



The Political Islamist Meets the Philosopher



According to the twelfth century Muslim philosopher *Ibn Rushd (Averroes)*,¹ no conflict exists between philosophy and religion as both are capable of reaching the truth through different paths. *Pi Online* reports on an interesting article by the Moroccan Islamist, *Ahmad Al-Raysuni*,² entitled “A New Reading on the Role of Religion in Politics.” In the article, *Al-Raysuni* adopts *Averroes’* liberal interpretation, which is incompatible with Islamic Fundamentalist doctrine. *Al-Raysuni* mentions *Averroes’* treatise, “*Fasl Al-Maqal*,³” which argued in favor of the legality of philosophical inquiry under Islam. However, it was the scholar’s life that was of interest to *Al-Raysuni*. He asserts that *Averroes’* life is the best proof that religion and politics can coexist, noting that the great philosopher authored philosophical and theological treatises and was a physician and a judge as well.



It seems peculiar that *Al-Raysuni* chose *Averroes* as a role model to make this particular point. *Averroes* was considered by many in the West as the father of secularism. *Al-Raysuni* either ignored or was unaware of the fact, that the very *Averroes* treatise he quoted, *Fasl al-Maqal*, is a doctrinal justification for the separation of religion and the state, which is at odds with the main premise of *Al-Raysuni’s* article.

To make the point that a blend of religion and politics is possible, *Al-Raysuni* relies primarily on scriptures, including several quotes from the *Qur’an*. He argues that Moses, Solomon and Muhammad were all political. To underscore his point, he cites a quote from the *Qur’an*, which appears also to be intended as a warning to today’s Arab rulers. In the relevant passage, God says to Moses: “Go to Pharaoh as he is a transgressing tyrant.”⁴ *Al-Raysuni* considers present day politics an aberration, which he distinguishes from the “righteous politics” practiced by the prophets. He subscribes to the view that the involvement of religion in the political process is the solution, quoting *Al-Ghazali*: “Politics is to reform people and guide them on the right path to salvation on earth and beyond.”

Examining present day politics, *Al-Raysuni* considers the Turkish experience a failure because, according to him, the military is still in control. He also disagrees with the saying “no politics in religion and no religion in politics,” which he notes is repeated often of late by one Arab leader [a reference to Mubarak of Egypt]. *Al-Raysuni* attributes this concept to European philosophy, and he concedes that Europe has had some success governing under that principle. He asserts, however, that Europe’s tendency toward secularism was only skin deep and is now reversing. By way of example, he points to Europe’s refusal to admit Turkey into the European Union, and its espousal of a Christian heritage in drafting the European constitution, essentially, in his view, declaring the European Union a Christian club.⁵

In the end, *Al-Raysuni* invokes Western democratic principles to argue that the people should be allowed to decide, even if their decision entails mixing religion and politics. If he truly believes in such a democratic process, he should support making the writings of *Averroes* – Islam’s greatest philosopher and a proponent of the separation of religion and politics – available to all Muslims.

Source: Al-Ghad Newspaper – Author: *Ahmad Al-Raysuni* – October 19th, 2007
<http://alghad.dot.jo/index.php?news=207260>

¹ Considered one of the most important Muslim philosophers, *Ibn Rushd*, known in the West as “Averroes” is a twelfth century thinker most famous for bringing Aristotle’s Works back to life and for his early secular thought.

² *Ahmad Al-Raysuni* is an influential Moroccan Islamist writer who is the founder of *Al-Tawhid Wal-islam* movement.

³ This text is known in English as “On the Harmony of Religions and Philosophy” or “The Decisive Treatise”

⁴ From the Quran, chapter: “*Taha*” verses: 24 and 43

⁵ *Pi Online* notes that, although the Catholic Church lobbied for such an approach, France took a strong secular stance. In the end, the proposed Constitution included only a reference to “the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe”.