Chapter Fifteen

THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE ISLAMIC WEST

The Islamic West is a convenient term to designate Islamic Spain and North Africa, which are referred to in Arabic as the Maghrib or 'West'. Nearly the whole of Spain was conquered by the Arabs in the early eighth century and became a province of the Umayyad caliphate. Shortly after the overthrow of the Umayyads by the 'Abbāsids in 750 a young Umayyad prince, who had managed to escape from the 'Abbāsids, became independent ruler of the province of al-Andalus or Spain. The Umayyads maintained their rule in Spain until 1031. From then until 1090 over a dozen petty dynasties, the *reyes de taifas*, each controlled a small territory. From the middle of the eleventh to the middle of the thirteenth century north-west Africa was dominated in succession by two great Islamic empires ruled by Berber dynasties, the Almoravids and the Almohads (in Arabic al-Murābiṭūn and al-Muwaḥḥidūn). Both began as movements of religious revival or reform among young men, then later gained political power. The Almoravid empire at its greatest extent stretched from Senegal to Algiers, and from 1090 included nearly all Islamic Spain, which had asked the Almoravids for help against the Christian Reconquista. Between 1120 and 1150 the Almohads conquered most of this empire and even extended it to include Tunisia. As the Almohads in turn declined the Christians recovered Spain apart from the small sultanate of Granada, which maintained itself until 1492. The Almohad dynasty came to an end in Africa in 1269.

The culture of the Islamic West was continuous with that of the heartlands in many important respects. The relationship is not unlike that of the culture of Australia, Canada and the earlier America to British culture. It was usually possible for Muslim scholars to travel from the Maghrib to the eastern intellectual centres, at least as far as Baghdad, and many did so. A few scholars came from the east and settled in Spain. Contributions were made in Spain to the advancement of Islamic humanistic and religious studies. In its greatest

periods Moorish culture is reputed to have had a brilliance comparable to that of Baghdad, but one wonders how much of this brilliance was outward and materialistic. Was there genuine spiritual vitality, or was the Islamic religion merely the framework of a largely secular way of life? Was there any attempt to adapt the general forms of Islamic culture to the special situation of the Spanish Muslims? Until these and similar questions have been more fully investigated, no more than a preliminary orientation can be given of the place of theology and philosophy in the intellectual life of the Islamic West.

The one outstanding theologian of Islamic Spain was Ibn-Ḥazm (*c.*993–1064), europeanized as Abenhazam.[1] His family is thought to have been an old Christian Spanish one which had adopted Islam. His father rose to the position of vizier in Cordova, but this involved him in the troubles following a breakdown of government in 1008, and he met his death in 1012. The young Ibn-Ḥazm suffered in the confusion of these years, but that did not prevent him taking up an administrative career, and becoming vizier to two or even three of the powerless and short-lived Umayyad rulers of the next decades. He had several spells in prison. After the disappearance of the last Umayyad in 1031 he went into semi-retirement and devoted himself to intellectual work. He was a many-sided scholar and wrote books in many different fields, his best-known one being *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma*, 'The Ring of the Dove', which is about love and lovers, and has been translated into at least five European languages. This was his first prose work, written about 1022, and, though the genre was already established in Arabic literature, Ibn-Ḥazm managed to show some originality.

His studies in Cordova had of course included jurisprudence, but he was dissatisfied with the Mālikite school dominant in al-Andalus and, after following the Shāfi'ites for a time, eventually found his spiritual home in the Ẓāhirite school. This is a minor school which has died out. The name is derived from its principle that the statements of the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth are to be taken in their literal or outward sense (*ẓāhir*) and not in an inward or esoteric sense (*bāṭin*). While previous Ẓāhirites had applied the principle only to legal matters, and had held various views in theology, Ibn-Ḥazm attempted to apply it also in points of dogma, and so to bring law and theology together in a single intellectual structure. Indeed his coherent methodology also included grammar, as was shown by Roger Arnaldez' careful and detailed study.

Ibn-Ḥazm was very conscious of the way in which an individual's subjective motivations may cause his statements and interpretations to deviate from strict truth. He was trying to present a view of human life based solely on the objective divine revelation, the *ẓāhir*, and excluding everything subjective. This was the coherent elaboration

of a religious intuition with deep roots in the Muslim soul—the intuition which finds expression in the traditional view that the Qur'ān was in no way influenced by Muḥammad's personality but was brought to him from outside himself (from God) by an angel. There is something of the same objectivity in the act which is the climax of Muslim worship, the act of *sujūd* or touching the ground with the forehead in the formal prayers, in total submission of one's humanity to the omnipotence of God. It is therefore not surprising that Ibn-Ḥazm had considerable influence in the Islamic West, even though he had no followers. His theological views were not taken up by other Ẓāhirites, but something of his outlook is to be found in later writers of the region, even when their general position is very different from his. His views in detail were not unlike those of the Ḥanbalites. Like them he attacked *qiyās*, 'argument from analogy', and insisted that the choice of the ground of comparison on which the analogy was based was necessarily subjective. There is a short statement of his doctrinal beliefs in the chapter on *tawḥīd*, 'the unity (of God)', in his legal work *Kitāb al-Muḥallā*.

His most important theological work is not a comprehensive treatise like those of the Ash'arites, but takes the form of a 'critical history of religious ideas'. The short title is *Kitāb al-fiṣal*. He seems to have conceived it primarily as a dogmatic work, but it is in part a heresiography, describing the views of the Islamic sects briefly and then giving in full the reasons for rejecting these views. It also deals with other religions, notably Christianity, in the same way. This last feature, which led the Spanish Islamist Miguel Asin Palacios to speak of Ibn-Ḥazm as 'the first historian of religious ideas', is perhaps due to the conditions of inter-religious contact in Spain. He was particularly bitter in his attacks on the Ash'arites and their doctrine of the divine attributes, for he regarded their use of 'analogical' reasoning in respect of this topic as a subjective element. He seemed to treat them more harshly than he did the Mu'tazilites. He himself aimed at avoiding both anthropomorphism and metaphorical interpretation, and in this he came close to the Ḥanbalite conception of *balkafiyya*, 'amodality'; in discussing various items in the descriptions of heaven and hell he said 'we believe in them, but do not know *how (kayfa)* they are'.

Of less importance, but still of some interest is Abū-Bakr ibn-al-'Arabī (1076–1148).[2] He set out from Seville in 1092 on a journey to the east with his father. He studied in Damascus and Baghdad, made the pilgrimage to Mecca in November/December 1096, returned to Baghdad, and then went with his father to study Ḥadīth in Cairo and Alexandria. On his father's death in 1099 he returned to Seville, where he was held in high esteem, perhaps chiefly for his knowledge of Ḥadīth. He attended lectures by al-Ghazālī, probably between 1093

and 1095 before he abandoned his professorship; but he also recorded having seen him again in Baghdad in May/June 1097. It is only recently that scholars have become aware of his views on Kalām through realizing that he and not Muḥyī-d-dīn ibn-al-'Arabī was the author of *'Awāṣim al-qawāṣim*, a work which roughly follows the Ash'arite school and includes a vigorous attack on Ibn-Ḥazm. For a time Abū-Bakr ibn-al-'Arabī was chief *qāḍī* of Seville, but after Seville was taken over by the Almohads in 1145 he was removed to Marrakesh and imprisoned for a time, but died on a journey to Fez.

The theology of Ibn-Tūmart (*c.* 1080–*c.* 1130)[3] would hardly be worthy of mention had it not become the official theology of the Almohad empire. He was born in North Africa of Berber stock and about 1106 or 1107 studied in Cordova for a year. Then he went east to Alexandria, Mecca and Baghdad. There are stories of his meeting with al-Ghazālī, but these are almost certainly apocryphal, since after July 1106 al-Ghazālī was in Nishapur or Ṭūs and there is no suggestion that Ibn-Tūmart went further east than Baghdad. He did, however, come under Ash'arite influence and his interest in philosophy may have owed something to the books of al-Ghazālī. While in Spain he probably became familiar with the ideas of Ibn-Ḥazm. He is often spoken of as having spread Ash'arite views in the West, but he was not a consistent Ash'arite, being apparently chiefly concerned to attack anthropomorphism. His conception of God depends more on philosophy than on revelation, since by emphasizing *tawḥīd*, 'unity' —the noun corresponding to the participle *muwaḥḥidūn*, Almohads —he ascribed to God a bare abstract unity. It is curious that in this point he seems to agree with Ibn-Ḥazm in rejecting the Ash'arite view of the divine attributes.

His visit to the East is said to have inspired him with a plan for the reform of the West, so that he began preaching in the boat in which he made the return journey (about 1116 or 1117). He had to move from centre to centre, however, since by temperament he was prone to stir up opposition. Eventually he found supporters among the Berbers of the Maṣmūda and other tribes. About 1121 he publicly claimed to be the Mahdī, the expected 'guided one', who as a kind of Messiah would set everything right. Though he gained many adherents, his movement had little political or military success against the Almoravids up to the time of his death (about 1130). In 1132, however, 'Abd-al-Mu'min, a man with great administrative and military gifts, who had met Ibn-Tūmart in Bougie (in eastern Algeria) on the way back from the East and had become a follower, took control of the Almohad movement. By 1147 he had destroyed the Almoravid power in North Africa and then extended his sway over Islamic Spain, where he even recovered some territory from the Christians.

A potent factor in the replacement of the Almoravids by the

Almohads was doubtless the hostility of some Berber tribes for those other Berber tribes that supported the Almoravids; but the religious teaching of Ibn-Tūmart gave a focus to this hostility, even though his own primary interest was in religious reform. Though the idea of the Mahdī has close associations with Shī'ism, it was also popular with Sunnites from an early date. In the Almohad movement, however, its ready acceptance and its importance depended on the innate need of the Berbers for a divinely inspired or otherwise superhuman leader—a need witnessed to by the popular cults of Marabouts or holy men. It is interesting, too, that Ibn-Tūmart had composed books of instruction for his followers in the Berber language and had also used it in the call to prayer. The Almoravids he denounced as anthropomorphists, and spoke of fighting against them as *jihād*, 'holy war'.

While the Almohad movement did not itself contribute much to the general course of Islamic thought, it provided a tolerant environment for the great flowering of philosophy linked with the names of Ibn-Ṭufayl and Averroes. There had previously been one or two distinguished exponents of philosophy in Spain. It was said to have been introduced by Abenmasarra (Ibn-Masarra) (883–931), the son of an immigrant from the East, who combined Mu'tazilite views with ideas from Empedocles and the pseudo-Empedocles.[4] An ascetic and mystic, he had many pupils, but because of the opposition of the jurists could teach only in an isolated hermitage. After him the next philosopher of note was Avempace (Ibn-Bājja) (d.1138).[5] Although he was vizier to the Almoravid governor of Saragossa, his philosophy was an ethical protest against the materialistic outlook and the worldliness of the upper classes of the day. The individual who has seen the folly and the wrongness of the prevailing attitude must keep himself aloof from it, at least in his thinking, by withdrawing into an intellectual isolation. In accordance with this viewpoint he called his chief work *The Rule of the Solitary.* Although the main underlying motive was probably this moral one, the conclusions are worked out in terms of a very thorough analysis of the human mind and human thinking, and this analysis has been of great interest and value to subsequent philosophers.

A young admirer of Avempace, though, despite the statements of some biographers, not an actual pupil, was Ibn-Ṭufayl (*c.*1105–85), known in medieval times as Abubacer from his *kunya*, 'father-name', Abū-Bakr.[6] Born in the small town of Guadix north-east of Granada, he served in various administrative posts and finally became court-physician and vizier of the Almohad prince Abū-Ya'qūb Yūsuf (1163–84). His chief work is the romance of *Ḥayy ibn-Yaqẓān* ('Alive son of Awake'), perhaps the most charming of all philosophical works in Arabic, and reminiscent in some ways of Plato.

The story of Ḥayy is that of a baby cast adrift in a box (or

produced by spontaneous generation), who is brought up by a gazelle on an uninhabited island, and who, by the use of his reason, works out a complete philosophical religion for himself, which is crowned by the experience of mystical ecstasy. Eventually there comes to Ḥayy's island a young man called Asāl from a neighbouring island who has been brought up in the traditional religion but is inclined to metaphorical interpretation and to esoteric and spiritual meanings, and who now wants to devote himself entirely in solitude to the worship of God. When he and Ḥayy meet, they find that his spiritualized form of the traditional religion and Ḥayy's philosophical religion are really the same. Asāl tells Ḥayy of the island he has come from, where a friend of his Salāmān is ruler, who follows the literal meaning (*ẓāhir*) and avoids metaphorical interpretation. They go to the inhabited island and Ḥayy tries to instruct the ordinary people in his philosophical religion, but gives up in despair when he finds that their intellects are incapable of understanding it. In the end Ḥayy and Asāl return to the uninhabited island to spend their days in worship.

This is obviously a defence of the position of philosophy in the life of the Almohad state. Ḥayy stands for pure philosophy, Asāl for philosophical theology—possibly for that of Ibn-Tūmart—and Salāmān for the religion of the ordinary people and probably also of the Mālikite jurists. What is interesting here is the abandonment of the claim of the earlier philosophers like al-Fārābī that philosophy was necessary for the proper ordering of the state. For Ibn-Ṭufayl philosophy is seen to be incapable of directing the lives of the inhabitants of the state. It can lead a few selected individuals to the highest felicity, but to reach this they must retire from active life. In other words the *summum bonum* of the philosopher has become mystical ecstasy.

It is interesting to compare this attitude of Ibn-Ṭufayl with that of his younger friend Averroes or Ibn-Rushd (1126–98).[7] The latter came of a family of jurists, his grandfather being specially well known. He himself also received a legal training, and spent much of his life as judge in Seville and Cordova. He was well versed in the Greek sciences and for a short time (in 1182) followed his friend Ibn-Ṭufayl as physician at the Almohad court. The story is told in detail of how he was first introduced by Ibn-Ṭufayl to the Almohad prince Abū-Ya'qūb Yūsuf possibly in 1153 (before he came to the throne). The prince asked him whether the philosophers considered the heavens created-in-time or eternal, but out of fear he excused himself and denied his study of philosophy. The prince then turned to the older man and spoke of the views of Plato, Aristotle and other philosophers and of the refutation of them by the theologians; and thereupon Averroes took courage and spoke to him freely, and retained his friendship and support until the prince's death in 1084. His

fears were not entirely groundless, for the next sovereign, when the war against the Christian Spaniards was going badly for him and he needed the support of the jurists, had to take mild repressive measures against Averroes, though he subsequently found him a position in his court in Marrakesh.

At the centre alike of the life and of the thought of Averroes is the conviction that philosophy and revelation are both true. He reconciled the two in his life, since he was a judge (rising to be chief qāḍī of Cordova) and a writer on Mālikite law as well as a philosopher. He also gave considerable attention to the intellectual reconciling of the two in his philosophical works. Specially important is the essay known as *Faṣl al-Maqāl*; the full title may be rendered 'the decisive treatise, determining the nature of the connection (or harmony) between religion and philosophy'; but in English, following the hint of the latest translator, we might perhaps call it *The Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*. In this essay Averroes bases the discussion on the principles that philosophy is true and that the revealed scriptures are true, and that there cannot therefore be any disharmony between them. Most of the essay then consists in showing how apparent contradictions are to be removed. Philosophy is in general true and unalterable, though there may have been mistakes and misunderstandings in points of detail; and so the work of reconciliation has to be effected chiefly through finding harmonious interpretations of the scriptures.

The closing section of his book *The Inconsistency of the Inconsistency* has a succinct expression of his views on the relation of philosophy and religion. He does not believe that the philosopher should withdraw from active life or eschew popular religion, but that he 'should choose the best religion of his period'; it is assumed that this is 'the one in which he has been brought up', in short, Islam (though this is not explicitly stated). Because of the importance of religion for the life of the state the philosopher must accept its formulations and explain them. A religion of pure reason Averroes thinks inferior to the revealed religions when philosophically understood. All this shows that he has a full understanding of the place of religion in society and polity, and also in the early training even of the philosopher. He also saw that the class of religious intellectuals would only fulfil their functions adequately when they remained in contact with the ordinary people. He seems further to have held that part of this function was to criticize contemporary society, and he does this very acutely in the course of his commentary on the *Republic* of Plato.

What has just been said is an indication of the place of Averroes in the development of Islamic thought in Spain, but does not touch on his importance in the general history of philosophy. His greatness

here rests first and foremost on his work as a commentator of Aristotle. He had a profound knowledge of Aristotelian thought, and in the commentaries he wrote on many of the works he was able to remove some of the Neoplatonic interpretations which had hitherto been current in Arabic. His superlative merits were recognized by the Christian and Jewish scholars then in Spain, and his commentaries were translated into Hebrew and Latin. This was the first main introduction of Aristotle to Europe, and was the seed which led to the flowering of medieval philosophy in Thomism, even if that was in part a reaction to the distortion of Averroes' teaching by the Latin Averroists into the theory of the 'double truth'.

Another major philosophical work was *The Inconsistency of the Inconsistency* in which he set out to refute what al-Ghazālī had said about philosophy in *The Inconsistency of the Philosophers*. This book, which is now available in an excellent English translation, is a masterly exposition of Averroes' faith in the capacity of reason to attain to a knowledge of the inner secrets of the world. Yet in some respects it was a failure. Averroes had no influence in the Islamic world comparable to his influence in Europe. This was not simply due to the collapse of Islamic civilization in Spain shortly after his death, for his *Inconsistency* at least was known in the East. More important was probably his failure to convince the main body of scholarly opinion in Spain and North Africa that there was a place for philosophy alongside their rather unphilosophical theology. Moreover, though he had written against al-Ghazālī, he had never had to deal with any prominent Ash'arites in the flesh; thus his arguments would be unlikely to convince any Ash'arites, and yet they were the people in the East most sympathetic to philosophy.

By the end of the twelfth century the Almohad hold on Spain was loosening, and by about 1225 they had abandoned it. Despite this political crisis and the Christian advance academic studies continued. An influential thinker was Muḥyī-d-dīn ibn-al-'Arabī (1165–1240), who was primarily a ṣūfī but was also interested in theological questions.[8] The speculative scheme which he developed shows pantheistic tendencies, and, though sometimes called a 'philosophy', is better described as a theosophy. He was born in Murcia, and studied in Seville and other cities of Islamic Spain and North Africa until 1202 when he went on pilgrimage to Mecca. Thereafter he remained in the East, chiefly in Konya and Damascus. He has often been called 'Ibn-'Arabī' by Western scholars to distinguish him from Abū-Bakr ibn-al-'Arabī, but it appears that 'Ibn-al-'Arabī' is the correct form.

A man who, though also a mystic, had a better claim to the title of philosopher was Ibn-Sab'īn (*c.* 1217–*c.* 1270).[9] He spent most of his life in Spain or North Africa, constantly involved in quarrels and subjected to persecution, but attracting devoted followers mostly

from among the humbler people. Some attention has been paid to the *Answers to Sicilian Questions* attributed to him; these were questions which the emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen had asked the Almohad sultan of the day to answer. Ibn-Sab'īn is reported to have died in Mecca by opening his veins as Stoics had done.

The consummation of the intellectual efforts of the Islamic West came with Ibn-Khaldūn, but he belongs to a later chapter.

NOTES

1. *GAL*, i.505f.; *GALS*, i.692-7; *EI*², art. Ibn Ḥazm (Arnaldez); I. Goldziher, *Die Ẓâhiriten, ihr Lehrsystem und ihre Geschichte*, Leipzig 1884, esp. 116-70 (Eng. tr. by W. Behn, Leiden 1971, 109-71); I. Friedlaender, 'Zur Komposition von Ibn Ḥazm's Milal wa 'n-Nihal', *Orientalische Studien Th. Nöldeke gewidmet . . .*, Giessen 1906, i.267-77; M. Asin Palacios, *Abenházam de Córdoba y su historia de las ideas religiosas*, Madrid 1927; Roger Arnaldez, *Grammaire et théologie chez Ibn Ḥazm de Cordoue, essai sur la structure et les conditions de la pensée musulmane*, Paris 1956; do., 'Controverses théologiques chez Ibn Ḥazm de Cordoue et Ghazali', *Mardis de Dar al-Salam*, Paris 1956, 207-48; do., 'La profession de foi d'Ibn Ḥazm', Congreso de arabistos y islamistos, Cordoba, 1962, *Actas*, 137-61; A. J. Arberry (tr.), *The Ring of the Dove*, London 1953.
2. Abū-Bakr ibn-al-'Arabī: *GAL*, i.525; *GALS*, i.632f.; *EI*², art. Ibn al-'Arabī (Abū Bakr . . .) (J. Robson); 'Ammār Ṭālibī (Talbi), *Arā' Abī-Bakr ibn-al-'Arabī al-kalāmiyya*, Algiers n.d.
3. Ibn-Tūmart: *GAL*, i.506f.; *GALS*, i.697; *EI*², art. Ibn Tūmart (J. F. P. Hopkins); I. Goldziher, 'Materialien zur Kenntnis der Almohadenbewegung', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, xli (1887), 30-140 (and in *Gesammelte Schriften* ii, Hildesheim 1968, 191-301), and also the introduction to Luciani (ed.), *Le Livre de Moḥammed ibn Toumert*, Algiers 1903; R. Brunschwig, 'Sur la Doctrine du Mahdi Ibn Tūmart', *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, ed. S. Löwinger, ii.1-13.
4. Abenmasarra: *GALS*, i.378f.; *EI*², art. Ibn Masarra (Arnaldez); M. Asin Palacios, *Abenmasarra y su escuela*, Madrid 1914, and Eng. tr. by E. H. Douglas and H. W. Yoder, *The Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Masarra and his followers*, Leiden 1978.
5. Avempace: *GAL*, i.601; *EI*², art. Ibn Badjdja (D. M. Dunlop); Georges Zainaty, *La morale d'Avempace*, Paris 1979.
6. Ibn-Ṭufayl: *GAL*, i.602f.; *GALS*, i.831f.; *EI*², art. Ibn Ṭufayl (Carra de Vaux); Eng. translations of *Ḥayy ibn-Yaqẓān*: (1) *The Improvement of Human Reason*, by S. Ockley, London 1708; revised by A. S. Fulton, London 1929; (2) *The Awakening of the Soul*, by P. Brönnle, London 1904.
7. Averroes: *GAL*, i.604-6; *GALS*, i.833-7; *EI*², art. Ibn Rushd (Arnaldez); Simon van den Bergh (tr.), *Averroes' Tahafut al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, two vols., London 1954; G. F. Hourani (tr.), *Ibn Rushd (Averroes) on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, London 1962, a translation of *Faṣl al-maqāl*; do., 'Averroes on Good and Evil', *Studia Islamica*, xvi (1962), 13-40; L. Gauthier, *La théorie d'Ibn Roschd sur les rapports de la religion et de la philosophie*, Paris 1909; Roger Arnaldez, 'La pensée religieuse d'Averroès', in *Studia Islamica*, vii, viii, ix (1957-9).

8. Muḥyī-d-dīn ibn-al-'Arabī: *GAL*, i.571-82; *GALS*, i.790-802; *EI*², art. Ibn al-'Arabī, Muḥyi 'l-Dīn (A. Ateş); A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyi'ddīn Ibnul-'Arabī*, Cambridge 1939; H. Corbin, *L'imagination creatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī*, Paris 1958, and Eng. tr. by R. Manheim, Princeton 1969.
9. Ibn-Sab'īn: *GAL*, i.611; *GALS*, i.844; *EI*², art. Ibn Sab'īn (A. Faure).