

Seminar of the Department of Jewish History and Bible, University of Haifa
The Bucerius Institute for Research of Contemporary German History and Society

**Truth, Error, Lie, and Doubt:
The Separation of Philosophy and Law in Averroes
and his Muslim, Jewish, and Christian Readers**

Prof. David Wirmer (University of Cologne, Germany)

In the legal opinion in defence of philosophy which Averroes (Ibn Rušd, 1126–1198) issued under the



title *Book of the Decisive Treatise and Determination of the Connection between Philosophy and the Law* (*Kitāb faṣl al-maḳāl wa-taqrīr mā bayn al-šarī'a wa-l-ḥikma min al-ittiṣāl*) he famously argued for the unity of truth and the harmony (*ḡam'*) between the pronouncements of Scripture and the conclusions of philosophical reasoning. Due to this overt advocacy of congruence, it has become common place among present day scholars to reject readings of Averroes which find in him any difference between philosophy and religion more pronounced than a duality of expression of the same truth—be it disagreement, devaluation, or

dissimulation. Thus, various Medieval emulators and critics of Averroes who discovered such tensions have been described as twisting, misunderstanding, or misrepresenting Averroes's position on the relationship between philosophy and religion, for instance the Jewish philosopher Isaac Albalag (13th c. Catalonia), the Christian theologian Giles of Rome (ca. 1246–1316), and the Muslim jurist and traditionist Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328 Damascus). Unnamed Latin arts masters at the university of Paris, often associated with the teaching of Averroes, were accused by the Parisian bishop Étienne Tempier in 1277 to handle philosophical questions touching on religious dogma “as if there were two contradictory truths” (*due contrarie ueritates*), and yet historians of philosophy have predominantly qualified the existence of such-minded thinkers as a myth. The “double truth” question, as the whole complex of issues came to be known, has bred as much confusion as it has attracted attention. One of the main reasons for the confusion, as I will argue in my lecture, is the failure of many modern readers to understand that Averroes's main aim is not the establishment of harmony between philosophy and Law but their separation in praxis. Harmony and contradiction, difference in expression and duplicity, do not exclude each other, rather they are components of one and the same enterprise. Following the Medieval readers of Averroes with their much better grasp of the problem and their varying emphasis of the different components can help to better understand Averroes's analysis as well as its enduring relevance.

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