

IBN RUSHD (AVERROES, D. 1198): REASON AND UNREASON IN PROPHECY

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Abstract: This paper explores Ibn Rushd's (Averroes, d. 595/1198) distinctive stance on miracles as they pertain to Islamic prophetic theory, situating his arguments within the broader intellectual and theological climate of his era. Beginning with Hugo Grotius's early modern critique contrasting Christian and Islamic miracles, the study shows how Ibn Rushd's own views challenge the dominant Sunni Ash'arite position, which considered miracles unequivocal proof of prophecy. After surveying the Ash'arite theologians – most notably Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī, and al-Ghazālī – who vigorously defended miracles as the decisive validation of a prophet's claim, the paper turns to Ibn Rushd's critique. While he does not deny that miracles happen, Ibn Rushd questions their logical power to establish prophecy, underscoring the absence of a rational, necessary link between the supernatural event and a prophet's truthfulness. Instead, he privileges the *Qur'an* as Islam's singular miracle capable of providing lasting, rational credibility. The paper also highlights how Ibn Rushd draws on, yet critically reinterprets, segments of al-Ghazālī's later works – particularly *al-Qistās al-mustaqīm* and *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl* – to shore up his argument. Though al-Ghazālī remained committed to a broader Ash'arite framework, both he and Ibn Rushd share the view that extraordinary feats do not, by themselves, confer certain knowledge of prophecy. Ultimately, the article argues that by relegating miracles to a chiefly rhetorical function and centering 'corresponding' proofs such as lawgiving and unique moral insight, Ibn Rushd separates prophecy from extravagant supernatural claims. His approach thus preserves both causality and the rational integrity of religious belief, while still acknowledging the formative role that miracles, especially the *Qur'an*, play in the faith of ordinary believers.

Keywords: Miracles; Prophecy; Ash'arite; Ibn Rushd; Rationality; Causality; al-Ghazālī; *Qur'an*; Lawgiving; Philosophy in Muslim contexts.

The Dutch humanist and theologian Hugo Grotius (d. 1645) tried to prove the superiority of Christianity over Islam by saying "Jesus gave sight to the blind, the power of walking to the lame, health to the sick; yea – as Mahomet confesses, even the life to the dead: Mahomet says, that he himself *was sent by God* – not with miracles, but – with arms."¹ Muḥammad himself did not claim to perform any miracles;² however, in later times, his followers, traditionalists, and some

1 HUGO GROTIUS 1859, 113.

2 Ancient biographies acknowledge that the Prophet Muḥammad refused to perform miracles to make people believe in his prophecy. He says: "I am not a maker of that (miracles),

theologians attributed to him the most remarkable miracles. Grotius commented:

Notwithstanding, there have followed him some who ascribed miracles also to him; but what sort? Namely. Effects, such as may easily be caused, either by human art; as that of the “dove flying down to his ear!”; or, those of which there are no witnesses – as that of “the Camel speaking to him by night!”; or, such as are refuted by their own absurdity – as that of “a great portion of the Moon having fallen into his Sleeve, and of its having been sent back by him to restore to that planet its former rotundity!” Who would not say, in a doubtful cause, we ought to abide by that Law, which has in its side more certain attestations of Divine approbation?³

In spite of Grotius’ strategically critical posture, oriented towards favoring Christianity and refuting “Mahometanism,”⁴ it is essential to recognize the validity of his discerning observations regarding a pivotal transformation in the history of miracles within Muslim societies. Amidst this evolution, a substantial segment of the Muslim community began attributing numerous miracles to the prophet Muḥammad – a departure from the initial circumstances. Notably, within Sunni theological sects, the Ash‘arite theologians ardently embraced the concept of miracles as primary evidence of prophecy. In contrast, it is noteworthy that Muslim philosophers refrained from endorsing these purported miracles, with some, such as Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 311/923), even going to the extent of repudiating the very idea of prophecy.⁵

Moreover, Grotius was not the first figure to assert that Muḥammad’s prophethood did not rely on miraculous substantiation; Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 595/1198), a Muslim philosopher, articulated this stance five centuries earlier. According to him, no explicit religious text unequivocally designates miracles as the proof for establishing Muḥammad’s prophetic status. He states:

Observing the approach of the lawgiver (*al-shāri‘*), may God bless him and grant him peace, it becomes apparent that he did not urge any individual or

nor am I one who asks his Lord for this, but God has sent me as a bringer of good tidings and a warner,” ABDUS-SALĀM HĀRŪN 2000, 51, with slight modification.

3 HUGO GROTIUS 1859, 113.

4 HUGO GROTIUS 1859, 109.

5 RASHED 2008.

nation to accept his message or the content he delivered by substantiating his claims with supernatural feats, such as turning one thing into another.⁶

Notwithstanding this particular denial of miracles as being the core of the call of the prophet to believe in him, Ibn Rushd undertook a nuanced exploration of miracles, navigating the challenge of harmonizing three perspectives. First, he emphasized the crucial need for miracles to unwaveringly maintain their indisputable status as foundational tenets within the Islamic religious framework. These miracles, integral to the *Shari‘a*, not only illuminate the path for believers’ actions but also play a vital role in enhancing their overall well-being. To question these miracles is to cast doubt upon the very principles that govern human action and existence. This initial stance, attributed to Ibn Rushd, emerged in the context of his response to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s (d. 505/1111) *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*). There, al-Ghazālī robustly defended miracles, such as the cleavage of the moon and the transformation of a staff into a serpent, as compelling evidence of God’s omnipotence. For Ibn Rushd, going further, miracles should not be a subject of question.

Second, Ibn Rushd aimed to diminish the role of miracles as evidence of prophethood, deeming them inherently inconclusive. He posited that miracles make little sense at a rational level, since they lack necessary causal relationships linking qualities (prophecy) to actions (miracles) or causes to effects. For example, while the cause-effect relationship between a doctor and a patient’s recovery is rational, supernatural acts like walking on water lack such rational associations with the attribute of prophethood. That is, it is not self-evident why walking on water would indicate a person’s status as prophet. This second position by Ibn Rushd emerged in response to the proliferation of discourse on miracles within the Muslim theological sphere. Here, he sought to temper the extravagance of such discussions, as articulated in his work *al-Kashf ‘an manāhij al-adilla fī ‘aqā’id al-milla*. Despite this, Ibn Rushd does not outright deny the existence of miracles in Islam. Rather, he provides a specific interpretation of them, which diverges from then-prevalent views among Muslim theologians. According to him, the sole miracle authenticating prophetic status is the *Qur’an*,

6 IBN RUSHD 1998, 178, my translation; see also IBN RUSHD 2001, 96.

housing a divine *Shari‘a* that bestows benefits upon humanity – a nuanced perspective constituting his third position. This recurring third stance in Ibn Rushd’s work serves as a defense of causality and rationality within prophetic theory, underscoring the importance of a rational basis for understanding prophecy and its underlying principles.

This discussion will commence with an examination of views among Ash‘arites during the centuries prior to Ibn Rushd, according to which miracles comprise substantiating evidence for prophecy. Subsequently, Ibn Rushd’s distinctive approach will be introduced, with an analysis of its sources and multifaceted dimensions. It should be noted, however, that a comprehensive examination of the development of this concept within the thought of Muslim theologians and philosophers is beyond the purview of the present paper. This article’s primary objective is to offer a glimpse into the discourse that transpired within Ash‘arite texts and that was taken up in the works of Ibn Rushd.

1. Miracles in the Early Ash‘arite Theological Framework

The Ash‘arite theologians integrated miracles within the corpus of evidence for prophethood, specifically regarding them as incontrovertible substantiation of the Prophet’s veracity.⁷ This perspective posits that the distinguishing feature by which any prophet is recognized invariably manifests as a miraculous occurrence attributed to the prophet. This theological stance initially emerged as a response to the *Barāhima* sect’s denial of prophetic missions,⁸ and consequently, it underwent refinement and elaboration within the Ash‘arite scholarly tradition.

For Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), a prominent figure in an earlier period of the Ash‘arite school, the mere assertion of prophethood was deemed insufficient; it necessitated concurrent attestation through the manifestation of miracles. Al-Bāqillānī articulated this perspective, stating that,

It should be known that the veracity (*ṣidq*) of the claimant to prophethood is not established solely on the basis of his assertion, but rather through the exhibition of miracles, which are extraordinary acts ordained by the Almighty

7 On the miracles as proof of prophecy in its evolution the Ash‘arite Theology, see GRIFFEL 2004.

8 On *barāhima*, see RAHMAN 2012; STROUMSA 1985; ABRAHAMOV, 1987; CALDER 1994.

God, aligning with the claims made by prophets and their challenge to nations through the performance of deeds akin to those of God.⁹

Al-Bāqillānī firmly asserted that miracles constituted conclusive evidence of prophethood, serving as its essential hallmark, thereby implying that the occurrence of miracles by a Prophet was both anticipated and indispensable for belief in his prophetic mission.

Besides, al-Bāqillānī's argument holds significant weight as he imparts a contextual dimension to the concept of miracles. He posits that each prophet is endowed with a specific type of miracle aligned with the prevailing characteristics of the audience to whom they are initially directed. According to al-Bāqillānī's rationale, Moses, addressing a people known for their proficiency in magic, presented the miracle of transforming a staff into a snake, thereby challenging the established norms of magic. This deviation from conventional magical practices prompted those practitioners to recognize the authenticity of Moses' message. In the case of Jesus, who emerged in an era dominated by medical knowledge, his miracles centered around reviving the dead and healing the blind and lepers – feats beyond the capabilities of medical practitioners. Consequently, people in that era were convinced of the truthfulness of his message. Turning to the era of the prophet Muḥammad, whose audience was not characterized by expertise in magic or medicine, but rather by eloquence and linguistic prowess, he manifested his miracle by presenting a message of unparalleled eloquence, i.e. the *Qur'an*. By challenging the people to produce anything comparable, he accentuated the unique nature of his divine message, tailored to the specific attributes of his audience.¹⁰

In al-Bāqillānī's viewpoint, miracles epitomized the genuine actions of a Prophet, akin to how the acts of teaching and learning substantiated one's status as a scholar. He elucidated this concept by noting,

It is universally acknowledged that there exists no evidence capable of distinguishing authenticity from falsehood in claims of prophethood, apart from the miraculous, just as there exists no proof affirming the status of a scholar

9 ABŪ BAKR AL-BĀQILLANĪ 2000, 58.

10 See AL-BĀQILLANĪ 2000, 58–59.

except through actions that impeccably align with the attributes of scholarship.¹¹

Indeed, in the aforementioned instances, al-Bāqillānī asserts a necessary and intrinsic connection between the miracle and the prophet, framing it as a relationship akin to that of an attribute to what is described. This conceptualization underscores the idea that the nature of the miracle is intricately linked to the specific attributes and characteristics of the prophet's audience.

It is important to note, however, that al-Bāqillānī extends his acknowledgment of miracles beyond the *Qur'an* to encompass a broader spectrum of supernatural occurrences. These include extraordinary events

Such as the splitting of the moon, the descent of rain, the alleviation of ailments, the springing forth of water from between the Prophet's fingers, the glorification of pebbles in his hands, and even the ability of animals to articulate speech.¹²

In embracing a diverse range of miracles, al-Bāqillānī broadens the scope of divine manifestations, recognizing that the miraculous extends beyond the confines of the *Qur'an* to encompass a multitude of extraordinary phenomena associated with the prophetic mission.

Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) emerged as a pioneering figure during the revival of the Ash'arite school of thought in its second establishment. Similar to al-Bāqillānī, he asserted that there is no proof of the veracity of the Prophet other than miracles. So, "if one says: 'Is it possible to ascribe the Prophet's veracity to something other than a miracle?' We would say: it is not possible."¹³

Nonetheless, al-Juwaynī exhibits a keen awareness of the distinction between the miracle-based proof and the rational proof. He aptly articulated this distinction by asserting that,

11 AL-BĀQILLANĪ 1958, 38.

12 AL-BĀQILLANĪ 2000, 58.

13 "Fa'in qīl: 'Hal fi al-maḡdūr naṣb dalīl 'alā ṣidq al-nabiyy ḡayr al-mu'jizāt?' qulnā: 'dhālika ḡayr mumkin'": AL-JUWAYNĪ 1950, 331 (cf. AL-JUWAYNĪ 2000, 180).

A miracle does not prove the veracity of the Prophet in the same manner that rational proofs prove what they prove. A rational proof inherently applies to its subject matter, and its effectiveness in doing so is indisputable. However, the efficacy of a miracle does not share this same inherent quality.¹⁴

This proposition can be elucidated through illustrative examples in two distinct cases. Firstly, the presence of “origination” (*ḥudūth*) inherently substantiates the existence of an originator (*muḥdith*) responsible for its advent. The conceptualization of its emergence without serving as evidence for the existence of said causal entity remains inconceivable. Conversely, in the scenario of a staff transforming into a snake, if this transmutation were to occur spontaneously as an act of God in the absence of a corresponding prophetic declaration, it would fail to establish the veracity of the claimant. Consequently, miracles diverge fundamentally from the evidentiary paradigm governed by rational proofs.¹⁵

Al-Iqtiṣād fi al-Iʿtiqād (Moderation in Belief), a text authored by Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, is widely recognized as the work that espouses the Ashʿarite theological tradition of the author. Although relatively compact in size, this book encompasses al-Ghazālī’s perspectives on a multitude of Ashʿarite issues. It is important to note that this particular work does not fall into the category of al-Ghazālī’s earliest or latest writings; rather, it occupies an intermediate phase in his literary oeuvre. Scholars have identified *Moderation in Belief* as a composition that followed his renowned work, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)*.¹⁶ Given that *Moderation in Belief* more directly represents al-Ghazālī’s Ashʿarite views, I take from there the following concise overview of his discourse on the subject of miracles as evidence of prophethood.¹⁷

Al-Ghazālī asserts:

To substantiate Muḥammad’s prophethood through miracles, two distinct methods are employed. The first method hinges on a steadfast commitment to the *Qurʾan*. In this regard, we posit that the essence of a miracle lies in its association with the Prophet’s challenge, wherein he demonstrates his veracity in a manner that renders opposition futile, particularly among the Arabs, renowned for their literary eloquence.¹⁸

14 AL-JUWAYNĪ 2000, 177; with slight modification, AL-JUWAYNĪ 1950, 324.

15 See AL-JUWAYNĪ 2000, 177; see also AL-JUWAYNĪ 1950, 324.

16 BOUYGUES 1959, 34.

17 On miracles in al-Ghazālī, see GRIFFEL 2004.

18 AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1962, 206, my translation; cf. AL-GHAZĀLĪ 2013, 203.

Indeed, refuting Muḥammad’s challenge as articulated in the *Qur’an* becomes logically untenable; otherwise, it would have attained widespread recognition, particularly considering the Arabs’ distinguished reputation for eloquence. Al-Ghazālī summarizes the miracle of the *Qur’an* in

literary excellence and eloquence fused with extraordinary constructions. [...] Combining these constructions with such eloquence is miraculous beyond the ability of mankind.¹⁹

The second method centers on the demonstration of Muḥammad’s prophethood through “a collection of events that occurred for him and that transcended the ordinary.”²⁰ These phenomena encompass the splitting of the moon, the imbuing of inanimate objects and animals with speech, the gushing of water from between his fingers, the multiplication of meager provisions, and various other supernatural acts – “all of which serve as compelling testimonies to his truthfulness.”²¹

Al-Ghazālī’s stance on the intricate relationship between miracles and prophecy is elucidated through his stringent critique of philosophers, as articulated in *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*. In this seminal work, he censures philosophers who deviate from the established consensus within the Muslim community by advocating a necessary connection between causes and effects – a position that, in his estimation, undermines the absolute omnipotence of God. The crux of al-Ghazālī’s critique of the philosophical construct of causality lies fundamentally in his endeavor to safeguard and uphold the concept of God’s unbounded omnipotence.²² To sum up, in response to the *Barāhima*’s rejection of prophetic missions, Ash‘arite theologians integrated miracles as unequivocal proof of

19 AL-GHAZĀLĪ 2013, 203; AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1962, 206.

20 AL-GHAZĀLĪ 2013, 205; AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1962, 208–209.

21 AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1962, 208–209; AL-GHAZĀLĪ 2013, 205.

22 Al-Ghazālī says in his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*: “This, then, is their doctrine of miracles. We do not deny anything they have mentioned, and [agree] that this belongs to prophets. We only deny their confining themselves to it and to their denying the possibility of the changing of the staff into a serpent, the revivification of the dead and other [miracles of the kind]. For this reason, it becomes necessary to plunge into this question to affirm miracles and [to achieve] something else – namely, to support what all Muslims agree on, to the effect that God has power over all things,” AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1997, 165.

prophethood. Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī argued that miracles were imperative for the validation of prophethood. Al-Juwaynī stressed that miracles were the exclusive validation of a Prophet's truthfulness, setting them apart from rational proofs. Al-Ghazālī's *Moderation in Belief* outlines two methods to authenticate Muḥammad's prophethood – via the *Qur'an* and extraordinary occurrences, including the moon's splitting and other supernatural acts, which stand as compelling proofs. Despite nuances, al-Ghazālī's work aligns with Ash'arite perspective on miracles, though it might not represent his definitive stance.

2. Miracles: Exploring the Boundaries of Rationality

Ibn Rushd, in his discourse within the *Paraphrase on Aristotle's Topics*, delineates three distinct and clearly demarcated spheres that the dialectician must consider when constructing the object of research. One circle encompasses those inquiries deemed inappropriate for all sciences – be they scientific, practical, or instrumental; a second circle guides the formulation of permissible questions; and a third circle, bereft of strict regulations, is left to the discretion of scholars. As an illustration, the query, "Should God be worshipped or not?" exemplifies a question deemed inappropriate due to its potential harm in practical actions. Similarly, the question, "Do sensible things have reality or not?"²³ falls within the category of queries to be avoided, as its pursuit is deemed detrimental within theoretical sciences.²⁴

Given the foundational distinction between permissible and non-permissible inquiries, Ibn Rushd's assertion in *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* that miracles fall into the category of questions to be avoided, such as inquiries about the existence of God, blessedness, or virtues, is noteworthy. He contends that questioning miracles is deleterious to practical endeavors. While the *Paraphrase on Aristotle's Topics* lacks detailed elucidation, in *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* Ibn Rushd draws a parallel between the existence of God and miracles, presenting them as principles within the domain of immutable laws resistant to challenge through proof or falsification. According to him, these principles should remain inviolable, aligning with his perspective that certain topics, in-

23 IBN RUSHD 1978, § 23, 46.

24 See BEN AHMED 2010–2011, 266–268.

cluding miracles, ought to be regarded as beyond the purview of inquiry. In his own words:

The philosophers further hold that one must not object either through a positive or through a negative statement to any of the general religious principles, for instance whether it is obligatory to serve God or not, and still more whether God does or does not exist.²⁵

In response to al-Ghazali's accusation that the philosophers' comments on miracles lead to doubting God's power, Ibn Rushd denies that miracles are one of the topics of philosophers. He states:

The ancient philosophers did not discuss the problem of miracles, since according to them such things must not be examined and questioned, for they are the principles of religions, such as whether God exists or blessedness or the virtues. For the existence of [miracles] cannot be doubted, and the mode of their existence is something divine which human apprehension cannot attain.²⁶

Examining miracles means delving into the foundational tenets of laws encompassing the existence of God, virtues, and the afterlife – an inappropriate pursuit, given the imperative nature of preserving the inviolability of these principles that govern the cohesion of the societal unit. He posits that philosophers refrained from delving into discussions about miracles, recognizing their pivotal role in religion, which, in turn, serves as the cornerstone for virtues. Consequently, Ibn Rushd advocates the most prudent approach to miracles: acknowledging their presence as manifestations of divine nature. Miracles, according to Ibn Rushd, transcend human reason and operate within the confines of divine principles. Precisely, he argues that these issues find explicit delineation within Islamic law, emphasizing the constraints imposed upon scholars. This affirmation essentially underscores that such aspects are situated beyond the sphere of rational inquiry.²⁷

25 AVERROES 1954, 359, slightly modified; AVERROÈS 1930, 581.

26 AVERROES 1954, 315, slightly modified; AVERROÈS 1930, 514.

27 "These are the terms of the sharia and the limits of the scholars," AVERROÈS 1930, 527; see also AVERROES 1954, 323.

According to Ibn Rushd, the acknowledgment of these religious principles is deemed indispensable for the foundation and durability of human existence. He posits that any repudiation or skepticism concerning these tenets is akin to dismantling the virtues integral to the completeness of human existence, considering that a functioning society inherently relies on a structured legal framework. Consequently, he advocates for severe penalties for heretics, viewing their dissent as a potential threat to the foundational fabric of societal order.²⁸

To encapsulate Ibn Rushd's scholarly stance on miracles, it transcends a singular perspective. Initially, his position solidified in the context of defending the philosophers' viewpoint against al-Ghazālī's *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, as seen here. Further elucidation may be found in his *al-Kashf*, to which the following section turns.

3. The Logical Status of Miracles as Evidence for Prophecy

Al-Kashf provides a nuanced, comprehensive examination of miracles as a dialectical mechanism employed by theologians to substantiate the Prophet's prophecy. Responding to the theologians' exposition and doctrinal assertions, Ibn Rushd delves into the intricacies of miracles and their interconnectedness with prophecy.

Ibn Rushd's analysis of prophecy in the fifth section of *al-Kashf* involves addressing crucial questions related to divine and human acts, encompassing topics such as the proof of the creation of the world, free will, destiny, and resurrection. The primary focus is on the sending of messengers, with Ibn Rushd meticulously exploring both the content and mechanisms inherent in the concept of prophethood. This aligns with the overarching theme of his book, which centers on evaluating the methodologies that theologians employ to substantiate their doctrines. The scrutiny extends to various approaches, particularly emphasizing the concept of miracles, which is fundamental in affirming the

28 "It is therefore necessary for everyone to admit the principles of religion and to grant authority to the one who lays them down. Since the denial and discussion of these principles denies human existence, and therefore heretics must be killed. Of religious principles it must be said that they are divine things which surpass human understanding but must be acknowledged although their causes are unknown," AVERROES 1954, 322, slightly modified; AVERROËS 1930, 527.

truthfulness of Muḥammad's prophecy. Ibn Rushd's discussion includes robust criticism, particularly directed at the Ash'arite school of theology. He challenges the Ash'arite doctrine of proving prophecies, emphasizing their dependence on miracles which disrupt the customary order by disabling causality. As explained in *al-Kashf*, Ash'arite theologians often used miracles as a persuasive tool for the common people, to demonstrate to them the validity of prophets. Therefore, miracles are no more than a rhetorical form of proof – a point that reveals the inherent tension between reason and irrationality within this theoretical framework.

To discern the logical status of miracles as a persuasive means of substantiating prophethood, Ibn Rushd poses critical questions about the relationship between miracles and prophethood. He explores whether miracles represent a distinctive action designating someone as a prophet, the fundamental connection between miracles and prophecy as a quality, and the rational scrutiny of such a connection. These queries lay the foundation for further exploration in the subsequent paragraphs.

Examining the Ash'arite argument through the lens of the logical structure inherent in the art of rhetoric demands a meticulous differentiation within this discourse. Early in his career, Ibn Rushd undertook such an analytical endeavor, as evidenced in his work, *Compendium on Rhetoric (Mukhtaṣar al-khaṭāba)*. This distinction delineates between the modes of persuasion that belong strictly to the art of rhetoric, exemplified by enthymeme (*ḍamīr*)²⁹ and paradigm (*mithāl*),³⁰ and “the persuasive things which do not occur by arguments.”³¹ Within this framework, Ibn Rushd undertakes a reinterpretation of miracles, situating them within the latter category – the modes of persuasion that do not belong strictly to the art of rhetoric, like consensus (*ijmā'*)³² and witnesses (*shahāda*).³³ This categorization finds its niche within the broader context of challenge (*taḥaddī*),

29 On enthymeme (*ḍamīr*), see also IBN RUSHD 1977, § 5, English: 63–64, Arabic: 170.

30 On paradigm, see also IBN RUSHD 1977, § 26, English: 71, Arabic: 183–184.

31 IBN RUSHD 1977, § 33, 77. He stated earlier in the same book: “It appears that the things effecting persuasion [in Rhetoric] can first be divided into two classes: one of them consists in arguments, and the second is external things, which are not arguments-like oaths, testimonies,” § 2, 63.

32 On consensus, see IBN RUSHD 1977, § 35–40, English: 74–76, Arabic: 189–194.

33 On testimony, see IBN RUSHD 1977, § 42, English: 76–77, Arabic: 195.

where miracles assume the role of the form of non-technical rhetorical argument, i.e. less persuasive than enthymemes and paradigms. Nevertheless, Ibn Rushd posits a provocative assertion regarding the illusory nature of the perceived persuasive potency of miracles, thereby challenging their intrinsic efficacy within the realm of rhetoric. He states:

Challenge may be made by means of different things. However, the most persuasive of challenges is the one that is made by means of the completely unprecedented miracle, i.e., by the performance of something considered impossible by mankind. But it is obvious, even if the feat is extremely marvelous, that it provides nothing more than good opinion about the one who performs the feat or nothing more than trust in him and his excellence when the feat is divine.³⁴

In this excerpt, Ibn Rushd's perspective regarding the limitations of miracles is distinctly elucidated. He contends that miracles, functioning as a rhetorical device, possess a capacity to persuade and to encourage a "good opinion" (*ḥusn al-ẓān*) of the one who performs the miracle. Their efficacy markedly falters, however, when it comes to engendering certainty and is unable to proffer definitive evidence. At most, when a supernatural occurrence is ascribed to the Prophet, it imparts a sense of "trust" (*thiqa*) in that person.

Ibn Rushd's conclusion resonates with anticipations aligned with his methodological inclination towards redefining miracles as challenges, subjecting them to meticulous logical scrutiny. This strategic realignment effectively situates miracles within the realm of proofs utilized by rhetoric, albeit at a level of persuasiveness that is comparatively diminished. Unlike rhetorical elements engendering persuasion intrinsically within discourse, such as enthymeme and paradigm, "challenge" assumes the distinctive role of arguments generating persuasion external to the discourse. Ibn Rushd critically reevaluates this pivotal distinction and expounds upon it in his work, *al-Kashf*. Consequently, a revisitation of this thematic thread becomes imperative for a comprehensive understanding of his nuanced perspective.

34 IBN RUSHD 1977, § 43, 77.

It is pertinent to consider whether there exists a connection between miracles as extraordinary actions, often supernatural, and prophecy as a quality or attribute. Ibn Rushd's foundational premise in addressing this question is deemed "self-evident" by him. He asserts that entities possess essences and attributes determining their specific actions, which then merit distinct names and definitions. Without specific actions, a thing lacks a distinct name and definition, rendering all things indistinguishable.³⁵ Accordingly, Ibn Rushd contends that the Prophet, by virtue of prophethood, must exhibit unique actions defining his prophetic role. These actions, forming the basis for reason to discern a correlation between them and the Prophet's prophetic status, distinguish him from other individuals, such as sorcerers and charlatans.

Yet there is a problem. "The miracle does not prove the prophethood," states Ibn Rushd, "because reason does not readily discern a direct connection between the two. Unless one considers the miracle itself as an expression of prophethood, akin to how a cure is an action of medicine."³⁶ Ibn Rushd's argument here is that miracles are not among the actions that define the Prophet as such; he does not see a tangible and rational connection between miracles and prophethood.

Furthermore, Ibn Rushd argues that miracles lack intrinsic connection with prophecy, constituting violations of causality, a foundational concept for rational knowledge. Denying causality, according to him, eradicates the potential for genuine knowledge about entities, which he insists is only attainable through understanding their underlying causes. In his notable statement, he declares, "he who denies causes has denied reason," positing that reason involves apprehending entities through their causes.³⁷

35 He asserts: "It is self-evident that things have essences and attributes which determine the specific actions of each thing and through which these essences, names and definitions of things are differentiated. If a thing had not its specific action, it would not have a special specific. And if a thing had not its specific nature, it would not have a special name nor a definition, and all things would be one – indeed, not even one," AVERROES 1954, 318, with modifications; AVERROÈS 1930, 520.

36 IBN RUSHD 1998, 177; my translation; cf. IBN RUSHD 2001, 95–96.

37 Ibn Rushd states: "Reason consists of nothing more than the apprehension of entities through their causes. Logic implies the existence of causes and effects, and knowledge of these effects can only be rendered perfect through knowledge of their causes. Denial of cause implies the denial of knowledge, and denial of knowledge implies that nothing

In essence, Ibn Rushd's intricate perspective challenges the conventional notion of miracles as proof of prophethood, asserting that a rational connection between the two is not evident. Miracles, moreover, in his view, disrupt the established framework of causality that underpins rational knowledge.

4. Exploring Alternatives to Theological Proofs of Prophecy

Besides engaging in criticism of the theologians' perspectives, *The Incoherence of Incoherence* and *al-Kashf* also articulate Ibn Rushd's own theory of prophecy. In both texts, he introduces an argument that he intends to form the basis of belief among the learned classes. He emphasizes specific actions by prophets, such as making concealed things known and establishing religious laws aligned with truth, as foundational to recognizing a prophet.

In *The Incoherence of Incoherence*, Ibn Rushd elaborates on his philosophical perspective, offering a detailed exposition of his position on the credibility of prophecy. Drawing from the works of al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd distinguishes between the belief in prophethood held by scholars and that held by the common people. The former relies on the "action which proceeds from the quality" (*al-fi'l al-ṣādir 'an al-ṣiffa*), grounded in rational arguments, while the latter relies on rhetorical techniques rooted in opinion, known as the "proof of challenge" (*ḥujjat al-tahaddī*), as described above.³⁸ The proof of a prophet's existence lies in specific actions, particularly in discerning concealed knowledge and establishing religious laws.

In *al-Kashf*, Ibn Rushd further expounds on prophets' role in promulgating

in this world can be really known," AVERROES 1954, 319; AVERROÈS 1930, 522. In *al-Kashf* one reads: "You should know that whoever denies that causes influence their causes, God willing, has nullified wisdom and nullified knowledge. This is because knowledge is knowledge of things by their causes, and wisdom is knowledge of ultimate causes. The statement of denying the causes as a whole is a statement that is very strange to human nature," IBN RUSHD 1998, 193, my translation; see also IBN RUSHD 2001, 114.

38 Ibn Rushd states: "The argument on which the learned base their belief in the prophets is another, to which Ghazālī himself has drawn attention in another place [he means *al-Qistās al-mustaqīm*], namely the act which proceeds from that quality through which the prophet is called prophet, that is the act of making known the concealed things and establishing religious laws which are in accordance with the truth and which bring about acts that will determine the happiness of the totality of mankind," AVERROES 1954, 315-316, with modifications; AVERROÈS 1930, 516.

divine laws to guide humans, asserting that establishing laws is inherent to their prophetic status. He says, “It is well-known that the act of the prophets [...] is to establish the laws inspired by God, and in whosoever this act is found is a prophet.”³⁹ The act of establishing laws, in this context, comprises the quality that is peculiar to a prophet. It is the natural outcome of their prophetic status. Crucially, Ibn Rushd’s corpus does not manifest an outright rejection of miracles *per se*; rather, he assigns no intrinsic logical value to them within the framework of his philosophical discourse. However, it is noteworthy that an exception exists in his perspective. Ibn Rushd identifies the *Qur’an* as the singular miraculous phenomenon, standing apart as the exclusive proof challenging individuals and substantiating the authenticity of the Prophet’s message. Ibn Rushd articulates this perspective by stating that, “The miracle of the Prophet, may God’s prayer and peace be upon him, with which he challenged people and proved his truthfulness in what he claimed about his message, is the Precious Book.”⁴⁰ This distinctive miracle of Islam, emanating from the prophet’s inherent prophetic quality, possesses a unique nature compared to other miracles. Ibn Rushd states:

The clearest of miracles is the Venerable Book of Allah, the existence of which is not an interruption of the course of nature assumed by tradition [*al-samā*], like the changing of a rod into a serpent. Rather, its miraculous nature is established by way of perception and consideration for every man who has been or who will be till the day of resurrection. And so, this miracle is far superior to all others.⁴¹

Ibn Rushd’s perspective, marked by the rejection of the intrinsic logical value of miracles, alongside the acknowledgment of the *Qur’an*’s miraculous nature, introduces a fundamental distinction within his conceptualization of miracles. He distinguishes between two categories: corresponding (*munāsib*) and extraneous (*barrāni*) miracles,⁴² asserting that the first category of miracles, such as manifesting extraordinary knowledge and the establishment of laws, serve as definitive proof of prophecy. Extraneous miracles, which deviate from the natural

39 IBN RUSHD 1998, 180, my translation; see also IBN RUSHD 2001, 99.

40 IBN RUSHD 1998, 179, my translation; see also IBN RUSHD 2001, 99.

41 AVERROES 1954, 315; AVERROÈS 1930, 515.

42 IBN RUSHD 1998, 185; cf. IBN RUSHD 2001, 105.

order, like the parting of the sea, the splitting of the moon, and the transformation of a staff into a serpent, lack inherent evidentiary value and only become compelling when coupled with the establishment of laws. Importantly, when extraneous miracles stand alone, they lack inherent evidentiary value, i.e. they do not inherently and on their own signify the quality of prophecy. In essence, Ibn Rushd contends that miracles, to be valid proof, must exhibit exceptional knowledge and action, particularly in the establishment of laws, while actions of an extraordinary nature are merely supplementary.⁴³ Consequently, individuals such as saints, despite their potential to perform extraordinary actions, cannot conclusively substantiate their claims, as these actions do not pertain to the establishment of laws. Prophets often forewarn of events yet to transpire, predicting precisely when they will occur.⁴⁴

In addition to foretelling, prophets prescribe specific actions and impart knowledge transcending conventional understanding, alongside actions comprehended through instruction.⁴⁵ The *Qur'an*, for its part, is composed in a way that no human can imitate.⁴⁶ These three aspects collectively constitute compelling evidence affirming the *Qur'an's* status as a miraculous testament to prophetic authenticity. Miracles, such as transformations from one state to another, may indeed manifest through prophets. However, unlike the *Qur'an*, these miracles are not typically aimed toward challenging skeptics.⁴⁷ Consequently, no

43 IBN RUSHD 1998, 181: “wa-ammā al-mu‘jiz fī ghayr dhālik min al-af‘āl fa-shāhid la-hā wa-muqaww.” Cf. IBN RUSHD 2001, 100. Ibrahim al-Najjar completely misunderstood this idea when he translated it as follows: “The miraculous in other actions is merely a warrant and a strong proof thereof.”

44 Prophets commonly forewarn of “the existence of events that have yet to transpire, leading to their realization precisely as prophesied and at the appointed time,” IBN RUSHD 1998, 180, my translation; cf. IBN RUSHD 2001, 100.

45 “What the *sharā‘i‘* contain of knowledge and work is not something that can be acquired through learning, but rather through revelation,” IBN RUSHD 1998, 181, my translation; cf. IBN RUSHD 2001, 101. Ibn Rushd adds: “The actions they command and the sciences they warn against are not similar to the knowledge and actions that are attained through learning,” IBN RUSHD 1998, 180, my translation; cf. IBN RUSHD 2001, 100.

46 “Arrangement (*naẓm*) that surpasses the constructs derived from human thought and deliberation,” IBN RUSHD 1998, 181, 183, my translation; cf. IBN RUSHD 2001, 101, 103.

47 “Wa-mā zahar ‘alā yadayh ṣallā al-Lāh ‘alayh wa-sallam min al-karāmāt al-khawāriq, fa-innamā zaharat fī athnā’ aḥwālīh min ghayr an yataḥaddā bi-hā,” IBN RUSHD 1998, 178, my translation. Ibrahim al-Najjar translated this as follows: “other extraordinary deeds that appeared at his hands, God’s blessing and peace be upon him, he performed them during his [mystical] states, without presenting a challenge thereby to anyone,” IBN RUSHD

inherent or necessary connection exists between a prophet's prophetic status and the manifestation of such extraordinary actions. In summary, the pivotal criterion for a miracle to serve as compelling proof lies in its exceptional manifestation of knowledge and action, particularly in the establishment of laws. Such manifestations point toward and prove their origin in divine revelation rather than human cognition. Ibn Rushd encapsulates his perspective by asserting,

According to this, you must understand miracles as proof of the prophets. I mean that the miraculous in knowledge and action is the definitive proof of the quality of prophecy.⁴⁸

Ibn Rushd contends that extraneous miracles are primarily a way for the masses to arrive at assent to the veracity of a prophet and belief in him, whereas assent by "corresponding" miracles is common to both masses and scholars.⁴⁹

5. Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazālī on Miracles

An additional crucial step in Ibn Rushd's analysis, aimed at exposing the limitations of the logical validity of miracles, involves his utilization of the writings of al-Ghazālī, with a specific interpretation of select texts authored by the latter. This represents an opportunity to delve into some of the intricacies of the complex relationship between Ibn Rushd's and al-Ghazālī's texts.

It is well-documented that al-Ghazālī himself regarded philosophers as heretics, primarily due to their rejection of miracles, a point he vehemently criticized. However, it is essential to note that the al-Ghazālī whom Ibn Rushd draws upon is not the al-Ghazālī of theological discourse. Instead, it is the al-Ghazālī who embraces Sufism. Notably, Ibn Rushd's references here do not pertain to *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* or *The Moderation of Belief*, which are the works most commonly associated with al-Ghazālī's Ash'ārite critique of philosophers. Instead, Ibn Rushd sources his arguments from *al-Qistās al-mustaqīm* (*The Just*

2001, 96–97.

48 IBN RUSHD 1998, 181, my translation; see also IBN RUSHD 2001, 100.

49 "It is almost probable that the assent by the extraneously miracle is only the way of the common people, and the assent by the appropriate miracle is a common way for the common people and the scholars," IBN RUSHD 1998, 185, my translation; see also IBN RUSHD 2001, 105.

Balance), and *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*The Deliverance from Error*), two texts belonging to the later phase of al-Ghazālī's intellectual journey.⁵⁰ These particular writings by al-Ghazālī diverge from the methodologies of the theological scholars, championing the Sufi approach. In essence, Ibn Rushd draws inspiration from *al-Qistās al-mustaqīm* and *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* in his criticism of the theological concept of miracle.

In spite of the disparities between Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazālī in their fundamental positions regarding miracles, notably concerning the latter's disavowal of causality, there exists substantial evidence within al-Ghazālī's texts that underscores his emphasis on the indispensable connection between the quality of prophethood and the actions emanating from this quality. It is this precise connection that guarantees the authenticity of the latter, as Ibn Rushd cites from al-Ghazālī in his rejoinder to the theologians. al-Ghazālī articulates in *The Deliverance from Error*,

If we regard miracles in isolation, without their countless attendant circumstances, we shall be liable to confound them with magic and falsehood, or to regard them as a means of leading men astray.⁵¹

In *The Just Balance*, al-Ghazālī outlines his approach, denoted as "the way of the knowers," in affirming the truth of Muḥammad, a method he deems clearer and more certain than reliance on apologetic miracles. In chapter eight of the same book, al-Ghazālī expounds, utilizing the first person:

I have believed in the veracity of Muḥammad – Peace be upon him! – and in the veracity of Moses – Peace be upon him! – not by reason of the splitting of the moon and the changing of the staff into a serpent, for that way is open to ambiguity, and one may not rely on it.⁵²

On the opposite, al-Ghazālī contends that his knowledge of the authenticity of the Prophet is akin to one's recognition of a jurist (*faqīh*) when witnessing his mastery in legal debates and the presentation of sound and cogent legal

50 BOUYGES 1959, 50, 70–71.

51 AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1969, 44, my translation; cf. AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1980a, 100.

52 AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1980b, 316; AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1983, 81.

arguments. This recognition, al-Ghazālī asserts, is sounder than the conviction arising from witnessing miracles, which remain susceptible to the potential of deception, manipulation, or charm, ultimately resulting in a weaker faith characteristic of the masses and theologians (*imān al-‘awāmm wa al-mutakallimīn*).⁵³ Thus, relying on miracles as a means to establish the credibility of prophethood does not offer any certainty. In contrast, “the way of ‘the knowers’,” or the approach of “the learned” among “the select few” – meaning the methods of the scholars (*al-‘ulamā’* or *al-khawāṣṣ*) – comprises a distinct methodology that transcends the approaches of both the common people and the theologians. This Ghazālīan argument is exactly what one finds articulated in one of Ibn Rushd’s earliest writings, *Compendium on Rhetoric*. Indeed, Ibn Rushd quotes al-Ghazālī from *The Just Balance*, where al-Ghazālī states:

Faith in the Messengers through the avenue of miracles, as described by the dialectical theologians, is the belief of the masses, while the select few follow a different path.⁵⁴

In his analysis of prophecy and its relationship with miracles, Ibn Rushd thus ultimately exhibits remarkable convergence with the sentiments expressed by al-Ghazālī in the aforementioned texts. However, Ibn Rushd interprets *al-khawāṣṣ* in a distinctive manner. It is true that he introduces the phrase “the way of *al-khawāṣṣ*” as an alternative to the approaches of the theologians and the common people, acknowledging his indebtedness to al-Ghazālī for this concept and making reference to it repeatedly. Nevertheless, it is imperative to underscore that the concept of *al-khawāṣṣ* employed by al-Ghazālī differs significantly from Ibn Rushd’s interpretation. Al-Ghazālī’s method alludes to “the way of sufism,”⁵⁵ i.e. to the faith of the masters of mystical illumination and intuition (*imān arbāb al-mushāhada*).⁵⁶ In contrast, the *khawāṣṣ* of Ibn Rushd are those who hold firm in prioritizing rational evidence, and specifically the relationship between cause and effect, which aligns with one of the interpretations of demonstrative reasoning.

53 Cf. AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1980b, 317; AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1983, 81–82.

54 IBN RUSHD 1977, § 43, 77.

55 AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1983, 82; cf. AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1980a, 112.

56 AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1983, 82; cf. AL-GHAZĀLĪ 1980b, 317.

Conclusion

If Grotius perceived the persuasiveness of Christianity to reside in the miracles associated with Jesus, Ibn Rushd, in contrast, regarded the absence of such miracles as precisely the wellspring of Islam's strength. This absence constituted a distinctive advantage for Islam when compared to the two preceding religions. Ibn Rushd states:

The *Qur'ān's* proof of Muḥammad's prophethood, may God bless him and grant him peace, differs from Moses' miracle about the transformation of a stick into a living creature, and Jesus' miracle about the resurrection of the dead, or the healing of the blind and lepers. While these actions, unique to the hands of prophets, may be convincing to the common people, they do not definitively prove anything when isolated. These actions are not inherent attributes by which a prophet is identified. In contrast, the *Qur'ān's* proof of Muḥammad's prophethood is akin to a medical healing. To illustrate, if two individuals claimed to be doctors, and one asserted, 'I am a doctor because I can walk on water,' while the other stated, 'I am a doctor because I can heal diseases,' belief in the existence of medicine would be more convincing when associated with the one who healed the sick, rather than the one who walked on water. The former's proof aligns more directly with the essential attribute of being a doctor.⁵⁷

In alignment with Grotius, Ibn Rushd did concede that specific factions of Muslims, guided by Ash'arite theologians, purportedly bore witness to extraordinary miracles. Nevertheless, Ibn Rushd endeavored to dismantle the inflated discourse that positioned miracles as the foundational pillar of prophecy. This critical analysis drew upon diverse sources, placing particular emphasis on selected works by al-Ghazālī – using some of them as a target for criticism and others as integral components underpinning Ibn Rushd's own argument. As demonstrated, the exploration of miracles as a means to authenticate prophecy provides an opportunity to reexamine various facets of the nuanced relationship between Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazālī. The delineation of the relationship between prophethood as a quality and the actions emerging from that quality, as established by Ibn Rushd, may initially appear as a criterion for evaluating miracles as acts originating from the prophet, with roots in Aristotelian thought.

⁵⁷ IBN RUSHD 1998, 184–185, my translation; see also IBN RUSHD 2001, 104.

However, it is essential to recognize that this conceptual framework also finds resonance in the works of al-Ghazālī. Ibn Rushd was cognizant of the latter's analysis and made adaptations to the examples employed. While al-Ghazālī employed the illustration of a jurist and the teaching of jurisprudence, Ibn Rushd substituted it with the example of a physician and the act of healing individuals. Ibn Rushd's utilization of al-Ghazālī's ideas to delineate the persuasive power of miracles and to distinguish the approach of the intellectual "elite" from that of the common people and theologians is readily discernible. However, it is crucial to recognize that Ibn Rushd interprets the notion of the "elite" differently than al-Ghazālī. Whereas al-Ghazālī alludes to the path of Sufism and spiritual illumination, Ibn Rushd situates "the elite" within the realm of the Aristotelian philosophy, meaning those who employ demonstrative reasoning rather than rhetoric. In Ibn Rushd's viewpoint, miracles function as compelling rhetorical arguments, deemed adequate for the comprehension of the non-elite. Conversely, the establishment of a *Shari'ā* serves as a conclusive proof, particularly targeted at the elite, who may or may not accord significance to miracles. Ibn Rushd refrained from outright denial of miracles; rather, he construed them as exempt from critical scrutiny, thereby attenuating their evidential weight. His systematic effort to mitigate the impact of miracles by dissociating them from prophetic discourse represents a bold initiative aimed at refining the concept of prophecy, divorcing it from incidental manifestations, and aligning it indispensably with the establishment of a sound legal framework for societal governance. Ibn Rushd's scholarly endeavors in this realm assume particular significance for those acquainted with the extensive array of miracles ascribed to the Prophet within Islamic theological discourse.

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