



The Legitimacy of Rational Interpretation between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Rushd

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Abstract

This study critically examines the contrasting perspectives of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Rushd on the legitimacy of rational interpretation in Islam. Employing a qualitative method with comparative textual analysis, the research explores their methodologies, intellectual justifications, and critiques of opposing views. Ibn Taymiyyah advocates a literalist approach, emphasizing strict adherence to textual sources and rejecting allegorical interpretation (ta'wil), while Ibn Rushd harmonizes reason and revelation, endorsing ta'wil for philosophical inquiry. The findings highlight their epistemological divergences and convergences, offering insights into the historical dynamics of Islamic thought and the ongoing tension between textualism and rationalism. This study underscores the relevance of their debates in contemporary discussions on interpreting sacred texts.

Keywords: *Rational interpretation, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Rushd, ta'wil, Islamic thought*

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Introduction

The Islamic intellectual tradition has long served as a fertile ground for profound discussions on how human reason engages with divine revelation. Throughout the historical development of Islamic scholarship, one recurring question has been the extent to which reason can be employed to understand sacred texts. This issue has remained a central theme, constantly debated and reinterpreted across generations (Firdaus & Kholid, 2024; Sulwana & Anwar, 2025). A key arena for this discourse lies within the Qur'anic sciences, particularly through the disciplines of tafsir (exegesis), *ta'wil* (esoteric interpretation), and translation. Though each of these approaches has its focus and methodology, they share a common goal: to uncover the meaning of God's words (Kayadibi, 2007).

Tafsir is generally explicit and literal in nature, grounded in historical context (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), linguistic structures, and grammatical analysis. Its objective is to extract meaning from the text in accordance with how it was understood by the early generations of Muslims. In contrast, *ta'wil* leans toward esoteric and symbolic interpretation. It seeks to unveil the inner

meanings of Qur'anic verses that cannot be explained solely through textual approaches, especially those that are *mutashābihāt*—verses that possess ambiguity or metaphorical elements (Setiyawan, 2024). Translation involves conveying meaning into another language and often exists in a state of tension between literal fidelity and interpretive freedom (Hidayat et al., 2024).

Within this broader framework, the tradition of *ijtihād* plays a crucial role in the development of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and textual interpretation (Has, 2013). *Ijtihād bi al-ra'y*—independent reasoning rooted in intellectual capacity—has been recognized since the time of Prophet Muhammad, as demonstrated in the appointment of Mu'ādh ibn Jabal as a judge in Yemen (Rahman, 2016). *Ijtihād* is understood as the utmost intellectual and physical effort of a mujtahid to derive practical rulings from the primary sources of Islam: the Qur'an and Hadith. Its presence is vital for maintaining the relevance and adaptability of Islamic law amidst constantly evolving social realities (Halimatus Adiah & Irwansyah, 2024).

Amid this extensive discourse, two central figures stand out in the history of Islamic thought for offering sharply contrasting perspectives on the legitimacy of reason and rational interpretation of divine texts: Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328 CE) and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198 CE). These thinkers differ not only in intellectual backgrounds but also in their paradigms of thought and methodological approaches to the Qur'an and Islamic tradition (Habti, 2011).

Ibn Taymiyyah, a Hanbali scholar, is well-known for his uncompromising stance against what he perceived as theological deviations within Islam. He strongly opposed the use of speculative theology (*'ilm al-kalām*) as developed by the Ash'arite and Maturidite schools, and he rejected philosophical approaches to understanding God's attributes. Instead, he advocated a return to the understanding of the *Salaf al-Salih*—the pious predecessors—emphasizing a strict adherence to the text and a rejection of esoteric *ta'wil*. From his perspective, any symbolic interpretation of God's attributes or ambiguous verses constitutes a deviation from pure Islam, as it opens the door to interpretations not grounded in explicit texts and the consensus of early scholars (Idharudin & Maya, 2025; Syukkur, 2019).

In stark contrast, Ibn Rushd, known in the West as Averroes, was a towering philosopher from Andalusia. Deeply influenced by Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism, he sought to harmonize philosophy with religious teachings (Putra, 2017). For Ibn Rushd, reason and revelation are not inherently opposed but rather represent two epistemological paths leading to the same truth. In interpreting the Qur'an, he explicitly endorsed the use of

allegorical *ta'wil*, particularly when dealing with metaphorical or ambiguous verses. He distinguished between two types of audiences: the general public, who should be presented with literal interpretations, and the intellectual elite, who are permitted to explore deeper philosophical meanings through rational interpretation (Gofur et al., 2025; Ngazizah & Mawardi, 2022; Tbakhi & S. Amr, 2008).

The fundamental disagreement between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Rushd over the role and limits of reason in interpreting revelation reflects a classical tension between textualism and rationalism in Islamic thought. For Ibn Taymiyyah, reason must submit to the text (*nass*), whereas for Ibn Rushd, reason is a divinely bestowed faculty capable of uncovering the deeper dimensions of revelation.

This article aims to critically explore the core differences and points of convergence between these two monumental thinkers concerning the legitimacy of rational interpretation. It will focus on the methodologies they employed, the intellectual justifications they presented, and the critiques they directed toward opposing perspectives. By examining the dialectic between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Rushd, we gain not only a clearer view of the historical dynamics within Islamic thought but also an opportunity to reflect on the ongoing relationship between reason and revelation in a modern context, where interpreting sacred texts remains increasingly complex and multidimensional.

Method

This study employs a qualitative method with a comparative textual analysis approach. The data are examined through content analysis combined with a philosophical-theological inquiry that contrasts the perspectives of the two thinkers. Both primary and secondary sources discussing the views of Ibn Taymiyyah in the *Muqaddimah fi Ushul al-Tafsir* and Ibn Rushd in *Fasl Maqal wa Taqrir Ma baina al-Sharia wa al-Hikmah min al-Ittisal* on rational interpretation, *ta'wil*, and *ijtihad bi al-ra'y* are scrutinized in depth. *Muqaddimah* provides the direct, prescriptive framework for how Ibn Taymiyyah believed the Qur'an should be interpreted, including his nuanced stance on the role of reason within that process. While another Taymiyyah's book, *Radd 'ala al-Mantiqiyyin*, is an indispensable work for understanding Ibn Taymiyyah's broader critique of philosophical thought and Greek logic, its primary purpose is polemical. The analysis focuses on identifying key definitions, methodologies, arguments, and the critiques they directed toward opposing views. A systematic comparison is conducted to highlight both the

convergences and divergences in their thought, as well as the implications of these differences for understanding the relationship between reason and revelation in Islam.

The Conceptualization of Rational Interpretation in Islamic Intellectual Tradition

Rational interpretation in Islam—manifested through the concepts of *ta'wīl* and *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*—represents an intellectual endeavor to uncover the deeper meanings of sacred texts. Etymologically, *ta'wīl* is derived from the word *al-awl* or *al-ma'āl*, which means “to return to the origin” or “to the ultimate purpose.” Terminologically, *ta'wīl* refers to the interpretation of Qur'anic texts in ways that align with their broader context, even if the interpreted meaning appears to differ from the literal one. This approach is typically symbolic and spiritual (Hidayat et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* refers to Qur'anic interpretation based on the independent reasoning and personal *ijtihād* of a commentator (*mufasssir*). Its legitimacy depends on the fulfillment of several scholarly conditions, including mastery of the Arabic language, understanding of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), knowledge of *qirā'āt* (recitation variants), *uṣūl al-dīn* (theology), *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal methodology), and the ability to distinguish between *nāsikh* and *mansūkh* (abrogating and abrogated verses). If such interpretation is conducted without an adequate scholarly foundation, it is considered blameworthy (*madhmūmah*); however, if it meets the established criteria, it is deemed praiseworthy (*maḥmūdah*) (Teodin & Alwizar, 2024).

Historically, the practice of *ijtihād bi al-ra'y* has been recognized since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who allowed his companions to employ rational judgment in addressing new and emerging issues. This concept has remained crucial in ensuring the continuity and relevance of Islamic law in the face of evolving social realities. *Ijtihād* itself signifies the comprehensive effort of a legal scholar to derive or apply Islamic rulings from its primary sources (Kayadibi, 2007).

Biography of Ibn Taimiyyah

The full name of this prominent scholar is Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Salām ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Taymiyyah al-Ḥarānī, though he is widely known as Ibn Taymiyyah (Abu Zahrah, 2000). He was born on the 10th of Rabī' al-Awwal 661 AH, corresponding to January 22, 1263 CE, and died on the 20th of Dhū al-Ḥijjah 728 AH or 1328 CE (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2004).

Ibn Taymiyyah was born in Baghdad, which at the time was a major center of Islamic civilization and the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate. However, due

to the Mongol invasions that endangered the city's inhabitants, his family migrated to Damascus, Syria, in approximately 1268 CE when he was just six years old, in search of safety and stability.

He came from a devout and scholarly family. His father, Shihāb al-Dīn ibn Taymiyyah, was known as a teacher (*shaykh*), judge, and preacher. His grandfather, Majd al-Dīn Abū al-Barakāt ‘Abd al-Salām ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Taymiyyah al-Ḥarānī, was a distinguished scholar of his time, well-versed in various branches of Islamic knowledge, including jurisprudence (*fiqh*), hadith, Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), and legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and was also a *ḥāfiẓ* of the Qur’an.

From an early age, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad was raised in a scholarly environment, particularly among family members who nurtured his intellectual growth and passion for learning. His exceptional memory, especially in memorizing the Qur’an and hadith along with their chains of transmission (*isnād*), gained admiration among the scholars of Damascus. His sharp reasoning skills and comprehensive understanding of religious sciences earned him recognition as a brilliant figure from a young age (al-Julainid, 1974).

Ibn Taymiyyah was not only known for his intelligence but also for his prolific scholarship. He contributed significantly to numerous fields, including theology, Qur’anic exegesis, hadith studies, Islamic law, and critique of philosophical thought. According to Muhammad Farid Wajdi, he is believed to have authored approximately 500 works. Qamaruddin Khan documented at least 295 titles, including published books, manuscripts, and lost works (Majid, 1984).

Beyond his scholarly pursuits, Ibn Taymiyyah was also actively engaged on the battlefield. He was a valiant fighter who once led troops against the Mongol invaders. One significant event was the Battle of Shaqhab in 1299 CE, where he played a leadership role. He also participated in the liberation of Jerusalem in February 1313 CE, reflecting his deep commitment not only to intellectual defence but also to physical resistance in safeguarding the Muslim community.

During Ibn Taymiyyah’s lifetime, the Muslim world experienced severe socio-political turbulence, marked by three major waves of assaults. The first was the Crusades, a prolonged and brutal conflict that targeted Muslims indiscriminately. Its impact extended beyond military destruction, contributing to cultural intermingling between Muslims and Western Christians. Over time, this interaction led to the diffusion of Western legal systems, trade norms, and social structures into Muslim societies, often

diluting Islamic identity and creating widespread confusion and disorientation.

Notably, some internal Muslim factions collaborated with the Crusaders, including the Ismā'īlī, Nuṣayrī, and Druze groups. These factions engaged in espionage and subversion, betraying fellow Muslims. During the Mongol invasions, they once again turned against the Muslim community. After the Mongols were repelled, Ibn Taymiyyah took the initiative to urge these groups to return to the authentic teachings of Islam.

The second major assault came from the Mongol-Tatar forces originating from Central Asia, known for their devastating conquests. Despite their military prowess, the Mongols suffered defeat in the Battle of 'Ayn Jālūt and later failed to conquer Damascus. This outcome was attributed in part to Ibn Taymiyyah's spiritual leadership and public supplications. Interestingly, many of the captured Mongols eventually settled in Muslim territories. However, they brought with them foreign cultural and religious practices, leading to a dilution of Islamic values. This cultural syncretism contributed to moral decay, the rise of injustice, and the proliferation of deviant practices such as *bid'ah* and superstition. Extreme practices at the time included sun-worship, consumption of forbidden foods, and deviations in marital laws, resulting in widespread issues of unknown lineage.

The third assault emerged from within the Muslim polity itself—through internal conflict among rulers and military elites. Driven by personal ambition, the *umara'* (nobles and military leaders) frequently engaged in warfare against each other, disregarding the Islamic principle of unity. This internal strife was exacerbated by sectarian divisions, with some factions once again allying with either Crusader or Mongol forces. This internal collapse is identified as the third destructive wave—the internal disintegration of the Muslim community (Yasin, 2010). Amidst this critical juncture, Ibn Taymiyyah emerged as a unifying figure, defending the ummah against both external threats and internal decay, and notably played a crucial role in preventing the Mongol conquest of Damascus (Iqbal & Nauton, 2010).

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the root of this profound societal crisis lay in the abandonment of the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet, and the exemplary path of the *Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* (the pious predecessors) (Mauludi, 2012). His religious thought and activism were therefore oriented toward a comprehensive renewal (*tajdīd*) of Islamic life. He staunchly rejected blind imitation (*taqlīd*), superstitions, and heretical innovations, calling instead for a return to the purity of Islamic teachings through rigorous *ijtihād*. This reformist spirit underpinned Ibn Taymiyyah's legacy as a foundational figure

in Islamic intellectual revival during one of the darkest periods in Muslim history (Suma, 2002).

Ibn Taymiyyah was a scholar who adhered firmly to interpreting Qur'anic verses based on transmitted reports and tended to reject interpretations based solely on reason. Ibn Taymiyyah's tendency to reject interpreting Qur'anic verses solely through reason is reflected in a work named *Daqaiq al-Tafsir al-Jami' li Tafsir al-Imam Ibn Taymiyyah* by Muhammad al-Julaynid. In this book, he predominantly interprets verses by referring to other Qur'anic passages, the sayings of the Prophet, the statements of the Companions, or the *ijtihad* of the *Tabi'in*. (Al-Julaynid, 1996).

According to Ibn Taymiyyah in *Dar Ta'arud*, the role of reason in religion is merely as a means to understand the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. This does not mean he denies the importance of reason, as he affirms that a proper understanding of the Qur'an requires a sincere heart and a clear mind (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1991). And he stated in *Muwafaqat Sahih al-Manqul li Sarih al-Ma'qul*, if there is a discrepancy between rational opinion and divine guidance on a particular matter, the rational view must be adjusted and brought into conformity with revelation (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1985).

The Fundamental Principle of Ibn Taymiyyah's Interpretation Methodology

Ibn Taymiyyah is widely recognized as a multidisciplinary scholar who possessed intellectual authority across various fields of Islamic sciences, including Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*). Although he did not compose a complete *tafsir* like other classical exegetes, his contributions to this field are far from insignificant. Through his work *Muqaddimah fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, Ibn Taymiyyah formulated a methodological framework and foundational principles for interpreting the Qur'an, which later became a significant cornerstone in the development of Qur'anic interpretation in subsequent eras (Afifah & Parwanto, 2023).

The influence of Ibn Taymiyyah's thought is strongly reflected in Nurcholish Madjid's idea of secularization. For Nurcholish, Ibn Taymiyyah's views served as a doctrinal foundation for many modern Islamic reform movements, whether fundamentalist or liberal. Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyyah's critiques of *Kalam* and Philosophy were presented with a mastery of Islamic scholarship imbued with Hellenistic elements, as quoted in one of his letters to Muhammad Roem dated March 29, 1983. (Gaus, 2010) Nurcholish Madjid observed that, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, Islam consists of the teachings delivered by Allah and His Messenger, with their application exemplified in the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Any addition to these established tenets is regarded as *bid'ah* (innovation). One of the main causes for the spread of such innovations is the uncontrolled intervention of free reasoning into the fundamental principles of religion (Madjid, 1995).

This work is not merely a preface but serves as a robust epistemological structure for a tafsir methodology grounded in transmission (*tafsir bi al-ma'thūr*). This approach is deemed safer and more authentic than speculative methods in understanding the Qur'an. In his *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized the importance of returning to the tafsir of the early generations (*Salaf*), namely the Companions and the *Tabi'in*, who are considered the most knowledgeable about the context of revelation and the meanings of Qur'anic verses.

Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyyah addressed the core principles in understanding the Qur'an and elaborated on the causes of interpretive differences among exegetes. He distinguished between valid differences—those grounded in the views of the *Salaf*—and invalid ones, which are based solely on linguistic or semantic aspects without considering contextual clarifications and deeper insights provided by earlier scholars.

M. Quraish Shihab noted that Ibn Taymiyyah's influence on Qur'anic exegesis was profound, extending even to reformist figures like Rasyid Ridha and Muhammad Abduh, the primary architects behind the modern tafsir movement that produced *Tafsir al-Manār* (Masyhud, 2008). Conversely, Ibn Kathir, a classical exegete known for his adherence to the method of *tafsir bi al-ma'thūr*, is also said to have referred to Ibn Taymiyyah's *Muqaddimah* as one of the sources for constructing his work.

Ibn Taymiyyah's thought in tafsir, when contextualized in today's complex and dynamic world, remains relevant, as the Qur'an itself serves as a universal guide for addressing human concerns across time and space (Wathani, 2016). He did not completely reject the use of reason (*ra'yu*) in tafsir, but he restricted it as a supportive interpretative tool rather than as a primary source of interpretation. This demonstrates his methodological openness, albeit still firmly within the framework of *Ahl al-Sunnah* principles.

In his works, including his commentary on short surahs such as *al-Ikhlās* and *al-Kawthar*, Ibn Taymiyyah demonstrated sharp analytical skills and precision in choosing the most compelling interpretations (*tarjih*). His commitment to the purity of Islamic teachings led him to be critical of various religious deviations prevalent in his time, which were rife with blind imitation (*taqlid*), innovation (*bid'ah*), and superstitions (*khurafāt*). This stance positioned him as a bold reformist voice, often in direct conflict with both

political authorities and mainstream religious scholars of his time, resulting in multiple imprisonments (Rezi, 2020).

In *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, Ibn Taymiyyah systematically explains that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had conveyed the complete meanings of the Qur'an to his Companions, both in terms of its wording and its intended meanings. Although there are differences among scholars regarding the extent of this explanation, Ibn Taymiyyah affirms that the Prophet ﷺ did not leave out any essential aspect of Qur'anic interpretation without clarification—except for verses whose meanings are known only to Allah. In such cases, the Companions accepted this reality without further inquiry (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1980).

The interpretive differences among the Salaf are not contradictory but rather diverse. These differences do not pertain to legal rulings that allow for independent reasoning (*ijtihād*), but rather to informative transmissions (*riwāyāt*), which inherently provide limited room for personal interpretation.

Ibn Taymiyyah divided Qur'anic interpretation into two main categories: first, *naqlī*-based (transmission-based) exegesis, and second, *ma'qūl*-based (rational or inferential) exegesis. He affirmed his commitment to the former approach—interpreting the Qur'an through valid transmissions from the Prophet, the Companions, and the *Tabi'in*. He strongly criticized the rationalist approach that prioritizes reason without the backing of transmitted reports, as he believed such methods were prone to distorting the divine message.

Moreover, Ibn Taymiyyah proposed an ideal order in valid exegetical methodology: first, interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an itself; second, by the *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ; third, by the opinions of the Companions; and fourth, by the views of the *Tabi'in*. This approach reflects his endeavor to preserve the authenticity of the Qur'anic message while avoiding subjective interpretations that rely solely on human reason (Waliko, 2016).

Within this framework, Ibn Taymiyyah explicitly rejected and even deemed unlawful any *tafsir* based solely on reason as its exclusive source, without the support of transmitted tradition. According to him, such a method is not only epistemologically weak but also carries a high risk of misrepresenting the divine message (Al-Zahabi, 1976).

Biography of Ibn Rushd

Ibn Rushd, whose full name was Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Rushd, stands as one of the most eminent intellectuals in the history of Islamic thought. In the Western world, he is more widely

recognized by the Latinized name Averroes. He was born in Córdoba, Andalusia—now part of modern-day Spain—in 520 AH/1126 CE and passed away in Morocco in 1198 CE (Jaeni & Huda, 2021).

From an early age, Ibn Rushd displayed remarkable diligence in his pursuit of knowledge. His educational journey began with the study of the Qur'an, hadith, tafsir, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and Arabic literature. Over time, he expanded his learning to include rational sciences such as mathematics, astronomy, logic, philosophy, medicine, and physics. His intellectual prowess spanned an impressive array of disciplines, with particular distinction in law, medicine, and philosophy—the latter cementing his status as one of the most influential philosophers in the history of Islamic philosophy, especially during its golden age between the 8th and 12th centuries CE.

Ibn Rushd grew up in a family that deeply valued scholarship and religious devotion. Both his father and grandfather held prestigious positions as *qāḍī* (judges) in Andalusia. Following in their footsteps, Ibn Rushd himself served as a *qāḍī* in Seville in 567 AH/1171 CE and was later reappointed in 575 AH/1179 CE. Due to his reputation and expertise in legal matters, he was eventually appointed as *Qāḍī al-Qudhāt* (Chief Justice) in Córdoba in 1182 CE. In the realm of jurisprudence, he and his father, Abū al-Qāsim, studied and memorized the monumental work of Imām Mālik, al-Muwatta'.

In the Western tradition, Averroes is revered as a polymath whose influence extended across law, medicine, and philosophy. During the reign of the Almohad dynasty, Sultan Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf ibn 'Abd al-Mu'min emerged as a ruler with a profound passion for knowledge. He envisioned transforming Andalusia into a scholarly hub rivaling that of Baghdad. To achieve this vision, the Sultan dispatched emissaries to various regions to collect scientific manuscripts, sometimes paying as much as 1,000 dinars for a single text. He also invited renowned scholars, including Ibn Rushd, to enrich the intellectual climate of his court.

The initial meeting between Ibn Rushd and Sultan Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf took place in 565 AH/1169 CE, facilitated by his teacher and the royal physician, Ibn Ṭufayl. During this encounter, Ibn Rushd was entrusted with a significant task: to review, analyze, and reorganize the works of Aristotle in a more systematic and accessible manner so that they could be understood without direct reference to the original Greek texts. In doing so, Ibn Rushd not only offered commentary (*ta'wīl*) but also introduced his groundbreaking insights—something unprecedented among philosophers of his time. His analytical and critical approach established him as a central figure in the tradition of *sharḥ* (commentary) on Aristotle, ultimately earning him the title The

Commentator—a designation first attributed to him by the famed Italian poet Dante Alighieri, author of the *Divine Comedy*.

When Ibn Ṭufayl became too advanced in age to continue his duties as court physician, Ibn Rushd was appointed to succeed him as the personal doctor to Sultan Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf at the royal palace in Marrakesh in 1182 CE. However, during this period, the tension between rational-philosophical thought and religious orthodoxy—commonly referred to as *ghazw al-fikr* (intellectual invasion)—was escalating. Following the death of Sultan Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf, Ibn Rushd’s position at court became increasingly precarious. This was due to mounting pressure from the *fuqahā’* (jurists), who had significant influence over the public. These religious scholars leveraged their social authority to pressure the government to distance itself from philosophers in order to maintain political stability and public legitimacy.

The height of this backlash came in 1195 CE, when the *fuqahā’* widely disseminated accusations that Ibn Rushd had deviated from Islamic teachings due to his Aristotelian-rooted philosophy. They alleged that he had defiled the sanctity of Islamic doctrine and offended the Sultan himself. Consequently, the new Sultan stripped Ibn Rushd of all official positions and exiled him to Morocco—a move that functioned as both a political and theological punishment.

This intellectual tragedy was compounded by the burning of many of Ibn Rushd’s writings, especially those on philosophy and religion. Meanwhile, his works in the pure sciences—such as mathematics, astronomy, and medicine—were spared and continued to be valued. Ibn Rushd died in exile in the city of Marrakesh, the capital of Morocco, on December 10, 1198 CE, at the age of 72 (López-Farjeat, 2021).

Beyond his famed commentaries on Aristotle, Ibn Rushd also critically engaged with the works of other Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Bajjah, Ibn Sīnā, al-Fārābī, and even al-Ghazālī. His unyielding dedication to scholarship is underscored by the oft-cited anecdote that throughout his life, he never spent a single day without reading or studying—except on two occasions: his wedding day and the day his father passed away. This reflects his extraordinary commitment and consistency, making him a paragon of intellectual devotion in the Islamic world.

Ibn Rushd is widely considered one of the most influential Muslim philosophers of the medieval period. During his lifetime, Islamic philosophy flourished, and much of this advancement can be traced back to his remarkable contributions across numerous scientific and intellectual domains. He did not merely master philosophy but also demonstrated deep expertise in

medicine, mathematics, physics, Arabic grammar, jurisprudence, and Islamic theology (*kalām*). His encyclopedic knowledge positions him as one of the greatest polymaths in the intellectual history of Islam (Nasr & Leaman, 2005).

Despite his immense contributions, relatively few of Ibn Rushd's original Arabic works have survived. Two primary reasons account for this. First, many of his writings were deliberately destroyed by groups opposed to philosophy. Second, a number of his works were translated into Hebrew and Latin, especially by European thinkers who deeply appreciated his intellectual legacy. Europe, in contrast to much of the Eastern Islamic world, provided a more receptive environment for the growth of rationalism and philosophy, whereas many Muslim regions at the time were more focused on religious practice and often viewed philosophical reasoning with skepticism.

Broadly speaking, Ibn Rushd's works fall into three major categories: first, critiques of other philosophers' ideas; second, commentaries on classical texts, particularly those of Aristotle; and third, original philosophical writings that articulate his independent thought. It is this final category that later became a foundational pillar in the evolution of European philosophy. Ironically, however, these ideas remained relatively unknown within the broader Muslim world. This lack of recognition presents a striking paradox: Ibn Rushd's intellectual legacy found greater resonance in the West than in the very Islamic milieu from which it emerged.

The Integration of Reason and Revelation in The Thought of Ibn Rushd

The idea of integrating philosophy and religion did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, it arose from a complex socio-historical context shaped by the intellectual and theological climate of the medieval period. One of the most acute tensions in this integrative discourse revolved around the concept of causality, culminating in a heated polemic between Al-Ghazali—through his seminal work *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)—and Ibn Rushd's critical response in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence) (Fuady & Chair, 2023).

Ibn Rushd's unwavering defense of philosophy, particularly the tradition of Ibn Sīnā, is reflected in his various writings, such as *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* and *al-Kashf 'an Manāhij al-Adillah*. These works represent a systematic attempt to vindicate philosophical reasoning against accusations of deviating from religious doctrine. Deeply concerned about the negative stigma attached to philosophy by segments of the Muslim community, Ibn Rushd firmly believed that philosophy and religion are not inherently contradictory. On the contrary, they pursue the same ultimate aim—truth—albeit through different methodological routes. He criticized Al-Ghazali for his alleged failure to grasp

both the esoteric dimension of Islamic law (*sharia*) and the essence of philosophy. For Ibn Rushd, religion and philosophy are like “milk-siblings” (*ta’ūmatān*): parallel paths that complement each other in the pursuit of divine truth.

Three primary factors underlie Ibn Rushd's advocacy for the integration of philosophy and religion. The first is sociological: Andalusian society at the time regarded truth as the exclusive domain of the *fuqaha’* (jurists), and any viewpoint outside this framework was deemed heretical. The second is ideological: Ibn Rushd held a profound admiration for Aristotle, whom he saw as the epitome of intellectual virtue. This admiration exposed him to charges of heresy by conservative circles. The third factor is objective: the intellectual environment of Muslim Andalusia was in dire need of a reconciliation between rational philosophy and religious doctrine, as the climate of extreme intellectual polarization had resulted in mutual accusations of disbelief.

From Ibn Rushd’s perspective, philosophy does not undermine faith; rather, it strengthens it. He even urged Muslims to study philosophy as a form of deep contemplation upon God's creation. For him, the Qur’an itself repeatedly invites believers to reflect, to ponder the universe, and to understand the existence of the Creator. Thus, philosophy is essentially a means to draw closer to God through reason, consistent with its fundamental task: to guide humankind toward a rational and profound comprehension of both the Creator and His creation (Kholis, 2017).

The fundamental distinction between religion and philosophy lies like truth they respectively affirm. From a philosophical standpoint, truth is relative, stemming from human reasoning and limited intellectual speculation. In contrast, religious truth is perceived as absolute and eternal, originating from the infallible Divine revelation. Nevertheless, Ibn Rushd denies any notion of a duality of truths; for him, there is only one ultimate truth. Therefore, despite the differing approaches of religion and philosophy, their coexistence and potential harmony are not only plausible but necessary. He constructs his integrative framework on three key assumptions. First, the principle of *al-dīn yūjibu al-tafalsuf*, which asserts that religion itself compels and encourages philosophical inquiry (Salabi, 2021).

Second, the concept of *anna al-shar‘ fīhi zāhir wa bāṭin* posits that Islamic law possesses two dimensions: an exoteric aspect for the jurists and an esoteric dimension open to philosophical exploration. Third, the principle *anna al-ta’wīl darūrī li-khayr al-sharī‘ah wa al-hikmah*, meaning that

philosophical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) is essential for the well-being of both religious law and philosophical wisdom.

Ibn Rushd reinforces his claim that philosophy does not contradict religion through various Qur'anic proofs. He refers, for instance, to Qur'an 59:2 (al-Ḥasyr), which recounts how God destroyed the disbelievers in ways observable and analyzable through reason. He also cites Qur'an 17:84 (al-Isrā'), which acknowledges that each person follows a different intellectual path and that God alone knows who is rightly guided. According to Ibn Rushd, these verses underscore the imperative for human beings to think, reflect, and seek the truth—activities that, by their very nature, constitute philosophical inquiry.

Moreover, Ibn Rushd concludes that the Qur'an does not prohibit philosophy. If certain texts appear to oppose philosophical activities, they must be understood contextually through a mature and balanced interpretive approach (*ta'wīl*). Therefore, within Ibn Rushd's intellectual framework, religion and philosophy not only coexist but mutually reinforce each other in the quest for holistic truth.

Ibn Rushd adopts two major approaches in reconciling philosophy with religion: a scriptural (*shar'i*) approach and a rational approach. He held a strong conviction that these two realms are capable of peaceful coexistence and mutual enrichment. At a time when philosophers struggled to maintain the relevance of philosophy amid growing skepticism from Muslim rulers, seeking common ground was the most prudent path.

The first approach emphasizes that philosophy serves to explain the nature of creation by contemplating existence as evidence of the Creator. Ibn Rushd argues that everything in the universe is a creation of God, and a deeper understanding of these creations naturally leads to a more profound knowledge of their Creator. In other words, the study of *sunnatullah*—the divine order of creation—is a principal way to know God more intimately (Pridandi, 2023; Susanti & Hayani, 2021).

The second approach involves interpreting Qur'anic verses in ways that align with rational human thought. Ibn Rushd views these verses as a clear mandate obligating Muslims to pursue philosophy. However, he also stresses that not everyone is equipped to engage in such inquiry, as it requires mastery of logical sciences (*mantiq*), particularly the Aristotelian concepts of *burhān* (demonstrative reasoning) and *qiyās* (syllogism). Using Aristotelian *qiyās 'aqliy*, Ibn Rushd concludes that the study of philosophy is a religious obligation—or, at the very least, highly encouraged.

Epistemologically, Ibn Rushd employs *qiyās* and *ta'wīl* to bridge the perceived divide between religious and philosophical understanding. He insists that the two are not in conflict but are mutually supportive, for truth, by its very nature, is consistent and indivisible. To him, philosophy and religion are like “twin siblings” journeying together toward the essence of truth.

The divergences in interpretation among jurists, theologians, and philosophers, according to Ibn Rushd, stem more from differences in language and modes of articulation rather than from any fundamental disagreement in the underlying principles of truth.

Regarding natural sciences, Ibn Rushd affirms that God manifests His majesty in two forms: the Qur'an, as the verbal revelation (*ayat qauliyyah*), and the cosmos, as the physical signs (*ayat kauniyyah*). The Qur'an contains numerous verses that invite humanity to reflect upon, explore, and extract wisdom from these divine signs—not only regarding worldly phenomena but also the realities of the hereafter.

In principle, when confronted with scientific discoveries not explicitly mentioned in religious texts, Ibn Rushd contends that there is no conflict as long as these findings do not contradict sharia. Researchers bear the responsibility to uncover and explain such knowledge through scientific or philosophical reasoning. However, if empirical findings appear to clash with scriptural texts, then those texts should undergo reinterpretation (*ta'wīl*) in light of the outer meanings of the sharia to achieve harmony between revelation and reason (Rushd, 1986).

Comparative Analysis: Divergence and Convergence

The comparison between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Rushd reveals two distinct patterns of thought regarding the legitimacy and limits of rational interpretation in Islam. Although both scholars acknowledge the importance of reason and the role of *ijtihad*, their methodological approaches reflect deep philosophical differences.

One of the main differences lies in their views on *ta'wīl* (allegorical interpretation). For Ibn Taymiyyah, *ta'wīl*—especially in the context of God's attributes—is a misguided practice that can lead to error. He rejects symbolic interpretations of divine texts and prefers a literal understanding. When the meaning is unclear, he advocates *tafwīdh* (consigning the knowledge of it to God). He believes that allegorical approaches to God's attributes risk two extremes: either likening God to His creation (*tashbih*) or denying His attributes entirely (*ta'tīl*).

"Knowledge is either a text which is received from an infallible source, or a saying backed by a clear proof. As for all else, then it is either false and rejected, or doubtful, so its truthfulness or falsehood cannot be ascertained."(Ibn Taymiyyah, 1980)

This foundational statement establishes Ibn Taymiyyah's epistemological hierarchy, placing revelation from an "infallible source" (Qur'an and Sunnah) as the primary and most certain form of knowledge. Any other knowledge is either verifiable by clear proof (secondary, but acceptable) or is inherently suspect ("false and rejected, or doubtful"). This directly underpins his textualist approach, where scriptural texts are the ultimate arbiters of truth, thereby limiting the independent authority of reason. His high regard for infallible textual sources leads to a restrictive view of reason in interpretation, reflecting a deep-seated concern for the purity and unadulterated nature of divine revelation. His methodology is not merely a preference but a defense mechanism against what he perceived as intellectual and theological innovations that could distort the original message, ultimately aiming to safeguard the integrity of Islamic doctrine and the unity of the ummah.

"It is binding that a person should know that the Prophet explained the meaning of the Quran to his Companions, just as he made clear to them its Words."(Ibn Taymiyyah, 1980)

This statement forms the bedrock of Ibn Taymiyyah's emphasis on the Salaf as the authoritative interpreters. If the Prophet fully explained the Qur'an to his Companions, then their understanding, preserved through transmission, becomes the most reliable and authentic source for interpretation. This directly justifies his methodological preference for *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* and his skepticism towards later, more speculative interpretations that deviate from the Salaf's consensus. This principle is fundamental to his conservative hermeneutic, aiming to prevent subjective interpretations from corrupting the divine message.

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, there are two sources of differences in Qur'anic interpretation. The first is differences that stem solely from religious texts (*al-naql*). The second is differences originating from sources other than religious texts. This issue then develops into questions such as whether the transmitted religious texts—other than the Qur'an—come from an infallible source or not, and whether their authenticity can be verified. Narrations whose authenticity cannot be confirmed due to their weakness are considered of no real benefit for us to know. Examples include disagreements among exegetes regarding the name and color of the dog of the Companions of the Cave (*Ashhāb al-Kahf*), which part of the cow was used to strike the murdered

man, the weight of the wood used in Prophet Nuh's Ark, or the name of the child killed by Prophet Khidr, and the like (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1980).

Rashid Rida, quoting Ibn Taymiyyah, stated that the way to ascertain such matters must be based solely on religious texts (*al-naql*), in this case, the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). If a hadith is authentically reported from the Prophet, it must be accepted. However, if the narration originates from the People of the Book, such as Ka'ab or Wahab, it should neither be affirmed nor denied, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "If the People of the Book tell you something, do not believe them and do not disbelieve them." (Ridha, 1947).

In contrast, Ibn Rushd regards *ta'wil* as a vital tool in interpreting verses that contain ambiguity. He asserts that sacred texts have two layers of meaning: the outward meaning intended for the general public and the inward meaning accessible only to the learned through rational and philosophical interpretation. In his view, *ta'wil* is essential for bridging the gap between textual meaning and philosophical truth (Rushd, 1986).

"He who does not understand the art does not understand the product of art, and he who does not understand the product of art does not understand the Artisan." (Rushd, 1986)

This concise aphorism encapsulates Ibn Rushd's core argument for the necessity of philosophical inquiry. The "art" refers to the intricate design and order of the universe, the "product of art" is creation itself, and the "Artisan" is God. To truly comprehend God (the Artisan), one must understand His creation (the product of art), which in turn requires understanding the underlying principles and design (the art). This understanding, for Ibn Rushd, is achieved through philosophical and rational investigation, thereby making rational inquiry a prerequisite for profound theological knowledge. This statement underscores his belief that intellectual engagement with the cosmos is a direct path to divine cognition.

Another significant difference concerns the relationship between revelation and reason. Ibn Taymiyyah firmly places revelation as the ultimate and primary source of knowledge. Reason is appreciated, but its function is to understand and affirm revelation, not to supersede it. He maintains that a true conflict between sound reason and authentic revelation is impossible; any perceived contradiction stems from flawed reasoning or incorrect interpretation.

Conversely, Ibn Rushd proposes a synthesis between reason and revelation. He believes both are distinct paths leading to the same truth. For him, philosophy and religion are not in opposition but are complementary forms of

knowledge that reinforce one another. He even argues that philosophy clarifies the content of revelation and deepens its understanding.

Their attitudes toward Greek philosophy also mark a critical point of divergence. Ibn Taymiyyah is highly critical of Muslim thinkers influenced by Greek philosophy, viewing their rational methods as speculative and detrimental to the purity of Islamic teachings. He calls for a return to the methodology of the *Salaf al-Salih* (pious predecessors), grounded in the Qur'an and Hadith. Conversely, Ibn Rushd is a staunch advocate of Aristotelian philosophy. He considers Greek thought a legitimate and useful intellectual tool for elaborating Islamic legal and ethical principles.

Epistemologically, Ibn Taymiyyah rejects the validity of Aristotelian syllogistic logic, emphasizing instead the significance of fitrah (innate human disposition) and revelation as foundations of knowledge. To him, sound reason is naturally embedded in the human self and is reinforced by revelation. Meanwhile, Ibn Rushd upholds demonstrative logic (*burhan*) and empirical observation as the main pillars for constructing rational arguments. He believes that through such methods, humans can attain certainty and consistency in understanding truth.

Despite these significant differences, there are important points of convergence. Both scholars agree that truth is singular, although the paths to it may vary. They also equally recognize reason as a crucial instrument in understanding revelation, affirming that reason is a divine gift that enables human beings to bear the responsibility of divine law (*taklif*) and to acquire knowledge.

Furthermore, both Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Rushd advocate the importance of *ijtihad*. Ibn Taymiyyah is known for reopening the gates of *ijtihad*, encouraging scholars to move beyond blind imitation (*taqlid*). Meanwhile, Ibn Rushd is noted for his epistemological approach to *ijtihad*, particularly in addressing *ikhtilaf* (juridical disagreement) in Islamic jurisprudence. He seeks to establish a rational basis for differentiating legal opinions and to clarify legal reasoning through philosophical thought.

By critically examining the views of both thinkers, we not only witness sharp theological and methodological differences but also gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay between reason and revelation in the intellectual heritage of Islam.

Discussion

The meeting and differences between the thoughts of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Rushd regarding the legitimacy of rational interpretation are not merely

intellectual discourse, but have broad impacts on the development of theology, Islamic law, and interpretative methods throughout Islamic scholarly history. Each figure brought a distinctive epistemological foundation and methodology, shaping two major streams of thought that challenge yet enrich Islamic discourse to this day.

Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that regarding the attributes of God, Muslims must avoid allegorical approaches (*ta'wil*) and firmly adhere to the apparent meaning of the text. He believed that philosophical interpretations of divine attributes could lead to theological errors, either by likening God to His creation (*tasybih*) or by denying His attributes altogether (*ta'thil*). These literalist views later became a cornerstone for Salafi and reformist movements advocating the purity of doctrine based on the understanding of the early generations of Islam (*Salaf al-Salih*) (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1980).

In contrast, Ibn Rushd offered a bridge between religion and philosophy. For him, logical reasoning and symbolic interpretation are necessary to understand the ambiguous or metaphorical verses of the Qur'an. He believed that revelation would never contradict sound reason, and intellectuals bear the responsibility to explore the deeper meanings of such verses. With this approach, Ibn Rushd established the foundation for the development of philosophical theology within Islam and fostered a spirit of critical thinking that goes beyond reliance on textual authority alone (Rushd, 1986).

In the field of law, Ibn Taymiyyah combined the strength of the *nash* (text) with reason but within strict limits. He insisted that all Shariah laws must not only be rooted in revelation but also be supported by rational wisdom. This approach allowed the emergence of the *tajdid* (renewal) movement in Islamic law, emphasizing that legal validity depends not solely on tradition but also on benefit (*maslahah*) and logical arguments aligned with the *maqasid al-sharia* (objectives of Islamic law).

Meanwhile, Ibn Rushd viewed reason as a vital tool for resolving legal differences (*fiqh ikhtilaf*). He employed demonstrative logic to weigh the strength of arguments from various schools of thought, making *ijtihad* not only a means to understand the text but also an instrument to respond to social dynamics and contemporary needs. This approach rendered Islamic law flexible, adaptive, and relevant in addressing new realities.

Regarding the interpretation of sacred texts, Ibn Taymiyyah firmly adhered to a literal approach. He rejected any form of speculative or philosophical interpretation, especially concerning the attributes of God. His goal was to preserve the sanctity of the Qur'an's meaning from external influences that might distort its original intent. This resulted in a hermeneutic approach

heavily focused on explicit, textual meaning, suitable for lay society and puritan movements.

Ibn Rushd defended the right of *ta'wil* for those intellectually capable of it. He believed that sacred texts contain layers of meaning beyond literal comprehension. By opening the door for deeper, philosophical interpretation, Ibn Rushd encouraged the development of a richer, more flexible, and contextual tradition of exegesis.

The intellectual contest between these two great figures reflects a long-standing tension in Islamic intellectual history. This tension manifests in the interplay between reason and revelation, and between conservatism and rationalism. Although differing in approach, both Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Rushd agree that reason holds an important place in religion. The difference lies only in the extent to which reason may be used and under what epistemological framework it can be considered valid.

Ibn Taymiyyah's thought became a main pillar for many modern Islamic movements that reject innovations not rooted in *nash* and call for a return to the early generations' understanding. His influence remains strong in Salafi groups seeking to purify religion from what they consider deviant external elements.

Conversely, Ibn Rushd's ideas played a significant role in shaping modern Islamic intellectual paradigms open to dialogue with science and Western thought. He became a symbol of resistance against dogmatism and closed-mindedness, as well as a foundational figure for contemporary efforts to integrate religious knowledge and general sciences. The harmony between reason and revelation that he advocated is highly relevant to the development of comprehensive Islamic educational curricula in the global era.

Examining the intellectual struggle between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Rushd is not merely a historical study but a key to understanding many problems faced by Muslims today—from education and law to the relationship between religion and science. They teach that the tension between reason and revelation is not to be avoided but managed and developed wisely. Both, despite their differences, demonstrate that reason is a gift from God that can deepen faith and broaden the horizon of understanding divine teachings. The intellectual legacy of these two scholars lives on, challenging each Muslim generation to think critically, responsibly, and continuously seek truth within a framework that harmonizes text and reality, faith and intellect.

Conclusion

This study elucidates the profound intellectual divergence between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Rushd regarding the role of reason in interpreting Islamic texts. While Ibn Taymiyyah champions textualism and rejects allegorical interpretation to preserve doctrinal purity, Ibn Rushd embraces rationalism, viewing philosophy and revelation as complementary paths to truth. Their methodological differences reflect broader tensions in Islamic thought between conservatism and intellectual flexibility. Despite their contrasting approaches, both scholars affirm the significance of reason within their respective frameworks, contributing to the richness of Islamic intellectual heritage. Their debates remain pertinent today, offering valuable perspectives for reconciling faith and rationality in modern contexts. This research underscores the need for nuanced engagement with sacred texts, balancing reverence for tradition with the demands of contemporary inquiry.

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