

AVERROES AND HIS BOOK "POLICY BRIEF"

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## Introduction

Ibn Ahmad Rushd, Latinized usually as Averroes was feudal Andalusian Renaissance elite who wrote and taught on various outstanding subjects including Islamic philosophy, law, and theology, Aristocracy, psychology, geography, literature, arithmetic, physics, art, and astronomy. Averroes was born in 1126 in Cordoba, the present-day Spain, but later immigrated to Marrakesh, the present-day Morocco, where he died in 1198.<sup>1</sup> However, upon his death, his remains were shipped back to Spain for interment at a family cemetery. Averroes was a staunch defender, guardian, and champion of Aristotelian philosophy which conflicted sharply with the mainstream Islamic pedagogy led by other contemporaries such as Al-Ghazali. Although regarded highly as a legal scholar of Maliki School of Islamic jurisprudence, Averroes philosophical ideas contradicted sharply with certain aspects of Islam, which put him in a constant conflict with the faith. Besides, Averroes had a significant influence on Christianity and its spread in Europe through his teachings that earned him the designation of a commentator for his attribution to Aristotle-Christianity and Islamic axis. According to Taylor and Therese-Anne, the Latin translations of Averroes' works greatly popularized Aristotle and earned him a place in the global milieu. Averroes' philosophy emerged from a strong foundation of his training in Islamic jurisprudence and Aristocracy alongside his Christian orientations, which influenced his works and permeated his life. In his book, "Policy Brief," for instance, he stresses the primacy of logical thinking as a precondition to interpreting the Quran, especially regarding the orthodox Islamic theology, where the pedagogy vests emphasis on logic other than the faith.

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<sup>1</sup> . Majid Fakhry, *Averroes: His Life, Work and Influence* (London, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2014), 23.

Typically, a policy brief explores a concise summary of an issue under scrutiny. Policy briefs seek to highlight the various outstanding issues within a subject to illuminate the desired outcomes pursued by the policymakers. Often, the policy options inherent in such an analysis seek to deal with the underlying concerns and further offer recommendations to enhance the present status of things. In other instances, policy briefs strive to clarify a concept to demystify the underlying issues, which might permeate a subject and lead to misgivings. In most cases, policy briefs, aim at influencing a course of action and can take different formats to achieve their mandates. In Averroes' "Policy Brief" for instance, the author elaborates on various outstanding issues that permeated his life and work and a scholar, thinker, and futurist. Averroes' wide readership and intricate orientations were instrumental in shaping the focus of his reasoning. Logic features outstandingly as the underlying element that captured his familiarization to various themes and subjects. Averroes' admiration towards logic put him on the path to an ongoing search of the meaning of things to enhance knowledge and unravel the mysteries of life.<sup>2</sup> Averroes' pursuit of the infinite meaning of things put him at crossroads with both Christianity and Islam, which tend to espouse certain dogmas, which did not precisely capture his viewpoints. Consequently, he was always at loggerheads with these major religions, whose followers saw Averroes' perspectives as inherently conflictual to their doctrinal foundations. The majority of the religions around the world thrive on theoretical orientations that prevail over the believers to align themselves with the faith without question to the fundamental concepts that constitute them.

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<sup>2</sup> . Averroes Averroës, *On Aristotle's "Metaphysics": An Annotated Translation of the So-called "Epitome" Volume 5 of Scientia Graeco-Arabica* (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 42.

In his pedagogy, Averroes observed that learning is a continuous and an ongoing process aimed at changing or modifying the nature things to enhance the quality of human life. He, therefore, encouraged his students to view the world from different angles to have a broader perspective of life in general. Under these lenses, Averroes sought to prevail over his students to adapt to learning an ongoing and endless process that continually seek to enhance their welfare. In particular, he attributed to the fact that religion has a way of confining the thinking skills of individuals such that they view things and ideas only from a classical point of view that does not breed novelty. According to Averroes, overreliance on the stipulated foundations of knowledge only serve to constrict the knowledge formation processes and the thinking skills of individuals. As such, he advised on the need to question the nature of things to inspire scrutiny and make amends where necessary to enhance the quality of human life. In virtually all his teachings, Averroes sought to magnify knowledge as the foundation of human welfare. Through his inquisitive attribution to things, Averroes opted to question certain philosophies espoused by mainly Islam and Christianity, thereby inspiring him to come up with a set of principles of viewing the world in general. Within these frameworks, Averroes set forth his opinion on the origin of the world, God's existence and attributes, philosophy and religion, metaphysics, psychology, philosophy, jurisprudence, and law. In essence, Averroes observed that the quality of human life begins to regress the moment individuals choose to adapt to things that prevail over their lives without necessarily questioning the underlying concepts behind them.

### **Aristotle and Plato in Averroes' Pedagogy**

Scholars describe Averroes as an enthusiastic commentator on the writings of the early Greek philosophers, Plato Aristotle and Plato. According to Sonneborn, Averroes regarded Plato as an ancient figure in human intellect and a thorough thinker of all times that inspired human

thinking in ways no other individuals have been able to achieve.<sup>3</sup> Through his work, Averroes strived to explain and explore the knowledge formations of these two pioneering Greek Philosophers while often agreeing and disagreeing with them on various outstanding issues touching on the fundamental concepts of his teachings. The incessant search of knowledge prevailed over Averroes to question the underlying ideas forwarded by Plato and has since found its way into the mainstream learning without a rigorous, in-depth assessment. While at times disagreeing with Plato's perspectives, his attribution to Plato's contribution to human scholarship is of profound relevance. For instance, Averroes' acknowledgment of Plato's notion of transformation and decline of the ideal and flawless republic is of immeasurable significance. He discredits the conservatives of yore such as Mu'awiyah, who according to Averroes, perverted the perfect society into a dynastic power base.<sup>4</sup> Averroes attributed to the adoption of Platonic sense in the concept of government to avoid turning an ideal society into an isocracy, oligarchy, and tyranny. Accordingly, a utopian civilization according denotes the ability of a state to espouse the fundamental concepts of democracy such as liberty, opportunity, and equal rights for the greater common good of all. Notably, an ideal society aspires to collectively recognize itself as an inclusive whole where each member forms part of the overall wellbeing. According to Averroes, such systems seek to maintain the health of a society holistically while promoting the general welfare of all its members.

Averroes analysis of Plato's ideal society reveals a fundamental characteristic not available in his other commentaries. Even though he toiled a great scholarship of seeking to

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<sup>3</sup> . Liz Sonneborn, *Averroes (Ibn Rushd): Muslim Scholar, Philosopher, and Physician of the Twelfth Century* (New York City, NY: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2006), 5.

<sup>4</sup> . Catarina Moura-Belo, *Chance and Determinism in Avicenna and Averroës*, Volume 69 of *Islamic philosophy and theology* (Leiden, Netherlands: BRILL, 2007), 63.

synthesize the underlying interactions between Greek philosophy and religious law, Averroes went yonder his precursors despite his massive dependence on their works. For instance, Averroes moderated Plato's political theory and blended it with Aristotle's perspectives to augur well with the Islamic edicts. He, therefore, applied the spiritual concepts to the then Almohad and Almoravid republics and observed that if a philosopher should always aspire to influence policy towards the fulfillment of an ideal state. Plato's notion of a perfect state espouses the most exceptional society whose idealness springs from a formal constitution. However, Averroes advocated certain beliefs that contradicted the traditions of the religion. For instance, he regrets the situation of womankind in Islam, which does not mirror Plato's position of their civic duty and equality. He criticizes the Islamic orientation that women's duty is for childbearing and that their place is in either in the kitchen or the bedroom. According to Averroes, such a direction is detrimental to the economy, marginalizing, and perpetuates poverty of the society. With significant support and consideration, Averroes observed that women's contribution to the republic could be of profound significance. Denying women an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the society is most unorthodox and demeaning form of marginalization.<sup>5</sup> Averroes questioned the undermining legacy of the Islamic faith towards women and demanded reforms on specific chapters that advocates and perpetuate a society that discriminates against woman and the girl child. Probably, Averroes saw into the distant future, hence his inquisitiveness of the ancient principles and practices that bear little or no significance to humanity but attempt to expand the bondage of human anguish.

In his pursuit to restructure the society, Averroes sought to blend the Platonic notions with the Islamic concepts while likening the false philosophers to stand up for an ideal society

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<sup>5</sup> . Richard Taylor and Therese-Anne Druart, *Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 15.

envisioned by Plato. He declared such logicians a real danger to the nation and termed them as the defilers of Islam whose teachings were injurious to the security of the state. He further appealed to the ruling power to prevail over the dialectical theorists to explain their convictions and beliefs to the masses to avoid confusing and the proliferation of heresy within Islam. Borrowing heavily from Plato's political philosophy, Averroes' views the society from Aristotle's lenses, which espouses a Nicomachean Ethics in the concept of the Republic. He further acknowledged the real semblance between Sharia and Plato's jurisprudence of the natural law. He agreed with Al-Farabi's comparison of Plato with an Islamic Imam arguing that as a philosopher, Plato was both a leader and a law teacher but fails to graduate him to a prophet. He held that a prophet is a seal of divinity who promulgated the spiritually ordered revelations to Muhammad. In his pedagogy, Averroes attempted to exempt Muhammed from the general line of prophets, thus clearly typifying the psychological justifications of prophecy under Islam. Both in theory and practice, Averroes' writings and teachings are in strict compliance with Aristotelian, which borrows heavily from Plato and attempts to be free from the notion of emanation.<sup>6</sup> In essence, it makes good sense to reiterate that Averroes' scholarship vests great interest in religious-philosophical commentary on Plato's perspectives of an ideal Republic. However, the fact that his political, religious, and economic philosophy was distinctly Islamic, he was quick to point out the underlying loopholes in the faith, offer critic, and further seek for amendments to such proclamations. These orientations added significance to Averroes whose stature as a religious philosopher is widespread.

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<sup>6</sup> . Ibn Rushd Averroes, *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics* (London, UK: Continuum International Publishing Group Limited, 2000), 57.

### Averroes' Political Views

Averroes' political views relate mainly to the defense of philosophy and the perpetuation of the philosophical doctrines in his works. He attributes primarily to the teachings of the ancient Greek philosophers who engineered and championed the political views that continue to impure the society across time and space. Ideological positions held by Averroes' predecessors have been the foundation stones that nurtured Averroes' worldviews. In essence, the majority of his writings emanated from the religious and political happenings that characterized the society at the time.<sup>7</sup> Mainly the Islamic and Christian perspectives contributed immensely to Averroes' ideological formations. In part, Averroes' discourse on Plato's Republic offers an ideal standing point of gauging his political views. There is greater semblance in his works, and those of Plato since both begin by declaring their intentions from the dialectical purviews of ideological scholarships. Alongside these lenses, he cultivates his orientation to the classical view of philosophy and crafts his political perspectives in ways that either blend or antagonizes those of his predecessors. He acknowledges that political science springs from theory and derives its sway from the acceptable norms that regulate the behavior and conduct of human beings across societies. Averroes recognizes that the foundations of political science are the volitional acts that stem from freewill and spring from rational thought. In contrast with the theoretical concepts, Averroes observed that political science does not rely on the abstract knowledge of its objectives, but concrete action. Such a position does not necessarily deny reason a chance to play a role in the machinations of political science. Within this context, Averroes produces the well-known models, which support the practical and theoretical purviews of his pedagogy. While the

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<sup>7</sup> . Averroës Rushd, *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer, Volume 1* (Reading, UK: Garnet, 2000), 73.

theoretical aspects of this orientation involve the examination of human conduct, the functional elements ascribe to the politics and the choice of governance adopted by the society.

Accordingly, perfection is the trait that makes systems to work with precision and which is the epitome of an ideal republic. Averroes further observes that the knowledge formation in individuals replicates into four significant aspects including speculative, ethical, practical, and intellectual. In essence, the meditative viewpoints are the primary virtues while other elements are mere steps in the ladder of attainment. While Averroes acknowledge the difficulties or impossibilities in attaining all perfections, he nonetheless, attributes to the practicality of merging efforts to achieve greater perfection. Averroes underscores the necessity of creating a society that does not only seek to reach human achievements but also aims at satisfying the obligations of life to enrich human welfare.<sup>8</sup> He compares the arm of government to the parts of the soul to ensure that the republic runs complementary to all its branches to avoid the unnecessary conflicts that might polarize the system. Averroes' pedagogy understands justice as a concept that prevails over the citizenry to follow the laid down procedures that characterize a society's culture. He further underscores the importance of authority in the idea of governance since it is the foundation of the rule. Accordingly, where there is an authority, there is a robust reference to the strict observance of the law, hence an ordered system. However, where jurisdiction is lacking, the chances are that individuals may fail to recognize the foundations of code that makes a society to hold. In essence, Averroes underscores the fact that authority and law work in a symbiosis structure where each benefit from the other. While the law safeguards the supremacy of authority, the authority acts as the supreme guardian of the law, the collapse of

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<sup>8</sup> . Sara Silvestri, 'Islam and Religion in the EU Political System', *West European Politics*, vol. 32, no. 6 (2009), 1234.

the rule threatens the applicability of power, hence the need to ensure that all strive to maintain one another in an ordered axis.

Averroes tackles the subject of wisdom and explores that wisdom is the foundation of all knowledge sought by humanity. While acknowledging that intelligence is a preserve of certain individuals in the society, he attributes to the need by everyone to strive and acquire wisdom. Accordingly, intelligence is the foundation of sustaining a rational and virtuous political order, which inspires a harmonious unity and permits the citizenry to pursue their happiness and enjoy the fundamental rights but not at the expense of others.<sup>9</sup> In Averroes opinion, the features of an ideal political society to which people take pride being part designate the Republic under the fundamental virtues of justice, moderation, wisdom, and courage. Whereas justice grants all other welfares, the three other virtues, temperance, wisdom, and courage, describe the characteristics of the various social groups within a community. Wisdom, which Averroes equate to knowledge must assist individuals to nurture and build self and political prudence to epitome a community's leadership. Courage, as perceived by Averroes, is not simply military might but largely merited to civic courage. Such audacity relates to the capability of creating, defending, and sustaining the right, fundamental freedoms, and civil liberty. Averroes points out that courage is an essential aspect of not only the individuals but the society as well. Finally, Averroes perspectives on moderation explore a sense of the confines that build and sustains peace, order, and happiness for the greater common good of all. Moderation is a fundamental quality of all social clusters since it articulates the mutual consent shared by the governed and the governors who govern through the consent of the people. Where a government or rulers misses out on the consent of the people, it becomes illegal since it does not have the popular backing of

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<sup>9</sup> . Oliver Leaman, *Averroes and His Philosophy* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013), 123.

the masses. According to Averroes, the people have the power to force out such rulers and restore order in the concept of governance.

Averroes' critique of democracy is another aspect that maps out his political views succinctly. While the modern readers might find certain elements of his critic as outrageous or least applicable to the present-day's liberal democracy edicts, an in-depth analysis of Averroes works espouse that liberal democracies do not merely spring from the considerations of justice such as equality and freedom. In essence, his pedagogy also comprises other essentials, such as regular elections, the right to vote, the rule of law, and multiparty systems. Structured alongside the concept of the separation of powers, Averroes envisioned a varied system of governance with greater degree of moderation and objectivity with robust structures for checking the powers of the government. Averroes concerned himself more with the formation of governments that cannot monitor themselves well. He believed the foundation of a society is the lifeblood of the citizens to govern themselves under strict observance of the law.<sup>10</sup> Averroes noted that an unchecked government would always suffer the political concerns, such as corruption, disregard to the rule of law, and factionalism, which pose a significant danger to their existence. The foundations of the ruin of society are its inability to apply law judiciously and smoke out the underlying social ills that bedevil it. As such, Averroes advises on the adoption of the doctrines of harmony, fairness, liberty, and the rule of law as the foundation of a robust political order to enhance the quality of leadership in society.

### **Conclusion and Opinion**

Across time and space, philosophers continue to emerge as the fountain of logic and knowledge. The majority of the robust systems both present and in history are those that

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<sup>10</sup> . Leaman, *Averroes and His Philosophy*, p. 124.

subscribe to the works by the celebrated philosophers whose contribution to human thinking skills is tremendous. Averroes is one such type of a scholar who envisioned the society in virtually all lenses including psychology, philosophy, law, and theology, geography, Aristocracy, literature, arithmetic, art, physics, and astronomy. He wrote and taught on various outstanding issues that bedeviled the society. In particular, his writings on “Policy Brief” have been instrumental in illuminating the fundamental concepts that continue to give direction to modern day learning. Through his writings and teachings, Averroes strived to explain the idea of knowledge formations of while attributing to the Greek philosophers often agreeing and disagreeing with them on various outstanding issues that touch on the society. Alongside his political views, his constant search of knowledge prevailed upon him to question the underlying ideas forwarded by Plato and these projections has since found their way into the mainstream learning in today’s scholarship.

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