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Dialectical views on metaphysics in Islam: Thoughts of Ibn Rushd and theologians

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Author:
Aminullah Elhady[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Department of Islamic Studies, Graduate School, Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq, Jember, Indonesia

Corresponding author:
Aminullah Elhady,
aminelhady@uinkhas.ac.id

This paper discusses the dialectical thoughts of Ibn Rushd and theologians on divine metaphysics. The discussion is based on the study of criticisms and dialogues on the theologians' view on metaphysics. Three important points emerge: firstly, how Ibn Rushd presented the basis of his critical arguments; secondly, the process of Ibn Rushd's methods of criticism on the theologians' metaphysical reasons and lastly, the content of Ibn Rushd's criticisms of the theologians' metaphysical reason. This paper provides a detailed description of the themes as accurate and comprehensive ways to provide a basis of Ibn Rushd's criticism.

Contribution: This study contributes to encouraging and changing the views of scholars of Islamic theology that Ibn Rushd, apart from being a philosopher, is also a critical thinker in the field of Islamic theology.

Keywords: metaphysics; theology; philosophy; criticism; dialectics.

Introduction

Attempts to prove the existence of God with attributes attached to Him have given rise to serious debates amongst Muslim theologians. Some of them tend to choose a textual approach by simply taking the two most authoritative sources of Islam: the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet, and some preferred a rational-philosophical approach. The theological debate around the existence of God has actually given birth to the figure of Ibn Rushd (1126–1198) who tried to reconcile the various schools of thought. He was known as a defender of reason and seems to ignore revelation, but on the other hand, he was also known as a theologian who staunchly defended revelation and ignored rational reasoning.

Studies on the thoughts of Ibn Rushd have been carried out by some researchers. But so far, the works on his thoughts are still limited to four main tendencies: First is the study on Ibn Rushd's efforts to harmonise reason and revelation, to religion and science and to seek common ground between *shariah* and philosophy (Al Moussawia & Roomib 2019; Bershadska & Yarosh 2021; Khattab 2019; Sandybayev & Abzhalov 2021). Second is the study on Ibn Rushd's views in the medical field (Amar, Lev & Serri 2009). Forcada (2020) revealed the concept of treatment according to Ibn Rushd whilst Olimat (2020) traced the use of Agnus-Castus as a medicine offered by Ibn Rushd and confirms it with the findings of modern medicine. Third is the study that discussed Ibn Rushd's views on metaphysics (Judaechil 2021; Taylor 1998). Halper (2019) discussed the internal contradictions of Ibn Rushd's attitude towards dialectical and demonstration methods. Kokoć (2018) compared the concepts of essence and being in the views of Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, whilst Cerami (2020) explained the doctrine of action and potential according to Ibn Rushd. Dickman (2021) presented the study that examined Ibn Rushd's view of cosmology. Taufiqurrahman and Hambali (2021) discussed the cosmological concept according to Ibn Rushd, which was a middle path between Muslim theologians and philosophers. Of the four trends, it was rare for studies to explore Ibn Rushd's criticism to Muslim theologians on the issues of divine metaphysics. Meanwhile, Al-Ash'ari, the central figure of the Asharites school, viewed that theological issues are not purely religious, but there were ideological and political aspects that influenced them (Mabrook 2013; Zaini 2020).

Ibn Rushd was a well-known philosopher, physician, astronomer, lawyer and theologian, as well as a well-known critic in the field of religion. His criticisms on the views of philosophers and theologians, especially those of Ibn Sina and Asharites, were largely concerned with the problems of divinity (Parvizian 2021). His philosophical thoughts that specifically addressed the issues of divinity can be understood through the basis of his criticisms.

The discourse on metaphysics is always interesting in the study of theological-philosophical thoughts, both in the past and at present. The object of metaphysics is concerned with what does not appear in the real world but rather is concerned with the occult. This domain of metaphysics in Arabic term is usually referred to as *ma ba'da al-tabi'ah*; that is, anything that is invisible or inaccessible by the senses.

According to Leaman (2005), Ibn Rushd distinguished the arguments of *shariah* into two: the *zahir*, which contains intrinsic meaning and is clearly literal, and the *batin*, which contains esoteric meaning. The *zahir* argument can be reached by the public, as it contains a meaning that is close to and easily understood by simple thinking, whereas the *batin* argument contains allegorical meaning that can be understood through the *ta'wil* (interpretation), which is a realm for the ulama or Muslim scholars. According to Ibn Rushd, laypeople are not to take the thinking path of scholars, and to the contrary, scholars should not present the understandings gained through that directly to the laity. The revealed texts, which contain esoteric meanings, can only be understood by those who have the capacity to discover the meaning of the *batin* arguments. According to Ibn Rushd, a person with the capacity of *burhan*, but uncover it textually, will lead him to disbelief.

The study is discussed because the issue of metaphysics related to divinity in Islam is still one of the issues of debate, not only in the academic realm but also in the socioreligious movement of Muslims' daily life, as happened in Indonesia amongst the majority group who also claimed as Asharites (Dhuhri & Jakfar 2020). This can be felt by the increasingly massive dissemination of information and discourse through social media, including in this metaphysical problem. Debates on divine issues are usually based on religious textual arguments by some groups, but there are other groups that rely solely on rational arguments.

In general, the Muslim community in the contemporary world can be grouped into two categories, namely the textualist and the rationalist. The textualist group (*harfiyyun*) understands that religious messages are written and read outwardly without interpretation whilst the rationalist group (*'aqliyyun*) captures the inner meaning of religious messages according to the context studied through interpretation. However, in its development, a new group emerged that combined the two trends with a textualist-rationalist style of thought, which is generally found in educated or enlightened groups.

This study aims to complement the previous studies on the divine metaphysics and examines further views of Muslim theologians and Ibn Rushd's critiques. In line with this goal, there are at least two questions to be answered: How did Muslim theologians construct evidentiary arguments around the existence, oneness and attributes of God? And, what was Ibn Rushd's response and criticism of the arguments put forward by Muslim theologians? This paper is based on an argument that Ibn Rushd's views on divine metaphysics showed his consistency in establishing harmony between reason and revelation, *shariah* and philosophy, as well as religion and science. The truth in Ibn Rushd's view was not proven using only one approach; it must empower all intellectual tools, both revelation and reason.

Method

The study on Ibn Rushd's critique of Muslim theologians in the divine metaphysics is important. Firstly, Ibn Rushd's critique on this issue has not received serious attention from scholars in the medieval and the millennial era. Secondly, the question of divine metaphysics has given rise to a long debate amongst Muslim theologians and has made historical tensions between various schools of thought in the field of *kalam* (dialectical theology in Islam), which is still ongoing in contemporary debates. Ibn Rushd's critique of Muslim theologians in this study is explained through qualitative research that relies on primary and secondary data. The primary data source of this study is Ibn Rushd's treatise on the issue of theology entitled *Manahij al-Adillah* (1964a) and *Fasl al-Maqal* (1983). For secondary sources, this study relies on works written by contemporary writers on Ibn Rushd's theological thought, such as Qasim's *Muqaddimah* (1964), Al-Iraqi's *Al-Manhaj al-Naqdi* (1984) and Fakhry's *A History* (2007).

Results and discussion

This study explicitly discusses metaphysics that is oriented to the study of criticism and dialogue on the understanding of metaphysics presented by the theologians. The study becomes urgent because reviewers of Ibn Rushd very rarely examine his discourse in the context of the critique of metaphysics. Ernets Renan in his book *Averroes l'averroisme* (1882) discovered in historical studies Ibn Rushd's mission to purify the doctrine of *tawhid*. Wohlman made more emphasis on the study of Ibn Rushd's views in reasoning Quranic interpretation with his deepest study. He also presented a study of methods of demonstrative philosophical interpretation (Wohlman 2013).

Ibn Rushd's criticism: A demonstrative philosophical reason

Divine revelation in Islamic belief is the main basis and source for instilling faith, even though the theologians disagree in presupposition, that is, if there is no revelation whether humans have faith after revelation existed. After the revelation really has come down, the next difference arises, which must be put forward in argument, revelation or reason. Muslim theologians cannot be separated from the religious framework, so any differences in building the argument are also based on the text or signs contained in the revelation.

The reason for Ibn Rushd's criticism to the theologians and the Muslim philosophers can be traced as follows. Firstly, the theologians argued with the dialectical (*jadal*) method, whilst Ibn Rushd believed that the demonstrative (*burhan*)

method was a valid argument and its validity could be tested. However, the Muslim philosophers who endorsed neo-Platonic views, found that their ways of thought were incompatible with demonstrative methods of proof. According to Ibn Rushd, hikmah is reasoning for things according to the methods of proof. When the theologians came up with a dialectical method and did not try to take a new path with the *burhan* method, Ibn Rushd criticised them because any view whose argument was not equivalent to the demonstrative method and considered as an invalid view could not be categorised into philosophical arguments (Iraqi 1984).

Furthermore, Ibn Rushd also admitted that various groups had emerged in the midst of Muslims, each of whom argued that his group most correctly followed the path of *shariah*, whilst others who differed were accused of being heretical groups. Such extreme views, according to Ibn Rushd, were completely out of context of *shariah* because they did not understand the purpose of *shariah* itself (Ibn Rushd 1964a, 1964b). He displayed his criticisms in response to the views of the theologians in matters of divinity. Various theologians' views on divine matters were accompanied by propositions. The arguments put forward by each group also varied, in which some had similarities with each other, some were different and some conflicted with one another.

The existence of God

Various schools use different approaches to reach the recognition of the existence of God (Kaukua 2021). Some rely solely on revelation and some mobilise reason. Here, the schools are grouped into rationalist and textualist. The rationalist school is represented by the Mu'tazila and its supporters, whilst the textualist school, also called as the traditionalist school, is represented by the Ahl al-Hadith (Hodgson 2009). Hourani (2010) noted that the Mutazilites declined because of the continuing strength of the traditionalist led by Ibn Hanbal, who was opposed to theologians.

Amongst the textualist groups, there was the Hashwiyah, which argued that the way to reach the knowledge of the existence of God is through revelation information, not reason. That was to say, according to this group believing in the existence of Allah and the problems of the Hereafter must be conveyed by revelation although it seems irrational. At first glance, this group has a view similar to that of Ibn Hanbal, but in fact there is a difference. Ibn Rushd mentioned that this group had fallen into error because it had neglected the purpose of the *shariah*. The Hashwiyah was part of the Mujassimah and Mushabbihah groups; they were anthropomorphic, meaning that they incorporated many elements of *israiliyyat* and agnosticism into the interpretation of *mutashabihat* verses (Al-Nasshar 1981). They described the God they worshiped as a form that had limbs and other parts, both in spiritual and in physical dimensions. In addition, they also believed that God can move, go down, rise, dwell or settle down.

Meanwhile, the Asharites have their own way of thinking to know the existence of Allah. The group maintained that the existence of God is through reason. Similar to the Mutazilites, although Ibn Rushd acknowledged that he could not directly refer to books of Mutazilites because he did not find them, he saw that their views on the matter were like the Asharites. Therefore, Ibn Rushd equated the views of the Mutazilites and Asharites in this matter (Fakhry 2007). Although there are differences between the Mutazilites and Asharites, namely that Mutazilites take rational interpretations greater than that of Asharites, it is clear that the Mutazilites are a *kalam* school of thought, even considering the first *kalam* sect to exist. That is to say, similar to the other *kalam* school, that the Mutazilites' method of thought is dialectic rather than demonstrative (Iraqi 1984).

To prove the existence of Allah, the theologians of Mutazilites and Asharites proposed the theory of *al-jawhar al-fard*, which is also called as *dalil al-huduth*. The creation of nature theory states that the universe consists of parts that are not divided into atoms, so the existence of nature is new and created, so there must be a creator who makes it 'to be' and the creator of this world is God. The theory grows a problem, that creation by God is an act (*fi'l*) must be related to a will (*iradah*). If this world is *hadith* because Allah created it from nothing (*al-ijad min al-'adam*), then the problem is whether the will (*iradah*) related to creation is *hadith* or *qadim*. If this problem is approached through the theological method, three possibilities can be found, namely (1) with the *qadim* (eternal will) and the *hadith* (temporary act), (2) the hadith will and the *hadith* act also and (3) both the will and the act are *qadim*. In this case, there is no fourth possibility to say the will and the act are *qadim* because it is totally illogical, arguing that will is a prerequisite for the realisation of an act, so it is irrational to say there is an act preceding the will.

The Asharites reject two of the three possibilities mentioned earlier and state that Allah's willing is eternal (*qadim*) as well as the creation is also *qadim*. On the contrary, the Mutazilites view that both the will and the act are new (*hadith*) because the will is part of the act, and for them acts are *hadith*. If the Asharites view that the act of creation is *qadim*, then how do the acts that are *qadim* manifest something that is hadith? Although, according to the theologians, something grows a thing temporary, it is temporary too. In addition, if the will is *qadim*, then of course it precedes something temporary even if only in a certain time. The Asharites make an analogy between natural norms and conventional ones to state that God can create the world on such conditions completely (Leaman 1986).

The method pursued by the theologians was indeed difficult and not recommended. Their arguments were uncompleted could not be understood by laypeople and were also not feasible for the khawas (Qasim 1964). According to Ibn Rushd, the solution is actually very easy if they return to the first source, namely the Quran, because

there are many evidences of proof that are easily understood by laypeople. The theologians also put forward the theory of al-mumkin wa al-wajib. It is possible if the volume of the world becomes smaller or larger than it is now or if it changes its shape or direction of motion – for example, the solid objects float up, gas objects fall down, sun rises in the west and sets in the east and so on. Every possibility is created, if there is a creator who brings it into being and enables the experience one of the two possibilities as aforementioned (Ibn Rushd 1964a).

Ibn Rushd put forward his criticism of the theory. The assumption that states that all possibilities can occur in this world is mere rhetoric because axiomatically it is not possible for a human existence to form other than a human being, so people are not sure if the sun rises in the west and sets in the east, contrary to its prevalence. The second assumption that everything possible (*ja'iz*) is created is completely unclear. Al-Juwaini, an Asharites figure, explained that the *ja'iz* happened because of the will, that is, the subject of the will. However, every action can occur sometimes naturally and sometimes designed (Al-Juwaini 1995).

Ibn Rushd concluded that the method of proof on the existence of God as delivered by the Asharites was categorised neither as a rational approach that contains truth nor as a religious approach that contains beliefs. According to Ibn Rushd, religious methods such as those described in the Quran generally have two characteristics, namely containing a simple belief and logical lines so that the conclusion is not far from its first premise.

The oneness of God

The problem of the oneness of God amongst the theologians is based on a number of verses that state that there is no more than one god possible (Zarkasyi 2020); therefore, based on the verses referred to the Mutazilites and Asharites, which was later also followed by the Maturidites, put forward an argument known as the *tamanu'* or *al-mumana'ah* (impossibility). The argument states if there is more than one god, there will be competition and even disputes between them; for example, if one god wants something whilst another rejects that desire, then there is a dispute between the gods. If this is the case, then it will show the weaknesses of all the gods or a part of them, and if there is a weakness between them, then surely the weak is not the god.

According to Ibn Rushd, in the *tamanu'* theory, the Asharites conclude from the verses aforementioned as a method that does not follow a natural and a *shariah* approach. He said that he followed neither a natural approach because their arguments were not proved nor a *shariah* approach because what they said could not be reached to the laypeople's understanding. Their argument, as Al-Ash'ari wrote, is that if there are two gods, then they cannot set the rules agreed upon to govern this nature (Kamarzaman, Mahmood & Azmi n.d.).

The point of theologians' weaknesses of the theorem, according to Ibn Rushd, is because it is based on the common sense of the two parties who have the chance to disagree and agree (Ibn Rushd 1964a). When the proposition imagined that if there were many gods the chance of a dispute that resulted in the destruction of nature, they should also imagine what if there were many gods and then they agreed to create nature together. If they are consistent with the logic they build, then the possibility of gathering many gods and then agreeing as the possibility of disputes is like the parties that form a business alliance, or cooperation agencies, to carry out a project. Therefore, the weakness of the theologians' argument in the *tamanu'* proposition is because they only base the suspicion of a dispute between the various gods, without raising the suspicion of what if the gods compromise.

The argument of *tamanu'*, as understood by the theologians from the verses of the Quran, is not contained in the verse itself because what they describe in their arguments is not in line with the arguments put forward by the verse. Their argument is divided into three parts, whilst in the verse there is no division. The argument contained in the verse of the Quran amongst the logicians is called the ordinary hypothetical syllogism (*al-qiyas al-shart al-muttasil*), whilst the argument put forward by the theologians is known as the hypothetical disjunctive syllogism (*al-qiyas al-shart al-munfasil*), which is contrary to the previous argument.

The impossibility mentioned in their arguments on the nature is totally different from the impossibility contained in the Quranic argument if there is more than one God. The arguments mentioned, such as to this nature 'does not exist nor does it not last' or 'exists and does not exist at once' or 'exists from a weak and failed god' – all that will never happen if there is not more than one God. Whereas the impossibility put forward by the Quran is not forever but for a certain time, that is, if there is more than one god, then this world will be destroyed when it is tangible (Al-Ash'ari 1955). According to Ibn Rushd, the verse seems to say:

> [*I*]f in heaven and earth there were many gods besides Allah then this realm would be destroyed instantly, but in reality this nature was not destroyed so there must be only one god. (Ibn Rushd 1964a)

The essence and attributes of God

Related to the pure discussion of the oneness of God, purifying Him from the inherent characteristics of beings is the main problem, and this problem is found as the theme of the debate between the Mutazilites and Asharites and following groups that agree with each other. The Mutazilites stand with their principle to deny multiplicity (*ta'addud*) whatever its form, for according to them the attributes are the essence itself so that there should not be a multiplicity of *qadim* in the essence. Meanwhile, the Asharites state that these attributes complement the essence (*za'idah 'ala al-zat*). These attributes of God according to Al-Ash'ari are eternal (*qadim*) and in the essence of Allah and cannot be said that the attributes are the essence and not the essence at once (Al-Shahrastani 1997).

Regarding the views of the theological groups that debate the issue of the essence and attributes of God, Ibn Rushd restrained from participating in the debate. In this case, it appears that Ibn Rushd behaved like the Salaf (followers and supporters of the textual paradigm of Islamic theology) who claimed that debating the matter was an act of heresy (Qasim 1964). This is because the characteristics they are arguing for are expressly stated by the Quran. The Salaf accepts and understands textual propositions as they are because for them God and His Prophet are the ones who know the essence of the textual statement of revelation. They refuse allegorical interpretations on the Quran to avoid altering of its message. They take descriptions of God literally and oppose the theological concepts of theologians (Halverson 2012).

Something when it is still a potential is different from when it becomes actual. The Quran explicitly states that Allah knows that creation when it occurs, as His word in Quran, 6:59 (Khan 2011). According to the *shariah*, God knows something before it happens, knows something that is happening and knows what has passed. Such is meant by Ibn Rushd as a view of the *shariah* because that description about this world can be understood by the laypeople (Ibn Rushd 1964b).

The Asharites state the essential attributes and actions as *al-sifat al-ma'nawiyyah*, namely the expression or manifestation of the inherent essence of *al-sifat za'idah 'ala al-zat* (the attributes are additional to His being). Therefore, according to them, Allah knows with knowledge that is attached to His essence and lives with the life that is attached to His essence (Ibn Rushd 1964a). They are not aware that the statement can bring laypeople to personify (*tajsim*) where the essence is something characterised, as the substance has an accident, even though substance is something that stands alone whilst accident stands because of another. Everything that consists of substance and accident is a body (thing). Therefore, if the attributes put to Allah are similar to those put to humans, then an image will arise in the layman's mind that God is an object, like a human being, or as a universal soul in the nature (Qasim 1964).

Al-Ash'ari argued that the attributes are attached to his essence (*al-sifat za'idah 'ala al-zat*) and will have a rational implication that there is an essence, and an attribute beside, even though they also stated that the attribute is not the essence and none other than the essence (*la hiya huwa wa la hiya ghayruhu*). If the essence is imagined as an object and the attribute as a colour, then there are two substances, each of which stands alone. Here Ibn Rushd assessed his thoughts similar to that of Christians, which was built on the doctrine of Trinity, the existence of three persons, such as *al-Wujud* (Existence), *al-Hayah* (Life) and *al-'Ilm* (Logos). The doctrine states that God is 'One' in substance with three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Al-Shahrastani 1997).

The characteristics of the Trinity are firstly, the Father (Lord, the Creator), which is the source of the origin of all beings and the purpose of returning beings. Secondly, Jesus Christ as the Word is the manifestation of himself in beauty, truth and love. Historically, Jesus (son of Mary) was a human, but theologically he was the Logos, a doctrine introduced in the second half of the first century by Ephesus, the head of the Asian Churches. According to this doctrine, Jesus is the word of God and the word is God (Zafar 1994). Lastly, the Holy Spirit (*Ruh al-Qudus*), i.e. God, is in humans, and humans are filled by God. In other words, from God through Jesus with the Holy Spirit, people become new beings in holiness. This Holy Spirit dwells in the human soul at Jesus' request for the happiness and prosperity of humans (Zafar 1994). Raimon Panikkar also stated the Holy Spirit as one of the three persons of the Trinity, namely the Father, Logos and Holy Spirit (MacPherson 1996; Thurston 2016).

However, when compared with the views of other groups on this matter, the Mu'tazilites' view had a tendency closer to *tawhid* and *tanzih*, far from the view of anthropomorphism. This is because of their view that expressly negates the intimacy between beings and God (Qasim 1964). It is just that this rational view cannot be reconciled with Ibn Rushd's view, which, as the Salaf views, tends to accept by faith without questioning.

Conclusion

The problem of divine metaphysics for reviewers of theological and philosophical problems especially in Islam is a never-ending topic and is always actual to be discussed. The discourse on divine metaphysics in Islam is the realm of the study of *kalam*, which in this case involves the theologians. Ibn Rushd as a philosophical thinker and a critic of divinity issues paid serious attention to the views of the theologians. The criticism by Ibn Rushd on the problem of divine metaphysics rests on the dialectical method based on divine reasoning, in addition to demonstrative methods. In presenting his view, Ibn Rushd took revelation texts as the basis of valid argumentation, because discussing divinity is not enough for one to use his relative reason, but he must allow the revelation texts to speak first as a guide to his human reason.

In the matter of the existence of God, when there is a debate between the textualist and rationalist groups, each of them argues in their way that the textualist group refers to the text of revelation and understands it through exoteric meaning that ends up likening God to beings, whereas the rationalist group tried to avoid falling in likening God to beings, so they take the way of *ta'wil* (allegorical interpretation) of the revelation text. According to Ibn Rushd, proof of the existence of God must use a rational approach that contains truth, as well as a religious approach that contains beliefs.

In the matter of the oneness of God, the theologians, as represented by Al-Ash'ari, used the *tamanu'* argument, which stated that the impossibility of the fellowship of God in cooperation will surely fail because each of the gods has a

will that contradicts one another. The theologians' views were criticised by Ibn Rushd as an unnatural method because the argument was neither the proof nor the *shariah* because what they said could not be understood by the laity. As for the essence and attributes of God, Ibn Rushd stated that they are the qualities of perfection as mentioned in the Quran.

In contrast to previous studies, this study finds 'consistency in inconsistency' in Ibn Rushd's criticism of Muslim theologians. His consistency was shown in his tendency to avoid pure reasoning in the essence of Allah and take a *tafwidh* (no interpretation) in explaining the statements of the Quran. However, he fully supported demonstrative evidence to prove the statements of the Quran about the existence of God, the oneness and His attributes.

Acknowledgements

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