

AVERROES AND THE RECOURSE TO QURANIC VERSES

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Resumen

El artículo considera el uso que hace Averroes de las citas coránicas en sus obras, y establece diferentes categorías. En la primera se encuentra su obra teológica cuyo título se puede traducir como *Los métodos de las pruebas en las doctrinas de la religión*, donde las aleyas son la base de estas doctrinas. A la segunda pertenece su comentario medio a la Retórica donde el Corán es citado por ser un modelo literario. La tercera situación es ante todo la de su obra “Tratado definitivo”, la cual tiene forma de dictamen jurídico (*fatwā*). La última situación es la de obras filosóficas donde Averroes cita aleyas coránicas para su interpretación de Aristóteles.

Palabras clave: Averroes, Corán

Abstract

The article considers how Averroes makes use of Quranic verses in his works and classifies them into different categories. His theological treatise, that can be translated as *Disclosure of the Proof Methods Concerning the Principles of Religion*, based on Quranic verses, belongs to the first category. Averroes middle commentary on the Aristotelian Rhetoric belongs to the second, in which the Qur'an is quoted as a literary paradigm. In the third category we find his ‘Definitive Treatise’, written in the form of a *fatwā* or legal response. His philosophical works belong to the last category, in which Averroes makes use of Quranic verses to buttress his interpretation of Aristotle.

Key Words: Averroes, Qur'an

* Unless otherwise specified, the English translation of texts and quotations is by PangurBàn Ltd.

The use of quotations from the Old and New Testaments in Latin philosophy is well known. In the case of Arabic-Islamic philosophy, their frequency varies depending as much on the different thinkers as on their schools. In Sufi thought, the recourse to the Qur'an is constant. However, philosophers as Alfarabi or Avicenna are able to discuss many topics without a single Quranic reference.

This paper will deal with the case of Averroes (1126-1198). Averroes can be considered as the most Muslim of the philosophers who integrated Greek thought and Islamic traditions.¹ The frequency with which Averroes turns to the Qur'an depends on the goal and the circumstances of each philosophical work.

Averroes also writes a theological treatise in the way of the Kalām, that is, he uses rhetorical and dialectic arguments instead of syllogisms. His aim is to persuade the reader who is not versed in philosophy. This treatise is usually known as the *Kashf 'an manāhij al-adilla fī 'aqā'id al-milla*,² (*Disclosure of the Proof Methods Concerning the Principles of Religion*), although Maḥmūd Qāsim preferred an abridged version, the *Manāhij al-adilla fī 'aqā'id al-milla*.³ As expected, the text is full of Quranic quotations. The quotations are from the following suras: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 51, 53, 54, 57, 60, 62, 67, 69, 70, 71, 73, 74, 78, 80, 85, 86, 88, 89. Although this list includes almost half of the total number of suras, 56, the quotations are not equally distributed. Averroes does not quote the last suras (90-114), all of them Meccan, very brief and often headed by an oath.

Some suras provide many of the verses quoted by Averroes, that is, Suras 2 ('The Cow') and 3 ('The family of Imran'), both Medinan, followed at a certain distance by Sura 17 ('The Night Journey'), which is followed in turn by Suras 6 ('The Cattle'), 7 ('The Heights'), and 42 ('The Consultation'), the four of them Meccan.

Averroes uses Quranic verses to support his doctrines. According to him, the simple proofs to demonstrate the existence of God are of two kinds, the signs of divine providence (*ināya*), and

¹ Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, was the first one to point out this aspect of Averroes' thought. He did so in his work *Political Thought in Medieval Islam; An Introductory Outline*, Cambridge University Press, 1962, 2nd ed., pp. 175-208. Spanish translation, Madrid, 1967.

² *Editio princeps* by Marcus Joseph Müller in *Philosophie und Theologie von Averroes*, Munich: G. Franz, 1859. Spanish translation by Manuel Alonso in *Teología de Averroes* (1947), Sevilla, El Monte, 1998, pp. 201-353.

³ Cairo: Al-maktaba al-anglo al-miṣrīya, 1964, 2nd ed.

the signs of its creation (*ikhtirā*). As for the first, Averroes finds in the Qur'an the following verses, 'The Tidings', 78. 6-13:

6. Have We not made the earth a resting place
7. And the mountains as stakes?
8. And We created you in pairs
9. And made your sleep [a means for] rest
10. And made the night as clothing
11. And made the day for livelihood
12. And constructed above you seven strong [heavens]
13. And made [therein] a burning lamp⁴

As well as in both 'The Criterion', 25.61 and 'He Frowned', 80.24. Averroes sees signs of the latter in 'The Nightcomer', 86.5-6, 'The Overwhelming', 88.17, 'The Pilgrimage', 22.73:

73. O people, an example is presented, so listen to it. Indeed, those you invoke besides Allah will never create [as much as] a fly, even if they gathered together for that purpose. And if the fly should steal away from them a [tiny] thing, they could not recover it from him. Weak are the pursuer and pursued.

And also in 'The Cattle', 6.79. He notes that 'the verses that bring together both proofs are also many, if not the most',⁵ and quotes from 'The Cow', 2.21-22:

21. O mankind, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, that you may become righteous.

22. [He] who made for you the earth a bed [spread out] and the sky a ceiling and sent down from the sky rain and brought forth thereby fruits as provision for you. So do not attribute to Allah equals while you know [that there is nothing similar to Him].

Since for him 'who created you' is a sign of creation and '[He] who made for you the earth a bed [spread out] and the sky a ceiling' is a sign of His providence; he also quotes 'Ya Sin', 36.33 and 'The Family of Imran', 3.191. Thus, Averroes interprets Quranic verses without forcing their meaning too much, because he refers to very general ideas. God's role as creator and benefactor is unquestionable in Abrahamic tradition, and the Meccan phase of the revelation insists on both aspects. Therefore, those ideas cannot be opposed.

However, through the doctrine of the *Qadā' wa-l-qadar*⁶ ('Destiny and predestination') we know that the Qur'an apparently offers contradicting opinions. Averroes is not only aware of it, but he

⁴ The quotations from the Qur'an throughout this paper come from the translation by Saheeh International available online at www.quran.com [Consulted: 2013-03-26]. The quotations in the Spanish original version refer to the translation by Julio Cortés, Barcelona: Herder, 2005, 9th ed.

⁵ *Manāhij*, ed. Qāsim, p. 152. Spanish trans. Alonso, p. 231. Transliteration follows ALA-LC standards.

⁶ *Manāhij*, ed. Qāsim, pp. 223-233. Spanish trans. Alonso, pp. 321-334.

does not hesitate to point out those verses that speak of human responsibility as well as those speaking about divine omnipotence.

Averroes quotes the following verses in favour of predestination: ‘The Moon’, 54.49: ‘Indeed, all things We created with predestination’; ‘The Thunder’, 13.9: ‘[He is] Knower of the unseen and the manifest, the Great, the Exalted’; ‘The Iron’, 57.22: ‘No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being – indeed that, for Allah, is easy–’.

Against predestination he quotes ‘The Consultation’, 42.34: ‘Or He could destroy them for what they earned; but He pardons much’; 42.30: ‘And whatever strikes you of disaster - it is for what your hands have earned; but He pardons much’; ‘Jonah’, 10.27: ‘But they who have earned [blame for] evil doings - the recompense of an evil deed is its equivalent’; ‘The Cow’, 2.286: ‘It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned’; and ‘Explained in Detail’, 41.17: ‘And as for Thamud, We guided them, but they preferred blindness over guidance’.

Averroes quotes even verses in which both doctrines appear, seemingly contradicting each other within the same verse. He quotes, particularly, ‘The Family of Imran’, 3.165: ‘Why [is it that] when a [single] disaster struck you [on the day of Uhud], although you had struck [the enemy in the battle of Badr] with one twice as great, you said, “From where is this?” Say, “It is from yourselves”’; followed by 3.166: ‘And what struck you on the day the two armies met was by permission of Allah’.

He also adds the verse ‘The Women’, 4. 79: ‘What comes to you of good is from Allah, but what comes to you of evil, [O man], is from yourself’, which, according to Averroes, is opposed by 4.78: ‘All [things] are from Allah’ and other hadiths he quotes.

In the opinion of Averroes and regarding this matter, Muslims are divided into three schools: the Mu‘tazilites, the Jabariyya and the Ash‘arites. The first defend free will, the second predestination and the latter a combination of both that Averroes does not find appealing. The Ash‘arites claim that man acquires his acts, but God creates both the acquisition itself and the means by which it is achieved. Averroes objects that if God creates both the benefit and the means of its acquisition, then His servant is indeed forced to acquire it.⁷

Averroes’ answer can be synthetized in the following quote: ‘The actions attributed to us are carried out thanks to our will and the assistance of other actions, which are external to them and are called “predestination”’.⁸ Averroes dilutes the tremendous strength of the *qadar Allāh* into

⁷ *Manāhij*, ed. Qâsim, pp. 224-225. Spanish trans. Alonso, p. 324.

⁸ *Manāhij*, ed. Qâsim, p. 226. Spanish trans. Alonso, p. 326.

an external conditioning of the will, and relates it to the necessity the will has of always deciding between two extremes. We do not choose what we want, but that which is within our reach.

The solution is purely logical, and nevertheless Averroes introduces a Quranic quote to justify it: ‘The Thunder’, 13.11, ‘For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah’. We will find again in his works this use of passages from the Scriptures to sustain his opinion.

* * *

Leaving aside this work of traditional theology, where the use of the Qur’an is a requirement, Averroes’ use of the Scriptures can be considered from three different standpoints. First, let’s see the recourse to the Qur’an as a literary model:

1) All Muslims agree to the fact that the Qur’an is the main miracle of Islam. It has a unique and inimitable style. Arabic stylistics and rhetorics were born in order to support this dogma, and reached maturity in the 4th/10th century. A remarkable example is that of al-Baqillānī (d. 1013), a Mu‘tazilite theologian, since he sought to analyse the Qur’an from a literary perspective, using rhetorical figures to that end. In his treatise *I‘jāz al-Qur‘ān*,⁹ al-Baqillānī explains those Quranic figures, among which stand out metaphors, the *muṭābaqa* or antithesis, the *tajnīs* or paronomasia, the *mubālagha*, hyperbole, and the *ṣiḥḥat at-taqsīm* or adequate distribution.

Averroes had learnt the Qur’an by heart as a child, as was the custom, before committing to memory classic Arabic poetry. When he learned about Aristotle, he also knew he was the author of a treatise on *Poetics*, on which he comments twice, once in the form of a compendium and the other in the form of a paraphrase. Aristotelian examples are replaced with examples taken from both classic Arabic poetry and the Qur’an.

Averroes brings together metaphor and metonymy under the category of the comparison or simile, *tashbīh*. The comparison can be made, he claims, either by using specific particles, *hurūf at-tashbīh*, or by directly taking what is being compared, which ‘in this art is called substitution’. He then indicates that substitution comprises metaphor, *isti‘āra*, and metonymy, *kināya*. Averroes gives two examples, one taken from the Abbasid poet Abū Tammām (d. 846): ‘[The caliph] is the sea, in any direction you take’, and the other from the Qur’an: ‘and his wives are [in the position of] their mothers’ (33. 6).¹⁰ Both contain metaphors. The sea is the image of limitless generosity and since ‘The Prophet is more worthy of the believers than themselves’ (‘The Combined Forces’, 33.6), so do his wives, as close to the believers as if they were their mothers.

⁹ *I‘jāz al-Qur‘ān*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣāqir, Cairo, 1972. Partially translated into English by Gustav von Grunebaum in *A Tenth Century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism*, Chicago, 1950.

¹⁰ *Talkhīṣ kitāb ash-shi‘r*, ed. Charles E. Butterworth – Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Majīd Harīdī, Cairo: GEBO, 1987, (3), pp. 54-55.

In Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* we find many more Quranic references. Then he provides two examples of metonymy, one from the poet Zuhayr Ibn Abī Sulmā, and the other from the Qur'an ('The Women', 4.34; 'The Table Spread', 5.6): 'or one of you comes from the place of relieving himself', literally 'if one of you comes from faeces'.¹¹ Averroes takes as examples of figurative speech or *majāz*, several Quranic verses;¹² he also turns to the Qur'an in order to illustrate the role of 'recognition' as a sign (*Poetics*, XVI).¹³ It must also be noted that Averroes, regarding the advice that the poet must talk little about himself (*Poetics*, 1460a 5-12), quotes as much a verse by Imrū' l-Qays as a verse from Sura 'The Light'. Imrū' l-Qays expounds the case of the one who deceives the thirsty camels which he cannot water, as an example of vain appearance,¹⁴ and the Qur'an offers the example of the mirage: 'But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland' (24.39). Averroes considers that 'nations have certain characteristics which are specific to their similes',¹⁵ and which differentiate them.

In other works, the references to the Qur'an due to linguistic reasons are less frequent. In Averroes' Long Commentary on the *Metaphysics*, there are two Quranic quotations of a linguistic nature. Averroes comments on the passage of *Metaphysics* IV, 1006b 18-20 regarding the principle of non-contradiction, where Aristotle asserts: 'It is not possible to be and not to be the same thing except in virtue of homonymy, just as if one whom we call "man" others were to call "not man"'. Averroes understands as homonymy the case in which a nation or people uses a term as a negation while another nation uses it as an affirmation, something that happens even among the Arabs:

What happens is similar to that which happens in the language of the Arabs for whom the terms for negation and affirmation are homonyms, and both words can have the same sense, instead of opposite meanings.

That homonymy exists in the language of the Arabs is demonstrated by His words: 'What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?' (7.12), since He means 'from prostrating', as well as His expression: 'Allah makes clear to you [His law], lest you go astray' (4.176).¹⁶

Averroes' Long Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* was translated into Latin by Michael Scotus in the 13th century, and was published during the Renaissance along with Cardinal Besaron's translation of the work of Aristotle from Greek into Latin. Michael Scotus translated here *ishtirāk al-ism* as *synonyma*.¹⁷

¹¹ 'The fast horses and she-camels of youth were dismounted', *Talkhīṣ kitāb ash-shi'r*, (3), p. 55.

¹² 'Joseph', 12.82; 'The Thunder', 13.31; 'The Cave', 18.201; 'The Cow', 2.124, 2.179 and 2.187; 'The Believers', 23.20; 'The Consultation', 42.11; 'The Cattle', 6.38 in *Talkhīṣ kitāb ash-shi'r*, (95-96), pp. 122-125.

¹³ 'Ibrahim', 14.24-26; 'The Cow', 2.261; 'The Poets', 26.224-227, in *Talkhīṣ kitāb ash-shi'r*, (70), p. 101.

¹⁴ 'He rises and shakes off his dust and causes excitement gathering dust when the heat its most intense, and on the fifth day denies his camels the water', *Sharḥ dīwān Imrū' l-Qays*, ed. Ḥasan as-Sandūbī (Cairo, 1939), p. 100.

¹⁵ *Talkhīṣ kitāb ash-shi'r*, (102), p. 128.

¹⁶ *Tafsīr mā ba'd at-ṭabā'ah*, ed. M. Bouyges, Beirut, 3rd edition, 1986, p. 364: 8-10.

¹⁷ *Octauum Volumen Aristotelis Metaphysicorum Libri XIII Cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem commentariis et epitome*. Venetiis: apvd Iunctas, 1562. Reprint Frankfurt am Main, Minerva, 1962, f. 78D.

As for the Arab commentators on the Qur'an, Ṭabarī, one of the earliest (d. 923), does not see any homonymy in 4.176, but understands 'lest you go astray',¹⁸ and Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) or al-Baydawī (d. 1286) express themselves in similar terms. With respect to 7.12, Zamakhsharī interprets 'prostrate' as a reinforcement of the meaning.¹⁹ Baydawī follows Zamakhsharī, and claims it is about reinforcing the meaning, *mu'akkada*.²⁰ None of them uses the term homonymy. Averroes tries to place the phenomenon within a more general framework, where different words may mean the same. In this case, negation and affirmation have the same sense; Averroes seems to understand it in this way.

The recourse to the Qur'an due to linguistic, or literary, reasons becomes of secondary importance when we take into account its significance for the justification of philosophical activity:

2) Averroes was a renowned jurist, although not so much as his grandfather, the great Maliki jurist, author of numerous *fatwas*, or legal judgements. A *fatwa* is a response to a legal consultation regarding a particular case, which the mufti answers, if possible, supported by the Quranic text, the primary source of law. *Fatwas* are not necessarily addressed to a judge or an expert; they may well be answers to consultations by individuals.

The work by Averroes *Faṣl al-maqāl*, or *The Decisive Treatise Determining the Nature of the Connection Between Religion and Philosophy*²¹ appears as a *fatwa* in response to the question whether the study of philosophy and logic is permitted, prohibited or prescribed as either recommended or required. Regardless its appearance as a *fatwa*, the work is a philosophical interpretation of several Quranic passages.

Averroes defines philosophizing as the observation of beings as proofs of their creator. The better the artifact is known, the better the artisan is known. If religious law recommends the observation of beings, philosophy is then mandatory or, at least, advisable. The equation, in any case, is very generous.

The next step is to provide Quranic quotations that call for the observation of beings. Averroes provides five of them and adds 'and so on in countless other verses'.²² The first one for example,

¹⁸ *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1992, vol. 4, p. 383.

¹⁹ *Al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl wa'uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta'wīl*, Cairo: al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1966-1968, vol. 2, p. 54.

²⁰ *Beidhawis Commentarius in Coranum ex codd. Parisiensibus Dresdensibus et Lipsiensibus = Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl; edidit indicibusque instruxit*, H. O. Fleischer, (1846-1848), Osnabrück, Biblio Verlag, 1968, vol. 1, p. 319.

²¹ Spanish translation by Manuel Alonso, in *Teología de Averroes*, (1947), Sevilla, El Monte, 1998, pp. 149-200. *Editio princeps* by M.J. Müller, Munich, 1859; Albert Nader, Beirut: Dār al-Mashreq, 2000, 9th ed.

²² Ed. Nader, p. 54. Hourani's translation, p. 45. Trans. Alonso, *Teología*, pp. 150-151; the other quotations here come from the verses 7.185, 6.75, 88.17-18 and 3.191.

‘So take warning, O people of vision’ (‘The Exile’, 59.2), is not a whole verse but only part of a quite long verse:

It is He who expelled the ones who disbelieved among the People of the Scripture from their homes at the first gathering. You did not think they would leave, and they thought that their fortresses would protect them from Allah; but [the decree of] Allah came upon them from where they had not expected, and He cast terror into their hearts [so] they destroyed their houses by their [own] hands and the hands of the believers. So take warning, O people of vision. (59.2)

The Banū Naḍīr were a Jewish tribe who laboured in one of the oasis of Medina and had an agreement with Muhammad. In 625, Muhammad suspected they were betraying him and ordered their expulsion. The Banū Naḍīr resisted, but in the end they surrendered, were force to demolish their own houses and were finally expelled.

Averroes has used a part of the verse with a rather different purpose. Ṭabarī, the aforementioned commentator, explains that the verse must be understood as an opportunity to learn a lesson: the Banū Naḍīr deserved punishment because they were not true to the pact they had with the Prophet.²³

Among the many quotations contained in the book of the *Decisive Treatise*, I will only refer here to another one. Following his argumentative train of thought, Averroes will try and prove that Islam not only advises the study of philosophy but also makes it mandatory, although not for everyone. He asserts that we are all forced to look for the truth, according to our capacities.²⁴ Some are capable of knowing the truth by means of demonstrations, others only through rhetorical arguments. Averroes understands that the Qur’an refers to this division of men and methods in the verse:

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided. (‘The Bee’, 16.125)

Ṭabarī explains that ‘way’ refers to Islam²⁵ and I also think that it should be thus understood. Averroes is not altering the text, for him Islam is true since nothing in it opposes reason. However, his interpretation is more than generous, since only with difficulty does the Quranic text foresee the classification of men Averroes produces.

The recourse to the Qur’an can also be of use in order to support a purely philosophical doctrine, even if not easily:

3) Quranic quotations in comments on Aristotle and in Averroes’ main work, *The Incoherence of*

²³ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, vol. 12, p. 30.

²⁴ Ed. Nader, p. 35. Trans. Alonso, p. 159.

²⁵ *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, vol. 7, p. 663.

the 'Incoherence' are rare. I mentioned above some quotations of a linguistic nature in his Long Commentary on the *Metaphysics*. In the book *lambda/lām*, there is still a third quotation, which comes from the verse 'The Cattle', 6.75 that I will promptly consider.

The book XII of the *Metaphysics* is presented as an independent work devoted to the study of the three types of substance: corruptible sensible substance, eternal sensible substance, and eternal non-sensible substance (1060a 30-36). In the first five chapters of the book, Aristotle deals with the principles of sensible substance in a similar way as in his *Physics*. In the following chapters, 6-8, he investigates the principles that correspond to eternal and unchanging substance. It is not enough to assert the existence of eternal substances, as the defenders of ideas do, because energy is necessary, that is, a being in actuality, which generates eternal movement. «There must be a principle whose substance is energy» (1071b 19-20). The passage commented on by Averroes carries on a bit further. There appears the Quranic reference, Text 41, and it also comprises 1073a 3-13. My translation from Arabic goes as follows:

Que existe una sustancia eterna, inmóvil, separada de las cosas sensibles resulta manifiesto de lo que se ha dicho. Se ha explicado que esta sustancia no tan sólo no puede tener magnitud alguna, sino que no tiene partes ni divisibilidad porque hace mover durante un tiempo infinito, y nada finito tiene una potencia infinita. Ya que toda magnitud es infinita o // finita, por esta causa no puede estar [esta sustancia] en una magnitud finita. No puede estar en una magnitud infinita porque no existe magnitud infinita en absoluto. Además es impassible e inalterable porque todos los demás movimientos son posteriores al movimiento local. Estas cosas, es evidente que son de esta manera.²⁶

Aristotle comes to the conclusion that the first substance is an immovable mover that eternally acts on the body of the universe. Averroes endorses his opinion but has to defend it from the attacks of those who maintain that the world started to exist and move at some point, that is, that the world is finite in time.

John Philoponus, also known as John the Grammarian, a Christian philosopher who lived between the 5th and 6th centuries, particularly attacked the Aristotelian doctrine on the eternity of the world.²⁷ Not only does Averroes know of his arguments, but he also reproduces here the

²⁶ 'That there exists an eternal substance, immobile, separated from sensible things, becomes obvious on the basis of what has already been stated. It has been explained that this substance cannot have any magnitude at all; on the contrary, it has neither parts nor divisions because it moves eternally, and no finite thing can have infinite power. If every magnitude is either infinite or finite, then it [this substance] will not be in a finite magnitude, nor will it be infinite because there is no infinite magnitude at all. Moreover, it is impassive and immutable because every other movement is subsequent to local movement. These things are clearly as stated', *Tafsīr mā ba'd aṭ-ṭabī'a*, pp. 1625-1626: 10-5. English trans. Charles Genequand, *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics: a translation with introduction of Ibn Rushd's commentary on Aristotle's metaphysics, book Lam*, Leiden: Brill, 1984. French translation by Aubert Martin, *Averroès. Grand commentaire de la Métaphysique d'Aristote*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984, pp. 245-253.

²⁷ He refutes the Aristotelian doctrine on the eternity of the world in several works, and claims that it has a temporal beginning. He provides 22 arguments in: Ioannes Philoponvs *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, ed. Hugo Rabe (Leipzig, 1899), Hildesheim, Georg Olms, 1963.

content of an especially relevant one. All bodies are finite; all finite bodies have a finite power, *qūwa*. Since the heaven is finite, it has a finite power, hence, is corruptible.

They all agree in this, but the Peripatetics argue that the celestial body is incorruptible because of an eternal power separated from it. John the Grammarian responds that, in that case, something destructible and at the same time eternal would exist, but that is impossible and Aristotle himself denies it in his *De caelo*.

Averroes denies the principle that all bodies, due to their finitude, have only a finite power. According to him, the celestial body only has local power, that of the translation movement. This constraint facilitates the solution since it excludes qualitative change and, more importantly, substantial change. The solution is that the celestial body moves due to the action of two movers: ‘A mover that imparts a finite motion, namely the soul that is in it, and a mover that imparts an infinite motion, namely the power, which is not in matter’.²⁸ Thus, two characteristics are put together: an eternal motion, albeit through time, with different velocities depending on the soul of each celestial body.

However, is the problem of the corruptibility of the universe solved with the mere assertion that the celestial body only has local power? Averroes seems to realize that assertion is not enough and formulates the following thesis: There must not be in the celestial body the ability or power, *qūwa*, to corrupt because it has no contrary, ‘it endures by its essence and its substance’.²⁹ However, motion cannot endure by itself because it has a contrary, rest. If it endures eternally, is due to another being, a mover always in actuality. Averroes –who opposes the Avicennian doctrine of the being necessary *per se* and the being possible *per se* but necessary because of the other– is, in this case, ready to make an exception: the movement of heaven.³⁰

Por esto uno debe convencerse de que todo aquello que posee un movimiento local eterno tiene que tener una sustancia eterna. Si existe una sustancia eterna, su movimiento local no tiene por qué ser necesariamente eterno, pero si su movimiento local es eterno, este tiene que proceder de un motor que no es ni cuerpo ni potencia en un cuerpo, sea eterno o no. Este significado es muy difícil de comprender, y los sabios erraron en este pasaje porque si uno demuestra que este cuerpo es eterno en cuanto a la sustancia, ya no precisa para existir de otro principio más noble que él. El error nace de pensar que aquello que hemos dicho, de que toda potencia en un cuerpo es // finita solamente es válido en el caso de los cuerpos materiales, generados y corruptibles, y pensar que si existe un cuerpo eterno en su sustancia, su potencia motriz tiene que ser eterna. En esto se equivocaron los sabeos³¹ y sus sabios. Este es el significado que tienen las palabras de Dios: ‘Hicimos que Abraham viera el reino de los cielos y de la tierra, para que fuera de los convencidos’ (6.75).³²

²⁸ *Tafsīr mā ba’d aṭ-ṭabī’a*, p. 1630: 2-4.

²⁹ *Tafsīr mā ba’d aṭ-ṭabī’a*, p. 1631: 9.

³⁰ *Tafsīr mā ba’d aṭ-ṭabī’a*, p. 1632: 1-3.

³¹ The term ‘Sabaens’ (see following note) seems to allude to the inhabitants of Ḥarrān, studied for the first time by Daniel Chwolson in *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*, St. Petersburg, 1856.

³² ‘Therefore one must accept that all that has an eternal local motion must necessarily be an eternal substance, and if it is an eternal substance, it does not follow necessarily that its local motion is eternal, but if its local motion is eternal, it must come from a mover which is neither a body, nor a power in a body, be it eternal or not. This idea is

Averroes does not end his reflection here and goes on through a long quotation from Themistius (d. ca. 387), but considering our current objective, these words will suffice. Averroes struggles in the midst of a problem that took him a long time and which he analysed in other places, as for example in his commentary on the *Physics*.³³

The verse ‘The Cattle’ 6.75, quoted by him, belongs to a narration in which Abraham observes the celestial bodies, the sun and the moon, and discovers that none of them can be God, but that there must be a single being who created them all.³⁴ Referring to the Qur’an, Averroes does not aim to justify his doctrine by means of several Quranic verses. He tells us how hard was for him to come to that conclusion, which for him entails a correct reading of Aristotle, but he does not assert that the exact solution is contained in the Qur’an. However, if that is the truth, both Aristotle and Islam share it, and Abraham, the first monotheist, also knew it since the Qur’an hints at that.

At the beginning of this work we saw that Averroes had to use the Qur’an in order to develop his theology, and that use did not need further justification. The second part shows how the recourse to the Quranic text involves very different characteristics. In the first section, Averroes extends the Aristotelian theory of the *Poetics* into the Arabic language and its two main sources: poetry and the Qur’an. In the second section, Averroes uses Quranic quotations, often out of context, in order to argue in the way of the Fuqahā’. In the third section, Averroes shows his conviction that the divine truth validates his correct interpretation of Aristotle and that Abraham knew this truth as well.

If the sincerity and conviction of Averroes in his use of Quranic quotations in a discursive and argumentative reading are questioned, finding a definitive answer is hard, but some passages, for example the last one, support them. If we admit as legitimate a reading at the level of minimum units, that is, Quranic verses, there is no reason to doubt his sincerity.

very obscure and as a result this passage has been a stumbling block for scholars. For if it is shown that this body is eternal in its substance, it may be assumed that it does not need, in order to exist, another principle distinct from it and nobler than it, because it may be thought that our principle that ‘every power in a body is finite’ is not true, except in the case of material bodies subject to generation and corruption. But if there is a body eternal in its substance, it may be thought that its moving power must impart motion eternally. Concerning this passage, the Sabians and their scholars were mistaken. This is the meaning to which the Quranic passage alludes: “And thus did We show Abraham the realm of the heavens and the earth that he would be among the certain [in faith]”. The Latin version by Michael Scot omits the reference to the Qur’an, *Octauum Volumen*, f. 325 F. Such omissions are quite frequent.

³³ *Quartum volumen. Aristotelis de Physico Auditv libri octo cum Averrois Cordubensis variis in esodem commentariis*, Venetiis: apvd Iunctas, 1562. Reprint Frankfurt am Main, Minerva, 1962, f. 427D.

³⁴ For the sources of this account see Flavius Josephus, *Antigüedades Judaicas*, I.7, ‘How Abraham, our ancestor, left the land of the Chaldeans and came to live in the land then known as Canaan, now known as Judea’. Josephus claims that Abraham was the first to profess the existence of one God, creator of the universe, and that he came to that conclusion through the observation of ‘the irregular phenomena that occur in the sea and on the earth, and which affect the sun, the moon and the celestial bodies’ since Abraham thought that ‘if those bodies had power over themselves, they would keep regular motions’.