



PLATO'S REPUBLIC

IN THE ISLAMIC CONTEXT

New Perspectives on Averroes's
Commentary

EDITED BY ALEXANDER ORWIN

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Plato's *Republic* in the Islamic Context

Rochester Studies in
Medieval Political Thought

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Plato's *Republic* in the
Islamic Context

New Perspectives on Averroes's Commentary

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Dedicated to Ralph Lerner

Translator of Averroes and teacher of many generations of students,
including the editor and several of the contributors to this volume.

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Introduction

Alexander Orwin

Plato's *Republic* occupies a central place in the study of political philosophy. From antiquity down to the present day, it has remained one of the most frequently read, taught, and interpreted books in the philosophical canon.¹ It is therefore both perplexing and unfortunate that the greatest medieval commentary on the work remains so little studied. Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* provides a worthy subject for the present anthology, which, as far as we know, represents the first scholarly collection of its kind.²

Averroes was by no means the first of the Muslims *falāsifa* to study the *Republic*. Inspired by Alfarabi's claim that Platonic philosophy was the true philosophy, generations of medieval Islamic *falāsifa* strove to understand and expound the *Republic*. But Averroes alone has bequeathed a full-blown commentary on Plato's most famous work.³ Even Alfarabi, who made such frequent and profitable use of Plato, has left us a commentary only on Plato's *Laws*.⁴ So while Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* clearly shows the influence of his predecessors, most notably Alfarabi and Ibn Bajja, it takes the project of commenting on Plato a step further. At the same time,

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- 1 According to one website, it is the fifth most common book on syllabi. Among so-called "classic" texts, only Marx's *Communist Manifesto* ranks higher. See Open Syllabus, <https://opensyllabus.org>, list of "Most Frequently Assigned Titles."
 - 2 Averroes, *On Plato's "Republic,"* trans. Ralph Lerner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974). In Hebrew: Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* ed. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). Cited as R. Lerner's and Rosenthal's introductions and commentaries are cited under their own names.
 - 3 See Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), 49–50.
 - 4 Alfarabi, "Sommaire du Livre des 'Lois' du Platon," ed. Therese-Ann Druart, *Bulletin des Études Orientales* (50): 110–55.

Averroes's inimitable creation is far from being a simple commentary. It is divided into three treatises, the first corresponding roughly to books 1–5 of the *Republic*, the second to 6–7, and the third to 8–10. But in no case does Averroes simply replicate Plato's argument, without some additions, subtractions, or changes of his own. Most dramatically, Averroes omits many of the most memorable passages of the *Republic*, such as the opening discussion of justice, the divided line, and the Myth of Er. He also adds a wide variety of arguments for which one looks in vain in Plato, including a digression of some fifteen pages in the center of the work and an original account of the nonvirtuous regimes. Some of these insertions may be traced to Aristotle and Alfarabi, but others appear to be Averroes's own.

Averroes's Uncertain Knowledge of Plato

Averroes's deviations from the original text of the *Republic*, combined with the puzzling absence of any medieval Arabic translations of the dialogue or any unimpeachable testimony to their existence, has understandably led some scholars to doubt his access to the dialogue, at least in the form that it has come down to us. This enigma has given rise to a fair number of scholarly studies on the transmission of Plato in Islam. The inconclusive results of these studies are well-known to all scholars in the field, leaving us unable to trace the manuscript of the *Republic* that any of the *falāsifa* would have used.⁵ My sense, however, is that the most common view among scholars in the field goes back to an extremely learned article by Franz Rosenthal, published in 1940, which argues that only snippets of Plato were preserved in medieval Islam.⁶

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- 5 See, for example, Rüdiger Arnzen, "Plato, Arabic," in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 1012–1115; Christina D'Ancona, "Greek Sources in Arabic and Islamic Philosophy," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, February 23, 2009; last modified November 28, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-greek/>; Felix Klein-Franke, "Zur Überlieferung der platonischen Schriften im Islam," *Israel Oriental Studies* 3 (1973): 120–39; Dimitri Gutas, "Platon-Tradition Arabe," *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, ed. Richard Goulet (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1989–2018), 5:835–63.
- 6 See Franz Rosenthal, "On the Knowledge of Plato's Philosophy in the Islamic World," *Islamic Culture* 14, no. 4 (1940): 387–422.

The absence of such manuscripts is indeed troubling, though hardly shocking given the uncertain fate of so many books before the invention of printing. At the same time, the references to the work in extant Arabic philosophical literature are abundant enough to indicate some very deep familiarity with the dialogue Dimitri Gutas accordingly arrives at the paradoxical conclusion, that “the dialogue was well-known in Arabic, but to what extent it was known, and under what form, remains highly obscure” (Gutas, “Platon-Tradition Arabe,” 856). Barring the unforeseen discovery of some manuscript, such obscurity is bound to persist. I therefore propose a novel approach to the problem. Let us set aside texts that we do not possess and focus primarily on those that we do. What do remarks gleaned from Averroes’s own commentary reveal about the philosopher’s own sense of his access to Plato, along with his actual knowledge of him? This does not yield any definite answer either, but in the present state of our knowledge it tells us significantly more than largely speculative attempts to trace the transmission of the texts.⁷ And it casts some serious doubt on Franz Rosenthal’s view, which originated years before the commentary had been edited.

Famous above all for his comprehensive commentaries on Aristotle, Averroes justifies his singular turn to Plato with the claim that “Aristotle’s book on governance has not yet fallen into our hands” (CR 22.4–5). This argument would be entirely nonsensical if Plato’s book had suffered a similar fate. Averroes evidently *believes* that Plato’s book has fallen into his hands. This does not settle the matter, of course, because Averroes could have mistaken a Hellenistic summary for the original article. Yet it is very hard to imagine, with E. I. J. Rosenthal and others, that his main source might have been a commentary of Galen, since Averroes himself accuses Galen of “confusion” and “ignorance of Plato’s intention” (CR 56.24–25).⁸ This rebuke

7 See, in this context, Muhsin Mahdi’s critique of the “source-hunting” to which scholars like Walzer devoted so much energy, at the expense of carefully studying the teachings of the authors themselves: Muhsin Mahdi, “Al-Fārābī’s Imperfect State,” review of *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī’s Mabādi’ Arā’ Abl al-Madīna al-Fādila*, by Richard Walzer, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110, no. 4 (October–December, 1990), 691–726, esp. 696ff.

8 Averroes makes an equally disparaging remark about Galen in 105.1, and none of his other references present the physician as any great philosophical authority (CR 36.8, 46.7, 55.23). E. I. J. Rosenthal deserves credit for drawing our attention to Averroes’s generally negative references to Galen, but he oddly cites them as evidence of Averroes’s reliance on him (Rosenthal,

would also be nonsensical if Averroes did not possess a Platonic source apart from Galen with which to compare him. It remains possible that Averroes mistook whatever quasi-Platonic source he had for the work of the original Plato. Here, however, I must defer to his acknowledged competence as a philosopher: would a thinker of Averroes's rank fail to distinguish the "invented Plato of gnostic, occult, and neo-Pythagorean traditions, and the pseudepigraphic Plato of neo-Platonic writings" (Arnzen, "Plato, Arabic," 1012) from the original work of so incomparable an author? It is worth remembering in this context Pines's observation, in an article translated for this volume, that Averroes was usually quite capable of distinguishing genuine Aristotelian works from spurious ones (see Pines, 153–54). Why would he have possessed any less competence with regard to Plato?

The supposition of access to something resembling the original Plato is strengthened by Averroes's grasp of abundant details of the text. For example, he displays particularly thorough knowledge of books 2–5 and again of books 8–9, often paraphrasing the original. In considering the small differences with Plato that emerge even in these passages, it is worth remembering the following remark of Ralph Lerner: "We cannot know for a certainty whether whatever of Averroes' account strikes us as baffling or simply wrong in the light of our present-day understanding of Plato's text does so because of inadvertence or design. Averroes' thoughts may not be our thoughts" (Lerner, "Introduction to Translation," xiv).⁹ One might nevertheless retort

"Introduction," 9). Adrian Sackson, in citing Rosenthal, is somewhat less emphatic, but continues to overstate the potential influence of Galen: "It is probable, though not certain, that it was the Arabic translation of Galen's synopsis which served as the basis for interpretation of the Republic by later Muslim philosophers, including Ibn Rushd" (Adrian Sackson. *Joseph Ibn Kaspī: Portrait of a Hebrew Philosopher in Medieval Provence* [Leiden: Brill, 2017], 173).

- 9 In contrast, Franz Rosenthal argues that Alfarabi "certainly had not the original wording of Plato's *Republic* in front of him, and, perhaps, he was not even really acquainted with its contents. Otherwise, he would have followed much more closely the train of ideas a given by Plato" (Rosenthal, "On the Knowledge of Plato's Philosophy," 411). Applied to the artistic domain, this feels equivalent to saying that Beethoven never studied the works of Haydn and Mozart or Michelangelo the great surviving statues of antiquity, because if they did, they would simply have imitated them. Not only do geniuses tend to identify their peers, but they harness them to develop their own thoughts and inspirations.

that Averroes displays an appalling ignorance of the other half of the dialogue. His most flagrant digressions from the original, however, are invariably presented as such. Most notably, Averroes gladly owns his omissions of books 1, 2, and 10 at the end of his commentary, in the course of which he displays accurate knowledge of the division of the *Republic* into ten books, along with the specific contents of book 10 (CR 105.11–27). Averroes acknowledges implicitly, but just as unmistakably, his digression, which replaces the second half of book 6, by enclosing the whole passage with “we say” and mentioning Plato only at the very end, where he correctly attributes the doctrine of forms to him. Shortly thereafter, Averroes singles out the doctrine of the form of the good as belonging to Plato alone (CR 65.5–74.14, cf. 73.27, 78.6–8; *Republic* 507bff.).¹⁰ Averroes returns definitively to Plato with a fairly accurate rendering of the image of the cave, accompanied by another invocation of Plato’s name (CR 74.14ff.).

A final feature of Averroes’s commentary that has cast doubt on his knowledge of the original is its abandonment of the dialogue form. Socrates is mentioned only once, in a context that bears no direct relationship to the *Republic* (CR 38.1): none of the other characters are mentioned at all.¹¹ This includes Thrasymachus, who, along with Socrates, plays a significant role in Alfarabi’s *Philosophy of Plato*, as well as Glaucon and Adeimantus, whose names are preserved in a tenth- and eleventh-century manuscript that has been brought to light by David Reisman and Felix Klein-Franke.¹² It seems somewhat unlikely that Averroes would have simply forgotten anything taught by his great teacher Alfarabi, or would have been unaware, barely a century later, of facts about Plato that were well-known in the eleventh century. This leads us to consider the possibility that Averroes might have been aware of the dialogic nature of the work, but consciously chose to suppress it. A few small hints in this direction are scattered throughout the work. Averroes’s summary of book 1, tucked away in a far more detailed

10 Averroes’s equally flagrant digression concerning the nonvirtuous regimes is also initiated by “we say,” terminated with a reference to Plato, and eloquent with a deep silence about him in between (CR 80.17–87.14).

11 The beginning of Yehuda Halper’s chapter provides a more detailed discussion of this feature of the dialogue.

12 See Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 66–67; David C. Reisman, “Plato’s *Republic* in Arabic: A Newly Discovered Passage,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (September, 2004): 271ff., esp. 286, 297; Felix Klein-Franke, “Zur Überlieferung der platonischen Schriften im Islam,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 3 (1973): 128–30, 133ff.

commentary on book 4, mentions the vigorous debates that characterize it: “Plato, at the beginning of this book, had already investigated what justice is and refuted what was said concerning justice by the opinions generally accepted in his time” (CR 47.29–30, cf. 105.5–6). How could Averroes have understood the force of this refutation without some familiarity with the interlocutors whose opinions were refuted? Perhaps the summary he possessed contained all the objections while removing the names of their authors, but Averroes’s own reference to Thrasymachus in another work casts doubt even on this assumption.¹³

The most plausible reason for Averroes to expunge the dialogue form is indicated by his introductory promise to remove all dialectic from the *Republic* while preserving its scientific elements (CR 21.2). The connection between dialectic and dialogue, etymological and otherwise, is evident. Transforming the whole into a demonstrative treatise almost without objections or interlocutors would seem to accord perfectly with Averroes’s stated intention. This alone could account for the absence of explicit dialogue from his commentary.¹⁴

I reiterate here what I suggested in my earlier work on Alfarabi: most of the evidence that we do have points to a very thorough reading of the *Republic* on the part of the *falāsifa*, Averroes included.¹⁵ *Thorough*, however, does not quite mean *exact*. It therefore remains essential to ask, what concessions ought to be made to our lack of knowledge of the text with which the *falāsifa* worked? We cannot demonstrate the existence, let alone the assess the accuracy, of a complete translation of the *Republic* at any point in classical and medieval Islam. Interpreting Averroes as if he were capable of parsing every sentence, assessing the density of every term, and reflecting on every

13 Averroes, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s “Topics,”* ed. Charles Butterworth and Ahmad Abd al-Magid Haridi (Cairo: American Research Center in Egypt, 1979), 133.

14 Oliver Leaman has suggested along somewhat similar lines that Averroes’s transformation of the dialogue is designed to assimilate it into the teaching of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. This includes both the removal of dialectic and various other changes. See Oliver Leaman, “Averroes’ *Commentary on Plato’s ‘Republic,’*” in *Across the Mediterranean Frontiers: Trade, Politics, and Religion, 650–1450*, ed. Dionisius Agius and Ian Richard Netton (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 195–203, esp. 196–98.

15 See Alexander Orwin, *Redefining the Muslim Community: Ethnicity, Religion, and Politics in the Thought of Alfarabi* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 15–18.

particle in the original Greek, a language that nobody in his time and place is likely to have known, would be wildly inappropriate. I am less inclined, however, to presuppose that Averroes was unaware of entire themes or sections of the original, and in my own contributions I have tended to emphasize Averroes's profound grasp of Plato. The diversity of opinion that prevails concerning this question is nonetheless reflected in this volume as a whole.¹⁶

Whatever the answer to this scholarly puzzle may be, it should not greatly diminish the value of this inventive work. Part commentary and part original treatise, Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* constitutes Averroes's most comprehensive statement on political philosophy, understood as both an account of the best regime and a description of the various kinds of imperfect regimes. It might even be considered the most substantial Muslim work in the genre, in the four centuries between Alfarabi and Ibn Khaldun. Studying the work therefore promises to provide us not only with additional insight into the *Republic*, but also with a better grasp of Averroes's own thought. It also promises a deeper understanding of how Averroes adapted Plato's work to meet the needs of a foreign civilization whose religion, political organization, and cultural traditions differed so dramatically from ancient Greece. In assessing the various divergences between Averroes's commentary and the original, one should reflect on this consideration as well.

The Historical Reception of the Work

Unbeknownst to him, Averroes wrote at a time when a new era of philosophic inquiry was beginning to blossom in Europe. Meanwhile, the ongoing political turmoil within al-Andalus, culminating in its conquest by, and integration into, Christian Europe, would have a dampening effect on the study and transmission of philosophy in western Islam. As a result, Averroes seems to have enjoyed a more pervasive influence on European civilization, both Christian and Jewish, than on his own. The peculiar oblivion of this work in the Islamic world manifests itself in the fact that the original Arabic does not survive, forcing scholars to rely on Samuel ben Judah's somewhat awkward Hebrew translation, on which all later translations are based. As wary as we

16 For example, Josep Puig Montada provides another valuable perspective on this question. He examines the question of Ibn Bajja's and Averroes's source at some length. He suspects that they used the same source but admits that there is little certainty on the matter.

might be of trusting a translation, we cannot afford to ignore so important a work on these grounds. We must assume basic competence on the part of the translator, who attests to the seriousness of his effort in the colophon to the work and who has won plaudits from modern scholars.¹⁷ We can certainly reflect on all the major passages and themes. I would acknowledge, however, that a certain amount of caution is required, especially when examining the precise meaning of words, tracing their presence or absence in the text, or otherwise engaging in extremely close textual analysis. Some Hebrew words are very easily traceable to Arabic originals, but many others are not: Islamic names and religious vocabulary, in particular, may not have been perfectly understood or conveyed by the Provençal Jewish translator.

The historical legacy of this particular commentary of Averroes is not very substantial. Within the Islamic world, the Arabic text was eventually lost, and not even Ibn Khaldun mentions it. Like so many other works of Averroes, it was rendered into Hebrew, so that it did enjoy a certain influence on Jewish thought; unlike many other works of Averroes, however, it did not appear in Latin until the late Renaissance, when Averroes's influence on European thought was already beginning to wane.¹⁸ The impact of this translation, which is discussed in this anthology by Michael Engel, remained modest. Like so many medieval Islamic works of philosophy, the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* was then virtually forgotten until the twentieth century.

The work did attract some interest from Leo Strauss, but he left us only some rough, unpublished notes, and a couple of citations in the footnotes to the first chapter of *The City and Man*.¹⁹ Formal modern scholarship on the work got off to a strong start with E. I. J. Rosenthal's 1956 Hebrew

17 Lawrence Berman, "Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles," in *Jewish and Medieval Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

18 See Alexander Green's contribution to this volume. On the translation of Averroes and other *falāsifa* into Hebrew, see James T. Robinson, "Al-Farabi, Avicenna, & Averroes in Hebrew: Remarks on the Indirect Transmission of Arabic-Islamic Philosophy in Medieval Judaism," in *The Judeo-Christian Heritage: Philosophical & Theological Perspectives*, ed. Richard C. Taylor and Irfan A. Omar (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2012), 59–89, esp. 71–73.

19 Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 26n30, 27n32. The notes have just recently been published by a contributor to this volume. See Rasoul Namazi, *Leo Strauss and Islamic Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 221–31.

text, English translation, and copious notes, which were reissued in 1966 and 1969. This was followed by Ralph Lerner's 1974 English translation, which remains accurate and readable almost half a century later. Lerner also includes a concise introduction, which argues convincingly for the philosophic depth and importance of the work. The newfound availability of the text gave rise to a modest number of scholarly studies. The most substantial effort is by Charles Butterworth, whose novella-length analysis still stands out as the only secondary source to thoroughly consider the contents of the book from beginning to end.²⁰ Muhsin Mahdi wrote a short article, available only in French.²¹ Like Lerner's introduction, it draws our attention to several important aspects of the book without aiming at a thorough interpretation of it. The same can be said of a Hebrew-language article by Shlomo Pines, translated for the first time in this volume, which addresses above all Averroes's view of religion and prophecy.²² These contributions are now at least a generation old: it is puzzling that so few people have built on the work of such distinguished scholars.

The respect with which Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* is still held manifests itself in its prominent inclusion within the encyclopedic work on Islamic political thought by Antony Black.²³ Unfortunately, such esteem has yet to translate into detailed or abundant scholarly studies. The only recent translations that have come to my attention, which have been made into German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic, are listed in the bibliography.²⁴ I am aware of no book-length studies of a work that definitely merits some. The low visibility of Averroes's only commentary on Plato in contemporary scholarship on Averroes is reflected in a recent anthology,

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- 20 Charles Butterworth, "Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule: A Study of Averroes' *Commentary on Plato's 'Republic'*," *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 9:1 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1986), 1–95.
- 21 Muhsin Mahdi, "Alfarabi et Averroes: remarques sur le commentaire d'Averroès sur la République de Platon," in *Multiple Averroès*, ed. Jean Jolivet (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978), 91–103.
- 22 Shlomo Pines, "Notes on Averroes's Political Teaching," trans. Alexander Orwin, 133–59 in this volume.
- 23 Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 120–28.
- 24 For a list of all translations, save the most recent Portuguese version, see Friedrich Niewöhner, "Polis und Madīna: Averroes's Platon-Lektüre," in Peter Bruns, ed., *Von Athen nach Bagdad: zur Rezeption griechischer Philosophie von der Spätantike bis zum Islam* (Bonn: Borengässer, 2003), 76–91, esp. 78.

titled *Interpreting Averroes*, which contains only a few scattered references to this work, all of which are only tangentially related to the main theme of its articles.²⁵ In the past generation, only a few brief articles appear to have been published. Notable recent contributions include an article by Catarina Belo on the role of women in Averroes, a thorough discussion of revolutions in Averroes by Maroun Aouad, and an exchange in the *Maghreb Review* between Christopher Colmo and Shawn Welnak on the relationship between theory and practice.²⁶ These indicate a promising resurgence of interest in Averroes's commentary, on which the present effort hopes to build. I have done my best, with the help of the contributors, to include all the most significant existing research in the bibliography.

What kind of readers today might be interested in Averroes's commentary on Plato? Its appeal ought to extend beyond the usual audience of specialists in medieval Islamic and Jewish philosophy. Classicists might be curious to see how Platonic thought continued to wield such influence in remote climes, evolving across place and time. Historians of political thought might be interested in exploring a fascinating new text of political philosophy that could help them trace its development in a relatively uncharted period. The widest potential audience may be found in professors across a variety of fields who might be interested in teaching the work. The existence of an outstanding translation should make the task of teaching easier, but the paucity of interpretations of a dense, unfamiliar work may deter some potential teachers. While Averroes's work on Plato is unlikely to figure in introductory courses, it could be used profitably in more advanced classes, especially for students who have studied the *Republic* and want to delve more deeply into interpretations and adaptations of it. With a view to this goal, Averroes's commentary could profitably be taught alongside Cicero, Alfarabi, and Thomas More. It could also serve as a bridge into the *terra incognita* of Islamic political philosophy for students who are familiar only with classical Greek thought, and the *Republic* in particular. The present volume is

25 Peter Adamson and Matteo di Giovanni, eds., *Interpreting Averroes: Critical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 15, 168–69, 223–25.

26 Catarina Belo, "Some Considerations on Averroes' Views Regarding Women and their Role in Society," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20, no. 1 (January 2009): 1–20; Maroun Aouad, "Does Averroes Have a Philosophy of History?" *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 57 (2004): 411–14; Christopher Colmo, "Wisdom and Power in Averroes' Commentary on Plato's *Republic*," *Maghreb Review* 40 (2015): 308–318; Shawn Welnak, "Philosophy and Power in Averroes," *Maghreb Review* 41 (2016): 325–35.

designed to be not only scholarly but also accessible, in order to assist academics who specialize in other areas but might consider teaching this work, and who are looking for some ideas with which to get started.

Our hope is that an anthology focusing on this neglected work will stimulate interest in it more effectively than any volume executed by a single hand. It engages a variety of contributors and approaches, and it does so in a way that encourages further study and exposes readers to a wide array of possibilities. I have not sought to impose any kind of doctrinal uniformity on this collection. Indeed, one might go so far as to say that the current state of our knowledge renders any definitive interpretation of the Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* elusive, or even preposterous. Weighing down its study with dogmas during this incubatory stage does not contribute to that end. This anthology covers, in one form or another, most aspects of the work, in a way that should assist in teaching and studying it from beginning to end.

Summary of the Chapters

This volume consists of twelve chapters, two written by me, and each of the others written by a different scholar. The contributors hail from five different countries, represent diverse academic disciplines (including Islamic studies, philosophy, Jewish studies, and political science), and are at various stages of their careers, from postdoctoral fellow to full professor. I have divided the anthology into five parts according to theme. I conclude the introduction with a brief overview of the book's contents:

Part One: Averroes and His Teachers

It is by no means shocking to observe that Averroes's commentary on Plato was influenced by the many philosophers who left their mark in the 1,500 years that passed between the time of its author and that of its subject. This section explores the impact of the two most important philosophic interpreters of Plato among the *falāsifa* prior to Averroes, both of whom clearly contributed to Averroes's thought.

Averroes's commentary contains a considerable amount of material taken from Alfarabi. These interpolations are often quite puzzling, but it is hard to believe that a philosopher of Averroes's caliber would copy and plagiarize without any definite goal. I attempt to make sense of Averroes's insertion of

the Platonic city into the political world of Alfarabi, showing how his curious and seemingly contradictory mixture of Alfarabi and Plato eventually reveals an original purpose of its own, addressed particularly to the readers of his own time.

Averroes was also strongly influenced by Ibn Bajja, the first great Andalusian philosopher and interpreter of Plato. Josep Puig Montada offers the first thorough catalogue of the various remarks made by Ibn Bajja on Plato, many of which are terse and enigmatic. Puig adds some valuable commentary concerning such topics as the possible Platonic sources available to philosophers in al-Andalus, Ibn Bajja's peculiar interpretation of Plato, and his impact on Averroes.

Part Two: Poetry, Philosophy, and Logic

Plato's *Republic* includes some famous discussions of poetry, music, and education, and Averroes's treatment of them includes some of the most provocative and memorable statements in his commentary. On some occasions, Averroes appears to summarize Plato, but on other occasions, he deviates from him or even rejects him outright. This section examines the meaning of these intriguing passages.

Averroes begins his commentary with a sweeping pledge to remove all dialectical arguments from the *Republic*. This implies a considerable transformation of the form and substance of the original, which Averroes does not shy away from undertaking. Yet he also mentions dialectic himself on one important occasion. Yehuda Halper shows how effectively Averroes purges the *Republic* of dialectic in keeping with an intention articulated in the *Decisive Treatise*, and then explains why Averroes, author of a commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*, still makes targeted use of dialectic to educate certain classes in the city.

Some of the most challenging passages in medieval Islamic philosophy concern its reworking of ancient discussions of music and poetry. It is impossible to reflect on this theme without confronting the dramatic differences between an ancient Greek civilization of which Averroes was at best imperfectly aware and the Muslim culture of his own day. Not only religion, but also music, poetry, and art, had changed so completely as to render the ancient accounts difficult to understand. Averroes frequently deviates from Plato in this portion of the commentary, all the while drawing our attention to well-known Platonic passages. Averroes's argument culminates in a deft but surprising dismissal of the Myth of Er. Douglas Kries makes a sustained

and impressive effort to penetrate the purpose of these passages, arguing that Averroes criticizes not only Platonic models, but Plato himself.

Part Three: Law, Religion, and Philosophy

Averroes was not only a philosopher but also a leading jurist. Some of the themes he deals with in commenting on Plato, particularly those relating to property, family, religion, prophecy, and war, inevitably raise questions about the compatibility between Plato's teaching and Islamic Law. This section explores this theme from several angles and perspectives.

For these reasons, it is particularly valuable to compare what Averroes says in his commentary on books 4 and 5 of the *Republic* with passages treating comparable themes in his famous juridical compendium, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*. Having situated Averroes's account of property within the commentary as a whole, Catarina Belo provides a detailed examination of both works, suggesting that they might in fact have mutually influenced one another. Most notably, even Averroes's juridical work turns out to be unusually liberal for its time. Belo concludes by indicating the limits of such influence, since the two works hardly agree on all points and have dramatically different audiences.

The famous scholar Shlomo Pines wrote a Hebrew-language article, made available here in English translation for the first time, in response to Rosenthal's pioneering edition. He was particularly concerned with contesting, in an unusually spirited and erudite way, Rosenthal's attempt to identify Plato's virtuous city with the Islamic city governed by *shari'a*. This remarkable piece also contains insight into such diverse topics as imitation, the size of Averroes's city, and Averroes's relationship to Maimonides.

Averroes's account of the relationship between Plato and Islamic law is subtle and difficult to understand. But he most certainly does not attempt to paper over all the areas of potential conflict between the two. In an extremely well-researched piece, Rasoul Namazi explains how the views Averroes attributes to Plato and sometimes to himself with regard to areas as diverse as war, crime and punishment, and women's rights come into tension with Islamic *shari'a* as conventionally understood. He concludes that Averroes could not simply conceal this tension if his goal was to educate his contemporaries.

Averroes also raises the more theoretical question of the relationship between philosophy (often called *hikma*) and divine law. Does philosophy require religious sanction? Or can human wisdom alone understand

and interpret religion? Alternatively, the two ways of thinking could coexist on more or less equal terms. Building off work already done by Lerner, Butterworth, Pines, and Rosenthal, and comparing relevant passages from the *Decisive Treatise* with those in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* Karen Taliaferro rethinks the relationship between *ḥikma* and *sharī'a*, showing how each can benefit from the challenging presence of the other, and concluding that Averroes does not firmly assert the superiority of either of them.

Part Four: Wisdom and Government

Plato's *Republic* is widely considered his most important political work. Averroes does not shy away from approaching the most controversial political questions, especially the relationship between theory and practice and between wisdom and politics. The contributions to this section all tackle these enduring themes.

Averroes's text is beset with numerous technical difficulties, exacerbated by the absence of the Arabic original. The Hebrew translation is often unclear precisely at those moments in which clarity is most needed. Michael Kochin zeroes in on one of these passages, concerning the size and number of virtuous cities. He brings out the philological issue by means of a careful study of the differing readings of two distinguished scholars, Erwin Rosenthal and Shlomo Pines. Having attempted to settle the textual question, he brings his conclusion to bear on the global political situation of our time.

Averroes's commentary follows Plato in enumerating the qualities of the philosopher-ruler of the best city. Like so much else in Averroes, this list borrows heavily from Plato but does not copy from him. It is informed by a diverse array of sources, including Persian teachings about royal government that passed into Arabic, Muslim theories of the caliphate, and the philosopher-kings as understood by Alfarabi. Rosalie Helena de Souza Pereira gathers an impressive variety of texts and sources in developing an interpretation of this important passage.

Some of the most famous Platonic passages describe the philosopher-kings. Averroes takes up this theme in a seemingly unobtrusive manner, while quietly indicating some profound disagreements with Plato and once again bringing Alfarabi into the discussion. I explore Averroes's novel teaching on the role of philosophers in politics, attributing his quarrel with Plato to a novel political strategy rooted in his peculiar environment.

The proposal for philosopher-kings would seem to require the superiority of theoretical science to practical science. Averroes therefore devotes

considerable effort to investigating the relationship of theory and practice. While he often asserts the primacy of theoretical science, and the corollary that possession of wisdom would warrant what he calls “lordship” (that is, philosopher-kings), he seems to cast doubt on the possibility of wisdom—thereby also casting doubt on philosopher-kingship. Yet, somehow, he makes a convincing case against the view of divine fiat advocated by the opponents of philosophy. Joshua Parens offers a thorough interpretation of the text that is designed to illuminate this dilemma.

Part Five: Averroes’s Reception in Europe

Averroes’s commentary has had only a modest historical influence, mostly on civilizations other than that for which it was initially intended. It is nonetheless worthwhile to trace this influence, as we continue the process of interpreting the commentary in the present day. This section of the current book offers one account of its influence in Judaism, another of its dissemination in predominantly Christian Europe.

Somewhat surprisingly, Averroes’s only commentary on Plato appears to have enjoyed the greatest immediate impact among the Jewish communities of Christian Europe. Having been translated into Hebrew in the fourteenth century, it gave the late medieval European Jews some access to the *Republic* for the first time, provoking a wide variety of responses. Alexander Green offers a highly erudite and comprehensive account of these interpretations, dividing them broadly into three groups.

Averroes’s work was eventually translated twice into Latin, first by Elijah Del Medigo and then by Jacob Mantino. These translations remain an important resource for modern scholars, especially those who do not know Hebrew. Michael Engel illuminates some salient differences between the two translations, and then attempts to uncover the reasons for Del Medigo’s interest in Averroes. He concludes by exploring the modest and uncertain influence of this translation.

Part One

Averroes and His Teachers

Chapter One

Imposing Alfarabi on Plato

Averroes's Novel Placement of the Platonic City

Alexander Orwin

Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* goes far beyond merely commenting on the original.¹ With the benefit of 1,500 years of hindsight, it reckons with important works of philosophy that would have been completely unknown to Plato. Averroes mentions three authors of such works by name: Galen, whom he mostly rebukes, Aristotle, and Alfarabi.² It would be hasty to assert that by including such extraneous material, Averroes departs from Plato, but, at the very least, he updates him on account of historical developments.

The importance of Averroes's post-Platonic additions is evident from the very structure of the work. The part of it that can plausibly claim to be a commentary on Plato does not begin until 27.24, almost seven pages into

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- 1 Averroes, *On Plato's "Republic,"* trans. Ralph Lerner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974). For the Hebrew, see Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* ed. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956). Lerner preserves Rosenthal's page numbers in the margins on his edition, so the citations apply to both texts. Cited as CR. I cite Lerner's translation. Both Lerner and Rosenthal have valuable introductions and notes, which will be cited under their own names.
 - 2 See Muhsin Mahdi, "Alfarabi et Averroes: remarques sur le commentaire d'Averroès sur la République de Platon," in *Multiple Averroès*, ed. Jean Jolivet (Paris: Les Belles Lettres: 1978), 91–103, esp. 92.

Rosenthal's Hebrew text. Averroes begins to address the subject of war, corresponding to *Republic* 374b, having skipped all of book 1 and the majority of book 2, with only two brief references to them in the opening section (CR 22.27–30, 23.31–33, cf. 47.29–30 and 105.25–27). Averroes does not justify his omission until the very end of the work, when he states that the opening part of the *Republic* does not contain any of the demonstrative arguments of which his commentary is comprised (CR 105.25–27, cf. 21.4). He is more immediately forthright about the reasons for what he includes in its place. In keeping with the demonstrative focus of the work, Averroes replaces Platonic dialectic with a substantial discussion of science. Having divided practical science into two parts, one about general habits and actions and another about their implementation, Averroes explains: “Before we begin a point-by-point explanation of what is in these arguments [of Plato], we ought to mention the things pertinent to this [second] part [of practical science] and explained in the first part, that serve as foundation for what we wish to say here at the beginning” (CR 22.6–8). Averroes's introduction concerns above all the first part of political science, while the *Republic* proper contains only the second. Averroes attributes to Plato only a small part of the ensuing discussion, concerning justice, the division of labor, and the arrangement of the soul (CR 22.22–24.6, esp. 22.27, 23.31). The other passages are inspired by Aristotle and especially Alfarabi. Averroes appears to substitute scientific arguments from Aristotle and Alfarabi—mainly about science, philosophy, courage, and war—for Plato's dialectical introduction about justice and the founding of the just city. In so doing, he takes the city out of its Platonic dialectical context and into a novel sphere, more suited to Averroes's purpose, place, and time.

The role of Alfarabi in Averroes's redesign of the Platonic city has yet to be adequately understood. Charles Butterworth clearly perceives Aristotle's influence on the opening passage but is somewhat less attentive to Alfarabi's.³ A number of other scholars have noted Alfarabi's importance and traced its sources, but they do not elaborate sufficiently on Averroes's purpose in citing him.⁴ Mahdi goes so far as to say that “Averroes accepts Alfarabi's guidance with regard to the political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle,” but he does

3 Charles Butterworth, “Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule: A Study of Averroes' *Commentary on Plato's 'Republic'*,” *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 9:1 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1986), 1–95, esp. 6, 13.

4 Rosenthal, “Notes to *Averroes's Commentary on Plato's 'Republic'*,” 257–58; Shlomo Pines, “Notes on Averroes's Political Philosophy”; Christopher Colmo,

not explain this idea.⁵ Maroun Aouad declares quite plausibly that “Alfarabi is the author whose teaching of just war is closest to Averroes,” but his article does not develop this observation about Alfarabi into a comparison between the two philosophers, or contain any reflections on the larger Platonic context of the city and its peculiar institutions.⁶ A desire to better understand the obvious significance of Alfarabi in what remains ostensibly a commentary on Plato informs the present chapter.

Averroes’s Use of Alfarabi: Some Preliminary Observations

Alfarabi does not find his way into Averroes’s commentary immediately. Averroes’s opening remarks focus solely on Plato and Aristotle. They attempt, among other things, to justify the substitution of Plato’s *Republic* for Aristotle’s *Politics*, which was unavailable in Averroes’s time. Both works, according to Averroes, contain the second part of practical science, whose purpose is the concrete establishment of habits and virtues in souls. The second part of political science, however, is not self-sufficient: it requires an introduction that explains many aspects of the first part of political science, which offers a more general account of volitional things and the relations between them (CR 21.11–22.8).

Averroes begins by suggesting that the first part of political science is contained in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (CR 22.3). He then introduces the first part of political science with a statement that can only be gleaned, with some difficulty, from scattered passages in the *Ethics*; that statement, however, constitutes a clear paraphrase of the beginning of Alfarabi’s *Attainment of Happiness*.⁷ Both philosophers list “theoretical virtues, deliberative virtues,

“Wisdom and Power in Averroes’ Commentary on Plato’s *Republic*,” *Maghreb Review* 40 (2015): 308–18, 309.

5 Mahdi, *Alfarabi et Averroes*, 92–94.

6 Maroun Aouad, “Humanisme, critique de hellénocentrisme et jihad dans la doctrine de la guerre d’Averroès,” *Héritage arabo-Musulman en Occident*, accessed November 19, 2021, <http://www.heritagearabomusulman.net/doku.php?id=articles:aouad>.

7 See CR 22.9–12, along with Lerner’s note to it and compare with the opening passage of *Attainment of Happiness*. Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), 13 [Ar. sec. 1] (cited as AH; Arabic sections henceforth given in brackets). For the Arabic, see Alfarabi, *Tahṣīl as-Sa’āda*, ed. Ja’afir al-Yasīn (Beirut: Dār

moral virtues, and practical arts” as the qualities essential to bringing about human happiness.⁸ The sudden insertion of a well-known statement from Alfarabi into a commentary on Plato sets an important precedent. Many more paraphrases from the *Attainment of Happiness* will follow.⁹ The sheer bulk of quotations from the most famous of the *falāsifa* would not have been lost on readers well versed in their domain.

Averroes’s inclusion of Alfarabi at the beginning of his account of the first part of political science implies that his predecessor may be more valuable for this part than for the second. The portions of Averroes’s commentary that specify the actual practices of the Platonic city (for example, CR 30.14–60.16) tend not to make use of Alfarabi at all. Rather than determine any of the institutions or laws of Averroes’s city, Alfarabi provides a general framework within which its formation takes place. In this context, Averroes’s heavy reliance on the *Attainment of Happiness* makes perfect sense. For this is the work in which Alfarabi describes the general establishment of wisdom and other virtues in the nations and cities, without reference to any specific political community. Averroes’s frequent use of *the Attainment of Happiness* is accompanied by a striking neglect of the *Philosophy of Plato*, the work by Alfarabi most explicitly devoted to summaries of Plato. In fact, Averroes’s removal of dialectic from his commentary appears to contradict the highly

al-Andalūs, 1981); Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato (Falsafat Aflātūn)*, ed. Franz Rosenthal and Richard Walzer (London: Warburg Institute, 1943) (cited as PP).

- 8 The word translated in this list as “deliberative” is translated as “cogitative” by Lerner and “deliberative” by Mahdi; it is almost certainly *fikriyya* in Arabic.
- 9 Mahdi also mentions the *Enumeration of the Sciences*, *Political Regime*, *Virtuous City*, *Selected Aphorisms*, and *Book of Letters* as possible sources for Averroes (Mahdi, *Alfarabi and Averroes*, 93). With the possible exception of the *Political Regime*, which assumes a crucial role in the specific discussion of the ignorant cities in the Third Treatise, none of these works are nearly as present in Averroes’s commentary as the *Attainment of Happiness*. Here is a tentative list of passages that may be traced indisputably to that work: Averroes 22.9–12 is taken from Alfarabi 13 (Ar. sec. 1); Averroes 22.15–21, from Alfarabi 22–23 (Ar. secs. 15–16); Averroes 25.2–4, from Alfarabi 27–28 (Ar. secs. 27–29); Averroes 25.14–16, from Alfarabi 35 (Ar. sec. 44); Averroes 26.1–3 and 8–10, from Alfarabi 36–37 (Ar. secs. 45–46); Averroes 27.5–6, from Alfarabi 43 (Ar. sec. 54); Averroes 27.24, from Alfarabi 47 (Ar. secs. 48–49); Averroes 30.5–13, from Alfarabi 45 (Ar. sec. 57); Averroes 61.8–16, from Alfarabi 46–47 (Ar. secs. 58–61).

dialectical approach that is characteristic of the *Philosophy of Plato*, in which Alfarabi works carefully through a variety of themes and arguments, ascribes a very high value to dialectic, founds a particular city in speech, and retains the *Republic's* emphasis on justice (PP 57 [11], 64–65 [25]). Alfarabi's most Platonic writing is at the same time too dialectical, and too concrete, for the task with which Averroes charges Alfarabi in the present commentary.

These general considerations make Averroes's liberal paraphrases from the *Attainment of Happiness* somewhat less puzzling. Yet the details still need to be worked out. Averroes's quotations of Alfarabi are inevitably selective, and do not in themselves indicate any complete agreement with him. Apart from the two works' shared interest in science and Plato, their overall purpose does not obviously converge. The original *Attainment of Happiness* concludes with an argument, not to cultivate any political virtue or goal, but to revisit the works of Plato and Aristotle, the greatest philosophers known to Alfarabi (AH 49–50 [65–66]). These final paragraphs, which pave the way for Alfarabi's dialectical account in the *Philosophy of Plato*, do not recur in any way, shape, or form in Averroes. Instead, Averroes's begins to examine Plato in conjunction with the highly political virtue of courage, the possibility of a war designed to spread virtue and wisdom, and the apparent disagreement between Plato and his successors with regard to that possibility (CR 25.10ff., 26.25–32). Averroes's political purpose in taking up Plato seems to contrast with Alfarabi's more philosophical approach. Are these differences superficial or real? We cannot know without delving more deeply into the context of Averroes's paraphrases of Alfarabi.

In Nations and Cities: The Enlarged Scope of Averroes's City

Both Plato in the *Republic* and Alfarabi in the *Attainment of Happiness* agree that humans are essentially political animals, who cannot attain their highest perfection or even basic needs without the help of their fellows. Averroes can easily derive that argument from both works (CR 22.15–21; AH 22–23 [15–16]; *Republic* 369b5–c4). A greater challenge to their mutual compatibility arises from the scope of the political communities proposed respectively in each of them. The declared purpose of the *Republic* is to vindicate justice by founding a single city (*Republic* 368cff.); that of the *Attainment of Happiness* is to bring happiness to an indefinite number of nations and cities (AH 13 [1]). The particularism of the one and the universalism of other defy any easy synthesis.

One might expect Averroes, in weaving together the two works, to conceal this difficulty: instead, he brings it into broad daylight. Averroes directs his reader toward Alfarabi's political framework just before introducing Plato: "You ought to know, besides, that however possible it may be to formulate these [virtues] in speech, that does not yet suffice to bring them about in deed in *cities and nations* until such time as the cogitative faculty is joined to it (CR 25.2–4; cf. AH 1.27–28 [29], emphasis mine). Shortly thereafter, Averroes brings up "the virtue of courage . . . with which Plato begins to introduce the discussion of the bringing about of these virtues" (CR 25.11). At this early point in the commentary, Plato is already asked to do something more suited to Alfarabi's context than to his own—namely, to use courage to spread the virtues across an indefinite number of nations and cities. Averroes is well aware that he has already departed from Plato. In challenging Plato's presentation of war as an activity derived purely from necessity, and therefore incapable of spreading virtue, Averroes invokes Alfarabi by name (26.25–27.9, esp. 26.27).¹⁰

Despite expanding the military ambitions of the city, Averroes does not let Alfarabi overwhelm Plato entirely. Averroes follows Plato in describing a single city with a carefully designed education and carefully designed institutions. Much of the first treatise is devoted to developing these themes in a way that makes no direct use of Alfarabi. No such city emerges from the

10 Averroes's commentary on the well-known discussion of courage in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* does not challenge the Greek master in any comparable way: see Averroes, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Lawrence Berman (Jerusalem: Israeli Academy of Sciences), 1988, 127–37 (in Hebrew). For example, Averroes seems to agree completely with Aristotle's definition of political courage (131–32; cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 73 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999], 1115b17–116a3). Scholars who have studied this commentary are often disappointed: two have concluded that "it is among the least helpful of the Middle Commentaries for understanding an Aristotelian text. Often Averroes seems to do little more than copy the Arabic translation" (Steven Harvey and Frederique Woether, "Averroes's *Middle Commentary* on Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Oriens* 42 [2014]: 254–87, esp. 257). For reasons that we cannot explore here, Averroes appears generally more willing to challenge Plato's political teaching than to challenge Aristotle's, rendering his sole Platonic commentary a particularly rich source for his own thoughts and ideas (see Harvey and Woerther, "Averroes's Middle Commentary on the Ethics," 279–80).

Attainment of Happiness, in which the character of the entity designed to fight the war to spread wisdom is strikingly vague; it often seems to resemble more a clique of philosophers than an actual city (AH 43 [54], 47 [61]). The difference between Averroes and Alfarabi is illustrated by their respective accounts of the need to use compulsion against recalcitrant nations and cities, according to the model of heads of households disciplining children and youths. In mentioning coercion, Averroes once again borrows heavily from Alfarabi, but he diverges from him on one key point: while Alfarabi suggests that every city and nation alike contains some people who need to be coerced, and entrusts this coercion to loosely defined “groups” (AH 36–37 [47–48]), Averroes distinguishes this city’s own citizens, who require only minimal compulsion, from the inhabitants of other cities, who must be subjected to a great deal of it. He is therefore able to entrust the task of coercing the nations to the Platonic city (CR 26.1–15, cf. 37.12–13). Averroes thus effects a peculiar synthesis of Alfarabi and Plato, inserting the Platonic city into the world of the *Attainment of Happiness* and charging it with its imperial military mission, without abandoning that city’s unique political and military orders.¹¹

The changes demanded by this synthesis extend far beyond the mere size of the city. The challenge of waging a large-scale war demands an entirely different approach to virtue. The whole moral focus of the dialogue is altered, with justice giving way to courage as the most important of the virtues. We will explore this shift in the following section.

From Justice to Courage

The *Republic* opens as a dialogue about justice. Broached first by Cephalus and then demanded by Glaucon and Adeimantus, the search for justice induces Socrates to found the city (*Republic* 330d–e, 357aff., 368e).¹² The apparent discovery of justice in book 4 is an event that occurs with great fanfare (432d–e). Alfarabi acknowledges, in the *Philosophy of Plato*, the central

11 For a somewhat different perspective on this same passage and theme, see Rasoul Namazi’s contribution to this volume, especially the part titled “The Question of Warfare.”

12 Plato, *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 2016). For the Greek, see Plato, *Res publica*, in *Platonis Opera*, vol. 4, ed. John Burnet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

place of the inquiry into justice in Plato's *Republic* (Alfarabi, PP 64–65 [19.12–20.5]). But it is by no means a major subject in much of his own work. In the *Attainment of Happiness* in particular, the meaning of justice is never investigated or defined. The subject arises only in two very specific contexts. First, the warriors charged with fighting the battle for spreading virtue and wisdom among the nations are praised as “just warriors” (AH 37 [49]); second, the genuine philosopher must love justice and be naturally inclined to it (AH 48 [62]). Justice is presented as a nebulous moral quality of the philosophical elite and its minions, without any clear relation to the fair distribution of goods within the city.

The influence of Alfarabi on Averroes makes itself felt with respect to this issue as well. While Averroes ascribes the concern with justice to Plato, he does not present justice as the central theme of his own work. The omission of the first book and a half of the *Republic* entails the removal of its most lively discussion of justice. This portion is summarized, with astonishing brevity, in Averroes's introduction: “This is the very justice that Plato investigated in the first book of this book and explained in the fourth book. It is nothing more than that every human in the city do the work that is his by nature in the best way that he possible can” (CR 23.31–33).¹³ Averroes later observes that “Plato, at the beginning of this book, had already investigated what justice is and refuted what was said concerning justice by the opinions generally accepted in his time” (47.29–30). Yet Averroes shows no particular interest in the details of this investigation, which he later dismisses as dialectical (105.26–27); furthermore, when Averroes turns to investigate the prevailing opinions of his own time, he proposes a list of human ends in which justice is not included (65.28ff.). While the alleged discovery of justice is declared with great excitement by Socrates, Averroes's commentary on this passage is explicitly anticlimactic, offering “nothing more than what we were saying it was in the previous account”—that is to say, justice means everyone doing his own activity well (CR 50.9–51.2, esp. 50.11; *Republic* 432d2–e2). While Averroes follows Plato in arguing that the kingly philosopher is happier than the tyrant, he deviates from him in making no mention of his justice (CR 102.15–18; cf. *Republic* 580b8–c4). Finally, he explicitly rejects the Myth of Er, along with any other stories about justice in the next life (105.14–25). In general, Averroes treats Plato's memorable discussions of justice in a rather desultory manner, giving short shrift to all his investigations and many of his conclusions.

13 As Butterworth puts it, Averroes “drops the issue” of justice early in the work (Butterworth, “Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule,” 13).

Averroes's relative indifference to justice is qualified, however, by his description of the proposed war to spread virtue as a "just war" (CR 27.24). Plato never defines war in this way, pointedly refusing to discuss in the parallel passage of the *Republic* whether "war works evil or good" (*Republic* 373e4–5). Since Alfarabi defines the just warrior in connection with the same kind of offensive war in the *Attainment of Happiness*, we must again infer that Averroes took the idea from him.

The broader issue raised by Averroes concerns the relative importance of domestic and international affairs. Socrates founds the city in speech in order to discover justice. Justice is viewed, at least at first, as something internal to the city (*Republic* 368e1–2, 371e12–13). This means that the city must be insulated, as much as possible, from the vicissitudes of the international order: the fact that the city is situated in a remote barbarian place, and finally in heaven (*Republic* 499c9–d1, 592b2–5), suggests that Socrates never manages to integrate it into any international order with which he and his interlocutors would have been familiar. Alfarabi, in the *Attainment of Happiness*, and Averroes, in his retelling of the *Republic*, follow an entirely different procedure. Rather than abstract the city from the international order, they begin with the ubiquitous presence of that order, which is casually described as "nations and cities." It follows that the most immediate necessity for the city is not domestic justice but some kind of action within the wider world. Alfarabi relates the very quality of justice mainly to this action. It is true that Averroes summarizes a definition of domestic justice easily traced to Plato, but this brief, dogmatic effort seems less designed to thoroughly reflect on justice than to free the city from internal tension in order to engage in a war to spread virtue among the nations. The overarching question becomes, for Averroes no less than for Alfarabi, whether such a war is feasible. The focus on war means, however, that among the virtues courage begins to outshine justice: "And we say that the virtue of courage is that with which Plato began to introduce the discussion of the bringing-about of these virtues" (CR 25.10–11). By adding "we say," rather than "Plato says" to this statement, Averroes indicates that his emphasis on courage at the expense of justice cannot simply be attributed to Plato.

As Butterworth has observed, Averroes's preoccupation with war and courage has something to do with the political environment created by Islam (Butterworth, "Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule," 28–29). Averroes invokes divine law, the word for which was presumably *shari'a* in the original Arabic, to justify a view taken from Alfarabi, mandating the use of both speech and war to coerce difficult nations into obedience (CR 26.14–18;

AH 37 [48]). Alfarabi, however, remains silent about divine law throughout the *Attainment of Happiness* and purports to speak only from a human point of view (AH 12 [1]). Averroes himself stresses that he is treating only those aspects of “this our divine Law that proceed like the human Laws” (CR 26.18). In attempting to determine the limitations of divine laws concerning war according to some human standard of feasibility, Averroes appears to follow Alfarabi. It goes without saying that this account of war differs enormously from Averroes’s juridical treatment of the same subject, which cites all manner of respectable Islamic sources, hinges on a distinction between Muslims and polytheists, and cites conversion to Islam as a major reason for war. None of these elements figures in his Platonic commentary. Nor does the question of the distribution of booty, a central issue in Islamic jurisprudence that dominates much of Averroes’s juridical discussion of it.¹⁴

We may freely ask at this point whether these merely human tools will be up to the task of spreading virtue. In order to vindicate the international scope of multiple virtuous cities, Averroes will later cite a well-known *ḥadīth*: “I [the lawgiver] have been sent to the Red and the Black” (CR 46.19–20). But it remains to be determined how far virtue may be spread among the various colors and races of the earth (CR 27.4–9; cf. Qur’an, 49.13).¹⁵ Averroes himself is careful never to offer any definitive answer: in considering the relative receptivity of various nations to various moral qualities, he admits that “there is room here for a penetrating investigation,” and he concludes only that “it is not impossible that many . . . should receive the virtues *to some extent*” (CR 27.10, 19–20, emphasis mine). Averroes’s reticence

14 Aouad rightly observes that “Averroes examines the question of just war under different contexts: juridical and philosophic” (Aouad, “La doctrine de la guerre d’Averroes,” 2, 15–17). But on what grounds does he insist on finding harmony between the two? Pines argues quite persuasively, at the end of the article translated for the present volume, that the juridical and philosophical works of Averroes contain different teachings intended for different audiences. So, while the Islamic context of Averroes’s concern with large-scale war is evident, he does not feel obliged to adhere, or even pay much attention, to particular Islamic doctrines. See Averroes, *The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer: Bidāyat al-Muḥtaḥid*, trans. Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee and Mohammad Abdul Rauf, Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, 2 vols. (Reading: Garnet, 1994), 1:454–88, esp. 455–56, 465.

15 For a further exploration of this subject, see Michael Kochin’s contribution to this volume.

concerns both the natural distribution of potential for virtue and the ability of war and coercion to bring that potential into act (27.5–23). Alfarabi displays a similar skepticism when he investigates the groups that would have to exist in nations so that wisdom could be spread in them but he concludes with a clear hypothetical: “Provided that these groups exist in nations” (AH 49 [51–52]). Both Averroes and Alfarabi appear ready to consider, more seriously than Plato, the value of a war to spread virtue, yet they do so with some nagging doubts.

In employing the Platonic city as the main instrument of his plan for conquest, Averroes imparts to the project both additional force and additional challenges. Most importantly, he inherits that city’s program for the education of its guardians. Would this education train the city’s soldiers for so demanding a war? Muhsin Mahdi is therefore right to ask how the education that prepared Plato’s guardians primarily for the defense of a small city could prepare Averroes’s for an offensive war against an indefinite number of foreign nations (Mahdi, “Alfarabi et Averroes,” 100–101). But since this query comes at the end of Mahdi’s article, the task of answering it in detail has been passed on to us.

Justice and Courage in the Guardians’ Education

Averroes’s shift in focus from justice to courage is motivated at least to some extent by Alfarabi. Yet Alfarabi is considerably less helpful when it comes to actually examining or defining courage, let alone providing the education that might inculcate it. His treatment of all these subjects is marked by studied brevity and equivocation. When Averroes attempts to delve deeply into these subjects, then, his need for Plato soon becomes evident.

Like its sister virtue justice, courage is invoked but never defined in Alfarabi’s *Attainment of Happiness*. Indeed, that work’s approach to this virtue turns out to be no more detailed or comprehensive than its approach to justice. Alfarabi’s concern lies not with investigating virtue as such but only the most powerful virtue, which alone will suffice to prepare the prince for the exigencies of multinational rule. In this context, he mentions the powerful courage of the general, which must be able to make use of the particular courage of the warriors serving beneath him (AH 31 [37]). Any question of the actual meaning of courage gets lost in this global political shuffle. Alfarabi implies that those who strive for multinational rule may not have

the time or energy to scrupulously examine the nature of the moral qualities on which their enterprise is based.¹⁶

Alfarabi's treatment of the moral education of the rulers is just as maddeningly brief. He appears to endorse the education proposed by Plato, in a startlingly concise manner. I cite Mahdi's translation:

They should be made to pursue a course of study from their childhood until each of them reaches maturity, in accordance with the plan described by Plato. Then the princes among them will be placed in subordinate offices and promoted gradually through the ranks until they are fifty years old. They will be placed in the office with the highest authority. (AH 35 [45])

This would seem to describe, in three unassuming sentences, the Platonic education that begins in childhood at *Republic* 376b, continues through much of book 3, and resumes in a different guise in book 7, culminating in 540b when the guardians are appointed the highest offices at the age of fifty.¹⁷ Alfarabi employs his talent for summary to leap over certain thorny questions. Yet could he really have expected his readers not to reflect on the compatibility of this Platonic education with the scheme for multinational conquest proposed in Alfarabi's own work? As a commentator on Plato, Averroes could not afford to evade this issue so blithely. In treating it, he pursues a certain line of questioning that Alfarabi's artful summary quietly raises only to immediately drop.

Averroes's account of the guardians' education is, by the standards of this commentary, long, detailed, and relatively faithful to Plato. As previously noted, Averroes keeps Alfarabi out of most aspects of it. But he does preserve, to a considerable degree, the focus on courage at the expense of justice. Averroes introduces a certain ambiguity by saying that the education focuses on "these virtues" and "this virtue," without clearly indicating whether that virtue is just war, courage, or something else entirely (CR 27.25–27). He consistently removes Plato's references to justice, often replacing them with discussions of courage. For example, while Plato fears that stories of the

16 Joshua Parens has explained the deliberate vagueness of these passages. See Joshua Parens, *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 44–45.

17 Mahdi has argued that Alfarabi presents the education of the *Republic* as "the normative account of the education and upbringing of the true philosopher." See Muhsin Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 193.

crimes of the Greek gods will encourage injustice among the children who hear them, Averroes worries that contemporary stories about mischievous demons that knock over doors and walls will foster cowardice (*Republic* 377e6–378b5; CR 30.30–31.3). Averroes omits Plato’s call for poetry that equates justice with happiness (*Republic* 392a13–c4; CR 33.4–6), while reiterating several passages that concern courage, such as Plato’s attack on depictions of the gloomy lives of heroes in Hades, and his praise of the orderly, martial modes (*Republic* 386b4–c7, 399c3–e11; CR 31.26–29, 35.7–23).

In maintaining his focus on courage, Averroes might still aim to educate the guardians for a large-scale military onslaught against the nations. If that were the case, he could certainly find passages in Alfarabi that would be useful for that purpose. Most importantly, Alfarabi expounds at considerable length how multiple cities and nations could be educated through rhetoric, poetry, and science (AH 37–41 [50–52]). This passage would seem to form an indispensable part of Alfarabi’s program for multinational conquest, but it is completely ignored by Averroes. The passage from Alfarabi that Averroes does choose to cite concerns not so much the relationship of the supreme ruler to the nations but rather that of religion to philosophy, with the former being an imitation of the latter (CR 29.19–30.13; AH 44–45 [56]). It occurs in the part of the *Attainment of Happiness* where the focus has shifted away from laying out a program for world conquest and toward defining philosophy (AH 43–50 [53–66]).¹⁸ Averroes cites it primarily as an example of the imitations that should be introduced into the city, rather than as any inspiration for foreign adventures (CR 29.31–32).¹⁹ The following section, also a digression from Plato, culminates in an attack on traditional Islamic image-making that seems to be inspired by Alfarabi. According to Alfarabi as cited by Averroes, “matter is imitated by privation or darkness”: applied to Islam, this means that evil should not be ascribed to Satan or God, but “ought rather to be attributed to the imitation of matter, as when one attributes evil to darkness or to privation” (30.9, 31.4–5). These new doctrines help fend off the sophistry of the dialectical theologians, who deny that good

18 See Alexander Orwin, *Redefining the Muslim Community: Ethnicity, Religion, and Politics in the Thought of Alfarabi* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 136–44.

19 While the title of the Alfarabian work cited here, “Degrees of Being,” is often taken to refer to the *Political Regime*, the ensuing passage is taken entirely from the *Attainment of Happiness*.

and evil have any true nature at all, as well as discredit fear-inducing superstitions about Satan and his demonic minions who break down walls and doors (30.23–31.3). From the same section of Alfarabi, Averroes cites the following: “The happiness that is truly happiness will be imitated by what is believed to be happiness” (30.11–12). Averroes proceeds to denounce traditional Muslim imitations of happiness, such as eating, drinking, and copulating, in the name of a more cerebral imitations of happiness, such as the health and eternal life of the soul—as though people should believe that the health of soul, rather than the pleasures of the body, constitutes happiness (31.10–25). He thereby implies that aspects of Islamic education could profitably be reformed along the lines proposed by Alfarabi, but he no longer suggests that a holy war could be undertaken in Alfarabi’s name. Averroes’s later citations of Alfarabi urge the reform of religion in a way that might make it more amenable to virtue and philosophy without calling for any political or military expansion. This anticipates a shift in focus—from external war to internal reform—that occurs gradually in Averroes’s commentary.

Let us return now to Averroes’s interpretation of Plato. Certain key aspects of the Platonic guardian education as presented by Averroes severely qualify his earlier emphasis on offensive war. Averroes’s treatment of the guardians’ attitude toward foreigners and kin is quite astonishing in this regard. According to Plato, the guardians must be trained to be gentle toward their kin and harsh toward outsiders, friendly toward those whom they know and disagreeable toward those whom they don’t know (*Republic* 375c1–2, 376a5–7). Averroes not only reproduces these Platonic statements but accentuates them: his guardians are expected to display hatred toward foreigners and love toward fellow citizens. Averroes will later reiterate that the entire education in music and gymnastic must be tailored to this end (CR 28.15, 26–28, 29.5, 36.20–23). Plato is loath to speak of passions this zealous, preferring the dichotomy of “gentleness” and “spiritedness” to that of hatred and love (*Republic* 375c1–376c5, 411e4–412a10). Why does Averroes choose to emphasize the xenophobia of the guardian class? Intense hatred toward outsiders might strengthen both internal justice, by rendering the guardians loyal to the city and its inhabitants), and a certain kind of courage, by inspiring them to defend the city vigorously against outsiders. But would it induce the guardians to undertake the perils of a war intended to spread virtue among people whom they are supposed to loathe? One might also worry about the effects of such attitudes on the justice of that war: would the guardians’ behavior toward the other, detestable nations, “which are not good and whose conduct is not human” (CR 26.6), itself fail to meet a reasonable

human standard? One fears that they may be tempted to “kill and enslave” the conquered like “dumb brutes” (27.22–23). An enlightened war requires coercion, to be sure, but also some limits on savagery and cruelty, not to mention genuine concern for the happiness of the nations deemed worthy of being civilized. Far from allaying our worries about the benevolence of the guardians, Averroes will later deepen them, arguing that in war they would spare the fields and houses of people of their own kind, whom they love, but burn and destroy those of other peoples (59.20–60.5). We conclude that the hatred of foreigners with which the city’s guardians are imbued would render offensive wars in faraway places at best undesirable.

Averroes continues to follow Plato by abolishing private property among the guardian class. On this subject Averroes would have received little guidance from Alfarabi, who avoids it like the plague. Even in the summary of the *Republic* in the *Philosophy of Plato*, Alfarabi passes straight from the investigation of justice to the rule of philosophy, skipping the notorious proposals of the middle books (PP 64–65 [19.12–20.14]). In the *Attainment of Happiness*, Alfarabi alludes, however briefly, to the guardians’ education in the *Republic*, but he never makes the slightest peep about its reforms of property and marriage. In fact, he implicitly contradicts them, by presenting the money-making arts alongside the military arts as a perfectly legitimate use of the deliberative virtue (AH 32 [39]). Alfarabi never pretends that his proposed scheme for conquering the nations can be accomplished merely through courage and foresight, without adequate financial resources. Despite his open admiration for Plato, Alfarabi seems eager to escape the controversy that Socrates’s most radical proposals about the household were bound to provoke. He prefers to present himself as a more sober Aristotelian who accepts the inevitable importance of property and money in politics and war.

In pronouncing on these subjects, Averroes is bolder than Alfarabi but also much more faithful to Plato. In fact, he seems at times to go even further than Plato. Averroes wholeheartedly embraces the property arrangements of the city, through which the guardians’ education is consummated (*Republic* 415e ff; CR 41.9ff.). He foreshadows this radical reform in earlier parts of his commentary, seizing on those Platonic passages that attack pleasure and wealth and promoting them at the expense of existing Arab customs (CR 32.23–31, 33.17–34.20, 35.20–36.5). In one instance, Averroes explicitly connects his moral strictures to the imminent abolition of private property among the guardians (32.31–33.4). Averroes also exudes unusual certainty about the value of his reform, declaring it to be something “easy to show” (41.22). He validates Plato’s suspicion of the guardians’ predilection for

plundering their own flock by invoking anonymous examples from “these cities” (41.16–19, cf. 42.8–9). The guardians, he insists, must be guardians above all. Any prospect of wealth, to be gained either through wars abroad or plunder of their fellow citizens, would corrupt their judgment and distract them from their main task. It would cause them to launch wars for their own naked self-interest, neglecting the interest of the city (42.11–31). Averroes proceeds to extend the ban on gold and silver, far more explicitly than Plato, to the artisan class, on the grounds that the prospect of such riches would also seduce them away from their work for the city. Instead, they must be content with a base medium of exchange that permits essential transactions but not the accumulation of wealth (43.1–27, 31–32; cf. *Republic* 421e4–5, 422d2–3). Courage and justice appear to finally coalesce, as do Averroes and Plato. Averroes’s insistence that guardians should be guardians and nothing else implies both genuine, disinterested military courage and justice in the sense that Averroes ascribes to Plato—namely, that “every human in the city do the work that is his by nature in the best way he possibly can” (CR 23.31–33). We now see why the courage demanded by Averroes requires an education no less austere than the justice sought by Plato: both qualities demand the same, almost inhuman sacrifices of their practitioners.

Averroes’s newfound agreement with Plato also poses an enormous challenge to his earlier proposal taken from Alfarabi, since the absence of money that appears so necessary for preserving the virtue of the city does not readily conduce to large-scale, offensive war. Averroes acknowledges the presence of a “doubt” in Plato’s mind, expressed by Adeimantus in the original dialogue, according to which so poor a city could not succeed even in defensive war against wealthier neighbors (CR 44.9–11; *Republic* 422a4–7). It is true that poor, desert communities could, owing to superior toughness and training, conquer rich empires, just as the Arabs conquered the Persians at the beginning of Islam (CR 44.14–19). But would such conquests truly permit poor cities to expand intact, or rather tempt them into moral decay with newly gotten wealth? A subsequent remark by Averroes concerning the decline of the virtuous early Arab government into a timocracy under the Umayyad Mu‘āwiyya only a generation after the Persian conquest suggests the latter answer (89.28–31). Averroes agrees with Plato that the only way for the city to defend itself while remaining poor is to pursue a policy of divide and conquer, inciting neighboring cities and even factions within them against one another. Since the virtuous city itself rejects wealth as unholy, it is content to leave the spoils to whatever faction takes its side. This cunning policy will keep the city itself strong and united, and its enemies fractious and

weak, allowing it to punch well above its own weight in self-defense without being deformed by increased size and wealth (CR 44.20–45.12; *Republic* 422d1–423b2). The success of this policy requires fomenting perpetual strife among the city's neighbors, so the policy could be questioned from the point of view of justice, but guardians who have been taught to hate foreigners are unlikely to be perturbed by this concern. This approach is not merely questionable but downright impossible from the point of view of the "just war," which, at an earlier stage in the commentary, was designed to spread wisdom and virtue. Far from seeking to spread such qualities among other cities, Averroes's Platonic city abandons all pretense of doing anything for them beyond keeping them so angry, greedy, and generally hostile toward one another that the city's own precious virtue will be left alone.

Averroes begins by inserting the Platonic city into the international sphere of nations and cities, as conceived by Alfarabi. He also proposes that the city, being itself just, courageous, and wise, initiate a war with the aim of bestowing those same admirable qualities on other nations. Averroes then examines the Platonic education for virtue, which was the subject of a tantalizingly brief summary by Alfarabi. In so doing, he discovers that the poverty and harshness required to preserve virtue at home would disqualify the city from spreading it abroad. A war initiated for that purpose is bound to cause both the mistreatment the conquered and the corruption of the conqueror. The risk of the city initiating such a rash enterprise is fortunately quite low, since its rejection of money leaves it without the means to do so. At this point in the argument, Averroes appears to have abandoned Alfarabi's international war entirely. Yet Alfarabi's internationalism has left its mark: Averroes never quite shrinks his city to the size of Plato's, as we shall see in the next section.

The International Scope of the City, and its Return to Al-Andalus

Averroes does not determine the exact size of the city, entrusting such a matter to the prudence of its rulers. On this general point he does not deviate from Plato (CR 45.14–46.4; *Republic* 423b4–c4). Yet his treatment of the considerations that might affect the rulers' determination does not follow Plato's. For Plato, the only relevant factor is the internal unity of the city, not the character of its neighbors, be they Greek or barbarian (*Republic* 423a9). Averroes also insists on the fundamental unity of the city (CR 44.28), but he adduces mainly external circumstances in determining its size. These

include “the time, place, and the nations that are near it,” especially as pertains to defensive war (46.1–2, cf. 45.16–18). So, while Averroes no longer calls for international wars, he nonetheless continues to distinguish himself from Plato by stressing the need for the city to adjust to international contingencies.

Averroes also finds an ingenious way to expand the city without war. The city can simply be reproduced, with due adjustment to local circumstance, in all the natural climes. We now understand why Averroes puts so much stress on the variety of possible sizes for the city: every individual manifestation of the city will have a distinct size that suits its surroundings. Averroes strives to reconcile this interpretation with Plato, by arguing that the one thousand warriors with which Plato endowed the city were meant to apply to his own time and place only (CR 46.5–17; *Republic* 423a7–8). Yet he clearly goes beyond Plato in insisting that these “many cities,” taken together, encompass the entire habitable region, and cumulatively hold their own against “all the inhabitants of the earth” (CR 46.11–15).²⁰ Averroes thereby manages to preserve the cosmopolitan orientation of Alfarabi and Islamic law without calling for any reckless offensive wars. We observe, however, that Averroes no longer ascribes his argument to Alfarabi, but only to Aristotle and a well-known *hadith*: “I have been sent to the Red and the Black” (46.19–21, cf. 26.26–27). The universalization of the city does require a supplement to Plato, but this supplement is no longer the virtue of courage and the war that Alfarabi describes in the *Attainment of Happiness*. It seems, rather, to be closer to Aristotelian prudence, whose due attention to particular circumstances would allow a version of the good city to be established in every clime (CR 45.29–46.4; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b14–24).

Averroes’s ingenious account of the city’s universality prompts a very obvious local question: can this city be brought into being in his own al-Andalus? This is the only aspect of the issue that could arouse the immediate practical concern of his readers. Averroes anticipates this question by shifting the focus of his commentary away from its early concern with multinational conquest and toward the political affairs of his own realm. Discussion of the conquest

20 Therefore, we may not need, with Lerner, to amend the text, by adding a “not” in the phrase “we see that this city is [not] fit . . .” (46.10–12). This interpretation also removes the need for Pines’s speculation, discussed by Michael Kochin in this volume, that Averroes might actually be thinking of a single, universal city in the manner proposed by Alfarabi. To the doubts raised so aptly by Kochin, I would add that the austerity of the city does not conduce to its unlimited expansion.

of the nations ceases entirely after the opening section, while references to “these cities” and “this time of ours” abound. Averroes repeatedly rebukes these cities, first in the name of the standard set by Plato’s virtuous city, and then in the name of their adherence to the habits and practices of ignorant governments, such as democracy and tyranny. We cannot exhaust this topic here, beyond citing some prominent examples of a practice that permeates the entire work, written by Averroes “on account of the troubles of the time” (41.17–19, 50.26–51.1, 54.5–10, 64.21–24, 84.20, 98.3–4, 105.5–6).

Averroes’s repeated, explicit attacks on contemporary societies do not have any clear precedent in Plato, who for the most part evades the question of the applicability of the cities of the *Republic*, good and bad, to the actual cities of his time (*Republic* 554c1–d4). Nor can they be traced to Alfarabi, who claims that Plato was highly critical of the unjust cities of his time but who remains silent about the Muslim cities of his own (PP 65 [20.1–4]). What is most unique to Averroes’s use of Plato is not so much the universalization of his community and teaching, which he shares with Alfarabi, but his loud invocation of this teaching against the societies of his own time. We conclude by reconsidering Averroes’s peculiar synthesis of Plato and Alfarabi in that political context.

From the Universality of Philosophy to the Particularity of Politics

Averroes perceives the need to place the remote city of the *Republic* into a milieu that would have been recognizable to his readers. It seems unlikely that the subject of political justice, with which the *Republic* opens, would have inspired them to reflect on the city as much as a summons to just war would have done. Averroes owes this insight at least partly to Alfarabi, and he finds the suitable imperial mission in Alfarabi’s *Attainment of Happiness*, a work that he cites liberally. Alfarabi’s scheme, however, lacks a city, so Averroes’s new commentary furnishes it with one—the city of Plato’s *Republic*. Entrusted with the mission of spreading virtue and wisdom, the city becomes an object of greater interest to Muslim readers.

The Platonic city may have more compelling military force than Alfarabi’s coterie of philosophers, but it comes with baggage of its own. While Alfarabi does not have to delve into the guardian’s education, to which he only gently alludes, and the abolition of private property, which he quite openly rejects, the commentator Averroes chooses to cover these famous Platonic themes in

depth. His commentary on this part of the *Republic* may not yield the results that his readers initially expect. In summarizing the educational and property reforms developed by Plato, Averroes shows that truly virtuous, courageous, and disinterested guardians of a city would be too inward-looking and too poor to launch any extensive foreign conquest. In other words, the Islamicized notion of virtue as it pertains to war is subjected to a rigorous Platonic political critique, so that courage as initially understood eventually overcomes itself. With offensive war out of the picture, the multinational reach of Plato's proposed city is guaranteed only by allowing versions of it to be brought into being, separately and individually, in every suitable clime. This novel proposal of Averroes has a political purpose of its own: to provoke his readers into reflection on the possibility of establishing the virtuous city in their own clime—namely, al-Andalus. He manages to raise both the old Islamic question of the universality of war and politics, and the local question of the troubles that plague his own region. His puzzling synthesis of Alfarabi and Plato leads seamlessly into territory that was not claimed by either.

Averroes's Platonic critique of offensive war may seem abstruse, but one cannot appreciate its cogency without grasping its conformity to the historical reality of his time: far from being able to launch further aggressive wars against the Christians of Europe, the soon-to-be-defeated Andalusian Muslims were barely holding on under the authority of weak and unstable governments, while the once insignificant Christian north, buoyed by newfound prosperity, military competence, and links with the rest of Europe, was growing incrementally stronger. The Almoravid and Almohad renewal of *jihād*, sustained by foreign troops brought in from North Africa, quickly lost steam without managing to gain back any territory or to reverse the general trend.²¹ Averroes's early call to offensive arms is quickly tempered by a brief but powerful allusion to the Christian Jalāliqah, who are listed alongside Salāḥ al-Din's victorious Muslim Kurds in spiritedness: this reference reveals Averroes's awareness of the growing Christian threat (CR 27.9).²² His urgent

21 See Bernard Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party Kings: Politics and Society in Islamic Spain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 288–29; Bernard F. Reilly, *The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain: 1031–1057* (Oxford: Blackwell-Riley, 1992), 224.

22 Consider the following observations from Bernard F. Reilly: “Not until the great Christian victory at Las Navas de Tolosa could one be sure that the movement away from the world of North Africa and the Near East and toward a European future was irrevocable. Nevertheless, in the approximate century and a quarter between 1031 and 1157, the waxing of the north and

rebukes of “these cities” and the “people of our time,” which only become more frequent as the work progresses, should be understood in light of the great peril that his society faced. Just as Averroes’s proposition for large-scale offensive war quickly falls apart in the face of a flurry of Platonic arguments, so the fire of offensive *jihād* that once propelled the Arabs to the very gates of France has been extinguished by history and circumstance. What is needed, rather, is internal reform of some sort. Alfarabi also lived in an era of political decline, after the first and only unified Muslim empire had collapsed. Yet no infidel force had emerged that threatened to overwhelm his society. Alfarabi could safely counsel his contemporaries to calmly abandon their plans of world conquest for the comfort of studying Plato and Aristotle. Averroes has no such luxury: he needs to persuade his readers, somewhat counterintuitively, that a book by a pagan named Plato and the philosophy that it articulates can address the existential crisis faced by the Andalusian Muslims of his time. One of the ways to meet this formidable challenge would be to present Plato’s political philosophy as somewhat more practical than it was initially intended to be. I will probe this aspect of Averroes’s commentary in my second contribution to this volume.

the waning of the south in Iberia had already proceeded sufficiently far to suggest a probable outcome” (Reilly, *The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain*, 1, cf. 223–24). How likely is it that a trend that has become clear to modern historians would have remained hidden from a contemporaneous thinker of Averroes’s caliber? The “great Christian victory” took place in 1212, only fourteen years after Averroes’s death.

Chapter Two

Ibn Bajja

An Independent Reader of the *Republic*

Josep Puig Montada

Averroes (1126–98) wrote a commentary, or *be'ur* in the only extant Hebrew translation, on Plato's *Republic* that is the subject matter of the present anthology.¹ He insists there that his aim is to present Plato's doctrines without provoking polemics and that the dialectical arguments are not necessary to the understanding of those doctrines.²

Just as he did in his epitome of, or short commentary on, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Averroes neither follows the strict order of the Greek original

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- 1 *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* ed. and trans. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956; repr. 1969). Twenty years later, Ralph Lerner published a second translation: *Averroes on Plato's "Republic"* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974). The references to Alfarabi's works in his footnotes are much appreciated. Quotations here are taken from Rosenthal's translation. There is no agreement on the date of composition. E. I. J. Rosenthal places it between 1177 and 1180 (Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* 1969, 11). Cruz Hernández postpones it to a date between 1189 and 1195; cf. *Exposición de la "República" de Platón*. 5, trans. Miguel Cruz Hernández (Madrid: Tecnos, 1998), 148n.
 - 2 Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 111 (English translation). In his *Epitome on the Physics*, he defends the same argument, in both versions, *Al-Jawāmi 'fi l-falsafa. Kitāb al-samā' al-tabī'ī*, ed J. Puig Montada, *Corpus Commentariorum in Aristotelem, Epitome in Physicorum Libros*, A.XX (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas & Instituto Hispano-Árabe de Cultura, 1983), 7:7–8:12, and note (Arabic).

nor preserves the original division of books. While he gives his reasons for the rearrangement in the case of the *Metaphysics*, he does not give any for the *Republic*.³ Although Averroes's work follows Plato's text in many passages, the independent structure of the work fits better into an epitome than into a middle commentary. As for the Arabic translation he was reading, we know that it preserved the division into ten books but probably not the dialogue form, since Averroes never mentions the names of the figures participating in the dialogue. In the *Republic*, Socrates narrates in the first person, but in his commentary, Averroes give no hint of Socrates's peculiar role in that work; on the contrary, he presents Socrates only once, referring to him in the third person and mentioning that he held the belief that death is preferable to life without human dignity.⁴

Averroes lived two generations after Muḥammad ibn al-Šā'igh Ibn Bājja (d. 1139; henceforth Ibn Bajja), who did not write a specific commentary on the *Republic*. But he did compose a treatise, titled the *Governance of the Solitary*, in which he deals with some of the political issues raised by Plato. There, as in some other works that we will discuss below, Ibn Bajja refers to the *Republic* and to the *Phaedo*. In this chapter the attempt will be made to reconstruct the influence of Plato's *Republic* on Ibn Bajja through his own texts, and incidentally, to learn about the text that Ibn Bajja was using.

Greek Philosophy in Arabic

Scholars have displayed a lively interest in the reception of Greek philosophy by the Arabs for many years, and a few studies of that reception in connection with Plato should be mentioned. In 2004, David Reisman presented a newly discovered passage of the *Republic* in Arabic. Reisman wondered about the knowledge that Alfarabi, the Ikhwān al-Šafā', and Averroes had of Plato, which has long seemed to rely on Galen's summaries. Reisman hazards "the guess that there was more of Plato's *Republic* circulating among medieval Arab authors than a synopsis of Galen."⁵ Indeed, Reisman has edited and

3 Rüdiger Arnzen, *Averroes on Aristotle's "Metaphysics": An Annotated Translation of the So-called "Epitome"* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 25–26.

4 Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 138.

5 David C. Reisman, "Plato's *Republic* in Arabic: A Newly Discovered Passage," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (2004): 263–300, esp. 270. His edition is based on the Damascus manuscript—Zāhirīya 4871.

translated the passage from *Republic* 6, 506d–509b, contained in question 22 of the *Masā'il* by Abū Ḥāmid Aḥmad Ibn Abī Ishāq al-Isfizārī, from the middle of the tenth century. The passage is faithful to the Greek original and keeps the dialogue form.

Rüdiger Arnzen has studied the Arabic reception and transmission of Plato's *Timaeus*, as a dialogue that is emblematic of the general process of transmission. Despite the information supplied by the Arab bibliographers Ibn al-Nadīm, Ibn al-Qiftī, and al-Mas'ūdī, and despite the remarkable interest of the Arab philosophers in Plato, Arnzen affirms that “in all likelihood no direct Medieval Arabic translation of the complete Greek text of *any* authentic Platonic work was ever made.”⁶ There could have been more passages of the *Republic* translated into Arabic, as Reisman points out, but on the basis of the information available to us, the chances of discovering a complete translation of the *Republic* look slim.

This conclusion is strengthened by Cristina d'Ancona's contribution to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, which presents the philosophical Greek sources available “from the beginnings of the translations into Arabic to the end of the 10th century.”⁷ Only parts of Plato's works are attested to have been circulating during that time period. The probability of more texts being translated in a later period is almost nil, since after the eleventh century the traffic of manuscripts between Byzantium and the Arab world dried up completely.

Abū l-Qāsim Ṣā'id ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ṣā'id, an Andalusian judge and astronomer, was born in Almeria in 1028 and died in Toledo in 1070, about two generations before Ibn Bajja.⁸ Ṣā'id al-Andalusī was also a biographer of scientists, including philosophers. He is the author of a work titled *Ṭabaqāt al-Umam* (“Generations of the Nations”) in which he gives information about Plato:

Among his famous books are: *Phaedo* on the soul, the book of *Civil Administration*, the *spiritual Timaeus* on the organization of the three spiritual worlds,

6 Arnzen, *Averroes on Aristotle's "Metaphysics,"* 185.

7 Cristina D'Ancona, “Greek Sources in Arabic and Islamic Philosophy,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, February 23, 2009; last modified November 28, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/arabic-islamic-greek/>.

8 Ibn Bashkuwāl, Khalaf Ibn 'Abd Al-Malik, *Al-Ṣilah fī Tārīkh A'immat al-Andalus wa-'ulamā'i-him wa-muḥaddithi-him wa-fuqahā'i-him wa-udabā'i-him*, ed. Bashshār 'Awwād (Tunis: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2010), 321.j.

that are the world of Lordship, the world of the Intellect and the world of the Soul, the book of the *natural Timaeus* on the organization of the natural world. He wrote these two books for a disciple whose name was Timaeus.⁹

The book of *Civil Administration* is unmistakably the *Republic*. Šā'id al-Andalusī wrote from an unidentified source, as he would have seen neither the *Phaedo*, nor the *Republic*, nor the “two books” of the *Timaeus*, which, along with Plato’s other works, were not present in al-Andalus at his time.

Known to the Latin philosophers as Avempace, Muḥammad Ibn Yahyà ibn al-Šā'igh al-Tūjibī Ibn Bājja was born in Saragossa around 1085 and spent most of his life in al-Andalus, during an era when it, along with Morocco, was under Almoravid rule; he died in Fez in Ramadan 533 AH/May 1139. His intellectual training was only in the West, but Alfarabi and Aristotle were already available in the region in his time, and he wrote or commented on both of them. He also read and quoted from the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius on Aristotle in Arabic.¹⁰

Ibn Bajja admired Alfarabi (d. 950 AD) and commented on his logical works.¹¹ Moreover Alfarabi was deeply concerned with political thought and conceived an ideal state from a Neoplatonic standpoint. The ideal state carried the name *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, “the virtuous city,” an adapted translation of the Platonic Kallipolis—“the fair city” (527c). Some of his works, such as *Book of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City* and *Book of the Civil Administration (Al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya)*, aim at building an ideal state in a way that is ultimately inspired by the *Republic*. Since Ibn Bajja commented on Alfarabi’s logical writings, he likely knew Alfarabi’s political writings, too.

9 Abū l-Qāsim Šā'id, *Ṭabaqāt al-Umam*, ed. Ḥusayn Mu'nīs (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1998), 35.

10 For instance, Ibn Bajja had read the commentaries of the two on the *Physics* in Arabic and quoted them. See Ibn Bajja, *Sharḥ al-samā' al-ṭabī'ī li-Aristūṭālīs*, ed. Majid Fakhry (Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1973), for Themistius: 86, 92, 138, and for Alexander: 48, 86, 88.

11 See Ibn Bajja, *Al-manṭiq 'inda al-Fārābī*, ed. Majid Fakhry, Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1987; *Ta'ālīq Ibn Bājja 'alā manṭiq 'inda al-Fārābī*, ed. Majid Fakhry, Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1994.

The *Republic*

Ibn Bajja refers much more frequently to the *Republic* in his various treatises than to the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*, and for this reason we will focus mainly on it. Plato's *Republic* centers on a discussion of what the virtue of justice is and why a person should be just. It aims to explain justice and happiness at the same time and to prove that the just man is always happier than the unjust, the latter proposition being particularly difficult to demonstrate. It is likely for this reason that Socrates approaches the issue from an indirect position, looking for justice as a virtue in cities before defining justice as a virtue in individuals. We can accept without difficulty that a just city is always happier than an unjust city and, if we also accept the analogy between a city and a person, we can infer that the just person is "blessed and happy." Socrates elaborates an account of a virtuous, happy city and contrasts it with several defective cities, so that the just man can be contrasted with vicious men.

Epistle of the Movable

Ibn Bajja's abundant references to the *Republic* are scattered across several works. Jamāl al-Dīn al-ʿAlawī edited a number of short texts by Ibn Bajja and classified some as more authentic than others. Among those he considered authentic is the *Epistle of the Movable*.¹² Ibn Bajja is concerned with the primary mover in animals, and he introduces the subject matter with the following words: "In the *Physics* it has been demonstrated by means of arguments providing certainty, that every motion which takes place because of more than one mover—and this is the motion in which the movable does not move by itself but because of another, is attributed to the primary mover."¹³ He continues by saying that people recognize the truth of the assessment when they say, for instance, that "Rashīd killed Jaʿfar." The caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd ordered the execution of his vizier Jaʿfar ibn Yanfa Barmakī in 803, so Ibn Bajja concludes that the caliph was the primary mover. Further, he considers other aspects such as motion in itself or as an accident:

12 Ibn Bajja, *Rasāʾil falsafīyya li-Abī Bakr Ibn Bājja*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn al-ʿAlawī (Beirut: Dār al-Nashr al-Maghribiyya, 1983), 135–39.

13 Ibn Bajja, *Rasāʾil falsafīyya*, 135: 4–7.

Blame and praise are said to cause motion accidentally. For in Islamic law, the punishment for the killer by error is other than the punishment for the killer on purpose. As for the instruments, there is no lot of praise or blame in the existence of that motion, with some exceptions, whether the intermediate movers are indivisible or divisible bodies, rational or irrational. Whoever blames or praises the nearby mover, [behaves] as Plato mentions regarding the dog, that bites the stone thrown at it and leaves the one who threw the stone, except in [the case of] the divisible instrument, inasmuch as it can be believed that [the instrument] is a first mover.¹⁴

In *Republic* 5, 449a–472a, Socrates deals with issues pertaining to the guardians' lifestyle, all of them related to war. Plato talks about cowardice and bravery and asks the guardians to respect the corpse of an enemy. The physical enemy has fled and left behind only the weapon with which he fought. Plato argues that you may take this weapon with you, but that plundering the corpse or preventing the burial of the dead enemy are acts of cowardice. The latter is compared to the dogs' behavior with stones thrown at them: "Do you see any difference between such conduct and that of the dogs who snarl at the stones that hit them but do not touch the thrower?" "Not the slightest" (469e).¹⁵

Ibn Bajja's attention is drawn to an apparently trivial instance. Plato was not intending the condition of blame and praise as a cause of motion although the instance can be used for it. What is remarkable is how Ibn Bajja recalls the anecdote in a completely different context, without mentioning the *Republic*. There is no definitive proof that he read the anecdote in the actual text of the dialogue itself, since he may have derived it from other sources of wisdom literature.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the way he tells it reveals an impressive familiarity with Plato and his text.

14 Ibn Bajja, *Rasā'il falsafīya*, 136: 1–8.

15 Translations are taken from *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vols. 5 and 6, trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

16 Averroes does not take up the example of the dogs (Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 174).

Epistle of Farewell

Ibn Bajja addresses the *Epistle of Farewell* to Ibn al-Imām, a friend who is leaving al-Andalus for good.¹⁷ After some considerations on motion and movers, Ibn Bajja develops a plan for how man should achieve his intellectual perfection, claiming to be the only one who has been able to write such a plan. He knows Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and he cites the book, but he criticizes what Aristotle wrote in the eleventh book (this corresponds to book 10 in the Greek) for its excessive concision.¹⁸

As for Plato's dialogues, the *Republic* is of some interest whenever Ibn Bajja refers to the division of the cities indicated above. Although Plato is ultimately the source of these passage, Alfarabi reproduced the dialogue with some changes, and the latter should therefore be regarded as another direct source for Ibn Bajja.

Nevertheless, when we seek science, we do not seek it for this pleasure, but pleasure is a resulting benefit because this pleasure accompanies the existence of the truth as all pleasure does always like the shadow of something else. . . . Whoever seeks science for the sake of honor, he does not seek it for the sake of the aim [final cause] but of an accident that accompanies it like a resulting benefit. If he happens to believe that he is not enjoying it in a given moment, he gives it up in spite of being healthy to his body, as many sick people do, who happen to be in a similar situation. For we find that he who seeks science for the sake of honor becomes lazy. This is the reason why many people forsake wisdom, when they think that it belongs to the ways of life of the ignorant times [*Jābiliya*]. (EF §29. [Asín 23])

17 Ibn Bajja, *La conduite de l'isolé et deux autres épîtres*, trans. Charles Genequand (Paris: Vrin, 2010), 88–120; Miguel Asín Palacios, “La carta de adiós de Ibn Bajja,” *Al-Andalus* 8 (1943): 1–87. The citations henceforth will be made according to the paragraph number EF § established by Genequand in his edition and French translation because of its practicality; they will be followed by the page numbers in Asín Palacios's edition. I will use the following abbreviations: GS (*Governance of the Solitary*); CI (*Conjunction with the Intellect*); EF (*Epistle of Farewell*).

18 It was likely translated into Arabic by Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn (d. 910). Douglas M. Dunlop worked on the edition of the only extant Arabic manuscript and the accompanying translation. Many years after his death, Anna Akasoy and Alexander Fidora got it ready for print: see *The Arabic Version of the Nicomachean Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); *Ibn Bajja, Letter of Farewell*, 88, §4.

The word *Jāhiliyya* literally means “ignorant”; it characterized the historical period in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. According to Alfarabi, the ignorant city and “the wicked city, the city which has deliberately changed its character and the city which has missed the right path through faulty judgment,” are opposed to the perfect city.¹⁹ The ignorant city “whose inhabitants do not know true felicity” divides into six cities: the cities of necessity, of meanness, of depravity, and of honor.²⁰ The fifth ignorant city is the city of domination (*taghallub*), and the last one, “the communal city” (*al-madīna al-jamā‘iyya*), is the city of freedom. Plato’s timocracy, oligarchy, and democracy are clearly identified with the three last cities of Alfarabi. Therefore, the latter is most likely the direct source for Ibn Bajja because he introduces here the category of ignorant cities to describe those who seek science for the sake of honor. Pre-Islamic poetry extolling the value of honor and poets who longed for fame continued to have great societal influence in Ibn Bajja’s time, a fact that lies in the background of his concern with honor. However, since he values science and knowledge as the main goal, and not as an instrument, he dismisses as ignorant those who follow such poetry in striving for honor.

Later, in the *Epistle of Farewell*, Ibn Bajja reflects on the cognitive process and explains two concepts: imagination (*khayāl*), in the sense of imagined object, and consensus (*ijmā‘*). Asín Palacios translated *ijmā‘* as “*resolución*”; Genequand renders *ijmā‘* as “*assentiment*”; and Lomba prefers “*consenso*,” in accordance with the juridical definition of the term.²¹ The cognitive process starts when the image of the perceived object becomes a form for the appetitive soul and then man agrees with it or not. If he accepts it, motion results. The next issue concerns the mover in the process. Ibn Bajja explains this as follows:

Therefore, the first mover that is in us, is composed of an image (*khayāl*) and appetite (*nuzū‘*), and the appetitive [part] is expressed as the “soul.” This is why we say: “My soul gives me appetite.” What the pronoun “me” designates is something else. Let us shorten the discussion, since it is taking too long. What the pronoun designates is the cogitative faculty and for that, it frequently opposes the appetitive faculty. This has been shown in many places and Plato

19 Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State. Mabādi’ ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, ed. and trans. Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 253.

20 Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, 257.

21 Ibn Bajja, *Carta del Adiós*, 60. See also the more recent translation in Ibn Bajja, *Carta del adiós y otros tratados filosóficos*, trans. Joaquín Lomba (Madrid: Trotta, 2006), 32.

spoke about it at great length in the *Republic* and in the book of *Phaedo*, just as Aristotle and the Peripatetics after him did. (EF § 35 [Asín 61])

The Greek antecedent of *nuzū‘* is indisputably *epithumia*. Plato divides the soul into three parts: The rational (*nous*), the high spirited (*thumos*), and the appetitive (*epithumia*) soul. The *Republic* contains one of the places where he makes the distinction:

“Is it not that there is something in the soul that bids them drink and a something that forbids, a different something that masters that which bids?” “I think so.” “And is it not the fact that that which inhibits such actions arises when it arises from the calculations of reason, but the impulses which draw and drag come through affections and diseases?” “Apparently.” “Not unreasonably,” said I, “shall we claim that they are two and different from one another, naming that in the soul whereby it reckons and reasons the rational and that with which it loves, hungers, thirsts, and feels the flutter and titillation of other desires, the irrational and appetitive—companion of various replenishments and pleasures.” “It would not be unreasonable but quite natural.” (439c–439d)

As is so often the case, Ibn Bajja uses the colloquial expression, “the discussion is taking too long,” in order to end a digression, but the main point here concerns his doctrine of knowing and acting at the animal and the rational level. Here the Platonic division of the soul into three parts is used for his twofold explanation and is presented as the authority for accepting it as so.

The Governance of the Solitary

We recall that the strongest influence of the *Republic* on Ibn Bajja occurs in *The Governance of the Solitary*, his most representative work, which expounds his system in which theoretical and practical philosophy interact.²² *The Governance of the Solitary* consists of two sections: the first (GS

22 The Arabic text has been edited by Miguel Asín Palacios, Majid Fakhry, and Charles Genequand. Asín Palacios translated the text into Spanish and Joaquín Lomba Fuentes authored a second Spanish translation, using the Oxford and Berlin manuscripts: See *El régimen del solitario* (Madrid: Trotta, 1997). Genequand also translated and annotated the text in French (*La conduite de l'isolé et deux autres épîtres*). The first part of the *Governance* was translated into English by Douglas M. Dunlop: “Ibn Bājjah’s Tadbīru’l-Mutawahhid (Rule of the Solitary),” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of*

§ 1–53) deals with the concept of *tadbīr* (“rule,” “governance”), and the second (GS § 54–227) deals with the doctrine of spiritual forms. To state matters summarily, there are four kinds of spiritual forms for Ibn Bajja: the forms of the celestial bodies; the active intellect and the acquired intellect; the material intelligibles; and the “significates” that exist in human faculties.²³ *The Governance of the Solitary* is primarily addressed to the “solitary,” the philosopher who has to live in a hostile environment but is not engaged in reforming it.

Ethics and Politics

The primary aim of the *Republic*, as indicated above, is to define what justice is and why a man should be just. Of course, Ibn Bajja’s solitary has to be virtuous in order to be perfect and possess wisdom. Since justice is the main virtue, the solitary must know what it is, and Plato comes to help in his regard:

Plato has made clear the nature of the rule [*tadbīr*] of cities in the *Republic*. He has made clear what the meaning of right is in respect of it, and hence the wrong that adheres to it. He has taken pains to discuss what we have already spoken of, and has defined virtue and ignorance and vice. (GS §11. [Asín 5–6, Dunlop].)

Great Britain and Ireland, no. 1 (April 1945): 61–81. Several sections were translated by Lawrence Berman for an anthology: See “The Governance of the Solitary,” in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), 122–33. As in the case of the *Epistle of Farewell*, the paragraph number GS § corresponds to the number established by Genequand in his edition and French translation; it is followed by the page of Asín Palacios’s edition (Ibn Bajja, *El régimen del solitario* 1946), and by the name of the chosen translator. If no translator is indicated, the translation is mine.

- 23 Ibn Bajja probably borrowed the term “spiritual form” and this precise sense of “spiritual” from a treatise falsely ascribed to Alexander of Aphrodisia that Abdurrahman Badawi edited and published with the title “Maqālat Aliskandar fī Ithbāt al-ṣuwar al- al-rūḥāniya,” (Alexander’s treatise establishing the spiritual forms), in *Aristū ‘ind al-‘arab* (Kuwait: Wikālat al-Maṭbū‘āt, 1978), 291–92. The author, however, is Proclus; Gerhard Endress edited and translated into German the original text: *Proclus Arabus: Zwanzig Abschnitte aus der Institutio Theologica in arabischer Übersetzung* (Beirut: Franz Steiner, 1973), Propositio 15, 12–13 (Arabic), 260–61 (German). But Ibn Bajja had no doubts about the authorship, and he quoted the book in CI §39, Asín 18: l. 3.

Ibn Bajja has associated his governance of the solitary with the rule of the state. Although Genequand accurately says that the quotation is too general to be identified, the general sense is correct, and Ibn Bajja shows a good understanding of the ethical as well as political purpose of the *Republic*.²⁴

Household and City

Ibn Bajja explains the different forms of human association, beginning with the household. While Plato blames the household as a form of private ownership for troubles in the state and forbids the guardians from even owning houses (*Republic* 464b), Aristotle presents the household as the first human association in book 1 of the *Politics*, rigorously defending it there as being the foundation of the state and objecting strongly in book 2 of the same work to Socrates's proposal for the communism of women and children.²⁵ Ibn Bajja extends the analysis of the household (GS §12–19) in a sense that is closer to Aristotle; however, Averroes might lament that the Arabic translation of the *Politics* was not available in al-Andalus.²⁶ Ibn Bajja examines the relationship of the household to the city and defends its entity:

As for the governance of the household, the household as such is a part of the city. He explained there that man alone forms the natural household [of which he spoke]. He explained that the most excellent existence of that which is a part, is to exist as a part. Therefore he [Plato] did not formulate the governance of the household as a [separate] part of the political art, since it is treated by him within the political art [*al-ṣinā'a al-madaniyya*]. (GS §12. [Asín 6, Berman])

Plato's exclusion of the rule of the household from the inquiry in the *Republic* leads us to the *Statesman*, the dialogue in which the master of a large household is compared to the ruler of a small state. There Plato states that that the science of the king (*basileus*), statesman (*politikos*), master (*despotēs*), and

24 Ibn Bajja, *La conduite de l'isolé*, 255.

25 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 264 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1252b 9–12, 1261a 9–22.

26 Even in modern times, such a translation is yet to be found. Shlomo Pines had identified some passages in Alfarabi's writings that led him to the conclusion that some paraphrase or abridgement of a part of the *Politics*, if not the whole text, had been translated into Arabic. See Shlomo Pines, "Aristotle's *Politics* in Arabic Philosophy," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1970): 150–60.

householder (*oikonomos*) is one and the same “for that matter” (*Statesman* 258e).²⁷ Ibn Bajja does not know of the differences in Plato’s approach and he distinguishes between the perfect household in the virtuous city, and the imperfect households in the four faulty cities:

As for the household existing in cities other than the *virtuous* (*fādila*)—that is, in the four [imperfect] cities enumerated [in *Republic* 5]—the household exists in them imperfectly, and there is something unnatural in it. Only that household is perfect to which nothing can be added without resulting in an imperfection, like the sixth finger; for the distinguishing feature of what is well constructed is that it becomes imperfect by adding to it. (GS § 13. [Asín 6 Berman])

The distinction between perfect and imperfect households is not found in Plato. Many years later, Averroes echoes the same distinction when he interprets Plato’s satirical description of the democratic city (*Republic* 557b–558c), that makes the household the basis of this kind of state:

It is clear that in this State [democracy] the home is that which is intended in the first place, and that the State exists only for its sake. Therefore it is based exclusively upon the home, in contrast to what is the case with the ideal State.²⁸

Averroes is very harsh in his criticism of the states based on homes or households, as he considers that many of the Muslim kingdoms are of this kind, and the consequences are that all property belongs to the “home,” whereas the population is deprived of everything. Such a social criticism was not present in Ibn Bajja.

Medicine and Judication

Book 8 of the *Republic* explains how the ideal city degenerates and the four corrupted cities, each one worse than the previous, come to be. The ideal city has its own characteristics and Ibn Bajja highlights these aspects:

The *virtuous* city is characterized by the absence of the art of medicine and of the art of adjudication. For friendship binds all its citizens, and they do not

27 Plato, *Statesman*, trans. Harold N. Fowler, Loeb Classical Library 164 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921).

28 Averroes, *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* 213.

quarrel among themselves at all. Therefore, it is only when a part of the city is bereft of friendship and quarrelsomeness breaks out, that recourse must be had to the laying down of justice and the need arises for someone, who is the judge, to dispense it. (GS §21. [Asín 8, Berman])

He continues as follows:

It is, then, characteristic of the *perfect (kāmila)* city that there is neither doctor nor judge, while it is inherent in the four [imperfect simple regimes or] unmixed cities that they are in need of doctor and judge. The more removed a city is from the perfect, the more it is in need of these two and the more dignified the station of these two types of men in it. (GS §24. [Asín 8–9, Berman])

As in GS § 13, Ibn Bajja assumes that the reader is familiar with the Platonic classification of the failed cities, or states, whose inhabitants strive for honors, wealth, freedom, or tyranny.

Ibn Bajja writes that the main purpose of his treatise is the regime of certain individual (*tadbīr* GS §36) in order to accomplish individual perfection, but the surrounding society is not forgotten. Ibn Bajja returns to it when he takes up the role of medicine and adjudication in the actual city. Ibn Bajja displays his contempt for Galen, who cures only bodies, and for other people who are not philosophers, writing:

The views of Galen or others on this are like alchemy and astrology. What we establish is the art of curing souls, and that [Galen's] is the cure of bodies, and adjudication is the cure of social relations (*mu'āsharāt*). It is clear that the last two sorts are completely worthless in the perfect city, and hence they are not be reckoned among the sciences. Likewise, that which we say is worthless when the city is perfect, and the benefit of the account will be as worthless as the science of medicine, adjudication, and other arts that developed on account of the imperfect rule. Just as those views [of Galen and others] that are true regarding medicine fall back on the natural arts, and those regarding adjudication, on the political art, so too these views fall back upon the natural and the political art. (GS §38. [Asín 12])

There are some differences between Plato and Ibn Bajja on this subject. Plato's character Glaucon agrees that the perfect city must have laws establishing arts of medicine and judging. For Plato, the art of medicine was invented "because the body is defective" (*Republic*, 341e) and the god Asclepius revealed the art to us (407c). Yet courts of law and judges are in

general signs of a degenerate state, in which infirmaries and physicians are also needed:

“And when licentiousness (*Republic* 405a) and disease multiply in a city, are not many courts of law and dispensaries opened, and the arts of chicanery and medicine give themselves airs when even free men in great numbers take them very seriously?” “How can they help it?” he said.

“Will you be able to find a surer proof of an evil and shameful state of education in a city than the necessity of first-rate physicians and judges, not only for the base and mechanical, but for those who claim to have been bred in the fashion of free men?”

Plato recommends appointing good and wise judges for the souls of all classes of people and also first-rate physicians for their bodies; but some people are incurable, and death is the terrible end for them in that ideal state:

“And I concur,” he said. “Then will you not establish by law in your city such an art of medicine as we have described in conjunction with this kind of justice? And these arts will care for the bodies and souls of such of your citizens as are truly well born, (410a) but of those who are not, such as are defective in body they will suffer to die and those who are evil-natured and incurable in soul they will themselves put to death.” (409e–410a)

It is unusual to integrate both arts with philosophy, but Ibn Bajja does it.

Alfarabi is the author of some works on the “classification of sciences,” the best known of which carries that exact name.²⁹ Ibn Bajja not only knew these works but also commented on them; accordingly, he integrated medicine and judication into the philosophical sciences, through the medium of natural and political science, respectively.³⁰ And while Plato focused on the situation of medicine in the ideal city, Ibn Bajja and Averroes had in mind the situation in al-Andalus and the institutions with which they were acquainted. Averroes explicitly points out that medicine and judication in the perfect state would have “only the name in common” with the arts practiced

29 Alfarabi, *Catálogo de las ciencias (Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm)*, trans. Ángel González Palencia (Granada: CSIC, 1953).

30 J. Puig Montada, “Ibn Bajja’s *Īsāgūḡī*,” in *Problems in Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Miklós Maróth (Piliscsaba: Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, 2003), 51–68.

in his time. He observes that medicine in the ideal state would not deal with internal diseases, since the regime of life there would preserve health, and its inhabitants “do not need many of the medicines which have been used in our time as well as in the past.”³¹

Dialectical Art or Polemics

Ibn Bajja contrasts the way that man acquires true knowledge in the perfect city with the way he acquires it in the four corrupt cities and he contrasts the different ways that men in these cities act. In the ideal city the truth is universally acknowledged, lies are nonexistent, and men act in conformity with the truth.

In the *perfect city*, therefore, one does not introduce arguments dealing with those who hold an opinion other than that of its citizens or performs an action other than their action. In the four [imperfect] cities, on the other hand, this can be done. For here, there may be an unknown action that a man discovers by nature or learns from someone else and does it. Or there may be a false opinion, and some man becomes aware of its falsehood. Or there may be erroneous sciences in all or most of which the citizens do not believe because they involve accepting contradictory positions; and, by nature or instruction, a man may find which of the two contradictory propositions is the true one. (GS § 29. [Asín 10 Berman])

For sure, Plato was very contemptuous of the pettifogging lawyers and politicians, but he developed the dialectical method and applied it throughout his dialogues to reach the truth by thinking through contradictory opinions. He was convinced that it was a universal instrument and did not restrict its use to any of the cities, either the perfect or imperfect ones:

Then you will provide by law that they shall give special heed to the discipline that will enable them to ask and answer questions in the most scientific manner? (534e). “I will so legislate,” he said, “in conjunction with you.” “Do you agree, then,” said I, “that we have set dialectics above all other studies to be as it were the coping-stone—and that no other higher kind of study could rightly be placed above it.

31 Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 137.

Nothing intimates that Ibn Bajja was aware of the dialectical method; the Arabic version he read would not have preserved the dialogue form. Plato contrasted his dialectical art with that of the rhetorician, the lawyer, and the politician, but Ibn Bajja sees no real difference between these groups. For him, the only significant difference is between the linear way of exposition in the perfect city and the winding ways in the imperfect cities.

Philosophers and Oppositional Standpoints

In Plato, the philosopher needs to become the king, insofar as this is the only way to bring the beautiful city into being. In Ibn Bajja, this task seems to be doomed to failure. Three groups of men are engaged in reforming the imperfect city: the judges, the physicians, and the Weeds (*nawābit*). It was Alfarabi who introduced the term *nawābit* in the sense of political “opposition”, on which Ilan Alon had shed some light.³² While Alfarabi saw the Weeds negatively, Ibn Bajja has a positive attitude toward them.³³ As he says: “The Weeds can, however, exist in the four [imperfect] ways of life. Their existence is the cause that leads to the rise of the *perfect city*, as explained elsewhere” (GS §32. [Asín 11 Berman]). After these encouraging words, Ibn Bajja corrects himself. The treatise aims at the individual Weed and his felicity, and not at building a perfect society. Whatever his plans for reform might be, he has no actual hope of achieving felicity for society collectively:

Similarly these words are appropriate to the solitary Weed, viz. how he is to obtain happiness when it does not exist, or how he is to eliminate from himself the accidents which prevent him from happiness or from securing as much as is possible for him, either with respect to the end of his reflection or with respect to tranquility of soul. Preserving happiness is like preserving health. It is not

32 Ilan Alon, “Fārābī’s Funny Flora: Al-Nawābit as ‘Opposition,’” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 121, no. 2 (1989): 222–51. Cf. Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Source Book*, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 53–56.

33 Peter Stefan Groff, “Cultivating Weeds: The Place of Solitude in the Political Philosophies of Ibn Bajja and Nietzsche,” *Philosophy East and West* 70, no. 3 (2020): 699–739.

possible in the three types of state or what is composed of them.³⁴ (GS §37. [Asín 12, Dunlop])

Since Plato never spoke of Weeds and never gave up the hope of constructing the virtuous city, he cannot be the source for Ibn Bajja. Instead, Ibn Bajja reworks the concept of the Weeds, as that concept was inherited from Alfarabi and the Arabic literary tradition. Averroes reiterates Ibn Bajja's pessimism thus:

When by chance a true philosopher grows up in these states, he is the position of a man who has come among wild beasts. He is indeed not obliged to do harm among them, yet he can also not be sure in his own mind that these wild beasts will not oppose him. Therefore he will have recourse to isolation and live a solitary life.³⁵

Averroes and Ibn Bajja share the same pessimistic approach. They both believed, with good reason, that philosophy was not welcome in their age. The ideology inspiring the African dynasties that ruled al-Andalus in their lifetimes—namely, the Almoravids between 1040 and 1147 and the Almohads between 1147 and 1228—was motivated by religious zeal, such that Averroes suffered from persecution in his last days, and his friends and disciples had to conceal their views. Despite all this, Averroes expressed the hope for a perfect life in a perfect state.³⁶ Ibn Bajja, who never suffered harm owing to his philosophical activities and, as Steven Harvey sharply remarks, successfully took advantage of the imperfect city, abandoned any hope for establishing the “beautiful city” of Plato.³⁷

34 Four ways are expected, and in GS §33 he mentions “four ways” without naming them.

35 Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's “Republic,”* 183.

36 *Ibid.*, 183.

37 “Ibn Bajja appears to have partaken of society to the fullest; far from eschewing the imperfect city, Ibn Bajja helped administer it.” See Steven Harvey, “The Place of the Philosopher in the City according to Ibn Bajja,” in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy: Essays in honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi*, ed. Charles E. Butterworth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 206.

The Cities and the Spiritual Forms

The second part of the *Governance of the Solitary* is dedicated to the doctrine of the spiritual forms. This is a doctrine whose origin Ibn Bajja himself attributes to Alexander of Aphrodisias in the *Epistle of the Conjunction*, although the true author of the doctrine should be regarded as Proclus.³⁸ Ibn Bajja developed the doctrine, ranked the forms, and found them to be present in the five ways or cities, as well as their inhabitants.

Every one of these [particular spiritual forms, that is, the ones present in common sense, in the imagination, and in memory] is beloved of man by nature, and hardly a man can be found who does not have a liking for at least one of these spiritual forms. If man is a part of the city, then the *city* is the end that is served in all of his actions. But this obtains in the *virtuous city* alone. In the other four cities and the ones mixed of them, on the other hand, each citizen establishes for himself any of these spiritual forms as an end and has a predilection for the pleasures resulting from them. Hence things that are mere preparations in the *virtuous city* become the ends in the other cities. (GS §104. [Asín 37 Berman])

If man is a part of the city, then the city is the end that is served in all of his actions. But this obtains in the *virtuous city* alone. In the other four cities and the ones composed [*rukkiba*] of them, on the other hand, each citizen establishes for himself any of these spiritual forms as an end and has a predilection for the pleasures resulting from them. Hence things that are mere preparations, in the *virtuous city* become the ends in the other cities. (GS §105. [Asín 37 Berman])

The introduction of the spiritual forms in the five cities represents Ibn Bajja's original contribution. He grades forms according to their distance from matter and their proximity to the purest intellect, and he establishes the highest form as the end of the philosopher. Spiritual forms are analogous somehow to the substantial form in Aristotle, and they are found at the various levels of existence. One of them is the animal level, and the related spiritual form is shared by the human being at an initial stage: GS §136. [Asín 49]

The perfection of the hatchlings of the perfect animals is due to this [spiritual] form [. . .] These states (*aḥwāl*) belonging to the spiritual forms are found in

38 Ibn Bajja, CI §39. For the arguments supporting Proclus's authorship of this doctrine, cf. Genequand's note, *La conduite de l'isolé et deux*, 373.

the children as long as they cannot feed themselves. Everything belonging to kinship is human, and most of it is by convention or by the Divine Law. These states have been adequately considered in book 5 of the *Republic*.

Book 5 contains Plato's views about the communion of wives and children among the guardians, and also about the rearing of the children. The Muslim philosopher was reading something as stunning as the following: "That these women shall all be common to all the men and that none shall cohabit with any privately; and that the children shall be common, and that no parent shall know its own offspring nor any child its parent" (*Republic* 457d).

Ibn Bajja considered Plato's proposed laws something "by convention," and he called for the Divine Law in the Muslim jurisprudence as the alternate option. Averroes would also keep his distance from Plato's views and comment thus: "This, then, is what Plato thinks about the community of women and children."³⁹ But Ibn Bajja does not exclude natural dispositions; on the contrary, he sees that spiritual forms are innate and that they determine the conditions or states of the individual, according to his age.

The third age [of man] is by convention (*wad'*) and for this reason, some Divine laws establish the custody of the children during this age. The state that exists because of the spiritual forms of the children is a different state and [it is] a love different from that which is by convention, and human nature participates of it. [This state] differs according to the ways of life, like the communal way (democratic, *al-sira al-jamā'iyya*), where the children are more beloved than in the other ways of life, because of their cooperation in keeping the households. (GS §142. [Asín 54])

The division of the human life cycle into periods of seven years is ascribed to Solon, the Greek lawgiver, and it is often quoted in the ancient sources.⁴⁰ In Islamic times, Ibn Ṭufayl, (d. 1085) applies the septennial division to the life of the central character of his philosophical novel.⁴¹

39 Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 170.

40 A modern English translation is available in Matthew Dillon and Linda Garland, eds., *Ancient Greece: Social and Historical Documents from Archaic Times to the Death of Alexander the Great*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), §4.105, 178.

41 Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ibn Ṭufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*, trans. Lenn Evan Goodman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

The third age mentioned by Ibn Bajja corresponds to the ages fourteen to twenty-one. In Islamic jurisprudence, when a boy reaches puberty, he has come of age, but other divine laws do not share this view, which is a matter of convention. The spiritual form of this age comprises its specific states or conditions, and love is related to them, or even derivative from them. Although love for the children is natural, it undergoes modifications according to the societies to which the children belong. The democratic city, Ibn Bajja believes, loves children best.

When some of those states that are in the early ages of men, in particular, those that are far away, as for instance, gravity, reverence, and affection, and what is even farther, the condition of giving advice, are found in a boy, then this is caused by a natural shortcoming, as it is sometimes observed, but if it persists into middle age, either it wanes and vanishes faster than Heraclitus' fire, or it is caused by something similar to that which nowadays is found among the children of the wealthy and famous people, and it is obvious that they show [apparent qualities] without deserving them.⁴² If it happens that these appearances are believed to be the virtue and it is accepted in the city, this is the most powerful cause of destruction in the city, whatever it is among the four, but in the *imamate* city, this is not possible. Most frequently it happens in the affluent city, then in the communal, and then in the city of domination. (GS §148. [Asín 54–55])

Ibn Bajja proceeds in an analogous way when he considers the later stages of the cycle of human life. The “states” are now modes of behavior or qualities appropriate to these stages, and they are dependent on spiritual forms. But in the text Ibn Bajja examines a contradiction—namely, a boy who behaves as an old man and gives advice. “The children of the wealthy and famous people” behave in just such a manner in Ibn Bajja’s own era, and he shows anger toward those who accept such behavior. Incidentally, he recalls the division of cities into the known four classes: oligarchy, democracy, tyranny, and timocracy, which he here calls an *imamate*.⁴³ Since this state is based on honor, he understands that false appearances should not be considered real.

42 Cf. Plato, *Republic* 498a–b. In this passage, Socrates deprecates the pseudo-philosophers and concludes: “And towards old age, with few exceptions, their light is quenched more completely than the sun of Heraclitus, inasmuch as it is never rekindled.”

43 Charles Genequand analyzes the passage in the commentary on GS §148, 314–316, and with particular consideration of the term *imāmiyya*. I am inclined to think that *imāmiyya* is a misreading of *ikrāmiyya* (“honorary”).

The reference to the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus and his doctrine of fire need not to be traced to Plato, since Alfarabi's treatise *On the Attainment of Happiness* uses the same image when he deals with the false philosophers.⁴⁴ Once again, Plato's influence likely passes through a third source.

Epistle of the Conjunction of the Intellect with Man

Ibn Bajja addresses this epistle to some friends who strive for attaining their unity with the intellect, and he explains what steps they should follow in order to reach that goal. They are to follow the path of knowledge, and they must detach themselves from the common people as well as from scholars and scientists. In order to illustrate the correct ways, Ibn Bajja adduces the Platonic allegory of the cave, the most famous allegory in the history of philosophy. In that allegory, Plato tells the tale of a group of prisoners in a cave being set free and led to the outside world where the sun shines as an allegory of man being raised from the false world of sense perception to the true world of the ideas by means of education. Let us consider the beginning of the allegory, where Plato calls for education as the key to reaching the true world:

“Next,” said I, “compare our nature with respect to education and its lack to such an experience as this. Picture men dwelling in a sort of subterranean cavern with a long entrance open to the light on its entire width. Conceive them as having their legs and necks fettered from childhood, so that they remain in the same spot, able to look forward only, and prevented by the fetters from turning their heads. Picture further the light from a fire burning higher up and at a distance behind them, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them a road along which a low wall has been built, as the exhibitors of puppet-shows have partitions before the men themselves, above which they show the puppets” (*Republic*, 514a–514b).

Ibn Bajja knew of the allegory and interpreted it according to his epistemology, so that the ideas of forms are interchangeable with his own concepts, and men raising in education are replaced by three categories of men, the common people, the theoreticians or philosophers, and the blessed:

⁴⁴ In Alfarabi, *The Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), §61, 49.

The condition of the common people regarding the intelligibles is similar to the condition of the vision of people who are in a cave where the sun does not rise: they look, and they see all the colors in the shadow. Those who are in the deepest part of the cave see the colors in a condition similar to darkness, and those who are at the entrance of the cave see the colors in the gloom. The common people see the beings in a condition similar to that in the gloom and do not see the light at all. Since, for the dwellers of the cavern, light has no existence apart from the colors, likewise for the common people the intellect has no existence, and they do not see it. (CI §47. [Asín 19])⁴⁵

Ibn Bajja does not talk about ideas but intelligibles and the intellect. In Plato, the shackled prisoners see shadows of puppets on a wall, illuminated by the light from an artificial fire behind them. Reality is for the prisoners nothing other than shadows, and shadows of puppets. The prisoner who has been set free from his fetters and stands up becomes pained by the new sights and confused about what is real.

Ibn Bajja groups the prisoners with the common people (*jumbūr*) and focuses on colors as opposed to light. Light is the intelligible world, and colors are the world of the senses. The prisoners, in Ibn Bajja's interpretation, see the objects in a gray scale, meaning that they have trouble discerning even the world of the senses

The theoreticians, (*nazariyyīn*) are like those who have gone out of the cave into the open air, where the light shines and they see all the colors as they are. As for the condition of the blessed, there is no similarity because they become the very object. Should the vision undergo alteration and become light, it will be like the perception of the blessed ones. As for setting the vision of the sun itself as an allegory of the condition of the blessed, such an allegory does not match up with the allegory of the condition of the common people. The allegory of the condition of the common people is more adequate and more akin. Since Plato believed in the ideas, the allegory of the one who looks at the sun for the blessed matched the allegory of the common people, and the allegory conformed to the classification. (CI §48 [Asín 19])

45 As in the case of the *Epistle of Farewell*, the paragraph number CI § forwards refers to the number established by Genequand in his edition, and French translation; it is followed by the page number of Miguel Asín Palacios's edition: "Tratado de Ibn Bajja sobre la unión del intelecto con el hombre," *Al-Andalus*, 7 (1942): 1–46.

For Plato, those outside the cavern need habituation—that is, education—so that they are able to distinguish between the shadows, the reflections, the objects themselves, the appearances in the heavens, and finally, the sun itself and are gradually able to apprehend these things. By contrast, Ibn Bajja divides those outside the cavern into two classes—the theoreticians and the blessed. The *nazariyyīn* is a general term for those who reflect and examine the essences; it does not only refer to the philosophers. The *nazariyyīn* are able to know by moving through the ascending grades established by Plato. Besides the *nazariyyīn*, Ibn Bajja introduces a new category, the blessed. The idea and the term “blessed” are not an innovation, since Greek mythology situated the Isles of the Blessed in the Atlantic Ocean where the heroes spent an afterlife free from sorrow. Nevertheless, the immediate reference should once again be Plato, who imagined the old philosophers enjoying their afterlife on these Isles of the Blessed (*Republic*, 540b).⁴⁶ This represents yet another indication that Ibn Bajja must have had a very detailed summary of the *Republic* at his disposal.

Ibn Bajja may accept the analogy between the prisoners and the common people but reject the one between the educated men and the blessed since “there is no similarity because they become the very object.” But he somehow corrects himself by the end and accepts the analogy because, as he explains, “Plato believed in the ideas”:

Here you should know that the ideas that Plato accepts and that Aristotle rejects are as I will describe them. They are significates (*ma‘nan*) bare of matter, and the mind adheres to them as the senses adhere to the sensible forms, so that the mind is comparable to the sensible faculty with regard to the sensible forms, or to the rational faculty with regard to the images [like forms]. Therefore, it results that the significates intellectually apprehended out of those forms are simpler than those forms, and that there are three [things]: the sensible significates, the forms, and the significates of the forms. The refutations aiming at the ideas affect the last aspect, and Plato calls them by the name of the [particular] thing and defines them with its definition. (CI §49 [Asín 20])

The passage offers a clear explanation of what Ibn Bajja understands as “significate” since he identifies the Platonic ideas with his own “significates of forms,” which are simpler than the forms and completely free from matter. The second part of the *Governance of the Solitary* consists of a description of

⁴⁶ Plato, *Republic* 519c had mentioned the islands before, but the context is clearly ironic.

the spiritual forms, and the *Conjunction with the Intellect* presumes that the receiver of the epistle, the vizier Abū al-Ḥasan Ibn al-Imām, is acquainted with the theory.⁴⁷ In al-Andalus, the discussion about the Platonic ideas gained importance in the case of Averroes, but some aspects are already found in Ibn Bajja.⁴⁸ He wrote his own treatises on Aristotle's natural works, including *De anima* but not the *Metaphysics*, where Plato's doctrine of the ideas is explicitly refuted. While the *Governance of the Solitary* includes more than a few direct references to Plato's *Republic*, it offers none to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. It is true, a quotation appears in the *Conjunction of the Intellect with Man* (CI §50–51; Asín 20), but the generic formulation—"the impossibilities mentioned by Aristotle"—betrays its indirect origin. Therefore, the *Republic*—more precisely, the *allegory of the cave*—was the main source for Ibn Bajja's knowledge of the ideas.

Averroes, on the other hand, occupied himself long and hard with the issue of the ideas.⁴⁹ His views as expressed in the middle and long commentaries on the *Metaphysics* are coincident in the affirmation that the Platonic ideas are of no use for understanding generation; natural generation, that is, cannot be affected by an incorporeal agent such as the ideas. Besides, in the long commentary he complained that Plato's doctrine of the ideas attracted so many people because it was close to the beliefs of Islamic theologians.

The *Governance of the Solitary* as Expression of the *Republic*

Ibn Bajja read the *Republic* well, but we do not know much about the details of the Arabic version he was reading. The copy he had kept the division into ten books, but most likely did not keep the dialogue form. The version was very comprehensive and many coincidences between Ibn Bajja and Averroes suggest that both philosophers were reading the same

47 Ibn Bajja, *Al-qawl fil-ṣuwar al-rūḥāniyya*, in *Rasā'il Ibn Bājjā al-ilāhiyya*, ed. Majid Fakhry (Beirut: Dār al-nahār lil-nashr, 1968), 49–104; Genequand, *La conduite de l'isolé*, 132–82.

48 Averroes mentions the allegory of the cave but does not place too much value in it. When the philosophers are outside the Cave, they must learn the intelligibles "step by step" (Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 198).

49 Josep Puig Montada, "'Substance' in Averroes' Three Commentaries on the *Metaphysics*," in *Florilegium medievale: études offertes à Jacqueline Hamesse à l'occasion de son éméritat*, ed. José Meirinhos and Olga Weijers (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009): 491–524.

translation. When he quotes the dialogues *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*, Ibn Bajja does not quote them in precisely.

Ibn Bajja understood that the main purpose of the *Republic* was to define what justice is and why a man should be just, but he diverged from Plato in various respects. The most pivotal, as E. I. J. Rosenthal observed early in 1937, was his interest in the perfection of the individual and his incorporation of a metaphysical system at the expense of any interest in building the ideal society.⁵⁰ He gives no advice for improving the state.

In Ibn Bajja, the analogy between the soul and the city that informs Plato's *Republic* assumes a purely psychological form. Ibn Bajja develops a metaphysical psychology in his hierarchical doctrine, according to which the spiritual forms are present in all levels of human life. In that respect, then, the political psychology of Plato and the metaphysics of Ibn Bajja intersect.

Ibn Bajja's spiritual forms are linked to levels of knowledge, in the context of which the allegory of the cave is introduced. Ibn Bajja and Plato agree on pursuing knowledge of the universal essences but disagree on what the highest form of knowledge is. Plato wants to educate the people and lead them to the knowledge of the ideas or forms by means of the art of dialectic. Education is toward philosophy; those who are philosophers have "beheld the good itself [and] they shall use it as a pattern for the right ordering of the state and the citizens and themselves" (*Republic*, 540a).

Ibn Bajja considers that the highest form of knowledge is not gained by dialectics in the Platonic sense but by contemplation, in which subject and object unify: "Should the vision undergo alteration and become light, it will be like the perception of the blessed" (CI §48; Asín 20). He was glad to find in Plato an authority to support his views, but he was proud of his own achievements and pointed out the differences between his own views and Plato's. The philosophers are the protagonists in Plato, but in Ibn Bajja there are only Weeds, men who hold views divergent from those of the majority of the population.

While Plato's philosophers dwell after death on the Isles of the Blessed (*Republic*, 540b), the blessed of Ibn Bajja become the very light of the intellect. Averroes also chooses an allegorical reading, but his interpretation corresponds to his own theory of knowledge. Plato believed in the existence of the good and that the philosophers "toward the end of their lives" should

50 E. I. J. Rosenthal, "Politische Gedanken bei Ibn Bāğğā," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 81 (1937): 153–68, esp. 162 and 167.

be freed from the concerns of the practically and morally virtuous life and devote themselves entirely to the rational study of the highest good and Averroes understands this study as a form of strenuous learning, not as joyful illumination.⁵¹

Despite all this, the *Governance of the Solitary* and Averroes's abridgment of the *Republic* are not mutually exclusive. They both share the same source; they both accept the guidance of Alfarabi; and they both interpret the contents of the *Republic* according to their own philosophical points of view—Neoplatonist in the case of Ibn Bajja, and Aristotelian in that of Averroes.

51 Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 203: "He means by the Islands of Happiness, to my mind, the inquiry into the idea of the Good" (*ha-ʿiyyun el şurat ha-ṭov*).

Part Two

Poetry, Philosophy, and Logic

Chapter Three

Expelling Dialectics from the Ideal State

Making the World Safe for Philosophy in Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"*

Yehuda Halper

Averroes begins his *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* with the assertion that the intention of his treatise is “to abstract from the statements that are attributed to Plato about political governance that which is included in scientific statements, and to eliminate the dialectical statements from it.”¹ This assertion would seem to find its full expression in the form of Averroes's

1 Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* ed. and trans. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 21. The original Arabic of Averroes's *Commentary* survives only in Samuel ben Judah's fourteenth-century Hebrew translation. On Samuel ben Judah, see Lawrence Berman, “Greek into Hebrew: Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles, Fourteenth-Century Philosopher and Translator,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967). In addition to Rosenthal's translation, there is also that of Ralph Lerner, *Averroes on Plato's "Republic"* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974). Lerner's translation follows the pagination of the Rosenthal edition, so references will list only Rosenthal's page numbers. In any case, here and throughout this chapter, I have preferred my own translations (often aided by Lerner's translations) of the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* unless otherwise noted.

Commentary: Plato's dialogue in ten books has become three treatises in Averroes's *Commentary*, which explicitly omit books 1 and 10. Moreover, Glaucon, Adeimantus, Thrasymachus, Polemarchus, and Cephalus are not mentioned at all in Averroes's *Commentary*; even Socrates is only mentioned once and then merely with reference to his choosing to die rather than live in a corrupt city—that is, with reference to events not literally referred to in Plato's *Republic*.² Rather, the one who speaks in Averroes's *Commentary* would seem to be Plato himself. Even if his words occasionally intermingle with those of Averroes, the resulting text takes the form of a monologue rather than a dialogue. Furthermore, Averroes dedicates the first argument of his *Commentary* to explaining the place of the science of governance, the purported topic of the *Republic*, in the Aristotelian hierarchy of the sciences. According to Averroes, the science of governance, which is the practical science dealing with volition and will, has two parts: a theoretical part, which treats “volitional actions and habits in general” (*haqinyanim wehape'ulot haresoniyyim*) and which he associates with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*; and a practical part, which deals with the establishment and ordering of those habits in order to achieve perfect actions and which he associates with Plato's *Republic*, since Aristotle's *Politics* was not available to him.³ As the

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- 2 The lone reference to Socrates occurs at Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 38. The context is a discussion of the benefits of euthanizing, or not healing anyone so sick as to not be able to participate in the affairs of the state. Socrates is brought as an example of one who chooses to die once it becomes clear that he will no longer be able to participate in the affairs of the city. Averroes's source for this is likely derived from the *Apology* rather than from the *Republic*. Although he is not mentioned in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* Thrasymachus is mentioned in Averroes's *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*. Aristotle's *Topics* does not mention Thrasymachus, but Averroes depicts him producing an argument reminiscent of *Republic* 343d–345c: the just person is worse off than the unjust person, and injustice makes its practitioner most happy. Socrates's knowledge of topical argumentation, according to Averroes, is what allows him to defeat Thrasymachus there. See Averroes, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*, ed. Charles Butterworth and Ahmad Abd al-Magid Haridi (Cairo: American Research Center in Egypt, 1979), 133, section 177. I discuss these examples in more detail in my monograph, *Jewish Socratic Questions in an Age without Plato: Permitting and Forbidding Open-Inquiry in 12–15th Century Europe and North Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 81–84.
- 3 Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 21–22. Cf. Samuel ben Judah's colophon to his Hebrew translation of Averroes's *Middle Commentary on*

practical part of practical science, Averroes's *Republic* fits into an Aristotelian division of the sciences—even if it is not exactly Aristotle's own division—as a treatise, or series of treatises, dealing with political science. In adopting this Aristotelian form, Averroes's *Commentary* dispenses with the dialogue form of Plato's writing.⁴

It appears from the rest of Averroes's *Commentary* that he has thrown out the dialecticians along with the dialogues. Perhaps as a consequence of this, Plato's account of the culmination of human reason in dialectic in connection with the divided line (*Republic* 509d–511e) is, in Averroes's *Commentary*, a culmination of human reason in Aristotelian metaphysics (*hafilosofiah hariṣonah*). The Socrates of the *Republic* may hold dialectic to be the most closely connected to using one's intellect, particularly among the true philosophers who have left the cave, but Averroes makes no mention of dialectic in these contexts. Instead, grasping intelligibles is said to be the chief aim of the sciences and this is done through an Aristotelian program of study that culminates in metaphysics. One leaves the cave by studying mathematics, physics, and metaphysics and attains human perfection through acquiring the intelligibles of the theoretical sciences.⁵ Plato's use of dialectic is entirely absent from Averroes's account here. Indeed, in general Averroes would seem to have an understanding of dialectic (*niṣuah*, in Hebrew; *jadal* in Arabic) based primarily on Aristotle, but highly modified by his own understanding of *kalām* as presented, for example, in his *Decisive Treatise*. Averroes, in fact, apparently imports his notion of non-philosopher dialecticians and their place in the tripartite division of society that he establishes in the *Decisive Treatise* into his reading of the *Republic*. In what follows, we shall trace Averroes's development of his famous division of humanity into rhetorical, dialectical, and demonstrative classes in the *Decisive Treatise* to his division

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: “The second part [of political science] is contained in the book known as the *Book of Governance* by the Philosopher [i.e., Aristotle's *Politics*], but this book did not fall into the hands of Averroes. Indeed, he apologized in [his *Commentary*] that he did not explain it, but instead explained the scientific statements that he found from that second part in Plato's *Book of the Governance of the City*” (my translation). For the original Hebrew, see Lawrence Berman, “Greek into Hebrew: Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles, Fourteenth-Century Philosopher and Translator,” 303.

4 Cf. Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 105. It is also possible that Averroes was not familiar with the *Republic* in dialogue form but had only seen summaries of the work.

5 Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 74–76.

of the best state in the *Republic* into poetic, rhetorical, and demonstrative classes. The best state, according to Averroes, thus replaces the dialectical class of people with a poetic class. Indeed, the justifications that we find in book 10 of the *Republic* for the condemnation of the poets also apply to the dialecticians in Averroes's reading—that is, they appeal to people who cannot distinguish them from truth; they strengthen unreasoning parts of the soul; they appeal to people who generally know better; and they present merely an imitation of reasoned argument. Moreover, Averroes implies that he has in mind a specific group of dialecticians who have no place in the best regime: the Muslim, religious thinkers known as the *mutakallimūn*.⁶ Accordingly, Averroes's depiction of Plato's *Republic* indeed has a practical end: to produce a regime without *kalām*, while still retaining imitative poetry, rhetoric, and, of course, philosophy.

The Decisive Treatise

In his legal ruling known as the *Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom*, Averroes presents what became his best-known view: the tripartite division of humanity into rhetorical, dialectical, and

6 These thinkers are referred to in Hebrew as *ha-medabrim*; see, e.g., Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 66. It is not, though, entirely clear to what extent this term refers to specific thinkers in Averroes' vicinity. In the *Decisive Treatise*, Averroes describes Ash'arite and Mu'tazilite interpretations of the Qur'an as dialectical (*jadaliyya*) (see source in 26n7 [paragraph 43]), which he later associates with heresy (30 and 32). The Mu'tazilite presence in al-Andalus and Morocco in Averroes's time was apparently negligible, and Averroes acknowledges his own unfamiliarity with Mu'tazilite texts in *Al-Kashf 'an manāhij al-adilla fī 'aqā'id al-milla*, ed. M. A. al-Jābirī (Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-wahda al-'arabiyya, 1998), 118. See Gregor Schwarb, "Mu'tazilism in the Age of Averroes," in *In the Age of Averroes: Arabic Philosophy in the Sixth/Twelfth Century*, ed. Peter Adamson (London: Warburg Institute, 2011), 251–82, esp. 280. Ash'arism had a more decided presence in al-Andalus and may have played an important part in establishing intellectual practices among the Almohads. See Sarah Stroumsa, *Andalus and Sefarad: On Philosophy and Its History in Islamic Spain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 70–72 (see 63–73 for Mu'tazilism in general). Still, if Averroes is not attacking Almohad doctrine directly, then it is not clear whom he might have in mind in his criticisms of the *kalām*, other than al-Ghazali (and perhaps Avicenna/Ibn Sina) and other Eastern thinkers.

demonstrative classes based on their manner of assent. In fact, he presents this view twice in the *Decisive Treatise*, the first time in connection with human natures (*tibā' al-nafs*) and temperament (*jibla*) and the second time in connection with the law (*fi-l-sharī'a*).⁷ Regarding the natural account Averroes says:

[Assent to the Law] is determined for every Muslim in accordance with the method of assent his temperament and nature require. That is because people's natures vary with respect to assent. Thus, some assent by means of demonstration; some assent by means of dialectical statements (*bi-l-aqāwīl al-jadaliyya*) in the same way the one adhering to demonstration assents by means of demonstration, there being nothing greater in their natures; and some assent by means of rhetorical statements, just as the one adhering to demonstration assents by means of demonstrative statements.⁸

To be sure, Averroes is talking about assent to “this divine law of ours,” but the criteria for assent are based on three kinds of statements: rhetorical, dialectical, and demonstrative. Nature, according to Averroes, requires people to form assent in different ways, and perhaps there are people who do so in ways that combine methods, using demonstration for some things and rhetoric for others. The *sharī'a*, which aims to convince all people, “the red and the black,” of its truth encourages the use of all three methods. Clearly, then, some Qur'anic statements are convincing for some while others are convincing only for others.

Accordingly, Averroes states later in the *Decisive Treatise* that the *sharī'a* also divides people into three classes (*ʿaṣnāf*): rhetorical, dialectical, and demonstrative. The rhetorical class, Averroes tells us, “is in no way adept at interpretation. These are . . . the overwhelming multitude.” The demonstrative class, Averroes tells us, “is those adept at certain interpretation. . . . This interpretation ought not to be declared to those adept in dialectic, not to mention the multitude.”⁹ This interpretation follows what is discovered through scientific demonstration, resolving apparent conflicts between

7 See Yehuda Halper, “Dialecticians and Dialectics in Averroes’s *Long Commentary* on Gamma 2 of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 26 (2016): 161–84, esp. 165–66.

8 Averroes, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, trans. Charles Butterworth (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 9 (paragraph 11). All quotations from the *Decisive Treatise* are from this edition and translation.

9 Paragraph 44, Butterworth trans., 26.

religion and reason by understanding Holy Writ to be figurative. The rhetorical class, by contrast, is not expected to pursue figurative interpretation of Holy Writ, but to accept the apparent sense (*al-zāhir*) of text. Should conflict still arise, they are to recognize that “none knows their interpretation but God” (Qur’an 3:7).¹⁰

Indeed, Averroes is very strict about the limits of interpretation. He says:

When something pertaining to these interpretations is declared to someone not adept in them—especially demonstrative interpretation . . . both he who declares it and the one to whom it is declared are steered to unbelief (*al-kufr*). The reason is that interpretation includes two things: the rejection of the apparent sense and the establishing of the interpretation. Thus, if the apparent sense is rejected by someone who is an adept of the apparent sense without the interpretation being established for him, that leads him to unbelief if it is about the roots of the Law.¹¹

Now unbelief (*al-kufr*) is a very serious charge; and were Averroes’s legal decision to be taken seriously, it would effect a serious divide between those who interpret and those who do not. Indeed, Averroes goes on to say, “interpretation ought not to be . . . established in rhetorical or dialectical books . . . as Abu Ḥamid [al-Ghazali] did.”¹²

Demonstrative books, however, must be allowed; after all, Averroes himself commented on all of Aristotle, even on such teachings as the eternity of species and the Unmoved Mover, which quite clearly call for interpretation of the Qur’an according to Averroes’s own guidelines. Moreover, according to Averroes, the Qur’an includes unique characteristics discernible only by the demonstrative class. One is that “no one grasps an interpretation of [it] . . . except those adept at demonstration.” Another is that “they contain a means of alerting those adept in truth to the true interpretation.”¹³ The Qur’an, then, is apparently directed primarily to two groups—the rhetorical class, who take it literally, and the demonstrative class, who use figurative interpretation to understand places where the literal text conflicts with demonstrated

10 Paragraph 46, Butterworth trans., 27.

11 Paragraph 45, Butterworth trans., 26.

12 Paragraph 45, Butterworth trans., 26–27.

13 Paragraph 58, Butterworth trans., 32.

science.¹⁴ These groups are forbidden from communicating directly, but they may communicate internally with members of the same class.

What about “those adept in dialectical interpretation”¹⁵? They, too, are forbidden from communicating their interpretations to the multitudes of rhetorically influenced people. Moreover, Averroes even forbids them from writing their interpretations in *dialectical* books!¹⁶ Since they are not of the demonstrative class, they cannot read demonstrative works either. Dialectical interpretation, therefore, would appear to have no outlet. Indeed, when it comes to examples of dialectical interpreters, the Asha‘arites and the Mu‘tazilites, Averroes says that “their interpretation neither admits of defense, nor contains a means of alerting to the truth, nor is true. Therefore innovative heresies have increased.”¹⁷ That is, such *kalām* interpretations should be avoided entirely. Those familiar with the Asha‘arite and the Mu‘tazilite writings may well wonder what would be left once discussion of interpretations of the Law, or topics arising from the Law, are removed. Indeed, it seems to follow from the *Decisive Treatise* that in Averroes’s view, such writings are neither necessary nor desirable for a good society. Those whose natures cannot help but seek dialectical arguments are advised to keep those arguments to themselves.¹⁸

14 On the religion of the philosophers as composed of beliefs established through demonstrations, see Richard Taylor, “Averroes on the Sharia of the Philosophers,” in *The Judeo-Christian Islamic Heritage: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. Richard Taylor and Irfan Omar (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2012), 283–304. However, as Taylor points out (297), the arguments of the *Decisive Treatise* themselves are mainly dialectical. Certainly, there are no demonstrations in the *Decisive Treatise*.

15 Paragraph 44, Butterworth trans., 26.

16 See note 9 above. The difficulty of enforcing this prohibition is highlighted by Averroes’s own dialectical interpretations in the *Decisive Treatise* (see note 14 above). Even if they are only responses to the popularization of such arguments by figures like Al-Ghazali, the arguments, as responses, are even more clearly dialectical!

17 Paragraph 58, Butterworth trans., 32.

18 This position is apparently not reconcilable with Averroes’s own use of dialectical arguments in the *Decisive Treatise* (see notes 14 and 16 above). Averroes’s view must be proscriptive rather than descriptive. Indeed, it may be entirely aimed at a future ideal society that was, of course, never realized.

The Commentary on Plato's "Republic"

Averroes presents a similar division of humanity into classes in his discussion of the best regime in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."*¹⁹ At first, the distinction appears casual, gently slipped into Plato's "one man, one art" argument. According to Averroes, because "no citizen ought to engage in more than one art [*melakāh*]"²⁰ and because the human perfections attained in the city are spread out among individual citizens, "the individuals of this species are as distinct in their temperaments as in their perfections."²¹ Indeed, Averroes claims:

This has already been explained in natural science and sensation [also] attests that individual humans have this attribute. This was explained even more so with regard to the noble perfections, for not every man is fit to be a man of war (*'iš miḥamah*), an orator (*melīš*), a poet (*mešorer*), or, above all, a philosopher (*filosof*). Since this is as we have described, there ought to be an association of humans which is perfect in every species of human perfection . . . so that the lesser perfection may follow the more perfect.²²

Averroes thus attests to a natural hierarchy of perfections in the best human association (*qahal*), where the lower perfections serve the higher as the art of bridle-making serves the art of horsemanship. Moreover, he goes on to compare the divisions of these perfections to the divisions of the soul. Yet the examples he gives are not those of Plato's division, but of

19 The distinction also appears after a fashion in Averroes's *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. See Mauro Zonta, *Il Commento medio di Averroè alla Metafisica di Aristotele nella tradizione ebraica: Edizione delle versioni ebraiche medievali di Zerahyah Hen e di Qalonymos ben Qalonymos con introduzione storica e filologica*, vol. 2 (Pavia: Pavia University Press, 2011), 7. I translate and discuss this passage in Yehuda Halper, "Abraham Bibago on the Logic of Divine Science: *Metaphysics α* and the Legend of the Pardes," in *The Origin and Nature of Language and Logic: Perspectives in Medieval Islamic, Jewish and Christian Thought*, ed. Nadja Germann and Steven Harvey (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 323–45, esp. 331–33.

20 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 22.

21 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 23. Note that the Hebrew word for temperament here, *yeširah*, is the same word used in the anonymous medieval Hebrew translation of the *Decisive Treatise* for *jibla*. See Norman Golb, "The Hebrew Translation of Averroes's 'Faṣl al-Maqāl,'" *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 25 (1956): 91–113; esp. 106.

22 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 23.

warrior, orator, poet, and philosopher. These examples are of those who receive instruction, the warriors, and those who give instruction, orators, poets, and philosophers. It is the philosophers who give instruction “most of all” since the proper ordering of the parts of the city is dependent on theoretical science.²³

One way to reach those perfections in a community of people is through what we might call education, and what Averroes calls, “establishing opinions (*hade'ot*) in the souls by way of poetic and rhetorical statements (*bama'amarim habalašiyyim wehaširiyyim*).”²⁴ What is the basis for deciding which opinions ought to be taught? Averroes says, “this is specific to [expounding] the theoretical sciences (*baḥokhmot ha'iyuniyot*) to the multitude of humans.”²⁵ That is, the singular elect—namely, the philosophers—teach the multitude opinions about what they have learned in the theoretical sciences.²⁶ Averroes explains:

In teaching science [*baḥokmah*] to the multitude, he [i.e., presumably, Plato] used rhetorical and poetic ways [*haderakim habalašiyyim we-haširiyyim*] because they are in one of two situations when it comes to instruction: either they [sc. the multitude] know them through demonstrative statements [*bama'amarim hamofiyyim*] or they do not know them completely [*lo yede'u otam legamre*]. The first is impossible, but the second is possible because every person ought to acquire the most of perfection that is in his nature [*šebeṭiv'o*] to acquire, according to his preparation for it.²⁷

23 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 24.

24 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 25.

25 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 25.

26 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 25. Samuel ben Judah renders the expression I have translated “the singular elect” here as *hayehide segullot*. Elsewhere in the *Commentary* Samuel prefers the expression *hayehidim segullot*; see 60, line 26 and Samuel's own afterward on 106, line 16. Samuel also uses the latter expression in his translation of Averroes's *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*; see *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics in the Hebrew Version of Samuel Ben Judah*, ed. Lawrence Berman (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1999), 197, 384. The editor supposes this word to be a translation of the Arabic *ḥašiyya* and the Greek ἰδίᾳ ἕκαστος. An anonymous reviewer suggests that the reading *hayehide segullot* here is most likely a scribal error. In any case, I can discern no difference in meaning.

27 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 25.

The philosophers gain their understanding of theoretical science through demonstrative methods, but these methods cannot be applied to the general public. Instead, the general public is instructed through poetry and rhetoric. Averroes does not explain precisely how opinions gained through poetry and rhetoric make one closer to theoretical perfection, though the ensuing discussion may suggest that it is through a moral means, or through the perfection of practical arts. In any case, Averroes here identifies three kinds of statements that lead people to accept opinions: poetry, rhetoric, and demonstration. These, in turn, give rise to a twofold division in society: the philosophers who accept demonstration and the multitude who accept opinions conveyed through poetry and rhetoric and turn to the philosophers for proper instruction.

This account differs from that of the *Decisive Treatise*, above all in three ways. In the first place, it is not the divine author of Holy Writ who sets out the statements that are proper for the multitude, but the philosophers. Second, poetics is added as an additional method of instruction for the multitude. That is, this best city does not reject imitative poetry, though it does censor it so that it is an imitation of theoretically understood truths and in particular of demonstrated truths.²⁸ Third, dialectics is entirely absent from this account. That is, no instruction of the multitude is done through dialectics. It would seem, then, that Averroes sees the realization of his muting of the dialecticians in the *Decisive Treatise* in the best city of the *Republic*.

Yet dialectics makes a surprise appearance in the discussion of the musical education of the guardians.²⁹ Averroes's words present a similar educational structure, but with the addition of dialectics:

These statements [*hama'amarim*] are of two kinds: demonstrative [*moftiyyim*] statements and dialectical [*nişuḥiyyim*], rhetorical [*halaşıyyim*], and poetic [*şiriyyim*] statements. Poetic statements are more suited for the youth. As they grow up, those who become proficient can be moved into another rank of teaching, in which he takes active part, until there arises one who has it in his nature [*şebeṭiv'o*] to learn demonstrative statements. These are the wise [*hahaḳamim*]. Those who do not have this in their nature remain at the stage beyond which they do not have it in their nature to pass. This is either at the dialectical statements, or at the two ways common to instructing the multi-

28 See *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 30.

29 Lerner identifies this as equivalent to *Republic* 377a.

tude, rhetorical and poetic statements. Poetic statements are more common and more suited for the youth.³⁰

Averroes here paints a fourfold picture of education according to the kinds of statements discussed in Aristotelian logic: poetics, rhetoric, dialectic, and demonstration. The account suggests that the guardian progresses through these ranks in order until his nature reaches its limit. Those guardians who turn out to be properly of the singular elect will be taught philosophy, while others will stop at their respective stage.

When speaking of the multitude, Averroes mentions three stages—poetic, rhetorical, and demonstrative—but when speaking of the guardians, Averroes also adds the level of dialecticians. In fact, this is the only place in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* where Averroes acknowledges that people can, in fact, reach the level of Dialectician. Why does Averroes bring in dialectics with regard to the guardians but not with regard to the multitude? While Averroes does not provide a direct answer to this question, the accounts of education themselves suggest an answer. With regard to educating the multitude, Averroes entirely dismisses the possibility that they will learn to make demonstrations. Yet, when it comes to the guardians, he suggests that making demonstrations is in fact the end goal of their education, even if most of them will not make it there. That is, dialectics is part of the training process for philosophers and accordingly philosophy students who have gained proficiency in the opinions disseminated by poetics and rhetoric may be urged to turn to dialectics to prepare themselves for philosophy. For everyone else, though, there is no reason to study dialectics or even to hear dialectical arguments.

The Problem with Dialectics

The importance of dialectics for philosophical training is emphasized at the opening of Averroes's *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*. There Averroes identifies training (*al-riyāda*) as the first of three benefits (*manāfi'*) of dialectic. Such training, he says, is a preparation for philosophy (*al-falsafa*). Indeed, it is a preparation for philosophy in the way that riding horses at the stadium is a preparation for war.³¹ This is apparently because

30 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 29.

31 Averroes, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*, 31. Aristotle's *Topics* here (101b27) does not mention horse races, but uses the term γυμνασία for

“philosophy,” by which Averroes appears to mean only demonstrative philosophy, uses demonstrative syllogisms based on certain premises, while dialectics uses syllogisms of the same form, based on premises taken from generally accepted views or inductive reasoning.³² If so, then dialectic is somewhat like philosophy, but still completely distinct from philosophy. Dialectic is also useful for theoretical sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-nazariyya*), especially when the scientist must choose between two nondemonstrable views and the disputes of the multitude (*munāzarat al-jumhūr*).³³ Averroes, though, explicitly denies that the dialectician should introduce dialectical syllogisms to the multitude (*al-jumhūr*), but rather should only expose them to certain forms of inductive reasoning.³⁴ Even then, it appears, dialectical reasoning among the many should be limited to answering sophists who would use dialectical arguments to encourage immoral behavior.³⁵ That is, dialectics may be like philosophy, but it is not philosophy and the general public should not learn its ways, except to refute bad dialectical arguments.³⁶ Nevertheless, since demonstrations and dialectics share the same forms of syllogism, working through dialectical syllogisms is good practice for building demonstrative syllogisms. The challenge of philosophy, it would seem, is to go from dialectical and

training. While the Greek γυμνασία usually refers to bodily exercise, the Arabic *riyāda* primarily indicates mental training.

- 32 Cf. *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*, 46–47. Induction is inferring properties of a universal from observing many or most of the particulars. By contrast, demonstration is supposed to proceed from an understanding of a universal to an explanation of particulars. See also Averroes's *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Topics* in *Averroës' Three Short Commentaries on Aristotle's Topics, Rhetoric, and Poetics*, ed. and trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977), 48–49.
- 33 Averroes, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*, 31.
- 34 Averroes, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*, 213, corresponding to *Topics* 157a19–33.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 343–44. This may explain Averroes' own use of dialectical arguments in the *Decisive Treatise*.
- 36 Note, though, that Charles Butterworth draws the opposite conclusion in his introduction to his edition of the *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*. He notes, however, that this is not the view expressed in Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* where “he claimed to have carefully exorcised all dialectical arguments. . . . There was . . . no reason to use anything but demonstrative arguments” (24). Butterworth's view of Averroes's view of dialectic in the *Topics*, then, explicitly contradicts his view of Averroes's view in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."*

inductive syllogisms about universals to demonstrative syllogisms that comprehend the universals *qua* universals.

In the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* Averroes is explicit that the philosophers, the singular elect, rely only on demonstrative statements.³⁷ He notes especially those demonstrative statements gained through the study of practical science—that is, through sciences like that studied in the *Republic*, according to Averroes's own way of looking at the *Republic*. The multitude, who have the nature of the ruled rather than that of the philosophical rulers, is to rely on persuasive and poetic statements communicated to them, often indirectly, by the philosophers.³⁸ Dialectics may be useful for philosophical training, but it seems to have no other use in Averroes's best city.

Indeed, Averroes has little to say in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* about why exactly dialectics does not play a part in the education of the multitude. The only description of content that he gives about dialectics in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* is his assertion near the end of treatise 3, in a discussion of why the philosophers attain the best pleasures, that dialectics concerns reasoning about the hierarchy of pleasures. Aside from the pleasure of the intellect—which Averroes swears on his life is demonstrably the best pleasure—the other pleasures cannot be ranked by demonstration. This is because only intellectual pleasure is eternal; the others are fleeting and therefore not universal. Accordingly, they cannot function as the minor term in a syllogism, and so cannot be compared via demonstration. Nevertheless, Averroes notes that ranking these pleasures is of great interest to the multitude, who do so in an imprecise way. In Averroes's view, the multitude would be better off just following what the philosophers do, rather than embarking on this reasoning themselves.³⁹

Implicit in this discussion of pleasures is the claim that dialectical reasoning about pleasures leads people away from self-improvement, especially if they cannot tell such reasoning apart from demonstrative reasoning. Indeed, Averroes claims that even Galen, who certainly should have known better, was taken in by these arguments. Moreover, the very engagement with such

37 On the expression, "the singular elect," see note 26 above.

38 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 60–61. Averroes's word for "persuasive" in Samuel ben Judah's translation, *sipuqiyyim*, could perhaps include dialectics, but it does not have to; indeed, there is no explicit reference to the dialectical education of the multitude. On the natures of rulers and of the ruled, see *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 65.

39 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 103–5.

arguments about pleasures contains within it the strengthening of nonintellectual pleasures rather than the purely intellectual pleasures. In short, we see in Averroes's critique of dialectic, some of the same elements central to Plato's rejection of poetry in book 10 of the *Republic*: dialectic is an imitation of reasoned argument (596a–598b); it strengthens unreasoning parts of the soul rather than the reasoning parts (604d–605c); and it appeals to the multitude who cannot distinguish it from truth, since even those who ought to know better can be taken in by it (605c–607a). Moreover, we shall see, it leads those taken in by it to accept unworthy guides and experts. For Plato, these were the poets (598c–607a), particularly Homer; for Averroes, these are the *mutakallimūn*.

Against the *Mutakallimūn*

The first appearance of the *mutakallimūn* in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* is in a discussion of how poets and mythmakers lead people astray in *Republic* 2 (corresponding to *Republic* 377). Averroes notes that Plato uses examples from “what was generally accepted in his day.” Rather than adducing Plato's examples, Averroes decides to bring examples from “what is generally accepted among us” (30). In particular, he brings examples of “base imitations” (*hahiqquyim hamegunim*), chief among them the view that God is the cause of both good and evil. Plato mentions Hesiod, Homer, and other poets who tell of the evil actions of gods like Uranus, Chronos, and even Zeus and Athena (*Republic* 377d–385c). Averroes's updated version refers to the *mutakallimūn*, who claim that good and evil do not apply to God “but that all the actions connected to Him are good.” This view, Averroes claims, suggests that good and evil do not have their own natures but are so by fiat (*hanaḥah*).⁴⁰ Averroes returns to this argument later on and notes

40 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 30. This use of the Hebrew *hanaḥah* is highly unusual. I use Lerner's term, “fiat.” Rosenthal translates it “decision” in the text, but offers “convention,” “agreement,” or “stipulation” as alternatives in a note. See *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 126. In his index, Rosenthal says that the Hebrew *hanaḥah* corresponds to the Greek νόμος, based on a comparison with Samuel ben Judah's translation of Averroes's *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1133a. I was not able to confirm this connection; indeed, the text there uses the Hebrew *nimus*, which is etymologically derived from the Greek νόμος. See *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, 187.

that the position of the *mutakallimūn* in fact obviates all natures in favor of God's will alone.⁴¹ This is the standard argument against the *kalām* that we find in Alfarabi's *Letter on Intellect* and Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, among other places—namely, if God's arbitrary will is the cause of all things, then there is no such thing as nature, especially universal nature.⁴² A consequence of this would be that demonstrations, which rely on inferences from a universal nature in the minor term, would be impossible.⁴³ That is, science itself, at least as Aristotle defined it, would then be impossible. Plato's critique of the poets and mythmakers thus applies, in Averroes's *Commentary*, to the *mutakallimūn*. Moreover, rejecting the *mutakallimūn*, whose arguments Averroes calls sophistic (*haṭa 'a' i*), is necessary in order to construct an Aristotelian scientific approach to governance.⁴⁴

In book 3 of the *Republic*, Socrates argues that the texts of poems and myths give rise to confused notions of good and bad, truth and falsehood. Accordingly, he goes into some detail as to how precisely one can censor the poems to make them truer and promote the good. While Socrates can restate various sections of the *Iliad* in what he says are less offensive forms, Averroes does not, perhaps cannot, restate what he sees as the basis for the arguments of the *mutakallimūn*. Indeed, according to Averroes, the *mutakallimūn* gained their notion of the scope of divine will from “the laws that exist in our time” (*hatorot hanimṣa'ot bizemanenu*) and “what happened to them is what often happens with legal inquiry (*ha' iyyun hatoriyi*), namely, that God, may He be exalted is first described by attributes (*bato' arim*). Then, later, one strives for agreement with existence (*haskamat hamiši' ut*) without mixing up what has been derived from those attributes.”⁴⁵ Once a *mutakallim* has a notion derived from God's attributes, which, Averroes notes, he considers revealed by the text, he strives to describe existence so that it may correspond to what he has understood from the Qur'an. This results in the denial of universal natures and the rejection of Aristotelian science. Averroes, as we would expect, does not reject the Qur'an but claims rather that the *mutakallimūn* are “close to sophism, very far from human nature, and far from what the

41 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 66.

42 See Alfarabi, *Risalat fi'l-'aql*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 1983), 7–8, 11–12; Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I 71.

43 As it stands here, this argument is also parallel to Socrates's claim at the end of *Republic* 2 that gods cannot step out of their own *ideas*.

44 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 30.

45 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 66.

Law brings.”⁴⁶ That is, as in the *Decisive Treatise*, it is *mutakallimūn* who are not interpreting the Law correctly. Averroes is not averse to censoring poems, particularly early Arabic poetry, which he claims promote excessive sensuality, but the Qur’an is a clear exception to this rule.⁴⁷ Thus, for example, Averroes advocates promoting virtues using sensual examples, such as promises of food, drink, and even sex, on the grounds that these lead to acting virtuously for its own sake.⁴⁸ Averroes, then, does not reject the Qur’an, or even the Qur’anic approach, but he does reject the way of interpretation of the *mutakallimūn*, which he associates with sophistry.

This rejection has practical political application in Averroes’s day. Averroes refers to his own days as those in which

sophists [*habaṭa ‘a’iyyim*] rule over the cities [*hamedinot*]; they [the sophists] blame the beautiful things, such as wisdom [*baḥokmah*, or: science] and the like, and praise the ugly things, and in general all the political evils that are present in cities. Indeed, their thought and their rule over the cities is the greatest cause for the loss of wisdom [or: science] and the extinguishing of its light.⁴⁹

I think it quite likely that the sophists he has in mind are the *mutakallimūn*, whose arguments he had earlier called *sophistic*, and that their thought, which he says is ruining wisdom, is dialectics. Indeed, it is possible these criticisms play a part in the corruption of the law that he sees in the past forty years of the Almohad regime.⁵⁰

46 *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* 67.

47 On the censorship of “women’s songs” and “the poetry of the Arabs,” see *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* 32-33.

48 *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* 31.

49 *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* 64.

50 *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* 103. Averroes criticizes the habits (*baqinyanim*) and mores (*wehamiddot*) that have been established among us (*‘eslenu*) over the last forty years. For the association with the Almohads, see Ralph Lerner’s introduction to his translation (xx–xxiii). It is not immediately clear which forty years Averroes has in mind. If the Almohads conquered Granada in 1159, then this would place the writing of the *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic”* in 1199, or a year after Averroes’s death. Alternatively, Averroes’s forty years may begin with the overthrow of the Almoravids in 1147; this suggests that the *Commentary* was written in 1187. It is also possible that the forty years began with the rise of Ibn Tumart around 1120.

Conclusion

Averroes desires to institute the rule of philosophy as a corrective to the rule of dialectics.⁵¹ We have seen that by the rule of demonstration, Averroes has in mind demonstration for the philosophers, and poetic and rhetorical images of demonstrated truths made by philosophers for the multitude. Dialectical imitations of demonstrated truths have no place in the city, except for training potential philosophers.

What is the role of the Qur'an in this? Averroes seems to operate according to the tacit assumption that it is a work of philosophical images, portraying those images in poetic and rhetorical form to the multitude. What Averroes appears to condemn is the dialectical arguments made on the basis of the Qur'an and the *hadith*, not the works themselves. As in the *Decisive Treatise*, Averroes seeks to mute the dialecticians and remove them from the public sphere. In removing the dialectical arguments from Plato's *Republic*, Averroes has removed them from the practical science of governing in general. Accordingly, they are to have no part in the perfect state.

Averroes's final example of this occurs in connection with the explanations of the immortality of the soul and the reward and punishment after death at the end of *Republic* 10. Both positions are doctrines of orthodox Islam and both could also be interpreted as compatible with Averroes's demonstrative proof that intellectual pleasures are the best, a proof that relies on the immortality of the intellect. Yet Averroes dismisses Plato's account in book 10 of the *Republic* because it is "a rhetorical or dialectical argument."⁵² Readers are to accept the poetic equivalents in the Qur'an or else the demonstration that Averroes provides but are to avoid the dialectical arguments.

Avoiding dialectical arguments is, for Averroes, part of practical science and of practical benefit for the city. Yet, we have already seen that dialectics does have a part to play in training theoretical philosophers. We may also wonder whether it can truly be removed from theoretical philosophy entirely, especially from metaphysics. If not, its removal from the political sphere is of practical benefit. In particular, the benefit accrued is the establishment of two classes of society: the multitude, who form assent through

51 Cf. *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 63ff., where Averroes begins his discussion of a city ruled by scientists (*ḥakāmim*) in contrast to the cities that exist now (*hanimṣa'im 'atab*), which do not benefit from scientists and philosophers.

52 *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 105.

poetic and rhetorical statements, and the philosophers, who form assent through demonstrations. People who form assent through dialectics would be left out of this class system, or rather, would be forced to pass as poetic or rhetorical people. Forcing a class system on a group of people is reminiscent of Plato's noble lie. Is it possible that Averroes's removal of dialectical arguments from the *Republic* is part of a practical attempt to create a new class system for Muslim al-Andalus via a kind of noble lie about how people form assent by nature?

Chapter Four

Music, Poetry, and Politics in Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"*

Douglas Kries

As our title announces, the current essay will explore three subjects that, in Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* lead from one into another, almost like a short series of stepping-stones. The first part of the essay will consider the treatment of music in the *Commentary*, arguing that Averroes effectively reduces music to poetry. The second of the stepping-stones will show that the *Commentary* credits poetry with educating the young especially and in that way transforms poetry into a political art for disciplining and educating citizens. The third will take up the question of the Andalusian's extended criticism of poetry's common practice of offering pleasurable prizes and rewards for virtue and show how the Commentator applies this criticism of poetry to the very author on whom he is commenting. In pursuing all three of these questions, we will focus squarely on Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* attempting to understand that text on its own terms but against its obvious background, the *Republic* of Plato. Nevertheless, in pursuing the teaching of *The Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* we cannot neglect the important research that has been done in recent decades on classical Islamic philosophy's understanding of Aristotle's *Organon* generally and of the *Poetics* in particular. We will therefore turn to the reports of other scholars on these aspects of Averroes, at least to the extent that such reports will be helpful in enabling us to understand better the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."*

From Music to Poetry

In the *Republic*, Plato initiates his analysis of the education of the guardians with a discussion of music in the latter portions of book 2; that discussion extends through much of book 3. Averroes's corresponding treatment of the education of the guardians through music is in the "First Treatise" of the *Commentary*, mostly in a relatively lengthy and isolable section that extends from 29.9 through 36.5.¹ During his treatment of music, Plato divides his subject into three parts: "melody is composed of three things—speech, harmonic mode, and rhythm."² Averroes seems to accept this division, although he inverts the order of the three elements: "A melody occurring in a narrative is composed of three things: rhythm, harmonic mode, and the speech to which the melody is set" (34.30–31).³ In the Greek of the *Republic*, the three words identifying the three parts of music are *logos*, *harmonia*, and *rhythmos*;⁴ in Samuel ben Judah's Hebrew translation of Averroes's Arabic *Commentary*, *rhythmos* has become *nigun* and *logos* has become *ma'amar*. A two-word phrase corresponds to *harmonia* in the translation of the *Commentary*: *ne'imah mesekehmet*.⁵

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- 1 References to the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* will be given in parentheses in the running text and will be to page and line numbers of the Hebrew text edited by E. I. J. Rosenthal, *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956).
 - 2 *Republic* 398d (*The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom [New York: Basic Books, 2016]). All subsequent quotations from the *Republic* will be to Bloom's translation and all references will be given in parentheses in the running text. The Greek text is printed in Plato, *Republic*, ed. and trans. Paul Shorey, Loeb Classical Library 275–76, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978.)
 - 3 *Averroes on Plato's Republic*, trans. Ralph Lerner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974). All quotations from the *Commentary* by Averroes will be from this translation.
 - 4 Aristotle uses the same three Greek words at *Poetics* 1447a22. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. and trans. Stephen Halliwell, Loeb Classical Library 199 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
 - 5 Cf. the threefold list in *Averroes's Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986; repr. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2000), 1.4.

These three musical concepts are never explicitly defined in either the *Republic* or the *Commentary*.⁶ In both works, however, rhythm is surely a concept referring to a measured division of temporal intervals; harmony (or “harmonic mode”) implies a distinction of tones or pitches that are subsequently grouped or combined in different euphonic collections; and speech refers to the words that may be set to rhythm and harmony—today we often call that part of music “lyrics.” Some confusion, however, is engendered by the use of the word *melody* in the two texts. The Greek word is *melos*; the Hebrew of the *Commentary* is *lahan*. Sometimes these words seem to mean a combination of harmony and rhythm, and in this they correspond closely to the English word *melody*, which refers to the tune that one can whistle; at other times, though, *melody* seems to refer to the whole of music. In Samuel’s translation of the *Commentary*, the confusion surrounding *melody* sometimes becomes considerable. Indeed, already in the quotation given in the previous paragraph (“A melody occurring in a narrative is composed of three things: rhythm, harmonic mode, and the speech to which the melody is set”), the first use of *melody* seems to refer to the whole of music, but the second seems to refer to the combination of rhythm and harmony. More importantly, in the passage of the Hebrew translation of the *Commentary* corresponding to Plato’s discussion of harmony in the *Republic*, the *Commentary* does not employ the two words translated as “harmonic mode” above but instead uses primarily *lahan* and *lahanim*—the words for melody and its plural form.⁷

6 Plato does give a sort of description of *rhythmos* and *harmonia* at *Laws* 664e–665a. See Plato, *Laws*, ed. and trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952).

7 At the critical point in the *Commentary*, *lahan* and *lahanim* (melody and melodies) are used eight times in eight lines (34.29–35.5). The meaning seems to shift throughout, although it mostly seems to refer to what we would expect to be rendered “harmony.” (The word for “modes” already mentioned [*ne’imot*] is also used twice in the passage, at 35.5 and 35.7.) Instead of melody, E. I. J. Rosenthal translates *lahan* as “tune”; see his translation of *Averroes’s Commentary on Plato’s “Republic”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 124 and note 2. In the Latin world, the word *melos* is also understood ambiguously by Augustine, who wrote a work of six books titled *De musica* that by his own admission (in *Letter 101*) is really only about rhythm. In the same letter, he considers adding six more books on melody (*de melo*) to his work on music, whereas it would clearly seem that books on harmony are what should be added.

Given, then, that the *Republic* and the *Commentary* understand the elements of music in more or less the same way, even if there is confusion surrounding especially the Hebrew vocabulary for melody and harmony, we are still able to pose the key question: What may be learned about Averroes's views on these musical elements by reading his treatment of them against their treatment by Plato? What we notice first is that Plato treats earnestly all three elements of music, but Averroes quickly subordinates the nonverbal elements to the one verbal element, with the element of harmony dropping away almost completely. But if harmony is subtracted from music so that we are left with speech and a temporal element such as rhythm or meter, what we are left with is poetry rather than music in the full sense. In other words, it soon becomes clear that Averroes subordinates music to poetry, or at least that he is more interested in poetry than in music.

What is the evidence for such an interpretation? We have already mentioned vocabulary confusion surrounding harmony, which could indicate a lack of emphasis on or interest in one of the important differences between music and poetry. A much more significant piece of evidence comes from the very beginning of the *Commentary's* treatment of the musical education of the guardians in which Averroes—the Commentator—uncharacteristically offers a definition of music *in his own name*:

By “music” I mean [*retsoni*] imitative arguments having a melody from which the citizens receive discipline. It is only intended that they [sc., the arguments] have a melody because thereby they become more thoroughly effective and more fully moving to the souls. For the art of music, as has been made clear, only serves the poetical art and carries forward its intention. (29.13–17)

In the definition contained in the first sentence of this quotation, music is said to have for its genus “imitative arguments”; the differentia is “having a melody from which the citizens receive discipline.” The definition apparently implies that an imitative argument having a melody but not imparting discipline might not constitute music; but more to the current point is the claim subsequent to the definition, which asserts that music (apparently the two nonverbal parts of music—that is, harmony and rhythm—are meant) exists only to better move the souls that need discipline. In other words, it is the speech part of music that truly counts for the Andalusian. As stated in the quotation above, music only “serves” (*ovedet*) the poetical art (29.16). But, of course, poetry emphasizes speech.

Surely the Commentator is correct to emphasize that the *Republic* is interested in the verbal elements of music; however, Plato also suggests that, in the education of the young guardians at least, it is rhythm and harmony that are most important. We do not know what Averroes's Arabic text or redaction of the *Republic* looked like but it is clear that one simply does not see represented in the *Commentary* of Averroes a robust statement on music as a whole such as this one from the *Republic*:

"So, Glaucon," I said, "isn't this why the rearing in music is most sovereign? Because rhythm and harmony most of all insinuate themselves into the inmost part of the soul and most vigorously lay hold of it in bringing grace with them; and they make a man graceful if he is correctly reared, if not, the opposite. Furthermore, it is sovereign because the man properly reared on rhythm and harmony would have the sharpest sense for what's been left out and what isn't a fine product of craft or what isn't a fine product of nature. And, due to his having the right kind of dislikes, he would praise the fine things; and, taking pleasure in them and receiving them into his soul, he would be reared on them and become a gentleman. He would blame and hate the ugly in the right way while he's still young, before he's able to grasp reasonable speech." (401d–402a)

Our interpretation, then, is that what Averroes is most interested about in the *Republic's* treatment of music for educating the guardians is that music shares certain characteristics, especially a rational or verbal element, with poetry. In short, the Commentator reduces or at least almost reduces music to poetry. Music is an embellishment, we might say, on poetry that poetry uses to make itself even more powerful and more valuable for disciplining citizens.

The next question, though, is why Averroes so subordinates music to poetry. For starters, it is necessary to consider that perhaps Averroes does not grasp the import of what Plato is pointing to in his treatment of the profound effects of rhythm and harmony because he does not understand rhythm and harmony very well. We have to consider this because, indeed, Averroes himself says this about both "melody" (by which he seems in this context to mean harmony) and rhythm. Plato, the Andalusian says, could at least refer his readers "to people generally known in his time for the making of melodies" (35.11–12); however, knowledge about melodies "has decayed in this time of ours" (35.12). Moreover, regarding the appropriate rhythms for the city, Averroes adds that they "were generally known in Plato's time, but in this time of ours we ought to investigate them" (35.18–19). Plato has

Socrates admit that he does not understand all the details about music, but Socrates can always consult Damon (400c). Averroes needs a Damon, but Damons are no longer to be found.

It is hardly obvious, however, that we should accept such professions of ignorance at face value. If Averroes thinks it important to know about such musical matters, why doesn't he investigate them? Can it really be the case that there is no one available from whom someone as well-positioned as Averroes could learn? Has he truly pursued the matter arduously? Or does he tacitly confess that he is either too busy or too lazy to find out about these matters? To entertain the thought that Averroes was not sufficiently diligent in trying to learn about something he thought important would place us in direct opposition to everything else we know about this remarkable scholar. Indeed, as music historian Dwight Reynolds reports, Alfarabi's large book on music circulated in al-Andalus; moreover, based on the testimony of Ahmad al-Tīfāshī, "the most important Andalusian scholar of music theory was Ibn Bājja," who is said to have spent two years revising the musical knowledge of his age and combining it with the music of the Christians and the songs of the East.⁸ Such evidence at least invites us to consider whether Averroes deemphasized rhythm and especially harmony for reasons other than his own invincible ignorance.

What might these other reasons be? Professor Reynolds also reports that early Arab music, even prior to the advent of Islam, was closely wedded to poetry, and of course this suggests that musical rhythm was closely tied to poetic meter. Arab music, because of its roots in poetic meter, was thus unique, especially in that it featured words and rhythm and *not* harmonics. One wonders, then, whether this feature of the relationship between Arab music and poetry would have made it easier for Averroes to run the two together. Reynolds also notes, however, that Greek works on music theory, which often included mathematical studies of harmonics, were being translated into Arabic already by the ninth century. In addition, there were the previously mentioned books on music by Alfarabi and Ibn Bājja. These factors would point to the existence of an Andalusian musical tradition that had come to value harmonics in addition to other parts of music.⁹

8 Dwight Reynolds, *Musical Heritage of al-Andalus* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 133–34. For more about Ibn Bajja and his influence on Averroes, see Puig's chapter in this volume.

9 Reynolds, *Musical Heritage of al-Andalus*, 27–35.

Of course, it may be the case that Averroes parts company with Plato's interest in musical harmony in favor of poetry simply because, in his own philosophical judgment, Plato was mistaken about the significance of music. Nevertheless, it seems likely that in turning from music to poetry, Averroes was also intentionally following Aristotle. The Peripatetic had written a work called the *Poetics*, on which Averroes wrote both a short and a middle commentary, but Aristotle did not write on music, except for the rather short treatment of the role of music in the education of the young in book 8 of the *Politics*, which was unknown to Averroes anyway. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle unsurprisingly leaves out harmonics completely; indeed, he does not emphasize meter either, favoring instead imitation or *mimēsis*, and especially the sort of imitation that employs speech.¹⁰ Averroes thus seems to follow the *Poetics* rather than the *Republic*, so that not only rhythm and meter become less significant in his analysis, but harmony almost disappears completely.

Support for such an "Aristotelian" interpretation of Averroes on music and poetry begins with the very definition of music quoted above, which asserts that music is a species of the genus "imitative arguments" that is subordinated to the aims of poetry. After offering his definition through the genus of imitative arguments, Averroes goes on to say that there are other kinds of arguments, which he divides into the demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical, and poetical arguments—with the poetical arguments apparently being another name for the imitative arguments (cf. 29.14 and 29.19–20). This fourfold list of demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical, and poetical arguments surely corresponds to the types of argumentation contained in the *Organon* as it was understood by Averroes.¹¹ Thus, the Andalusian's lack of interest in harmony and rhythm presumably stems from his emphasis on the *Organon* of Aristotle.¹²

10 *Poetics* 1447a13–b29.

11 On the basis of this list in medieval Islamic philosophy, see especially the summary offered by Terence Kleven, "Rhetoric, Poetics, and the *Organon*," in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Richard C. Taylor and Luis X. López-Farjeat (New York: Routledge, 2015), 82–92. The sophistical syllogistic art discussed by Kleven is not listed by Averroes in this part (29.19–20) of his *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."*

12 In the "Second Treatise" of the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* when discussing the education of the philosophers, Averroes boldly substitutes Aristotelian logic for Plato's concern with mathematics culminating in harmonics as the method for liberating the would-be philosophers from the cave. He feels free to do this, he says, because logic was unknown in Plato's time

The question of the structure and constituent books of the *Organon* is one that has received a great deal of scholarly scrutiny in recent decades. On the basis, especially, of the opening pages of Deborah Black's *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*, we can summarize the historical picture that emerges from this scholarship as follows: Two "canons" of the *Organon* circulated during the Middle Ages.¹³ The first belonged principally to the Latin world; it consisted of the six works that have become the standard canon in modern times. This has presumably become the modern canon because it was the one adopted by Bekker. The second canon belonged principally to the Arabic world, although Thomas Aquinas knew it as well.¹⁴ This larger canon concludes with the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* and has late antique Greek origins, apparently through the city of Alexandria.

What does this have to do with Averroes and his list of demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical, and poetical arguments, and the question of the reduction of music to poetry? Averroes wrote a *Short Commentary on the "Organon,"* which, since he was following the longer Hellenistic version of the *Organon*, concluded with a *Short Commentary on the "Rhetoric"* and a *Short Commentary on the "Poetics."* In studying these two commentaries and the preceding *Short Commentary on the "Topics,"* Charles Butterworth emphasizes that the version of the *Organon* of Averroes not only concludes with treatises on rhetorical and poetical arguments, but the positions of the *Sophistics* and the *Topics* are transposed from the standard Latin version.¹⁵ The *Topics*, moreover, is renamed in the Islamic tradition as Aristotle's book on dialectic. Consequently, Averroes's sequence of short commentaries on the *Organon* finishes with considerations of dialectical, rhetorical, and poetical arguments—exactly the last three items on the list of arguments that Averroes uses in his *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."*

(76.29–77.3). The implication is that Plato would have preferred logic to mathematics, too, if only he had known about Aristotle's *Organon*.

- 13 Deborah L. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 1–19.
- 14 Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio libri Posteriorum*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Commissio Leonina-J. Vrin, 1989); Aquinas, *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle*, trans. Fabian R. Larcher, O. P. (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1970), prologue.
- 15 Charles E. Butterworth, *Averroes's Three Short Commentaries on Aristotle's "Topics," "Rhetoric," and "Poetics"* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977), 7–8, 19–20.

The *Republic* emphasizes the significance of music in its statement on the education of the guardians. Indeed, Plato implies that music is the predominant element of the guardians' education with the famous speech of Socrates toward the beginning of book 4 that concludes thus: "For never are the ways of music moved without the greatest political laws being moved, as Damon says, and I am persuaded" (424c). By deemphasizing the nonverbal aspects of music, Averroes subordinates and reduces music to poetry. He in effect inverts the *Republic's* ranking of harmony and rhythm above the words of poetry. The result is a teaching consistent with the imitative interpretation of poetry contained in Aristotle's *Poetics*, which Averroes commented on not only in the *Short Commentary* mentioned above but in the much more developed *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's "Poetics."* Indeed, at one point in the *Middle Commentary*, Averroes expressly sets aside the study of harmony and rhythm as not belonging to the investigations of poetry.¹⁶

Replacing the teaching of the *Republic* with teachings we would associate with Aristotle is common enough in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."* What is especially ironic about Averroes's *modus operandi* in the case of music, however, is that Averroes is only commenting on the *Republic* because, as he says, he does not have Aristotle's *Politics* at his disposal. Nevertheless, the *Politics* concludes with a discussion by Aristotle on the significance of harmony and rhythm, and precisely on what Plato's *Republic* has to say about harmony and rhythm.¹⁷

From Poetry to Politics

To say that Averroes is far more concerned with poetry than with music is not to say that he completely or absolutely jettisons everything about music in his *Commentary*. In addition to harmony and rhythm, Plato obviously also considers carefully the *logos* part of music in discussing the education of the guardians in the *Republic*, and of course even outside the discussion of the education of the guardians the dialogue contains important treatments

16 *Middle Commentary on the "Poetics,"* 1.4. The relevant passage in the Greek of the *Poetics* (1447b) may be less clear than Averroes suggests, but Aristotle's words do seem to imply that it is not meter but *mimēsis* that truly demarcates poetry.

17 Aristotle, *Politics* 8.7, 1341b9–1342b34, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 264 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

of poetry. Indeed, like Averroes, Plato himself sometimes almost runs poetry and music together as a result of their overlapping interest in words. Thus, if Averroes parts company with Plato in important ways on the subject of harmony and rhythm, there is still much that he has in common with Plato's teaching on poetry. Most especially, Averroes emphasizes the relationship of poetry to politics in his *Commentary*, just as Plato does in the *Republic*.

In order to obtain an initial survey of this problem of poetry and politics in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* it is helpful to return to the work of Professor Black, whose opening pages we used in the previous section for an overview on the status of the question regarding Averroes's understanding of the contents of the *Organon*. We note now that Black points out that the existence of the two canons of the medieval *Organon* is something that has been known for a long time; the question now is what, if anything, is to be made of it. Black thinks that the placement of the *Poetics* among the logical works of Aristotle may indeed change how that work is to be interpreted, and the task of her long study is to show how Averroes (and his predecessors Alfarabi and Avicenna) understood the position of the *Poetics* within the larger logical structure of the *Organon*, or to show how the *Poetics* is in some sense "syllogistic." Before embarking on this task, though, she notes that historians of political philosophy have presented the only serious alternative to her approach. She credits political philosopher Muhsin Mahdi for raising the matter early on and views Charles Butterworth as prominent among those who interpret the larger *Organon* canon politically rather than logically.¹⁸

Black's statement of the problem in 1990—whether the larger context of the Arabic *Organon* means that the *Poetics* is to be understood, according to the Commentator, as a political or a logical work—corresponds directly to the manner in which Francesca Forte states the problem in 2015. Writing in *Quaestio*, Forte says that scholars reading the *Middle Commentary on the "Poetics"* of Averroes today choose between the same two alternatives. On one hand, there are those who say that, in the view of Averroes, "philosophy and poetry are the opposite poles on a spectrum which measures the

18 Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*, 1, 9–10. We are not able in this essay to pursue Black's study of the extensive treatments of the *Poetics* by Alfarabi and Avicenna. On these two major precursors to Averroes, see also the analysis of Salim Kemal, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes* (London: Routledge, 2003). Concerning Alfarabi alone on poetry and politics broadly conceived, see Shawn Welnak, "Alfarabi's Unacknowledged Legislators," *Maghreb Review* 40, no. 3 (2015): 356–78.

level of certainty of reasoning and which goes from demonstration properly conceived to reasoning through metaphors.” Such an interpretation finds it necessary to think of poetry “as a kind of quasi-syllogistic reasoning.” On the other hand, the political interpretation stresses the “moral dimension” in the Commentator’s understanding of Aristotle: “According to this interpretation, Averroes proposes a reading of the *Poetics* that is strongly influenced by Plato: poetic imitation is a form of communication of moral truths to the lowest and least educated layers of society.”¹⁹ Perhaps the logical and political or moral approaches to poetry are not, in the end, so incompatible as to be contradictory to each other, for there may well be political implications that follow from differing logical capabilities among human beings. Nevertheless, it is surely the case that the two approaches differ in important ways. Our conclusion is that the “political” approach has the most to commend itself, and our principal task in this section will be to explain why we think this is the case.

Soon after initiating his treatment of music in the education of the guardians by offering his definition (i.e., music as “imitative arguments having a melody from which the citizens receive discipline”), Averroes explains that the arguments by which the citizens are disciplined are not all imitative arguments. Indeed, there are two fundamental types of arguments for teaching citizens. Some are demonstrative, and the others are “dialectical, rhetorical, and poetical.” The demonstrations are said to be for the wise alone; the other three kinds of arguments are for those whose natures are not capable of grasping demonstrations. Of these latter, the poetic arguments are especially for the young, who generally later advance into the rhetorical arguments as they mature.²⁰ Both the poetic and the rhetorical arguments are “common to the instruction of the multitude” (29.24), however. Dialectical arguments, like demonstrations, are designed only for the few. Nevertheless, dialectical

19 Francesca Forte, “Averroes’s Aesthetics: The Pleasure of Philosophy and the Pleasure of Poetry,” *Quaestio: Yearbook of the History of Metaphysics* 15 (2015): 291–93.

20 In the *Middle Commentary on the “Poetics,”* Averroes says that at first “founders of regimes” used only poetical statements to establish “beliefs in the souls”; after the art of rhetoric was developed, they employed rhetorical statements in addition (4.28). This assertion by Averroes would seem to be his own view, as it does not appear to be contained in the relevant passage in the Greek of the *Poetics*, which is 1450b7–12.

arguments still carry the designation of not being appropriate for those who are capable of grasping certain truths through demonstrations (29.20–26).²¹

Averroes also mentions rhetorical and poetical arguments in an earlier passage of the “First Treatise” of the *Commentary* (25.14–33). There he says that both kinds are useful for establishing virtuous opinions “in the souls of political humans” (*benafshot bene ha’adam hamediniyyim* [25.14]). He later also refers to the two as “persuasive and affective arguments” (25.29), surely meaning thereby that the rhetorical arguments are persuasive and the poetical ones affective. In a third place, at the beginning of the “Second Treatise” of the *Commentary*, Averroes treats the distinction of these arguments yet again (60.25–61.1). In speaking of what philosophers must be prepared to teach, he says they should instruct “the elect few” by means of “demonstrative arguments” (60.26–27), but they should teach “the multitude” by means of “persuasive and poetical arguments” (60.27–61.1).

The disciplining or teaching of opinions to the citizens, then, seems to consist of an ordered progression. First, when they are young, the potential citizens learn poetry that emphasizes the affective and imitative elements of poetry. We are not told whether there is any poetry for the elderly, but after the young citizens have listened to the poets, they then encounter rhetorical arguments, which establish the proper opinions through persuasion. These are the two stages for the development of most of the citizens. Only the wise philosophers, of course, are able to receive demonstrative arguments and thereby know certain truth; there is also a fourth class consisting of an unfortunate few that are incapable of proceeding to true demonstrations but are able to pursue something resembling them—namely, dialectical arguments.

What are the poetical arguments for the young to consist of? What should their subjects or topics be? Perhaps we should not be surprised to note that in a *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* the Commentator is particularly

21 Dialectical arguments are especially important in the context of Islamic philosophy because the *mutakallimūn* or “dialectical theologians” are often viewed by the Islamic philosophers as espousing dialectical arguments. The current essay treats dialectical arguments only as they pertain to poetical arguments; for a focused treatment of dialectical arguments in the *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* see especially the essay in this volume by Yehuda Halper titled “Expelling Dialectics from the Ideal State: Making the World Safe for Philosophy in Averroes’s *Commentary on Plato’s ‘Republic.’*” An overview of the treatment of dialectical arguments in classical Islamic philosophy is offered by Allan Bäck, “Demonstration and Dialectic in Islamic Philosophy,” in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*, 93–104.

interested in the two “models” that Plato develops to guide the poets in his city in speech: the first is that the gods should never be said to be the source of good and evil, but only of good; the second (which seems to follow from the first) is that the gods do not mislead or deceive human beings, especially by changing their forms or by lying in any way (379a–383a).

Averroes does not hesitate to embrace fully a monotheistic alteration of the first model or pattern, which prohibits poets from claiming that God is the source of both good and evil:

Plato recounts of this what was generally accepted in his time and warns against it. We ourselves follow after him and also recount of this what is generally accepted among us. We say: Among these base imitations—in accord with what has been explained in the theoretical sciences—is the custom among humans of saying that God is the cause of good and evil. But He is perfectly good; He neither does evil at any time whatever nor is the cause of it. (30.22–26)

Averroes then immediately makes clear that he is criticizing the *mutakallimūn* for suggesting that God is not bound by the natures of good and bad, but that things become good because God wills them and bad because God does not will them (30.26–29). The implication would be that the *mutakallimūn* lag behind Plato in knowing what to attribute correctly to God or to gods. The second of Plato’s “models” for the poets—the one about the gods not deceiving human beings by changing their form or lying—surely goes without saying within a theistic world. Averroes thus, without explicitly stating as much, replaces or at least subordinates the second of Plato’s models to one of his own—namely, a model asserting that virtues are not to be pursued in order to obtain rewards or prizes. As will become clear in the next section, Averroes will use his revised second model against Plato himself. Thus, in the *Commentary*, the two targets of the two models turn out to be the *mutakallimūn* and Plato.

Establishing models for poets to follow while constructing imitative arguments would presumably move imitative narratives toward the truth, but it could also obfuscate the fact that the imitative narratives are not demonstrations and hence are at best approximations or representations of the truth rather than the truth itself. Averroes speaks of some imitations as “correct” and some as “untrue” or “base” (e.g., 30.2; 30.21), but surely all imitations are lacking in truth to a greater or lesser extent. The difference between the good imitations and the bad ones seems to lie in whether the imitations promote the proper opinions or beliefs in the souls of the citizens about the theoretical or practical things—about what is to be believed and about what

is to be done (29.31–30.1). Even the good ones, however, insofar as they are only imitations, contain something less than the truth. In some way, they are falsehoods or even lies.

Plato was very willing to speak in the *Republic* of the need for noble lies, which work as palliative drugs in order to instill the proper opinions into the souls of most citizens (382c). Averroes is not afraid to state this teaching openly, although he attributes it to Plato rather than to himself in his *Commentary*:

He said . . . The multitude ought to be told that when one of the multitude lies to the chiefs, there is a possibility of harm resembling the harm that comes when an invalid lies to the physician about his sickness. But the chiefs' lying to the multitude will be appropriate for them in the respect in which a drug is appropriate for a disease. Just as it is only the physician who prescribes a drug, so is it the king who lies to the multitude concerning affairs of the realm. That is because untrue stories are necessary for the teaching of the citizens. No bringer of a *nomos* is to be found who does not make use of invented stories, for this is something necessary for the multitude to reach their happiness. (32.13; 32.15–22)

In the *Republic*, Plato employs a great many of these noble lies or “images.” Indeed, the noble lie seems to constitute a sort of “imitative argument” that uses allegory to both tell and conceal truths. The most famous of these is the image of the cave, which is meant to explain the image of the divided line, which is itself meant to explain the image of the sun and its intelligible light. But those stories are designed to help with the education of the philosophers rather than the guardians. Within the context of the education of the guardians, the image that Averroes treats most extensively is the image of the metallic souls or the “myth of the metals” that Plato offers almost at the end of book 3. Indeed, within the *Commentary* considered as a whole, Averroes seems much more interested in the myth of the metals than in the images of the divided line or the cave.

The myth of the metallic souls divides into two parts. The first part, related by Plato in the third person, explains how the guardians were formed within the earth and then sent up; the second part, told in the first person, explains that different metals were mixed in with the various guardians, so that some now have gold within, some silver, and some iron or bronze. In his version of the myth, Averroes puts both parts into the first person and addresses the guardians with the second person. He begins, “The story is this: We shall say to them: ‘You are the chosen and the exalted. You were generated in the

womb of the earth. . . .” (40.11–12). The Andalusian does not shift back to third-person narration until he relates the part of the story describing the occasional and unfortunate birth of a child to parents of a different metal, which necessitates the expulsion of the child into another class. Although we do not know just how the Arabic text examined by Averroes stated the story, it seems that the Commentator cleverly imitates rather than merely reports Plato's telling of the myth or imitative argument, and also that he does so in accord with the *Republic's* rule for imitation that insists that only the good may be imitated by the good (396c–397b).

The Commentator-turned-imitator then goes on to give a version of the tale that is basically the same as Plato's but with some important alterations. The clearest of these alterations is that, in Plato, the god mixes the metals into the souls, but in Averroes “God created you” (the Hebrew verb used is *bara'*) and mixed in the metal in bringing “you” into being (40.16). Also, whereas in Plato the story includes the feature that an “oracle” (*chrēsmos*) has announced that the city will come to ruin when an iron or bronze souled person comes to rule (415c), in Averroes's version, a prophet (*navi'*) announces such a prediction “due to his care” (41.1). Whereas in Plato, the guardians will set up their headquarters within the city to make sure that people will observe the “laws” (*nomoi* [415e]), in Averroes the guardians will be charged with smiting anyone who does not wish to accept “the Law” (*hatorah* [41.6]).²² Also, whereas the interlocutors of the *Republic* seem to think it would be most difficult for poets to persuade the people of the city being founded in speech to accept such a whopper of a lie no matter how noble its origins are (414c–d, e, 415d), Averroes indicates no such reservations openly, but does add that “this story will be transmitted to them through music from youth” (41.3). Plato does not mention music in the context of this myth; Averroes enlists the power of music, including, apparently, harmony and rhythm, presumably because the story is so unbelievable that every means at the disposal of the poets must be made available to them in order to get the citizens to accept such an opinion.

22 In the Greek of Plato, the standard word for “law” is *nomos*; in the plural the word is *nomoi*. This word is preserved by transliteration in the Hebrew of the *Commentary* and also in Lerner's English translation. Hebrew has its own famous word for law, of course—namely, *torah*, which is translated as “Law” by Lerner; presumably behind *torah* is *sharī'a*. See *Averroes on Plato's "Republic,"* trans. Lerner, 169, 173–74; Rosenthal, *Averroes's Commentary*, 154n2, 265, 326.

Of course, the trouble with telling lies or half-lies or fables or tales to the young as they are being educated to become guardians is that there may well be a crisis that arises for those few of the young who are able to advance to receive the education of the philosophers, which second kind of education is the subject of the “Second Treatise” of the *Commentary*. If the goal of philosophical education is truth simply, through demonstrations, the philosophically inclined will have to unlearn the half-truths or full lies of their earlier days. A crisis is thereby provoked in the soul of the young person who is on the way to becoming a philosopher. Plato articulates this crisis in the remarkable story of “changeling child” in book 7 of the *Republic* (537e–539c). He offers his teaching by means of an image, even a poetic image; presumably this is because the crisis philosophy provokes for poetry is serious enough that it needs to be discussed in a veiled manner. According to Plato’s story, a child exchanged at birth grows up thinking the people who raised him have told him trustworthy opinions. When the child comes of age, he learns that he has been raised by strangers, that they are false and not who he thought they were, and that they have told him some falsities mixed in with the truth. After searching for his true parents, who presumably have the true opinions, and after being tempted by the flattering pleasures that are much stronger than his intellect, he ultimately succumbs and gives himself over completely to the flatterers—that is, the bodily pleasures.

In referring to the story of changeling child, Averroes comments thus: “Once the contribution of imitation to those stories on which they grew up has been made clear to them, they cannot be relied on not to ridicule them and proceed to refute them before the multitude and to shatter them with objections” (77.18–19). Ridicule and refutation of the poet’s lies cannot be permitted because that would undermine the advantage that imitation has in making true conclusions available to the multitude—at least in part and to an extent—in the form of correct opinions. Such undermining, though, is to be expected because the disadvantage of imitations is that they are also partly false. An aspiring philosopher, pursuing demonstrative arguments, recognizes the partial falsity of imitative arguments and often goes over to the opposite extreme, showing the poets no respect at all. Such a person does not realize the extent to which the imitations promoted his early education and thus throws out the true along with the false. “This happens frequently to the pretenders to philosophy of these cities,” says Averroes. “This is the most harmful of things in regard to them” (77.28–29). In other words, the true philosophers must know how to negotiate the crisis in the soul of the changeling child and know how to help him manage it.

Thus, in considering Averroes's statements about poetry in this, the second section of our essay, we wind up with poetry as a political problem, but this political problem constitutes a real impasse. On one hand, poetry comes to sight as the means of the moral education for the young; on the other hand, poetry is potentially a threat to philosophy because the philosophers have participated in the lie about poetry's origins. Stated differently, the ascent from poetical arguments to demonstrative ones is fraught with political obstacles. The way out of this difficulty is perhaps a poetry more compatible with demonstrations, or a poetry that knows how to transcend itself. In the third section of the essay, we will consider the attempt of Averroes to construct or at least point toward a better use of poetry—one that might avoid or at least mitigate the political problems presented by the poetical allegory of the changeling child.

From Politics to Pleasure

To this point, we have argued that Averroes turns Plato's teaching on music into Aristotle's teaching on poetry, but that subsequently Averroes returns from Aristotle's emphasis on poetry to Plato's teaching on the political use of poetry for moral education. Stated differently, we have argued that Averroes has set aside Plato's fascination with harmony and rhythm but preserved Plato's concern with the political importance of the speech or lyrical part of music. In this third and final section, the goal is to show how Averroes actually criticizes Plato's political poetry so that the impasse presented by the "changeling child" may be resolved or at least mitigated. This part of the essay will show that Averroes would revise Plato's poetry so that it does not have recourse to rewards and prizes for virtue. To begin this final part of the current essay, we will return to two passages already touched on in its second section: the story of the myth of the metals and the story of the models for the poets.

We noted in the second section that Averroes displays enthusiasm and inventiveness with respect to the myth of the metals, but we note now that he perhaps seems even more interested in what comes immediately after it—namely, the assertion that the guardians shall possess no property. Plato explains in the third person what should be told to the guardians about money and property in the city generally (416e–417a), but Averroes again turns this into a speech given in the first person and addressed to "you":

Of gold and silver they have no need at all. Rather we shall tell them: “You have [*lakhem*] in your souls something of a divine sort of this [sc. gold], which God has given in its place. Because of this there is no need of that [sc. gold] from which there arise damages to others. You are not allowed to mix the virtuous gold that was given to you with the gold of mortals, for the money of such people is employed in many illicit pursuits while the gold in you is pure, refined gold. You cannot handle gold or silver, or store them up beneath the rafters of the houses, nor seek after them, nor drink in vessels of silver or gold.” (41.25–42.2)

This concern with not permitting virtuous citizens to have property comes to the fore also in Averroes’s comments on the models given to the poets. As we noted in the second section, Plato laid down two rules: the first was that the gods are not the source of both good and evil, and the second was that the gods do not deceive human beings, especially by lies or by changing form. Averroes, we also noted, replaces the model about deception that was relevant in Plato’s time with a new model presumably relevant in his own time:

Also among the imitations that are not good are imitations of happiness as being a recompense for actions through which happiness ordinarily is attained and a reward for renouncing actions through which happiness ordinarily is not attained, and of suffering as punishment for renouncing virtuous actions and clinging to defective actions. For the virtues that come to pass from such imitations are closer to being vices than virtues. Hence the moderate one among them is only moderate regarding pleasure so as to obtain an even greater pleasure. Similarly the courageous one is not courageous because he holds death to be good but because it is a thing over which fear of an even greater evil takes precedence. Similarly the just one will not refrain from the property of humans because he holds this obligatory in itself but leaves it alone so as to attain thereby twice as much hereafter. Moreover, his movement toward many of the noble virtues will be for the sake of the base things—since most of the imitations concerning recompense are only of sensual pleasure—so that a man would only be courageous, just, faithful, and have virtues predicated of him, in order that he might copulate, drink, and eat. All this is self-evident to one trained in the sciences [*sheharagil bahakhamot*]. (31.7–20)

By “one trained in the sciences” it would seem that Averroes has in mind especially a reader of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for he goes on to say that people who seek prizes and rewards for virtuous acts are really not virtuous at all, but only like “those who restrain themselves” (31.21). This is surely a reference to the teaching of book 7 of the *Ethics* on the *enkratēs*—the

self-restrained or continent person who does not truly have the virtue of moderation but practices its actions while still secretly harboring vicious desires. The self-restrained may resemble those who are moderate in the eyes of external observers, but they are only able to achieve this resemblance by suppressing current vicious longings for the sake of the promise of future indulgence in decadent pleasures.²³

In these two instances—the expansion of the myth of the metals and the alteration of the second of the models for the poets—it is easy to see that Averroes agrees with the notion that virtues are not to be sought for prizes and rewards, and especially not for the prize or reward of bodily pleasure. In itself, this teaching denying the existence of such prizes and rewards is perhaps not so remarkable if it is expressed only to the few who are undergoing an education in philosophy, but what if it is expressed to the many who are taught otherwise by poets and their imitative arguments? And what if one of the poets who seems to teach otherwise is Plato himself, who knows that this teaching is false?

23 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.2; esp. 1146a10–15. Unlike the *Republic*, an Arabic translation of the *Ethics* has been uncovered and published by Anna A. Akasoy and Alexander Fidora as *The Arabic Version of the Nicomachean Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). This volume also includes an English translation of the Arabic translation of the *Ethics* by Douglas M. Dunlop. Interestingly, Dunlop suggests that Aristotle's point about the self-restrained is partly missed by the Arabic translation. He translates the Arabic as follows: "Also, if the restrained man is the one who has strong and wicked desires, then he is not the weak man, nor is the restrained man temperate, because the excessive man is not the temperate man, nor does he possess wicked desires, but he should possess none of these" (7.2.6; 374). Dunlop says of the passage that "the sense is misunderstood" (374n17). This may be true of the second half of the sentence, but the first half, as rendered by Dunlop, seems accurate about Aristotle. Like the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* Averroes's *Commentary on the "Nicomachean Ethics"* does not survive in Arabic but in Hebrew and Latin translation only (the former also by Samuel ben Judah). Only the Hebrew is available in a critical edition: see Lawrence V. Berman, ed., *Averroes's Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics in the Hebrew Version of Samuel Ben Judah* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1999); the passage on the self-restrained is in section 9, 228–30. On this topic of the self-restrained, see also Lawrence Berman, "Sōphrosynē and Enkrateia in Arabic, Latin, and Hebrew: The Case of the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle and Its *Middle Commentary* by Averroes," *Miscellanea mediaevalia* 17 (1985): 274–87.

For example, in the extensive section on music in the “First Treatise,” Averroes openly accepts, as we have seen, the use of lying by the chiefs or leaders of the city. He immediately qualifies that teaching, though, by insisting that not *all* lies are permitted to the chiefs. He emphasizes especially that the lies ought not to offer rewards and prizes for virtue, for often such promised rewards and prizes take the form of promised pleasures. But to offer pleasure as a reward for virtue goes against Plato’s emphasis on moderation in the education of the guardians. The kings, therefore, must reject the rule of the pleasures and embrace moderation instead:

Above all, they ought to reject statements that conduce to preoccupation with the pleasures. This is prevalent in the poems of the Arabs.²⁴ They will listen to statements warning them to shun them [sc., the pleasures] and against indulging in them, for self-control—as Plato says—can only be found together with moderation and shunning the sensual pleasures, as will be made clear from his statement in what follows.²⁵ The greatest of the acts of self-control is that these people faithfully obey the great ones among them and become chiefs ruling over the pleasures rather than those whom pleasures rule. Hence it is inappropriate to decide that they should listen to statements that incite them to such acts of self-indulgence. Hence it is most harmful of all if the great ones and the chiefs are described as having even one of these dispositions, and even if only for a brief time. (32.23–31; see also 32:32–33.4)

The concern of Averroes in all these cases is not with rulers lying to the many in an effective and affective way through the use of poetry but rather that these lies are not presently being composed properly. In particular, the Arab poets had a bad habit of offering prizes and rewards for virtue in the form of pleasures and possessions. However, according to the Commentator, Plato himself also comes to sight as someone who is willing to tell poetical tales that involve rewards for virtue in the form of pleasures and possessions. The criticism of the Arab poets thus turns out actually to be a veiled way of

24 In the *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic”* Averroes expressly refers to “the Arab poets” or “the poems of the Arabs” at 32.24, 33.2, 33.3, and 34.18 in discussing the education of the guardians. All the references—except the third—view the poems of the Arabs negatively. It seems that Averroes has in mind pre-Islamic poets who composed in Arabic.

25 Apparently, this is a reference to the discussion of moderation in the *Republic* from 389d to 390c; however, it seems also to anticipate the upcoming discussion of moderation in the *Republic* from 430e to 432a.

criticizing Plato himself, for he will be shown to commit the same mistakes that the Arab poets did.

Such concern about Plato's teaching on poetry comes to the fore at the end of the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."* The stated purpose of the conclusion of the *Commentary* is to explain why the work does not cover the end (book 10) and the beginning (book 1 and the first part of book 2) of Plato's *Republic*. The explanation becomes very complicated, however. Averroes first says that book 10 "is not necessary for this science" (105.11). Presumably, by "this science" he is referring to what he had earlier called the scientific arguments regarding political science (105.5). Averroes then divides book 10 into three parts and explains why it is unnecessary to write about any of the three.²⁶ The book opens, he says, with a discussion of "the art of poetry," but poetry has already been discussed and has been shown to have "neither the purpose nor the knowledge from which true knowledge comes about." The second part of book 10, he says, consists of "a rhetorical or dialectical argument" for the immortality of the soul. This presumably refers to Plato's claim that the soul is immortal because its specific corruptor, injustice, is unable to make the soul not to exist (608d–611a). This argument indeed seems to be rhetorical or dialectical, just as Averroes asserts, although in the *Republic* it convinces Glaucon. The third part of book 10 is the Myth of Er; Averroes summarizes it as a "story" in which Plato "describes the bliss and delight that await the souls of the happy and the just, and what awaits the souls of the tormented." Averroes says tersely that "we have made it known more than once that these stories are of no account, for the virtues that come about from them are not true virtues" (105.12–17).

Averroes is displeased that Plato goes back on his own criticism of poetry by composing the Myth of Er; indeed, prior to delivering the myth, Plato's Socrates openly asks Glaucon to return what was taken away earlier in the dialogue—namely, the prizes and rewards for virtue (612b–d). Plato presumably thought that a story restoring prizes and rewards for justice was necessary for most people—including Glaucon—to live even decently. Yet, such a treatment of the many is exactly what Averroes rejects:

It [the teaching about reward for virtue] is not something necessary to a man's becoming virtuous, nor will it be better and easier for a man to become virtu-

26 On this part of the *Commentary*, see also Charles E. Butterworth, "Philosophy, Ethics and Virtuous Rule: A Study of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's 'Republic,'*" *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 9:1 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1986), 84–86.

ous through it. For we see here many people who, in adhering to their *nomoi* and their Laws [*vetorotam*], albeit devoid of these stories, are not less well off than those possessing these stories. (105.19–23)

By “here” in this quotation, Averroes must mean the “here and now,” or the times and places in which he lives. Presumably the times of Averroes are to be juxtaposed to ancient times, for the ancients disputed these matters and “Plato was troubled thereby” (105.24).

This passage, which comes almost at the end of the entire work, is enigmatic for several reasons, one of the foremost being that Averroes refers to “Laws” in the plural. Which Laws or *torot* are these? And are they different from the *nomoi*? One might think, given the context of the *Republic*, that the reference to *nomoi* would be to the laws of Athens and the other Greek cities. One might also think, given the context of the *Commentary*, that a reference to “Law” in the singular would be to Islamic law. Is the reference to “Laws” in the plural then perhaps also to other religious laws, such as the “Law” of the Jews or even, perhaps more distantly, that of the Christians?

The way to make all this consistent is to suggest that what Averroes is arguing for is to substitute the law of the revealed religion of Islam, and even other religious laws, for the poetry of the Arabs as well as for the poetry of the ancients, including the “poetry” or imitative arguments of Plato. Of course, all three of the revealed religions include, among their sacred writings, statements teaching some version of the doctrine of pleasant rewards and prizes for virtue and unpleasant punishments for vice. Still, all three also contain elements that do not appeal to pleasures and prizes but suggest that virtue constitutes its own higher pleasures and rewards that are intrinsic rather than extrinsic to it. The religion that Averroes favors in the end would therefore be religious law shorn of poetry’s common doctrine about prizes and pleasures. The *Commentary* thus accepts Plato’s critique of poetry but, because of the advent of Islam, also attempts to extend Plato’s critique of poetry further than Plato himself could. Plato’s criticisms of poetry may be enduring, but the times to which they are applicable have changed. Indeed, Plato’s criticism of poetry now can be extended, it seems, to Plato himself.

We will conclude by considering Averroes’s cryptic comments on book 2 of the *Republic*. After stating that it is not necessary to comment on book 10 of the *Republic* (but in fact commenting upon it), Averroes says that book 1 requires no comment, either, because it is composed of dialectical arguments only. He then adds the following about book 2: “Similarly with the opening of the second; hence we do not explain anything of what is in it”

(105.27). Since Averroes begins the “First Treatise” of his *Commentary* with the problem of the guardians and their education, in speaking of the “opening” of book 2 of the *Republic* he must be referring to those parts of book 2 that precede the turn to the guardians at 373c. These earlier matters would therefore be the extended speeches of Glaucon and Adeimantus about justice, the proposal to found a city in speech, and the founding of the simple or “true” city by Socrates and Adeimantus. While we do not know what the Arabic text or redaction of the *Republic* available to Averroes consisted of, given what we have studied of Averroes’s criticism of poetry and its common teaching about virtue and pleasant prizes, what is especially striking about Averroes’s non-treatment of the opening of book 2 is that it has the result of leaving unexamined the speech of Adeimantus, which castigates the poets for the same reasons that Averroes does (362d–367e). If Averroes does know about the speech of Adeimantus, he thus draws the attention of his most persistent readers to that speech by referring to it very obliquely, suggesting that it is irrelevant even though it is supremely relevant—and then by remaining silent about it. If he does not know about it, it is perhaps even more remarkable that he reaches on his own a conclusion so similar to the one Plato places in the mouth of Adeimantus.

Part Three

Law, Religion, and
Philosophy

Chapter Five

Averroes on Family and Property in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"*

Catarina Belo

Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on Averroes's position on family and property in his *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."* I will lay out his views on the role of parents in the education of children, and the place of women and children within the family and in society. I will examine Averroes's stance on private and collective property, as well as his questions pertaining to the transmission of property.

Averroes's primary goal in this commentary is arguably to elucidate Plato's analysis of the structure of the ideal political state, given that, by his own admission, he could not find an Arabic translation of Aristotle's *Politics*. A distinction can in principle be made between Plato's views as expounded by Averroes, and the latter's own views on a given subject. Averroes' positions can be discerned in the way he introduces personal comments and references to contemporary al-Andalus. In order to discern Averroes's positions and to discover whether he concurs with Plato on issues such as the question of education and the status of women and property, comparisons will be drawn

with his main legal work, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid wa-Nihāyat al-Muqtaṣid*, so as to uncover his position on such legal matters as family law and property law.¹

It seems that Averroes would have preferred to write a commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*, since Aristotle's views are closer to his own. In spite of the fact that he is writing on a philosopher with whom he has fewer affinities, he succeeds in presenting many of his own views in this commentary on Plato. This is perhaps owing to the fact that Averroes often quotes Alfarabi, who greatly admired Plato's philosophy and held it to be in harmony with Aristotle's. Thus Alfarabi, who is a great source of inspiration for Averroes, constitutes in this instance a strong link between Averroes and Plato.² Averroes draws on Plato and appears to agree with him in many respects. Writing on Plato's work also allows him to expound some of his own views on issues such as virtue, education, the political state, and religion. In the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* there are echoes of works by Alfarabi, in particular *The Attainment of Happiness*.³ This is particularly apparent in the

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- 1 Averroes, *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer: A Translation of Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*, trans. Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee and Mohammad Abdul Rauf, Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, 2 vols. (Reading: Garnet, 1994).
 - 2 Rosenthal, however, believes that Averroes has a more practical approach to Plato's political works than does Alfarabi: "In contrast with his great precursor's predominantly theoretical interest in politics, Averroes is at least as much concerned with the actual government of the State. His active career as judge and physician, his realization of the close affinity between *Shari'a* and *nomos*, and his conviction that Plato's political teaching is valid and relevant for the Muslim State, past and present, account for this difference. All these factors led him to interpret the Muslim State in terms of Plato's *Republic*. And to criticize the contemporary States in the Muslim West in the form of a *Commentary on Plato's 'Republic'*" (E. I. J. Rosenthal, *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's 'Republic'* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966], introduction, 14). Rosalie de Souza Pereira also notes the influence of Alfarabi on Averroes' *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* in *Averrois: Comentário sobre a "República,"* trans. Anna Lia A. De Almeida Prado and Rosalie Helena de Souza Pereira (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2015), introduction, 25.
 - 3 Charles Butterworth notes similarities with Alfarabi's *The Attainment of Happiness*. See Charles Butterworth, "Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule: A Study of Averroes' *Commentary on Plato's 'Republic,'*" *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 9:1 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1986), 8.

way Averroes discusses the question of virtue and happiness, as well as the characteristics of the perfect political leader.⁴

Other themes discussed by Averroes pertain to education, the link between religion and philosophy, and the different types of discourse, such as demonstration, dialectics, and poetry, in addition to the connection between theory and practice, or theoretical and practical science. Therefore, as Alexander Orwin states in his introduction to this volume, this is partly a commentary and partly an original treatise, constituting his “most comprehensive statement on political philosophy, understood as both an account of the best regime and a description of the various kinds of imperfect regimes.”

With reference to the text, given the absence of the Arabic original, I will use both Rosenthal’s and Lerner’s editions and translations of the medieval Hebrew translation. In spite of the difficulties posed by the absence of the original Arabic (and the self-avowed “inadequate grasp of the Arabic language” by the Hebrew translator, Samuel ben Judah), as well as the fact that Averroes would not have had an Arabic translation of Plato’s *Republic* at hand, it is possible to draw a comparison between the views expressed in this work and the theories laid out by Averroes on similar matters in other works.⁵

Since Averroes’s work is a commentary, one may question whether Averroes is expressing his own views, or simply expounding those of Plato. Given his great admiration for Aristotle’s philosophy (expressed particularly in his long commentaries on Aristotle’s works), we can assume that in his commentaries on Aristotle he is likely to espouse the theories he is commenting on, or that they are at least close to his own views.⁶ In the case of Plato,

4 Averroes refers explicitly to Alfarabi’s work when he states, “As for the theoretical things which ought to be imitated to the most exalted degree, why Abū Naṣr [al-Fārābī], in his book ‘On the Degrees of Being,’ has spoken of them, and this may be brought over here from there.” Ralph Lerner comments that “Farabi’s *Political Regime* opens with a discussion that might suggest such a title for that work, though it was not known by that name. The quotation that Averroes reproduces a few lines below is drawn from Farabi’s *Attainment* [of Happiness].” See Averroes, *On Plato’s “Republic,”* trans. Ralph Lerner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 18, and 18n29 and 32. Averroes may also be referring to *The Political Regime*, which is subtitled “The Principles of Existing Things.” I am grateful to Alexander Orwin for this suggestion.

5 Ralph Lerner, Averroes, *On Plato’s “Republic,”* Appendix I, 154.

6 Charles Butterworth remarks that in the *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* Averroes makes it clear that he knows Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, although

and since Averroes explicitly claims that he would have preferred to comment on Aristotle's *Politics*, a work to which he did not have access, how can we know when he is expressing his own views or simply expounding Plato? As I have mentioned elsewhere, the wording of the text can help us in this direction.⁷ To refer to Plato and his views, Averroes introduces the sentence with "he said," and to refer to his own views he states, "we say."⁸ In addition, specific references to medieval al-Andalus can also be seen as indicative of Averroes's personal views.

I will first analyze the structure of the family according to Averroes, and then proceed to analyze the questions about the education of children and the status of women. I will conclude with an analysis of his views on private property. In addition to examining the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* to understand his position on family, education, women, and property, I will also look at his main juridical work, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid wa-Nihāyat al-Muqtaṣid*.

It is important to note what the translators have to say about the commentary. Ralph Lerner spends the greater part of the introduction discussing the level of agreement between Averroes and Plato in various places in the *Commentary*. He examines the language used by Averroes. With regard to the themes of the family and reproduction, Lerner argues that the control of the type and number of births and the size of the city would be against Islamic law (*shari'a*), and that Averroes discusses these matters in "an exceedingly guarded fashion" and does not delve into the conflict between the two views.⁹ He also notes that Averroes reports without any criticism the views of Plato regarding the common ownership of women and children as well

he has not yet commented on that work. See Butterworth, "Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule," 6. According to Nadia Harbash, Averroes disregards Aristotle's views on women. See Nadia Harbash, "Ibn Rushd's (Averroes)' Views on Women," Ibn-Rushd.net, February 1, 2015, <https://www.ibn-rushd.org/typo3/cms/magazine/16th-issue-winter-20142015/nadia-harbash/>.

- 7 Catarina Belo, "Some Considerations on Averroes' Views Regarding Women and Their Role in Society," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20, no. 1 (2009): 1–20.
- 8 Ibid., 4–5. Lerner addresses this issue, with many pertinent insights, in his introduction (xv–xix). Lerner also points out the comparisons made between Plato's ideal city and the different types of rule within al-Andalus in Averroes's lifetime.
- 9 Lerner, Averroes, *On Plato's "Republic,"* introduction, xxiii.

as the community of property.¹⁰ The link between education and the use of the different kinds of speech (demonstrative, dialectical and rhetorical) is apparent. Each class should be taught according to its mental abilities and expectations. Neither the young guardians nor the majority can be taught demonstrative arguments, because these are for meant for philosophers. The former learn imitations of the truth and are educated in music and gymnastics. Lerner states that according to Averroes, a state ruled by Islamic law has much to benefit from Plato's views. Yes, Plato's city is a kind of utopia, but it is also a reminder of an earlier period of Islamic history.¹¹ Lerner argues that, according to Averroes, the roles of warrior and judge should not be separated as was the case in the political constitution of al-Andalus. He argues that Averroes does not preclude the possibility that this type of city should once again come into being, if wise individuals came to rule over it.¹²

In his introduction to the work, E. I. J. Rosenthal, the first translator of the work into English, makes important remarks on the edition concerning such topics as references to it in medieval Arabic bibliographies and the technical terms used by Averroes. Rosenthal notes that Galen's summaries of Plato's *Republic* were translated into Arabic by Ḥunain b. Ishāq, and that Averroes in turn probably produced a summary divided into three treatises.¹³

The Role of the Virtues in the State

Before introducing the subject of education, Averroes discusses the need for the cultivation of the virtues in the ideal state. There is a clear link between ethics and politics. All citizens are expected to be virtuous in order to fulfill their roles in society.¹⁴ The guardians are expected to possess complete virtue. Averroes understands that the virtues are part of the human perfections of which he lists three types: theoretical, cogitative, and moral virtues.

10 Ibid., xxv. The common ownership of women and children is not contemplated in *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*.

11 Ibid., xxvii.

12 Ibid., xxviii.

13 E. I. J. Rosenthal, *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* introduction, 10–11.

14 Religious practice as laid out in *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid* could constitute preparation for the practice of virtue, as we shall see.

He adds that it is impossible for a person to attain all these virtues.¹⁵ In addition, these virtues cannot be attained when one is by oneself, and they therefore require communal living and political organization. The goal of education is to instill virtue in the souls of the citizens, with particular focus on the souls of the guardians. With regard to the virtues, the various types are discussed in a hierarchical manner that mirrors the hierarchy of the parts of the soul.

In the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* the different classes represent different parts of the soul, with the theoretical class constituting the ruling class. The remaining parts of the soul are the spirited and the appetitive parts, the spirited ranking above the appetitive soul. Averroes states:

In general, the relation of all these virtues to the parts of this city will be [as] the relation of the faculties of the soul to the parts of a single soul, so that this city will be wise in its theoretical part through which it rules over all its parts in the manner in which a man wise in the rational part rules through it over all the faculties of the soul—i.e., the part [of the faculties of the soul that is] linked to reason rules the spirited and appetitive part in which the moral virtues are to be found.¹⁶

Wisdom appears to be the particular virtue of the theoretical part, while courage is the particular virtue of the spirited part. In a sense, the parts of the soul could be seen as two or as three. Divided into two, the soul includes cogitation and appetite: “It has already been made clear in physics that there are two opposing faculties in us: one, cogitation; the other, appetite. This is evident in that we may have an appetite for something and yet not do it. Appetite is partly desire and partly spiritedness.”¹⁷

But since the spirited part can be divided into two, the soul is constituted by three parts, each with its particular virtues:

He said: “We have already said that equity in the city consists in each of the three natures—i.e., the calculating nature, the spirited nature, and the appetitive nature—doing what is appropriate for it in the appropriate measure and in the appropriate time. It is on account of this that we say of this city that it is wise, courageous and moderate.”¹⁸

15 Averroes, *On Plato's "Republic,"* 5.

16 *Ibid.*, 5.

17 *Ibid.*, 54–55.

18 *Ibid.*, 54.

The proper order, in the soul and in the city, is that “the cogitative part rules over the other faculties and the other faculties are in submission to it.”¹⁹ And these faculties are in the city because they exist first in the soul and in human beings. This balance in the soul is produced by the correct type of education, particularly through music and gymnastics.²⁰

The hierarchy of parts or faculties within the soul and within the city constitutes the specific virtue of justice. This means that those possessing the theoretical sciences should rule in the city, and that wisdom should rule in the soul and control the other virtues. Recalling a theory laid out by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Averroes states that virtue constitutes a mean between two extremes—for instance, in the way courage is a golden mean between rashness and timidity—and he takes into account the circumstances and the proper measure.²¹

With regard to education, the central issue is how to inculcate and maintain the virtues in the souls of the youth, as well as removing any vices from them.

With regard to the question of instilling virtue in the soul, Averroes mentions the various methods to be used (for teaching the theoretical sciences), poetical and rhetorical for the majority, and demonstrative for the elect few.²² The theoretical sciences include knowledge of the first principle and the first cause, and they are useful for the other moral virtues and the practical arts. The two methods resemble the two ways of knowing reality according to Alfarabi in the *Attainment of Happiness*—namely, the religious method and the philosophical method—with the former being directed at the majority of citizens and the latter being addressed to the philosophers. One could also learn by coercion, but Averroes opposes this to the natural method and finds it inferior; it should not be used in the virtuous city, or only for practical purposes such as military training. However, the virtue of courage is also necessary for military activity. Virtues also prepare for the practice of certain

19 Ibid., 54.

20 Miguel Cruz Hernández remarks that, according to his biographers, Averroes was very fond of music. See Averroes, *Exposición de la “República” de Platón*, trans. Miguel Cruz Hernández (Madrid: Tecnos, 2001; reprint Madrid: Tecnos, 2011), xxiii.

21 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross and J. O. Urmson, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Bollingen Series 71, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1106a26–b28.

22 Averroes, *On Plato’s “Republic,”* 10.

arts. After discussing which countries are more disposed toward the virtues and in particular the virtue of wisdom, Averroes states that “the majority of the kinds of nations are indeed disposed that these virtues be broadcast and apportioned among them,” particularly in moderate climates.²³ It is important that the virtues be acquired early on in life, as Plato states (and Averroes appears to agree). Virtuous governance helps in bringing about virtue in young minds. Here Averroes discusses theoretical virtue in connection with both moral virtue and the practical arts. In this respect, each citizen should specialize in a particular art. He states that guardians should be well disposed toward citizens but averse to enemies of the state, presumably external enemies. The education of the guardians is particularly important in the ideal state. It also seems that the guardians are to be philosophers.

He says: It is a condition for being a guardian, therefore, that he by nature love the one whom he knows. This nature is, without a doubt, a philosophic nature, for in choosing the thing with a view to knowledge and wisdom he is by nature virtuous. And he will hate whomever he does not know, not because of some prior harm the other had caused him, but for this very ignorance of him.²⁴

He concludes by stating that:

It has, then, been made clear from all this that the guardians and the fighters ought to be in their natures philosophers, lovers of knowledge, haters of ignorance, spirited, quick of movement, strong in body, and with a keen sense[s].²⁵

Butterworth remarks that only a select group of guardians will obtain training in some of the virtues.²⁶ The section on the virtues is important in this context since acquiring the virtues is in Averroes’s view an essential part of the education of children.

23 Ibid., 14. Charles Butterworth notes Averroes’s defense of the possibility of there being more than one virtuous city. See Butterworth, “Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule,” 32.

24 Ibid., 16.

25 Ibid., 17.

26 Butterworth, “Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule,” 40.

Education and Children

Averroes mentions the importance of music and gymnastics in the education of the guardians. Gymnastics serves to instill the virtue of the body “and music is for the discipline of the soul and its acquiring virtue.”²⁷ Discipline through music should take place prior to the practice of gymnastics because understanding precedes the “faculty for exercise.” Averroes explains the meaning of music as “imitative arguments” accompanied by melody, the music being appropriate for moving the soul. The art of music, according to him, serves the poetical art. How does Averroes bring that in line with the view that philosophers should be trained in the demonstrative method? In this context, too, he mentions the two kinds of arguments, those that are demonstrative, on the one hand, and those that are dialectical, rhetorical, and poetical, on the other.²⁸ He specifies that “the poetical arguments are more particularly for the youths,” and adds that “if, when they grow up, some one of them is fit to move on to a [higher] stage of learning, he [sc., the ruler] brings that about in him, to the point that one of them arises who has it in his nature to learn the demonstrative arguments. They are the wise.” On the other hand:

He who does not have this in his nature remains at the stage beyond which there is no possibility in his nature for him to pass. This would be either at [the stage of] the dialectical arguments or at the two ways common to the instruction of the multitude, namely the rhetorical and the poetical, the poetical being more widely common and more particularly fit for the youths.²⁹

Here Averroes makes an explicit reference to Alfarabi’s *On the Degrees of Being* and echoes that philosopher’s view that every citizen must be aware of fundamental principles of reality, whether by demonstrative or by dialectical, rhetorical, or poetical arguments.

Averroes stresses that, according to Plato, children should not hear untrue stories and the imitations of reality must be true, and therefore their education must be strictly supervised. He had previously mentioned Alfarabi’s theory of the various kinds of imitation, some of which are closer to or further from the original. For instance, metaphysical realities can be imitated

27 Averroes, *On Plato’s “Republic,”* 17.

28 *Ibid.*, 17–18.

29 *Ibid.*, 18.

through political activities, and are associated with what is taken to be the ultimate goal—namely, happiness. Quoting from Alfarabi's *Attainment of Happiness*, Averroes says:

The remote ones (imitations) ought as far as possible to be rejected. But the imitations that come close [to the original] are those that ought to be made here, just as we imitate the first principle and the second principle by their likeness among political principles. The divine acts are imitated by the acts of the political principles, and the acts of the natural powers and principles are imitated by their likeness among the voluntary powers and arts. The intelligibles among these are imitated by their likeness among the sensibles, such as the imitation of matter by privation or darkness. The kinds of ultimate happiness—that being the end of the acts of the human virtues—are imitated by their likenesses among the goods that are believed to be the end. The happiness that is truly happiness will be imitated by what is believed to be happiness. In general, the ranks of the beings in existence are imitated by their likeness among ranks of place and time.³⁰

The imitations provide links to realities that can be grasped by the majority of the population. Among the base imitations Averroes mentions the view according to which God is the cause of good and evil. In fact, God is wholly good, does no evil, and is not the cause of evil.³¹

In order to avoid implanting soft-heartedness in the hearts of the youth, stories about demons being able to transform themselves or about angels being able to become anything should be avoided. In certain cases, children of the guardians can join them in war, as part of their training to become guardians themselves.³² They should not be encouraged to be virtuous in order to avoid punishment or attain happiness—presumably because virtue is a good in itself and should be sought for itself, and not as means to an end.³³ Reward should not be conceived of in terms of sensual pleasures. He states:

One ought rather to believe that happiness comes to pass from the actions that bring it about, in the way in which health comes to pass from nutriments and medicines. This is likewise the case with [actions that bring about] suffering, in the way in which wisdom comes to pass from learning. Hence, if happiness

30 Ibid., 19.

31 Ibid., 20.

32 Ibid., 66–67.

33 Ibid., 21.

were represented as the health of the soul, and its immortality and eternal life, that would be a fitting story.³⁴

For the guardians to become courageous, according to Plato in Averroes's report, they should not think about punishment in the next life, and they should avoid women's songs and weeping, which are the activity of women and weak souls. Guardians should not be fearful, like prophets and chiefs, and should avoid laughter and lying, although the chiefs may lie to the multitude for the common good.³⁵ Averroes, commenting on these Platonic arguments with reference to traditional fables, shuns the poets of the Arabs. Poems should only "be permitted to describe illustrious women and their probity and, in general, the moral virtues . . . As for the virtuous there is need that the children and the youths should [not only] hear good speeches but [also] see good things so that beautiful actions be established in them in every respect."³⁶

He comments on the different melodies and their contribution to the virtues of courage in the soul.³⁷ Gymnastics and music, according to Averroes reporting on Plato, complement each other in producing courage and gentleness in the souls of the guardians. In fact, education seems to pertain primarily to the formation of the guardians, but training in music and gymnastics includes all the classes.³⁸

The guardians of the city are chosen for their virtue and the chiefs should possess the moral and the theoretical virtues. The guardians should be brought up with general laws and then will discover more particular laws, such as honoring one's parents and keeping silence before elders.³⁹

Naturally, the training of the ruler, which is described in the second treatise, is even more stringent, and evokes Alfarabi's description of the qualities of the ideal ruler, who must pursue complete studies in order to attain the practical and the theoretical intelligibles.

The guardians themselves should study the theoretical sciences. They should have knowledge of numbers and measurement, as well as of the

34 Ibid., 22.

35 Ibid., 24.

36 Ibid., 27.

37 Ibid., 28.

38 Ibid., 30, 69.

39 Ibid., 47.

seasons. They should also study logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, optics, mechanics, and then physics and metaphysics. After the age of twenty, they go on to study philosophy. From the age of thirty-five they begin to be charged with governing the army, and from the age of fifty they are put in charge of the city.⁴⁰

Women and Marriage

With regard to the family, each class should procreate within itself; marriage across classes should not be permitted.⁴¹ For instance, guardians should procreate with guardians and farmers with farmers, since children replicate both the nature and the activities of their parents. This is intended to preserve each nature and class. If procreation is not controlled in this way, there will be children who are not fit to be guardians entering the guardian class; they will not have the required virtues, and government will suffer as a result.⁴²

In addition, the number of births is also to be controlled—by limiting the number of marriages, so that the number of members in each class is also controlled. Members of the city procreate with those of their class and within a fixed limit, to keep the same number of members within a class.⁴³

The section on women is introduced by a theme that had been discussed by Averroes—namely, the question of procreation and family.⁴⁴ Again, each class, including the guardians, must marry within its class. In the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* women, like men, belong to different classes, and they have different trainings: “We say that it is clear that if we wish the nature of these guardians to be preserved through procreation—i.e., that for the most part they should procreate their like,” not “with any chance women, but [rather only with] women who resemble them in nature and who have

40 Ibid., 95–100.

41 As we shall see, Averroes states in *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid* that women should not marry beneath their social class.

42 Averroes, *On Plato's "Republic,"* 117–18.

43 Ibid., 42.

44 In an article on Averroes's views on women, I discuss his views as laid out in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* and also in *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*, and I compare his views to those of Alfarabi and Avicenna. See Catarina Belo, “Some Considerations on Averroes' Views Regarding Women and Their Role in Society,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20, no. 1 (January 2009): 1–20.

grown up with something like that training. This is obligatory not only for guardians but for each and every class of citizens.”⁴⁵

Averroes goes on to ask whether women’s natures fall within the same classes as those of men.

Hence it is [a subject] fit for investigation whether there exist among women natures resembling the natures of each and every class of citizens—and in particular the guardians—or whether women’s natures are distinguished from men’s natures. If the former is the case, then as regards the activities of the city, women should have the very same standing as men in those classes, so that there would be among them warriors, philosophers, rulers, and the rest. But if this is not the case, then women are only fit in the city for activities that men in general are unfit for, as if you were to say upbringing, procreation, and the like.⁴⁶

If women belong to different classes because they have different natures, like men, then they have similar professions to those of men. Otherwise, they have their specific professions or one specific profession, and constitute one class, which would be separate from the professions of men. Averroes states that men and women belong to the same species or kind and that they therefore share the same nature and goal.

And we say that women, in so far as they are of one kind with men, necessarily share in the end of man. They will differ only in less or more; i.e., the man in most human activities is more diligent than the women, though it is not impossible that women should be more diligent in some activities, such as is thought concerning the art of practical music.⁴⁷

The outcome of the argument to the effect that women’s and men’s natures are similar in terms of constituting different classes is that women should practice the same activities as men, even if they are weaker. They may be more diligent than men in certain respects, “as in the art of weaving, sewing, and other such arts.”⁴⁸ They should also participate in war (an idea he

45 Averroes, *On Plato’s “Republic,”* 57.

46 Ibid., 57. Butterworth remarks that the question about the natures of men and women is absent from Plato’s *Republic*. See Butterworth, “Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule: A Study of Averroes’ *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”*” 36.

47 Averroes, *On Plato’s “Republic,”* 58.

48 Ibid., 58.

also accepts in *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*), as well as being philosophers and rulers. “Similarly, too, since some women are formed with eminence and a praiseworthy disposition, it is not impossible that there be philosophers and rulers among them.”⁴⁹ They can also be priests: “Since it was thought that this class existed only infrequently among them, some Laws ruled out women’s being priests—i.e., the high priesthood. Some [other] Laws, however, not ruling out [the possibility] of this existing among them, rejected this.”⁵⁰

Averroes observes that there are female guardians in the animal kingdom, and that animals that usually fight have fighting instruments, whether they are male or female: “since the fighting instruments of those animals whose wont it is to fight are for the most part common to the male and the female, it [sc. nature] intends that the female also perform this activity.”⁵¹

Although he may be basing his argument regarding the equality between men and women on Plato’s conception of women, and on the required distinction between the different classes of women in parallel with that of men, he observes that their potential is unfulfilled in his native al-Andalus:

The competence of women is unknown, however, in these cities since they are only taken in them for procreation and hence are placed at the service of their husbands and confined to procreation, upbringing and suckling. This nullifies their [other] activities. Since women in these cities are not prepared with respect to any of the human virtues, they frequently resemble plants in these cities. Their being a burden upon the men in these cities is one of the causes of the poverty of these cities. This is because they are to be found there in double the number of men, while not understanding through [their] upbringing any of the necessary actions except for the few actions—like the art of spinning and weaving—that they undertake mostly at a time when they have need of them to make up for their lack of spending [power]. This is all self-evident.⁵²

Averroes clearly thinks that women’s potential is underutilized in his native al-Andalus. Perhaps he was concerned with the threat posed by the Christian armies, which made it particularly important that women should also be

49 Ibid., 58.

50 Ibid., 58.

51 Ibid., 59. In an Islamic context, women can fight. Averroes states that they are entitled to the spoils of war if they actively participate in fighting (see Averroes, *The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer*, 1:469). Equally, their blood can be shed in these circumstances.

52 Averroes, *On Plato’s “Republic,”* 59.

militarily active.⁵³ He implies that they should receive an education similar to men in preparation for their acquisition of the virtues and the different professions. They should not be limited to the procreation and upbringing of children, or such activities as weaving and spinning. This would benefit them and the city and would contribute to the common good.

The question of the education of women is crucial in this respect, as Averroes explicitly states:

This being so—and it is clear from the case of the females that they are to share with the males in war and the rest—it is fitting that, in choosing them, we seek for those very natures that we sought for in the men and that they should be trained in the same way through music and gymnastic.⁵⁴

Men and women would therefore be educated together. However, they would not be allowed to procreate randomly. “The arrangement of their procreation will be the best possible with respect to their conditions of guardianship, but at fixed times and with determined individuals and characteristics.”⁵⁵ The procreation would be limited to the needs of the city in order, above all, to maintain an ideal population. The respective natures should be preserved. “When one wishes to raise hunting dogs or raptorial birds, he takes care to mate the excellent natures with the excellent nature so that the offspring will be of that character. All the more ought care to be taken of this matter in the city.”⁵⁶

Averroes goes on to relate Plato’s view as to the nonexclusive nature of procreation among couples. In other words, women would be common to all the men, and there would be no specific couples, or families. Women and children would live in common with all the men, with no procreation allowed. “When the rulers hold that necessity points to procreation, they order that weddings for grooms and brides be celebrated in the city.”⁵⁷ There is subsequently a drawing of lots for the formation of couples, but within comparable kinds. “That is, the good kind of women are allotted to

53 See Averroes, *On Plato’s “Republic,”* 14, where Averroes praises the spiritedness of the Turks, and the Christians in the north of the Iberian Peninsula.

54 *Ibid.*, 59.

55 *Ibid.*, 60.

56 *Ibid.*, 61.

57 *Ibid.*, 61.

the good kind of men, and the bad to the bad, without any of the citizens other than the lords being aware of this.”⁵⁸

Pregnant women are then separated from the men and live with other pregnant women. After delivery, they are not allowed to see their own children. Averroes states that Plato’s rationale for this principle is that the children are to be had in common, so that each mother treats all children like her own children, and the children regard all adults as their parents. The only types of relatives are “parents, grandparents, sons, daughters, grandchildren, brothers and sisters,” all of which constitute different ranks.⁵⁹ In this city, procreation between brothers and sisters is allowed (perhaps they would not know that they are brother and sister) but not between parents and children, since they are of different ranks. Love between parents and children should not be physical, and children should thus respect their parents. The common living of men and women is meant to create a common city instead of a city made up of families or households.

No one should dwell in separate houses or possess anything of one’s own. The entire city should be like one body. This means that there would be no envy or hatred among the citizens of this city.⁶⁰ In these passages regarding the community of women, Averroes sometimes uses the pronoun “he” to explain Plato’s intentions, and sometimes Averroes speaks in the first-person plural. It is therefore not obvious that he objects to the idea of the community of women and children. Averroes’s reluctance to reach a definitive conclusion might reflect the religious sensitivity of the issue: Plato’s proposals concerning the family are clearly at odds with Islamic law.

Property

Averroes, like Plato, defends the principle that there should be no private property in the ideal city. He states that “the acquisition of property is harmful to the guardians because if they acquire land and houses and money, each will appropriate for himself and want to isolate himself from the citizens by assembling as much property as is possible for him. They will thereby turn into enemies of the citizens, haters of them; similarly, one with another.”⁶¹

58 Ibid., 62.

59 Ibid., 62.

60 Ibid., 66.

61 Ibid., 38–39.

He also says, “It is easy to show that none of them ought to have any possession, neither dwelling nor tools nor anything else. But they will have a claim against the other citizens for what will suffice them for food and clothing. Of gold and silver they have no need at all.”⁶² Everyone should serve the city and all the citizens, work toward the common good rather than personal gain. There should be no wealth or poverty in this city. Therefore, artisans and workers should also have no possessions; Averroes explains that “their usefulness to the citizens will be a kind of accident, their work being not for the sake of what results [from it essentially] but rather for the sake of their possessions. This being so, they frequently become confused about the end that is truly the end—namely usefulness to the citizens.”⁶³ In addition, in the city there should be no transactions in gold or silver, but there would be “a kind of money in the city with which all these tools and provisions will be paid for. Then they distribute them among the citizens in the measure that each kind had need of.”⁶⁴ This is because an economy in kind would make transactions very difficult, since the one receiving payment may not have need of the product that is being used for payment by the one paying. Averroes continues:

A case of the difficulty of transactions: for example, a farmer who wishes to have an iron plow has nothing to give a smith in exchange other than food. But if the smith has no need of food but rather has need of clothing, for example, or something else, their transactions cannot be completed. They need to set up something which is potentially all things.⁶⁵

This will constitute the money used for transactions. Wealth would make the guardians neglect study and the exercise for war.⁶⁶ The assumption is that wealth, generally speaking, brings about laziness and makes those who possess it weaker. Averroes appears to agree with this position by providing examples from the Arab conquests: “It is possible for these [the guardians] to battle with twice or thrice their number. (You can see this clearly in communities that grow up in the desert, [these people] being [both] tough and poor. They quickly subdue communities that are at ease and prosperous, as

62 Ibid., 38.

63 Ibid., 40–41.

64 Ibid., 41.

65 Ibid., 41.

66 Ibid., 44.

happened to the king of the Arabs with the king of Persia).⁶⁷ In *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*, however, Averroes takes private property for granted within an Islamic legal framework.

Focus on *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*

Bidāyat al-mujtahid is an important legal work by Averroes; it constitutes a compendium of Islamic law. Averroes defends in it the art of *ijtihād*, which is defined as the use of individual judgement on specific cases. This manual intends to prepare those wishing to practice the art of *ijtihād* for the resolution of new cases, instead of choosing from previous rulings. Although Averroes belonged to the Maliki school of jurists, which prevailed in al-Andalus, he compares the positions of the various schools of Islamic law.

It is important to consult this work because several topics discussed in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* such as specific laws concerning marriage and property, are also discussed in detail in *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*.

In this legal manual, Averroes does not dispute the findings of the various schools of law regarding marriage and property. However, some of the views that he expresses there are in consonance with Plato. For example, he argues that women should marry within their class, and not below their social status.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Islamic law does not permit, for instance, marriage between siblings. The community of women is also not contemplated within Islamic law. One man can marry up to four wives, but they are not shared in common by the community.

This work by Averroes also assumes the need for the existence of private property. In connection with marriage, Averroes also prominently discusses questions related to dowries. The sections on sales and exchanges reinforce the notion of the need for private property.

With regard to women, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid* gives women considerable freedom, both within marriage and with regard to property and various functions in society (including the ability to fight and possibly lead prayers), although it does not grant them complete equality of the sort seen in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."*

One question that does not feature in the commentary but is important within a legal framework is the question of prayer. Averroes states that there

67 Ibid., 42–43.

68 Averroes, *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer*, 2:14.

is disagreement as to whether women can lead communal prayers.⁶⁹ Jurists tend to agree that women should stay behind men in praying.⁷⁰ One of the most striking features of this section is the authority yielded to ‘Ā’isha bint Abī Bakr, as a narrator of hadith traditions that are taken into account by the legal schools, on these issues.⁷¹ Averroes states that according to Abū Ḥanīfa, women can be judges on financial issues, and that according to al-Ṭabarī, they can be judges on any issue.⁷²

How should we reconcile the different views presented in the *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic”* and in *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*? Perhaps Averroes intends to apply some, though not all, of Plato’s ideas in an ideal Islamic society. Perhaps a distinction can be made between particular laws and general laws. Robert Brunschvig, one of the leading modern scholars of the work, observes that ritual acts and prayer can promote virtue, while Hassan Hanafi also stresses the link between jurisprudence and ethics in *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*.⁷³

It is difficult to know exactly which views expressed by Plato are endorsed by Averroes, but it is clear that Plato’s work is a central source of inspiration for Averroes’s political views. These include the distinction of classes, a greater role for women in society, and a more equitable distribution of wealth.

Conclusion

The *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic”* is Averroes’s most important work on politics. That is to say, the *Republic* is an important source of Averroes’ views about society, and in particular about education, women, and property. Averroes lays great emphasis on the importance of the virtues in creating good citizens. He reiterates his views about the differences between philosophy and religion and the methods of instruction to be taught to the different

69 Averroes, *The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer*, 1:121.

70 Ibid., 164.

71 Ibid., 187.

72 Averroes, *The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer*, 2:553.

73 Robert Brunschvig, “Averroès Juriste,” in *Études d’Orientalisme dédiées à la Mémoire de Lévi-Provençal* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962), 65–66; Hassan Hanafi, “Ibn Rushd faqīhan,” *Averroes and the Rational Legacy in the East and West*, *Alif, Journal of Comparative Poetics* 16 (1996): 115–44 of the Arabic section, 131.

classes. He emphasizes the need to have women play a more active role in society. Like Plato, he has specific views on what an ideal state would look like. He does not defend the notion of a democratic state that would give priority to individuals but favors the notion of a common good to be sought and overseen by a virtuous, philosophic leader who can communicate the needs of the state to the entire population.⁷⁴

In this work Averroes seeks not only to elucidate Plato's views but to indicate agreement and disagreement with him on various issues. In relation to the rest of his corpus, the differences with his legal work *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid* have been noted, and these can be attributed to the different audiences of the two works, the commentary being especially addressed to philosophers, and the legal work being addressed to jurists.⁷⁵ Some common ground is to be found—namely, in the treatment of women, in the significance of virtue in society (in particular justice), and in a prevailing ideal of the common good.

74 Averroes, *On Plato's "Republic,"* 127–28.

75 I am grateful to Alexander Orwin for this suggestion, as well as for sharing his English translation of an article by Shlomo Pines, which is now published as the following chapter of this volume. It concludes by expressing precisely this view.

Chapter Six

Notes on Averroes's Political Teaching

Shlomo Pines

Translated by Alexander Orwin

The original Hebrew was published in *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (April 1957): 65–84. A complete English translation follows.

No commentary on the *Politics* can be counted among Averroes's commentaries on Aristotle's works. The Arab philosopher recognized, at a certain point, this deficiency. He thought at first that Aristotle's political teaching was contained at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, until the existence of this other book became known to him. But here is the problem: the *Politics* never reached the western regions of Islam. Was it never translated into Arabic in the Middle Ages? There is some evidence for this assumption, although the question still remains open.

Having no other option, Averroes composed a commentary or, more correctly, a summary with some additional remarks on Plato's *Republic*. It appears, as Rosenthal has shown,¹ that Averroes was influenced in his efforts by an abridged paraphrase of that book, a work of Galen that has not come down to us. But he also pursued his commentary in the tradition of Alfarabi, on whom the political books of Plato had a decisive influence. In the text

1 Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* ed. and trans. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956).

under discussion. Averroes draws from the writings of Alfarabi, and even quotes them on occasion.

The Arabic original of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* has not been preserved. A Hebrew translation of it has, however, come down to us, from the pen of Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles, who reviewed his translation and revised it twice between the years 1320 and 1322. So has a Latin translation made in 1539 on the basis of the Hebrew translation. This last translation, the work of Jacob Mantino, a Jewish doctor from Tortosa, was printed in Venice among the writings of Aristotle in 1550. It is, however, a rather free translation that should be trusted only to a very limited degree. Rosenthal has therefore performed a great service in bringing before an audience of those interested in medieval thought one of the most important texts belonging to the field of political philosophy. The agreeable result includes, in addition to the Hebrew text, a translation of that text into English, an introduction, and notes, several of which are of fundamental significance.

The Hebrew manuscripts are full of challenges, and it is E. Rosenthal's great achievement to have managed, through many years of diligent work, to overcome most of the difficulties lurking in this text.

The aim of the following comments is not to detract from that achievement. Most of them discuss the aims of the particular thoughts of Averroes, as expressed in the writing of which we speak, and first and foremost the efforts of the Arab philosopher to define the status of the Muslim city² and religion of Islam in relation to the Platonic city and its constitution.³ E. Rosenthal has done much to elucidate Averroes's discussion of this subject. Still, it seems to me that Rosenthal's ambition to prove that Averroes does not oppose Islam but rather seeks to exalt it hinders the full success of his elucidation. Indeed, the notion that Averroes must choose between opposition to religion and defense of it seems simplistic with regard to the thought of this philosopher. He does not seek to attack the Muslim religion and city, but to assign them their place and define their value according to philosophic criteria. One of the decisive questions is therefore the question that

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- 2 [AO] The word *medina* means state in modern Hebrew, and one could easily translate it that way. However, it almost certainly renders the Arabic *madīna* in Averroes's commentary; the meaning of this word can only be city. I have therefore decided to translate it as "city" throughout. [AO indicates translator's note.]
 - 3 In the framework of this discussion, I cannot dwell on the influence that this writing of Averroes appears to me to have had on Arabic thought. I will devote another article to an interesting example of this influence.

has already been alluded to here, of the relationship of the perfect Muslim city to the ideal city of Plato, called the “virtuous city” in the Hebrew translation in front of us.

The relationship is not one of identity. This perspective is expressed more clearly and unequivocally by Averroes than by Alfarabi, who frequently and intentionally uses Muslim terminology designed to confound with regard to this point. Yet isn't it clear that their approaches are different only at first glance? It is possible to explain them by relying on the fact that, apart from his *Summary of Plato's Laws*, there are no political writings of Alfarabi that belong to the same literary genre as the text of Averroes that we are discussing.⁴ Alternatively, one could ascribe them to the circumstances of the time, since it is not impossible that Alfarabi took the view that the revolutionary movement of his era—that is, the Ismaili movement, which received a striking amount of inspiration from the philosophers—was able, while preserving the terminology of Islam, to transform the Muslim city into the ideal Platonic city. The persuasiveness of this assumption, however, is weakened somewhat by the fact displayed in the text in front of us, that Averroes also deemed such a transformation possible, even though he saw fit to clearly distinguish between the two cities under discussion. This stance becomes clear already at the beginning of the second treatise of the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* (pp. 60–61), where Averroes speaks of four synonymous terms (61.14)—namely, philosopher, king, Lawgiver, and *koben*: according to Rosenthal's well-grounded opinion, the final Hebrew term translates the Arabic word *imām*, that is to say, a leader of the community, city, or religion.

All four of these terms signify for Averroes, who follows Alfarabi on this point (see Rosenthal, 270i.6), the governor of the virtuous city (Averroes, 61.20). E. Rosenthal is apparently inclined to identify, at least in this context, this city with the religious city (see also the argument below), because he thinks that in the expression “Lawgiver,” the word *Law* (*torah*) is the translation of the Arabic word *shar'* (or *shari'a*), whose meaning in English is *revealed law*.⁵ However, it is possible to prove that this is not the case, since

4 [AO] See Therese Anne Druart, ed., “Sommaire du livre des ‘Lois’ du Platon,” *Bulletin des Études Orientales* 50 (1998): 110–55. Alfarabi, *Summary of Plato's "Laws,"* in *Alfarabi: The Political Writings*, vol. 2, trans. Charles Butterworth (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 129–73.

5 See the end of note i.6 on 270, where Rosenthal determines, on the basis of the identity of the aforementioned terms: “It points to the central position of revealed law in Averroes' political thought.” But in a comment to another passage (272n. iii.1–2), Rosenthal is forced to raise the possibility that the word

in the same context Averroes says (61.17–19) of the governor of the virtuous city, that he is a king, philosopher, Lawgiver: “as to whether it should be made a condition that he be a prophet, why there is room here for penetrating investigation, and we shall investigate it in the first part of this science,⁶ God willing. Perhaps if this were so, it would be with respect to what is preferable, not out of necessity.”⁷ If it is indeed not necessary for the Lawgiver of the virtuous city to be a prophet, then it is crystal clear that this city does not need to be equivalent to the Muslim city or any other religious city.⁸

Is this virtuous city superior in character to the well-ordered Muslim city or inferior to it? Averroes replies to this question with astonishing frankness, if we consider his precise terminology. It should be observed that such precision in reading the text is the first condition for understanding it. For it is likely, in a paradoxical but perhaps intentional way, that the abundance of precise language in Averroes aims to disguise his thought from hasty reading. He says (89.28ff.): “You may understand what Plato says concerning the transformation of the virtuous governance into the timocratic governance and of the virtuous individual into the timocratic individual from the case of the governance of the Arabs in early times, for they used to imitate

torot refers here to “man-made laws.” This is clearly the case in the passage to which this comment relates. [AO: Pines uses the English term “man-made laws” here. We have collated two notes here, since Pines does not clearly indicate to what point in the text his note #3 is attached].

- 6 That is to say, in the commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- 7 Regarding this paragraph, Rosenthal says (see 271 ni.7): “Averroes’ hesitancy need not be interpreted as anti-religious. On the contrary, his realism—so clear from his remarks about contemporary Muslim States—may have caused him to leave this question open.” There is no doubt that Averroes’s “realism” is genuine, if this term signifies his attention to the political conditions of his time, and his assumption that the evaluations of political philosophy have great force with regard to the Islamic cities that existed in his era, or in the recent past. Yet it appears that this realism is not expressed in the passage under discussion, where indeed there is no place for it, because it speaks of the virtuous Platonic city whose governor and Lawgiver is a philosopher. At the end of the note just cited, Rosenthal relies on the opinion of Alfarabi in his work *The Virtuous City*. But it is obvious that this opinion, though well worth considering in investigating the genuine teaching of Alfarabi, does not bind Averroes.
- 8 [AO] For the sake of clarity, Lerner’s translation of the original text is employed consistently throughout this chapter.

the virtuous governance. Then they were transformed into timocrats in the days of Mu'āwiya. So seems to be the case in the governance now existing in these islands."

In this passage, Averroes draws a parallel between the transformation of the ideal city to the timocratic city described by Plato, and the transformation of the regime of the Muslim city in its beginning (meaning the regime led by the first four caliphs and, before them in time, by the rule of Muhammad) into the regime established by Mu'āwiyya, the first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, whose government, according to the historical view accepted among Muslims, signifies the end of the pious and heroic early era of Islamic history. The last sentence of the passage cited above concerns, so it seems, the Almohad government whose rule, to which Averroes was subject, extended across Spain and North Africa.

Averroes finds a similar process of decline among those who preceded the Almohads in government—namely, the Almoravids, whom the Almohads regarded as heretics. Among them, however, Averroes specifies additional stages of this process (92.4–9):⁹

9 In fact, one also finds the following passage in Averroes regarding the Almohads—this is, at any rate, the most probable identification (103.8ff.): “You can make this clear from what—after forty years—has come about among us in the habits and states of those possessing lordship and status. Because the timocratic governance under which they grew up has been undone, they have come by these base things that they now have. Only he among them who is virtuous according to the Legal prescriptions remains in an excellent state. This is rare among them.” From this it emerges that as the process of decline continues, the virtues found in a relative manner among people reared in a timocratic regime are not preserved among the Almohad ruling class. Rosenthal’s assertion (298nxix.5) that this passage applies not only to the Almohads but also to the Almoravids is not very plausible. Here is the evidence: “after forty years” refers, as Rosenthal himself notes, to the era after the year 540 in the Muslim calendar. But he also says that the effective end of Almoravid rule occurred in this year (compare also 292nxi.5). It is indeed correct to say that in the year 539 Marrakesh, the Almoravid capital, was conquered by the Almohad forces. Rosenthal understands the final sentence of the cited passage, which mentions the special qualities that did not disappear amid the general decline thanks to the religious Laws, but remained “in an excellent state,” as evidence of the two concepts that have a connection between them (299, continuation of xix.5 from 298): “Averroes’ identification of the Ideal State with the Islamic, i.e. *Shari‘a* State, and the conviction of the superiority of the religious law.” It appears to me that there is not, in this

An example in this time is the kingdom of the people known as the Almoravids. At first they imitated the governance based on the *nomos*: this was under the first one of them. Then they changed under his son into the timocratic, though there was also mixed in him love of wealth. Then it changed under his grandson into the hedonistic with all kinds of things of the hedonists; and it perished in his days. This was because the governance that opposed it at that time resembled the governance based on the *nomos*.

“The governance that opposed it” mentioned in the last sentence is the Almohad government. This designation offers overwhelming proof of the identity (which was clear in any case due to the parallel between the two passages cited above) of “governance based on the *nomos*” with the “virtuous governance” of which Plato speaks and which, as emerges in the passage found on p. 89 and following (see above), the Almohads imitated at the beginning of their rule. One cannot, however, see in the “governance based on the *nomos*” the *shari‘a* (Islamic religious law), as Rosenthal proposes (227n2), even though he admits that these Hebrew words usually have another meaning. In making this assumption, Rosenthal relies on historical facts. It is nevertheless clear that Averroes could not have intended to simply

same sentence, any basis for this opinion, since it does not discuss the virtuous city in any fashion, but rather the few who preserved virtuous qualities, but without having ability or preparation for leadership of the virtuous city. We also know already that the Almohad state at first imitated the virtuous city. And the meaning of the word “imitation” is elucidated in this text according to Averroes’s terminology. His elucidation shows that Rosenthal’s opinion on the matter under discussion contradicts the words of the Arab philosopher. In his article “The Place of Politics in the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 15, no. 2 (1953): 246–78, Rosenthal determines, on the one hand (p. 247), that Averroes frequently comments in the text under discussion on the opposition between the religious law of Islam and the Platonic *nomos*; and on the other hand (p. 250), that Averroes identifies the city that he views as ideal with the Muslim city instituted according to religious law. Rosenthal bases his final determination on the passage on p. 103 that is quoted in the beginning of this note, which Rosenthal treats in the note cited above. We have already seen that we should not accept his proof. The truth of the matter is that the vast majority of the texts adduced here testify clearly that the ideal city Averroes discusses is a philosophic city. With respect to Rosenthal’s conclusion, I will devote a note near the end of this article to proving the identification of the virtuous city with the Platonic city.

identify the Muslim regimes mentioned in the two quoted passages with Plato's ideal city.

This is not, however, what is conveyed by Averroes's words, even if we accept the explanation proposed here, since he determines only that the regimes imitated the Platonic city,¹⁰ and imitation is an eminently Platonic concept that Averroes has also defined in the book under discussion here. Concerning the problem that occupies us, it is appropriate to quote the following paragraph (30.7–13):

The divine acts are imitated by the acts of the political principles, and the acts of the natural powers and principles are imitated by their likenesses among the voluntary powers and acts. The intelligibles among these are imitated by their likenesses among the sensibles, such as the imitation of matter by privation and darkness. The kinds of ultimate happiness—that being the end of the acts of the human virtues—are imitated by their likeness among the goods that are believed to be the end. The happiness that is truly happiness will be imitated by what is believed to be happiness. In general, the ranks of the beings in existence are imitated by their likeness among ranks of place and time.

In light of this text, there is no doubt that Averroes did not use the verb “to imitate” in connection with the Muslim regimes by mistake. His intention was to teach the enlightened to read in his book that the philosophic city, whose legislator only doubtfully needs to be a prophet (see above), is superior in an essential way to the most well-ordered Muslim cities, for which it may appropriately serve as an example. We can appreciate the audacity of this position by remembering that Averroes counts among these Muslim cities not only the kingdom of his Almohad masters in their esteemed beginning but also the city of the four first caliphs—that is to say, the Muslim city that was, according to the prevalent opinion in Islam, the perfect city, and even the city that was under the personal governance of Muhammad.

In any event, as we have already indicated, Averroes does not despair of the possibility that the Muslim city of his time will transform itself into the virtuous, philosophic city. Indeed, the passage discussing this possibility comes after the description of the virtuous qualities that need to come

10 Concerning the Almohad regime, Averroes says in the passage most recently quoted that it is “similar” to the Platonic city. But because the passage cited earlier that also contains an allusion to this regime speaks of “imitation,” it indeed seems probable that in this case the two concepts are equivalent: “imitation” is expressed as “similarity” (which is obviously not “identity”).

together in the rulers of the virtuous city—in response to the claim that there is no possibility of this city being realized (62.28–63.5): “The answer is that it is possible for individuals to grow up with these natural qualities that we have attributed to them—developing, moreover, so as to choose the general common *nomos* that not a single nation can help choosing;¹¹ and besides, their particular Law¹² would not be far from the human Laws; [if these conditions are fulfilled] wisdom would have been completed in their time. This is as matters are in this time of ours and in our Law. If it should happen that the likes of these come to rule for an infinite time, it is possible for this city to come into being.”

We need not dwell at this time on the terms “general *nomos*” and “human Laws,” which we will discuss later. The general significance of the passage is that it gives expression to the idea that the virtuous philosophic city could be produced, if by chance a series of virtuous rulers possessing the requisite characteristics were to rule the city of the Almohads for an unlimited time.

The same idea is also alluded to in the passage parallel to the one just quoted. This second passage comes after a description of the method for educating the children after the expulsion of their parents, a method that Averroes justly ascribes to Plato. This method is capable, according to his argument, of bringing the virtuous city into being with great speed. He continues (78.26–79.4):

You ought to know that this manner mentioned by Plato is best for its emergence. Its emergence is possible in a manner other than this, but [only] over a long time. This is when virtuous kings come to [rule] these cities in a succession—one after another and for a long time—not ceasing to incline these cities gradually until the situation in them, by the end of time, comes to be the good governance. Their [sc., these cities’] inclining will be of two kinds at once—i.e., in their actions and their deeds, and [in] their beliefs. This will be more or less easy, depending on their [sc., the *nomoi*’s] proximity to or distance¹³ from this city.¹⁴ In general, in this time their inclining to virtuous deeds is more likely than their inclining to good beliefs.¹⁵

11 It appears that one should read this as “choosing it” in accordance with one of the manuscripts and not “choosing them,” as Rosenthal proposes on the basis of other manuscripts.

12 Meaning: the religion of Islam.

13 Meaning: the virtuous, philosophic city.

14 I added the period.

15 Averroes continues: “You can prove this from these cities. In general, one who has mastered the [several] parts of science and [understood] the manner of

The meaning of this passage is, in my opinion, that in certain cities, including the Almohad city, virtuous kings are liable to change, in the course of time, the deeds and beliefs of the people of the city, so that it will be transformed into the ideal philosophic city. The ease or difficulty inherent in this process of change depends on the closeness or remoteness of the *nomos* ruling in a given city from the *nomos* of “this city”—that is to say, from the *nomos* of the virtuous Platonic city.

It is possible to determine that their deeds (based on the ruling laws) of the people of the Almohad city are closer to the deeds (which are also based on the laws) of the people of the virtuous city, than the beliefs of the former are to the beliefs of the latter. This interpretation is obviously founded on the opinion, which I have endeavored to prove, that distinguishes between the virtuous Platonic city as Averroes sees it, and the Muslim city. Rosenthal, who points to the hint about the Almohad city contained in that passage, starts from the opposite opinion and therefore seems to me not to explain this passage correctly.¹⁶

creating inclinations in them [sc., the cities] will have no difficulty in asserting that they are no better than their beliefs” (79.5-6). If the text is not corrupt, it certainly seems that according to the understanding of this passage, one who has acquired the necessary knowledge will come to understand that the beliefs of the cities being spoken about—that is to say, the Muslim cities in the era of Averroes—are not good. (Perhaps a mistake was made by the translator in writing “than the beliefs” rather than “in the beliefs,” owing to the ease with which *fi* and *min* may be confused in Arabic script. Meanwhile, the sense of Rosenthal’s translation (which reveals that the text is difficult) is entirely different: see 205, line 13ff. “But on the whole it will not be difficult for him who has completed the study of [all] parts of philosophy as well as the manner of their deviation from his [Plato’s] opinion to realize that they will not improve by convictions (“or beliefs”) [alone] (?)” (The question mark signifies Rosenthal’s own doubts). This translation is implausible. Mantino translates (see 205n3) “*et propterea quod non rectas opiniones habeant, eas a recto perverti et rui.*” [In English: And on account of that those who do not have correct opinions are turned away from what is correct and ruined]. It is possible that Mantino had a different text, but this isn’t necessarily the case because his translation tends to be so free.

- 16 In commenting on this passage, he says (281nxvii.3): “The laws to which he refers are obviously not the *Shari‘a* in practice, as is clear, moreover, from his stressing—para. 4—right conduct in addition to right belief and philosophical convictions, which together are characteristic of a revealed Law, promulgated by a prophet. No doubt he had in mind the Almohad State of his native

The two recently quoted passages bring to our attention, in their discussion of the possibility of bringing about the virtuous philosophic city, the difference between the beliefs that ought to rule in this same city, and the beliefs accepted in the cities in Averroes's time. But the first of the two quoted passages treats this problem with a certain optimism. It counts among the conditions required in order to make possible the coming into being of the philosophic city that "individuals grow up with these natural qualities that we have attributed to them—developing, moreover, so as to choose the common nomos that [not a single nation] can help choosing; and besides, their

Spain, where—despite the theory of pure Islam—these conditions were not fulfilled. Plato taught him that good administration is as essential as right convictions." This comment seems to mean that the sole fault that Averroes finds in the Almohad city is essentially that they don't implement the judgement of *shari'a* in a convincing way. But this explanation assumes that the beliefs accepted in this city are correct. From this it follows that a competent manager could transform this city into the virtuous city (which is, as we saw, the Platonic city). It is difficult to see what basis this explanation has in the passage under discussion, which explicitly teaches us not only that the ruling laws in the Almohad city (not to mention putting them into action) are different from the laws of the virtuous city, but that this difference is much smaller than the difference that exists between the beliefs of these two cities.

This interpretation seems still less convincing if we accept Rosenthal's assumption on the matter of the "priestly-aristocratic city" (*medina mekahenet*) that Averroes mentions in the present context. Rosenthal is undoubtedly right to determine, that this city is none other than the imamic city that Ibn Bajja also mentions. According to Averroes, this city existed among the ancient Persians, and if one joins these words to the passage found in Ibn Bajja, it becomes clear that the source of this idea is Alfarabi (or at the very least, that Ibn Bajja attributes it to him). [AO: see Ibn Bajja, *The Governance of the Solitary*, trans. Lawrence Berman, in *Medieval political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. Joshua Parens and Joseph Macfarland (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 101.] Rosenthal is inclined to think that Averroes also alludes in his discussion of the "priestly-aristocratic" city to the Almohad city (281nxvii.5; 289, v.5–6). This assumption is somewhat plausible. On account of this the determination of Averroes in the context under discussion (79.7) is particularly important because "the cities that are virtuous in deeds alone are those called aristocratic." The term "deeds" is contrasted here to "beliefs." From this we learn that insofar as this sentence refers to the Almohads, Averroes determines, contrary to the opinion ascribed to him by Rosenthal, that the management of this city is better than the opinions prevalent in it.

particular Law would not be far from the human Laws . . . this is as matters are in this time and in our Law (see p. 140 above).” It is obvious that “our Law,” which is the “particular Law” of the people of Averroes’s time, is nothing but Islam. However, what is the “general common nomos”? And for what reason does Averroes speak about the “human Laws” that are, according to the context, the philosophic Laws, that in his opinion are not far from Islam?

Concerning the first question, Rosenthal points (272niii.1–2)—rightly, so it seems—to the discussion in Nicomachean Ethics V.7, which determines the existence of natural justice as the original source from which Averroes draws.¹⁷ As an additional source, the *Summary of Plato’s Laws* composed by Alfarabi comes into consideration (see Alfarabi, *Compendium legum Platonis*, ed. F. Gabrieli, London, 36, I.15 s22 for the Arabic text).¹⁸ It is obvious that the “general common nomos” is not identical with the ruling constitution of the philosophic city. This nomos is much less comprehensive, since it turns out to be nothing but a system of general rules of conduct that make the existence of well-ordered human society possible. These general rules assume different forms in accordance with the differences between societies. Despite this, it appears, as we have already said, that Averroes’s discussion of “human Laws” aims to treat laws and general rules of behavior that are exclusively philosophical, and not for the general run of humans.

The terminology used for this subject is likely to lead to paradoxical formulations, as will be illustrated by the analysis of the paragraph found in our text in the context of discussions of the ways of education of people of the multitude and “difficult nations” (25–26). One way is through language, by means of “speeches,” which is possible for most people who grew up in the virtuous philosophic city (25.29ff.). In contrast to this, one needs to put into action means of compulsion and punishment in order to impose virtuous qualities on the hostile and rebellious. This method is put into action by “those who govern cities that are not good: they castigate their people”

17 In the note just cited, Rosenthal says, among other things: “It is obvious that nomos, though of universal validity, is *not* revealed prophetic law . . . Universal law is, in any case, a close runner up to the *Shari‘a*, and in many of its principles identical with it.” The word “runner-up” implies that the general nomos is inferior in value to the *shari‘a*, although it is close to it. However, there is no indication of that view in the passage under discussion: the very problem does not arise in it at all.

18 Rosenthal prepared the text of Averroes for print before this work of Alfarabi was published. But he still had the opportunity to compare the two books: see his comments on p. 17ff.

(26.11). They (the rulers of the virtuous city) adopt the same method toward these nations according to the general teaching: “As for the other¹⁹ nations, which are not good and whose conduct is not human, why there is no way of teaching them other than this way, namely to coerce them through war to adopt the virtues” (26.6–7).²⁰

In this context comes the following passage (26.12–17): “But that city which we are describing in speech will minimize the occurrence of this way in it—i.e., discipline secured through coercion. This way, however, will be necessary with respect to the other nations—those without; in the case of coercion of difficult nations, nothing will be without war. This is the way in which matters are arranged in those Laws belonging to this our divine Law²¹ that proceed like the human Laws, for the ways in it that lead to God (may He be exalted!) are two: one of them is through speech, and the other through war.”

The critical phrase in the last sentence is “human Laws.” We now see that “the other nations” (that is to say, all the nations apart from the virtuous city) display conduct “that is not human.” One could accordingly conclude that “the human Laws” are the Laws of the virtuous city. It is accordingly obvious, that when Averroes speaks of “those Laws belonging to this our divine Law that proceed like the human Laws,” his intention is indeed to confer praise on Islam, which he calls “divine Law,” on the grounds that several of the Laws and educational directives that it adopts approach the “human Laws.”

This is the opposite of the accepted valuation, which raises the “divine” above the “human,” but it is certainly not the result of a war against religion, according to the formulation that was accepted, for example, in the seventeenth century. In contrast to certain Arab intellectuals who were not Aristotelian philosophers, Averroes does not mean to argue that *tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*.²² On the contrary, he points in this context

19 The word “other” appears here in opposition to “members of the virtuous city,” who are mentioned several paragraphs before this passage (26.3).

20 Rosenthal catches the gist of the author by translating this text as follows (118.17ff.): “Yet for other nations which are not good and whose (system of) government is not human[e], there is no other way of teaching (except by this method, namely coercing them through war to be bound to virtue.”

21 Rosenthal’s translation of this sentence seems more or less correct to me (119.7ff.): “In our divine law, the same is true of laws which follow (the pattern of) human laws,” although it might be appropriate to write simply “the human laws.”

22 [AO] Pines writes this in Latin. The English translation is: “So great are the evils that religion can encourage.” See Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*,

to positive features found in religion. There is no decisive certainty on this point, but it is by no means impossible that he intended for his puzzling choice of words to arouse through the *skandalon*²³ contained in it the special attention of readers who have the required preparation. As a result of this, they would be forced to give their opinion about the conclusions arising from the scale of values in which “the praise” of the “divine” is similar to that of the “human.” It seems superfluous to note that the passage under discussion serves as additional evidence for our determination that in Averroes’s view the virtuous philosophic city is superior to the Muslim city grounded in *shari‘a*—that is to say, the religious law (*halakhah*).²⁴

“Human” and “humanity” (Arabic *insān* and *insāniyya*) occur frequently in Arabic Aristotelian philosophy, and are also found in Jewish philosophy, as terms expressing a very high degree of esteem. It would be worthwhile to devote research to this *humanitas*, different in its philosophical underpinnings from Roman and then Renaissance humanism.

The position of Averroes toward religion and in particular toward certain ideas belonging to this domain is expressed both explicitly and perhaps also implicitly in a passage on pp. 65–67. Since it is important in this case to know the general context as well as to comment on the particular words included in the passage, I will offer several citations. The topic under discussion is “the human end” (65.27ff.).

The things that humans may possibly consider as the end are undoubtedly

trans. W. H. D. Rouse, rev. Martin Smith, Loeb Classical Library 181 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 10 (1.101).

- 23 [AO] Here Pines writes a Greek word, in Roman letters, meaning “scandal” or “snare.”
- 24 There is no possible way of reconciling Rosenthal’s commentary on the last quoted sentence, with its context. Here is his comment (258nvii.11): “Human laws must mean here laws intended to make truly human from the point of view of the divinely revealed *Shari‘a* (?)” [AO: I am unable to find this exact comment in the note indicated]. This comment, about which the question mark indicates that Rosenthal apparently had some doubts, stems from the presumption that Averroes sees the well-ordered Muslim city as the ideal city. And we have already determined that there is no support for this presumption in the book of Averroes that we are discussing. Again, many passages refute it in an unequivocal way. It is certainly not appropriate to bring evidence from the writings of Averroes that do not belong to the genre of philosophic literature in the precise, restricted sense of the word.

infinite, but of this we ourselves will only specify what is generally accepted in this time of ours. We say: [a] [Some] humans assert that the end of man is nothing more than preserving and protecting their bodies and preserving their senses . . . [b] Others assert that it is not appropriate for man to be limited in his existence to what is necessary . . . (66.5ff.): The people who hold this opinion concerning the end of man are divided into parts: [1] [some] humans hold that it is wealth; [2] [other] people hold that it is honor; [3] [still] others assert that it is pleasure. Those who hold that it is pleasure are divided into two parts: [a'] [some] humans assert that it is the delight of the senses (they are closer to unexamined opinion), and [b'] others think that it is delight in the intelligible. [4] Others assert that the end of man is only that he lord it over others and rule them, while acquiring all the goods of pleasure, honor, wealth, and whatever else they assert to be [desirable]. What the Laws existing in this time of ours assert concerning the matter is [that the end of man is doing] what God (may He be exalted!) wills, but that the only way of knowing this matter of what it is God wills of them is prophecy.

Rosenthal translates the above sentence (185, 17–18): “What the religious laws in our own time think of this matter is what God wills.” The Hebrew version certainly permits that translation. It appears clear to me, however, from the context, and contrary to that translation, that Averroes does not want to say that what the religious laws assert is the same as what God wills, but that the end of man according to what the religious laws assert is what God wills (or the fulfillment what God wills). Averroes continues (66.14):

And this [sc., what God wills], if you reflect on the Laws, is divided into abstract knowledge alone—such as what our Law commands concerning knowledge of God (may He be exalted!)—and action—such as what it forewarns concerning the [moral] qualities. Its intention regarding this purpose [sc., action] is identical with the intention of philosophy in genus and purpose.²⁵ That is why humans asserts that these Laws only follow ancient wisdom. It is evident that, in the opinion of all these, the good, bad, the useful, the harmful, the beautiful, and the base are something existing by nature, not convention. For whatever leads to the end is good and beautiful, and whatever hinders one from it is bad and base. This is clear from these Laws and particularly this Law of ours . . .²⁶

25 On this sentence, see below.

26 [AO] Pines leaves out “Many of those of our region hold this opinion concerning this Law of ours,” even though it is found in Rosenthal’s text in 66.21.

As for the people of our nation known as Mutakallimūn, their Legal inquiry led them to [the position] that what God wills has no definite nature and merely turns on what the will—i.e., the will of God (may He be exalted!)—lays down for it. According to this, there is nothing beautiful or base other than by fiat.²⁷ Furthermore, there is no end of man other than by fiat. What brought them to this was their thinking of defending the attributes with which God (may He be exalted!) is described in the Law, to the effect that He is capable of doing whatever He wills, and that it is possible for the [divine] will to extend to all things, including particulars as well. Hence all things are possible. What happened to them happens often in Legal inquiry. That is, God (may He be exalted!) is first described by [certain] attributes. Then one seeks to make what exists agree [with the teaching] without upsetting whatever of these attributes has been laid down.

Here is the translation proposed by Rosenthal for the end of this passage, beginning with the words “that is, God is described” (186, line 14ff.): “That is, God is first described by attributes, then after that one seeks to harmonize [with these] His [absolute] reality without confusing it with those attributes which were [first] posited (?)”²⁸ This translation seems mistaken to me, because it is probable that the Hebrew words *haskamat maši'ut* [agreement with what exists] reflect the Arabic expression *muṭābaqat al-wujūd* (or a similar expression); for example, the above expression is found in Maimonides in his discussion in chapter 73 of the first part of the *Guide of the Perplexed* in the tenth introduction to the dialectical theologians (*mutakallimūn*).²⁹ The opinions Maimonides attributes to the dialectical theologians are close to what Averroes implies about them in attacking them in the text presented here. Indeed, Shmuel Ibn Tibbon translates the Arabic expression in the same place: “*ševi hamaši'ut*” [equivalence with what exists], but when this expression appears with a slight change (*yutābaqa al-wujūd*)³⁰ in the very same context in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Ibn Tibbon translates (*yaskim 'imo hamaši'ut*). Obviously, Averroes's expression does not connote the essence of God, but the arrangement of beings³¹—that is to say, that the dialectical

27 See Rosenthal's note on this (274nvii.1–3).

28 The question mark here reveals Rosenthal's own doubts about his translation.

29 Joel edition, 144, line 15.

30 Ibid, 145, line 6.

31 According to what Rosenthal mentions in his note of the passage (274nvii.1–3), George Vadja understood the word *maši'ut* in the passage under discussion in a similar way.

theologians to whom Averroes refers try to develop a teaching on the order of nature without distorting the doctrine of divine attributes, which in their view is determined by religion. It is plausible that the word *'irbuw* (“mixing”) is only in the text as a translation of the Arabic word *ikhlāt* or some other form of the same root (for example, *takhlāt*). Indeed, for the word *ikhtilāt*³² there are two meanings: *'irbuw* and *bilbul* (“confusion”). And here the second meaning is preferable.³³

Here is the continuation of the passage (66.31–67.1):

But these [people] are distressed in [trying] to discover the explanation of this question of these things that they consider clearly evident in the Law are as they believe. As a result this leads them to an opinion close to sophistry, very far from the nature of man, and far from being the content of a Law.

Up to this point the arguments center on the opinions of the dialectical theologians that are attacked by Averroes. Now he summarizes the entire passage (67.2–5):

These, then, are the opinions of the multitude concerning the end of man, which is his happiness. The realization of their absurdity is readily grasped. As for the opinions of the philosophers, we shall mention them when we come to investigate that wherein they differ since their controversy is only over the rational part of the soul.

According to the context, nobody can cast doubt on the fact that the “opinions of the multitude” which Averroes places in opposition to “the opinions of the philosophers”³⁴ are not merely the opinions of the dialectical theologians against whom he polemicizes, but all the perspectives on the end of man that he articulated in the paragraph just quoted. We thereby discover that Averroes regarded all these ends, including the ends of wealth and honor

32 The Hebrew word *hit'arev* serves to translate *ikhtilāt* in the Hebrew translation to the *Commentary on the “Book of Sensation”* attributed to Averroes (see *Hebrew-Arabic-Greek-Latin Dictionary* [Cambridge, MA: D. Bloomberg, 1954], 126).

33 [AO] Lerner translates the word *'irbuw* as “upsetting.”

34 It emerges on p. 68 that in the opinion of the philosophers the end that man should reach occurs “if those of his actions that are specific to him (that is to say, actions of the intellect) are realized in him in the utmost goodness and excellence,” which is attaining the fullness of the “theoretical virtues, moral virtues, and practical arts.”

along with ends based on religion, as having their source in the opinions of the multitude, which are different from the opinions of the philosophers. To speak more precisely, as we are apparently obliged to do, even the opinion that there is equivalence between religion, which views the will of God (or its implementation) as the end of man, and philosophy, is also one of the opinions of the multitude. Did Averroes truly adopt this stance, which is sure to appear shocking, toward the point that was just mentioned? We are unable to decide the matter definitively, but even so, we are not entitled to ignore this possibility, which the formulation of the text brings to our attention. Or perhaps Averroes wanted to hint that the perspective positing equivalence between religion and philosophy is an opinion expressed by philosophers but intended for the multitude.

On the one hand, we found that in discussion of “our Law” in the quoted passage, Averroes says that “its intention regarding its purpose it [sc., action] is identical with the intention of philosophy in genus and purpose” (see above). Here again lies the question—which we are unable to answer—whether, and to what extent, the expression “in genus” is intended to restrict the meaning of the similarity (or identity) between religion and philosophy, which the sentence indicates.

It is worthwhile in this context to point out the arguments of Averroes in connection to the Platonic teaching that he has—or at least appears to have—as a parallel to religion, namely the teaching of the immortality the soul. Averroes refrains from presenting the arguments of Plato in book 10 of the *Republic*³⁵ that center on this teaching. His reason, explicitly declared, for so refraining, is that these discussions are rhetorical or dialectical³⁶—that is to say, not based on truth. As for the stories about the pleasures that humans gain for good deeds and about the pains that are prescribed as punishment for bad deeds, Averroes sees them as useless for education, because the virtues that such stories are designed to impart are not true virtues. Here is the text (105.11ff.):

What the tenth treatise encompasses is not necessary for this science . . . Then he mentions thereafter a rhetorical or dialectical argument by which he explains that the soul does not die. Then there is a story after that in which he describes

35 Averroes also views the first book and the opening of the second book of the *Republic* as “entirely dialectical arguments; there is no demonstration in them other than by accident . . . hence we do not explain anything of what is in it” (105.26–27)

36 In the Aristotelian sense of the word.

the bliss and delight that await the souls of the happy and the just, and what awaits the souls of the tormented. We have made it known more than once that that these stories are of no account, for the virtues that come about from them are not true virtues. If one calls them virtues, it is [only] homonymously. They belong to remote imitations. This has already preceded in [the discussion] of the genus of imitations. It is this that has brought us to an untruth such as this. It is not something necessary to a man's becoming virtuous.

The printed text continues (105.20–21): “Except³⁷ that it will be better and easier for a man to become virtuous through it.” This sentence points, as it were, to a certain educational advantage to these stories even though they are not necessary. But this perspective does not sit well with the rest of the passage that is about to be quoted, so perhaps we need to read the sentence according to the text of five of the manuscripts cited in the apparatus criticus: “Nor will it be better³⁸ and easier for a man to become virtuous through it.” And here is the rest of the discussion:

For we see here many people who, in adhering to their *nomoi* and their Laws, albeit devoid of these stories, are not less well off than those possessing [these] stories. In general, there is in these stories that over which the ancients had already disputed; and Plato was troubled thereby.

The syntax of the sentence beginning with “we see,” as well as the word *maspiqim* (well-off), admits of different explanations. Averroes's conclusion is nevertheless obvious: experience shows that many people who do not believe in these stories are not inferior to the people who do. He also condemns these stories on p. 31 (31.7ff.):

Also among the imitations that are not good are imitations of happiness as being a recompense for actions³⁹ through which happiness ordinarily is attained and a reward for renouncing actions through which happiness is ordinarily not attained, and of suffering as a punishment for renouncing virtuous actions and clinging to defective actions. For the virtues that come to pass from such imitations are closer to being vices than virtues.

37 [AO] Pines begins by presenting an interpretation of this passage that assumes this translation of it. He then cites the alternate reading used by Lerner and agrees with it.

38 According to four manuscripts, *hayoto tov*.

39 In the printed text, *pa' alot*.

In the continuation of the passage, Averroes observes that humans are influenced by such stories (31.17ff.):

Moreover, his movement toward many of the noble virtues will be for the sake of the base things—since most of the imitations concerning recompense are only of sensual pleasures—so that a man would only be courageous, just, faithful, and have virtues predicated of him, in order that he might copulate, drink, and eat.

Still, according to Averroes's assessment, not all stories about the subject under discussion are of this sort: "Hence, if happiness were imitated⁴⁰ as the health of the soul, and its immortality and eternal life, that would be a fitting story" (31.24–25).⁴¹ The crucial word in this sentence is "imitated." We have already seen that Averroes says in almost the same context (30.9–12):

The kinds of ultimate happiness—that being the end of the acts⁴² of human virtues—are imitated by their likenesses among the goods that are believed to be the end. The happiness that is truly happiness will be imitated by what is believed to be happiness.

So, if the story about the immortality of the soul is an imitation, then even if it is a good imitation it certainly isn't the full truth. True happiness of man is not connected with anything of that sort—that is to say, the immortality of the soul. This conclusion is known to agree with the teachings of Averroes as they are known to us from other texts.⁴³

40 [AO] This rendering is more accurate than Lerner's "represented" and necessary for understanding Pines's interpretation.

41 Rosenthal translates the term "*meyuhas*" as "appropriate" (127, line 36). He is probably right to do so. Averroes surely used the word *munāsib*.

42 In the printed text, *pa'alot*.

43 In his polemic against al-Ghazali called *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (and *Hapalat haHapala* in medieval Hebrew [*Incoherence of the Incoherence* in English]), Averroes argues that the things said in the teachings of Islam on the life of the world to come (Averroes uses the term *mu'ād*) "do more to encourage wonderful deeds than what is said in other religions. Because of this, imagining the life of the world to come (*mu'ād*) for them by material things is preferable to imagining it with spiritual things" (*Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, ed. Maurice Bouyges [Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1930], 585, lines 4–6). The Arabic word *lahum*, "for them," likely refers to the multitude (cf. 584, line 12). Averroes therefore determines here the educational value of material descriptions of

In the framework of this article I will touch on only one of the problems that have no connection to religion but are discussed in Averroes's work. It is the problem of the size of the territory and population of the virtuous city. After presenting the opinion of Plato on the need for this city to have a limited size, Averroes continues (46.17ff.):

Yet if these communities⁴⁴ be of a determined number⁴⁵ intended to limit them, then the truth of this ought to be shown by the conformity of this opinion to the natural climates or all the natural people. This is alluded to in the saying of the Lawgiver: "I have been sent to the Red and the Black." If this be the [correct] opinion, Plato does not favor it; but it is Aristotle's opinion, and it is the indubitable truth.

Rosenthal translates this passage, which has been made hard to understand by Samuel ben Judah or the copyists, as follows (153, line 9ff.):

If a limited number is intended for these communities in their delimitation, then it is right to verify this opinion by [applying to them] the test of natural climates, or of all the natural [distinctions between] (?) human beings. This is hinted at in the statement of the Master of the Law: "I have been sent to the Red and the Black." If this is not the opinion of Plato, it is nevertheless the opinion of Aristotle, and is undoubtedly the truth.

As it appears to me, Averroes intends to determine, in accordance with the opinion that he ascribed (wrongly of course) to Aristotle, and which is also his own opinion, that it is desirable to control the number of virtuous cities and increase their size. According to this perspective, the virtuous city can spread across the entire territory of a given climate zone. It is also possible

the next world for the multitude. This limited application removes the force of the contradiction between this passage and the passage in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* quoted above, whose tendency is to deny the educational value of such descriptions. But one should also consider the possibility that in the passage from the *Incoherence of the Incoherence* Averroes was guided above all by the needs of his polemic and defense of philosophy.

44 Meaning the virtuous associations—that is to say, the virtuous cities.

45 On 46.17, in presenting the opinion of Plato, Averroes speaks of a "determined area"—that is to say, a determined size. The expression "determined number" signifies in the passage quoted above his aspiration to limit the number of virtuous cities, and therefore to increase their size.

that it include all human beings within it.⁴⁶ One may find evidence for this interpretation that seems adequate to me in Averroes's resort to the saying of the Lawgiver. "I have been sent to the Red and the Black." As Rosenthal sees (265nxxii.3), this saying is nothing less than a *ḥadīth* attributed to Muhammad. This *ḥadīth* has come, in general, to point to the universal character of Muhammad's mission, intended for the entire human race. In the note mentioned above, Rosenthal himself refers to several places in other writings of Averroes, which ascribe to the *ḥadīth* this meaning. Despite this, he thinks it probable that in our text this *ḥadīth* has the opposite meaning. It seems to me that there is no justification for this interpretation. Alfarabi held the opinion (see *The Virtuous City*, ed. F. Dieterici, Leiden 1895, 53–54) that one kind among the "virtuous associations" that are "perfect"—that is to say, self-sufficient—is the association that spreads across the entire habited part of the world. It seems probable that Averroes was also of the opinion that the virtuous association can reach that size. We do not know on the basis of which authority he ascribes this opinion to Aristotle, and likewise the opinion that the "virtuous association" can also spread across a climate zone. It is not only that this perspective does not appear in the writings belonging to the Aristotelian corpus,⁴⁷ but that it stands contrary to Aristotle's explicit opinion, as expressed in *Politics* 7.4. Even Alfarabi does not attribute this opinion to the Greek philosopher, certainly not in the passage just mentioned. Nor could it be that Galen, whose criticism of Plato's severe restriction in size of the virtuous city⁴⁸ Averroes cites (46.6ff.), refers in Aristotle's name to the opinion that Averroes attributes to the philosopher, unless we could rely on Aristotelian writings that have not come down to us. On the contrary, we must consider the possibility that in attributing the opinion discussed above to Aristotle, Averroes means a passage that is preserved from the *Epistle on the Intellect* that was considered a composition of Aristotle. In this passage the author prophesizes, among other things, that "there will be in the world . . . one association and one order, and all human beings will obey one command and one king." But if we may judge according to the passage

46 If this explanation is correct, the words "distinction between" enclosed in brackets in the English translation are superfluous. Rosenthal adds them with a certain hesitation, as the accompanying question mark indicates.

47 [AO] Pines uses the Latin phrase "Corpus Aristotelicum."

48 Undoubtedly, in a no longer extant paraphrase of the *Republic*.

that has been preserved, this epistle is wrongly attributed to Aristotle, and Averroes appears to have had a great capacity for discerning the lack of authenticity of pseudo-Aristotelian writings.⁴⁹

It appears that the most important conclusions that we have reached are:

49 Here are some more proposals for corrections: on p. 67, lines 24–25, the argument concerns the “faculty of inclination” that “man has in common with the simple bodies.” In lines 25–26 “the inclination resulting from this faculty in this form is not a soul, nor do the actions resulting from it belong to the soul.” Rosenthal translates “faculty of inclination” (187, line 29) as “the faculty of appetite,” and in note 3 to the same page he proposes the explanation that the term “inclination” has a meaning that is identical here with the Greek word *orexis*. This is not the case. There is no doubt that this Hebrew word renders here the Arabic *mīl*, which has exactly the same sense. The natural *mīl*, understood by Averroes to be in the world under the sphere of the moon, is the quality existing among the four elements and the bodies composed of them: among them is the body of humans, which moves in a straight line to its natural place, if not already found in it. On the concept of *mīl* see my article, “*Études sur Awḥad al-Zamān Abū’l Barakāt al-Baḡhdādī*,” *Revue des Études Juives* (1938): 49ff. The word *mīl* renders the Greek word *ropē*, the Hebrew translation of which is “cause to incline” (see my article cited above, 49n190), and sometimes even the Greek *hormē*. On p. 93, lines 5–6, in a passage treating the transformation of the oligarchic city to the democratic city, it is said: “they agree to plunder the rich and seize their wealth and drive them from the city or enslave them.” Rosenthal translated the final three words, with doubts expressed by the question mark: “or to acquire them” (229, line 7). In n. 3 to the same page he proposes another explanation, according to which the word “acquire” [translated by Lerner as “enslave”] has as its object “property.” In accordance with this explanation, the passage admits of an alternative translation: “to seize and appropriate their possessions [wealth] and drive them from the state.” To me it seems that the verb “acquire” functions in this passage as in many others as a translation of the Arabic verb *m-l-k*, one of whose meanings is to be an owner of slaves. In the sentence cited above the word “acquire” must express the idea that one of the fates that the people planning to carry out the revolution prepare for the rich is to turn them into their slaves. The Latin translator also understands the text in this way, since he translates (as Rosenthal quotes in the comment above): “*aut redigant in servitudinem*” [English: “or they drive (them) into servitude”].

- (a) We have determined that Averroes makes a clear distinction between the virtuous philosophic city, which he sees as the ideal city, and the Muslim city based on a religious constitution.⁵⁰

50 I have tried to show above that the evidence on which Rosenthal wants to base his claim that the city Averroes sees as ideal is the Muslim city, is not evidence at all, and that the passages whose help he invokes do not concern the subject under discussion. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate for me to bring together here most of the proofs of my view, that Averroes, according to his *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* saw the Platonic city as the ideal city. I think that concentrating the proofs I have given here will have some advantage despite the repetition involved in it, since most of these proofs were already presented in this article. We must rely first of all on the terminology that Averroes uses. As we recall, Rosenthal's evidence is that Averroes uses the words "remains in a virtuous state" [AO: Lerner translates "excellent state," but the alternate translation of "virtuous" is crucial for understanding Pines' argument here] in order to signify the people who, thanks to their fulfilment of the religious laws, are not caught up in the general decline of the Almohad city of his time: this indicates that Rosenthal ascribes great importance to the use of the adjective "virtuous." And here we must determine that Averroes does not call any Muslim city by the name of virtuous city, nor by any similar name. These terms are used by him only to signify the ideal Platonic city. Here are several places where the usage of the term "virtuous city" in this sense is clearest: 79.24–25, 87.19, 93.32, 94.1, 102.20. For the term "virtuous governance," see 87.28. For the term "virtuous association," see 93.25. Accordingly, there is no doubt that the adjective "virtuous" (probably a translation of the Arabic word *fāḍil*) signifies, whenever it defines a kind of city, the ideal Platonic city, for which it is not necessary (although it may be desirable) that its Lawgiver be a prophet (61). Accordingly, whenever Averroes determines (on page 89, see above) that at the beginning of Islam the Muslim city "imitated" "virtuous governance," it is clear that in speaking of governance here he means the city of Plato. As we have seen, the use of the verb "imitate" demonstrates, in the language of Averroes as much as in the language of Plato, the superiority of the thing imitated, in this case the ideal Platonic city, over the thing that imitates it, in this case the most perfect Muslim city (on the imitation the different regimes make of the ideal regime, see Plato's *Statesman*, 300[a]–301[e]). To signify the ideal Platonic city Averroes also uses another term, found very frequently in our text—namely, "this city" (see, for example, 43.13, 32; 44.20, 26; 45.29)—and this is the term that Averroes uses in the context of the two passages mentioned above (62–63, 78–79), which speak about the prospects of transforming the Almohad city into the ideal city. Concerning the passage on pp. 78–79, it is obvious that the ideal city of

- (b) We have determined that in Averroes's view, a series of enlightened rulers might bring the existing Islamic city closer to the regime of the virtuous philosophic city, and thereby be able to realize the latter.⁵¹

Averroes is the city of Plato, especially because the Arab philosopher indicates that the way to actualize good governance is through a series of enlightened rulers, alongside the Platonic way of expelling all adults. Indeed, the possibility of the first way is determined personally by Averroes, on the basis of his knowledge of the political circumstances of his time. These two ways lead, according to the above passage, to the same goal. That is to say, Averroes fully adopts for himself the political ideal of Plato, obviously according to his personal understanding, and thinks about the possibility of realizing it.

- 51 Were it not for the explicit testimony of the text, it would be difficult to grasp how Averroes, who was involved in political life, would have been capable of placing his hopes in the enlightened absolutism that the Almohad rulers were expected, in his opinion, to demonstrate through their actions, and could take into account the possibility that these rulers would advance toward a realization of the ideal philosophic city. Knowledge about the existence of people with this sort of attitude close to the Almohad court might make some contribution to illuminating the character of the Arabic influence on Frederick Hohenstaufen II, who exemplified his own kind of enlightened despotism. As is well known, this emperor, who is separated from Averroes by a short period of time, sought the intercession of one of the Almohad governors to get in touch with the Muslim intellectual Ibn Sab'īn, who responded to his questions. We must nevertheless add that this intellectual was not fundamentally similar to Averroes (see Ibn Sab'īn, *Correspondence Philosophique avec l'Empereur Frédéric II de Hohenstaufen*, ed. Serefettin Yaltkaya and H. Corbin [Paris: De Boccard], 1943). It should be added that the hopes Averroes articulated did not delude him concerning the state of affairs in the Almohad city of his time. There is even testimony to this in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."* In this work he decries the authority of the government of the *mutakallimūn* ("the sophists who rule over cities") and determines that "If it happens that a true philosopher grows up in these cities, he is in the position of a man who comes among perilous animals. He is not obliged to do harm along with them, but neither is he sure in himself that those animals will not oppose him. Hence he turns to isolation and lives the life of a solitary. The best perfection is missing in him, for that can be attained by him only in this city that we have described in speech" (64.9, 23–27). This attitude is reminiscent of the opinions that Ibn Bajja, a predecessor of Averroes, arrived at in the *Governance of the Solitary*. It is also plausible that Maimonides was influenced by these opinions.

It should be noted that there is a link between this opinion and the assumption of Averroes, that the majority of people receive education from the regime under which they grew up, and therefore have the possibility to be “virtuous in the human virtues.”⁵²

Most instructive of all is the comparison between the text that we are discussing, and the treatises “*Faṣl al-Maqāl wa-Taqrīr mā bayn ash-Sharī‘a wa-al-Ḥikma min il-Ittiṣāl*” and “*Manāḥij al-Adilla fī Aqā‘id il-Milla*,”⁵³ in which Averroes seeks to present his perspective on the relationship between religion and philosophy (or on the appropriate conduct for a philosopher in the religious city), or to formulate, from the point of view of the philosopher, the religious teaching according to its explicit sense. What defines those two treatises is the explicit agreement of the author with the opinion that religion has the power and legitimacy to impose its authority on the philosopher.

Acceptance of this authority finds a clear expression in a passage at the very beginning of *Faṣl al-Maqāl* (Cairo edition, 1935, 9). “The goal of this statement is for us to investigate from the perspective of Law-based reflection [*al-shar‘i*, an adjective derived from the word *shar‘*, whose meaning is religious law] whether reflection upon philosophy and the sciences of logic is permitted . . . by the Law.”⁵⁴ From this we learn that in the treatise in which this passage appears, the question of the right to practice philosophy seems to be a question decided by religious law. It is obvious, according to this approach, that the philosopher whose right to existence rests on permission from religion, is not permitted to cast doubt on the superiority of this religion or the superiority of the regime based on it, or to aspire to introduce

52 See 102.26ff: “The cause of this is that the governance that is laid down has an effect by transferring certain states [of the soul] to whoever grow up in it, even if these are opposite to what is fixed in the nature of those who are being disposed toward these states. It is possible therefore for the majority of people to excel in the human virtues. This is only rarely impossible.”

53 [AO] Pines leaves the titles in Arabic. They can be translated as *The Decisive Treatise: Determining the Connection between Divine Law and Wisdom* and *On the Methods of Proof for the Beliefs of Religion*. The first is now available in an excellent translation by Charles Butterworth, cited in the following footnote. The second has been edited in Arabic: see Ibn Rushd, *Manāḥij al-Adilla fī Aqā‘id il-Milla*, ed. Maḥmūd Qāsim (al-Qāhira: Maktabat Anglo-Maṣriyya, 1969).

54 [AO] Pines translates into Hebrew. I use Butterworth’s English translation (Averroes, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, trans. Charles Butterworth [Provo: UT, 2008], 1). The note in the square brackets is inserted by Pines.

improvements to religious beliefs and laws, or to strive to replace them with other beliefs and laws.

Despite this, it is clear that in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* Averroes views philosophy and the philosopher as having the supreme authority. This authority grants the philosopher permission to relate to the Islamic city as an imperfect "imitation" of the virtuous philosophic city, and to hope to improve the religious city in a way that moves it closer to the philosophic city, or even to act for the sake of this goal.

In keeping with these divergent approaches, there is a difference concerning the methods of presentation and formulation between the treatises just mentioned and the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."* This difference would seem to be determined by the fact that these writings do not belong to the same kind of literature. It appears that in Averroes's time, the separation between the different kinds of literature with which philosophers were likely to occupy themselves was more clear-cut than it was, for example, in the tenth century, the time of Alfarabi.⁵⁵ This fact, once determined, confers additional importance on the question, raised first and foremost by Leo Strauss⁵⁶ in our era, on the method of Maimonides in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. It is an obvious fact that this book, toward which every Jewish intellectual in the following era was obliged to define his stance, does not belong, with regard to the structure and manner of presentation that Maimonides often chose, to the category of philosophical books, and is intended not for complete philosophers but for the perplexed. This is an essential fact in the history of Jewish thought. The book does not belong to the genre of literature among which the books of Averroes mentioned above should be counted. The fact is, that Maimonides establishes a genre of literature unto itself, which was not found in the literature composed in Arabic by the Aristotelian philosophers; its function is to discover the appropriate secrets of the Torah. At the end of the *Manāḥij al-Adilla*, Averroes defines, according to a method similar to Maimonides's, the purpose of such a book, which he himself never

55 The reason for this is undoubtedly rooted, to a great extent, in the circumstances of the time. It seems probable in this regard that the great influence of the prevailing tendency in Averroes's time—namely, to impose positive theology on Sunni Islam—made itself felt. Averroes was inclined to reject these doctrines, while Maimonides tried to transfer them to the realm of Judaism.

56 For example, in "*The Literary Character of the Guide for the Perplexed,*" in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), 38–94.

composed.⁵⁷ His words have the merit of helping us understand the great hesitations that Maimonides had when he wrote the *Guide of the Perplexed*. I shall devote a separate discussion to this subject.⁵⁸

The difference that exists between the stance of Averroes in the treatises mentioned above and the stance expressed in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* should also give us some notion of the surprises that might await us, were Maimonides to present his teaching in explicit philosophical language and for philosophical readers.⁵⁹

57 [AO] Averroes, *Manāhij al-Adilla*, 202.

58 [AO] I am unable to locate this discussion, which may never have been written.

59 *The Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* is also destined to shed new light on the attitude of Maimonides to the practice of poetry. This attitude is known to be extremely negative. The cause of this undoubtedly lies in the personality and original thought of Maimonides. However, it is worthwhile in this context to take into account the influence of Plato's *Republic* on this point, to which the text by Averroes that we have been discussing attests. On p. 32ff. we find comments made by Averroes that follow Plato, on the harm that poetry is likely to cause. Averroes points especially to the faults that may be found in this regard in many or even most of the Arabic poems (see 32.23–24, 33.3–4).

Chapter Seven

The *Shari‘a* of the *Republic*

Islamic Law and Philosophy in Averroes’s *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic”*

Rasoul Namazi

Averroes is one of the few Muslim philosophers whose work has had a considerable impact on European thought; the phenomenon of Averroism has been a part of the common European intellectual heritage for several centuries.¹ One of the most enduring and widely held views, or rather myths, about Averroes for centuries has been that he was a fierce enemy of religion.² This view was partly rejected by Ernest Renan’s classic nineteenth-century study, in which he critiqued what he called “*la légende d’Averroès*.” Although a spirited follower of the Enlightenment’s cult of science and battle against superstition, and despite his admiration for Averroes as a figure who tried to keep the spirit of reason alive during religious ages, Renan remained unconvinced by the charges leveled against the Arab philosopher. He tried to show

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- 1 I am grateful to Alexander Orwin and reviewers for their judicious comments and suggestions on the earlier version of this chapter.
 - 2 See, for instance, Pierre Bayle’s article on Averroes in his *Dictionnaire*, where he attributes some spurious statements about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to Averroes: Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, 5th. ed. (Amsterdam: P. Brunel, R. & J. Wetstein & G. Smith, H. Waesberge, P. Humbert, F. Honoré, Z. Chatelain, P. Mortier, Samuel Luchtmans, 1740), 1:387 (note H); Abraham Anderson, *The Treatise of the Three Impostors and the Problem of Enlightenment: A New Translation of the Traité des Trois Imposteurs (1777 Edition)* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 148n15.

how much this view of Averroes was a construction of the European mind in its own battles over heterodoxy and free thought. Renan did not, however, settle for a narrative about the intellectual history of European Averroism, but went beyond this, depicting Averroes’s rationalism and Islamic beliefs as two separate, independent spheres that tend not to conflict with each other. That is to say, Averroes could have been a good Muslim as well as a good philosopher.³ The historicist presuppositions of Renan’s thought, however—presuppositions according to which every system of thought is a product of its own time—made his perspective on Averroes incoherent and open to future revisions.⁴ Léon Gauthier, although critical of Renan, also tried to circumvent the question of the relationship between Islam and philosophy in Averroes’s work.⁵ He did this by depicting Islam as a religion without substantial doctrinal content, thereby making possible its compatibility with Greek philosophy. Gauthier therefore claimed that Averroes’s thought could be seen as “*un rationalisme sans réserve [an unqualified rationalism]*” without necessarily rendering Averroes an unbeliever.⁶ Scholars like A. F. Mehren, Max Horten, and Asin Palacio avoided such unsatisfactory solutions by wholeheartedly embracing the view that, in the end, Islamic philosophy is more Islamic than philosophic. They argued that the Islamic philosophy of the *falāsifa* is an outgrowth of Islamic beliefs expressed in the language of Greek philosophy, and fully in the service of Muslim revelation; therefore, according to these scholars, there is no real conflict between Averroes’s philosophy and the tenets of Islam.⁷ Émile Bréhier was so much impressed by

3 Ernest Renan, *Averroès et l’Averroïsme: Essai Historique*, 3rd. ed. (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1866), 162–72, 292–301.

4 Renan, v–vii.

5 Léon Gauthier, *La Théorie d’Ibn Rochd (Averroès) sur les Rapports de la Religion et de la Philosophie* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1909), 177–82.

6 Léon Gauthier, “Scolastique musulmane et scolastique chrétienne,” *Revue d’Histoire de la Philosophie* 2 (1928): 251–53; Gauthier, *La Théorie d’Ibn Rochd*, 108.

7 August Ferdinand Mehren, “Etudes sur la Philosophie d’Averroès concernant son rapport avec celle d’Avicenne et Gazzali,” *Le Muséon* 7 (1888): 611; Max Horten, *Die Hauptlehren des Averroes nach seiner Schrift. Die Widerlegung des Gazali* (Bonn: Marcus und Webers Verlag, 1913), iv; Asin Palacio, “El Averroísmo teológico de Santo Tomas de Aquino,” in *Homenaje a D. Francisco Codera en su jubilación del profesorado: Estudios de erudición oriental*, ed. Eduardo Saavedra (Zaragoza: Escar, 1904), 272. See also Muhsin Mahdi, “Averroes on Divine Law and Human Wisdom,” in *Ancients and Moderns*:

these developments that he had to add a new comment to his history of medieval philosophy in 1949 to declare: “*La légende d’Averroès libre penseur est bien finie*[the legend of Averroes as a freethinker is finished].”⁸

A look at this old debate shows that the question of the conflict, or rather relationship, between Averroes’s philosophical views and medieval Islam, has been mainly studied either through the lens of whatever metaphysical views are attributed to Averroes or else in the context of Averroes’s own treatise on a related subject—namely, the *Decisive Treatise*. Although such approaches to this problem have obvious advantages, one could argue that another approach is even more appropriate. That the ancient tradition of Greek philosophy was not entirely in harmony with Islamic revelation was, to the early proponents and opponents of the study of philosophy in the land of Islam alike, not exactly a secret. The adherence of Greek philosophers to the idea of the eternity of the world conflicted with the Muslim belief in the creation of the world. The passive character of the Greek conception of the divine differed from the active conception of the Muslim god who punished infractions and rewarded good deeds. The detached nature of the First Cause is contrary to Allah, who is aware of even the smallest things in the world. The highly intellectual character of the *falāsifa*’s understanding of the afterlife is different from the corporeal depiction of heaven and hell one finds in the Qur’an and other Islamic sources. These and similar issues were prominently emphasized in the works of those who had important objections to Muslim Aristotelians—most famously in the writings of al-Ghazali.⁹ Reading the apologetics of the philosophers against the traditional attacks, however, one has always the impression that the debate was a rather hair-splitting affair: the philosophers always managed to find some subtle interpretation of the philosophic ideas that sounded compatible with Islamic orthodoxy. What particularly helped them in this enterprise was the fact that the Islamic belief system itself is rather ambiguous on major abstract, theoretical questions; the orthodox antiphilosophic thinkers even contributed to this enterprise by

Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss, ed. Joseph Cropsey (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 114–17; Michel Allard, “Le Rationalisme d’Averroès d’après une étude sur la création,” *Bulletin d’études orientales* 14 (1952): 7–9.

- 8 Émile Bréhier, *La Philosophie Du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1949), 235.
 9 See particularly the author’s introduction in Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 1–12.

declining to delve more deeply into the meticulous aspects of Islamic beliefs (“divine secrets”) and thereby left considerable room for harmonizing philosophy with some understanding of Islam.¹⁰ In fact, one can claim that, owing to the rather limited and ambiguous character of Islamic dogma, the conflict between those beliefs and Greek philosophy is much less serious than the conflict between Christian beliefs and Greek philosophy.¹¹

A less speculative approach to the question of the relationship between Averroes’s philosophy and Islam could begin from a different observation. The most distinctive characteristic of medieval Islam was that it presented itself primarily as a religion of *sharīʿa* or Islamic Law, a law regulating men’s private and public lives alike. Medieval Islam, being a religion of law, had a decisively political character, and this meant that, although adherence to a set of doctrines or beliefs was important, the Law and its political character were decidedly more prominent. This also means that any study of the relationship between classical Islamic philosophy and medieval Islam should pay particular attention to Islamic *political* philosophy and what the *falāsifa* in general said and thought about politics.¹² In the case of Averroes, this

10 This approach is best represented in the comments of Malik ibn Anas on the Qur’anic passages that speak of God “sitting upon the throne” (e.g., Qur’an 7:54, 20:5). Commenting on these verses, which had been discussed by Muslim philosophers and theologians from a rationalist perspective, Malik reportedly said that “the sitting is known, its modality is unknown. Belief in it is an obligation and raising questions regarding it is a heresy.” See Arthur J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 22.

11 For a slightly different view see Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), 19.

12 This claim about the importance of Islamic political philosophy is emphatically challenged by Dimitri Gutas, who denies even the existence of such a political philosophy. The main evidence brought up by Gutas is a passage from Ibn Khaldun, who writes that his own reflections on politics are fundamentally *different* from those of his predecessors, presumably Alfarabi and Averroes; contrary to what Gutas claims, however, Ibn Khaldun is not saying that his predecessors did not have a political philosophy; only that his view is different from theirs. It is also remarkable that, in this passage, Ibn Khaldun describes as the basis of the political thought of his predecessors the idea of a “virtuous city” (*al-madīna al-fāḍila*) and emphasizes that this virtuous city is meant to be “rare and remote,” while, presumably, Ibn Khaldun’s own views are more realistic in character. This is precisely the claim made famously by Machiavelli in chapter 15 of *The Prince* about his Greek predecessors, Plato and Aristotle. Both Plato and Aristotle consider their best regime the result of

thought signifies that a fruitful approach to understanding the relationship between medieval Islam and philosophy ought to concentrate on Averroes's political writings. In other words, this politics-oriented approach would lead to an elevation of the importance of Averroes's specifically political writings, or, more precisely, his most comprehensive statement on political philosophy—namely, his *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* (hereafter *Commentary*).

Scholars have paid very little attention to the relationship between medieval Islamic Law and Averroes's *Commentary*: in fact, one can say that, despite the availability of a reliable edition of this work for more than fifty years—since the publications of the 1956 Hebrew-English edition of E. I. J Rosenthal and the excellent 1974 English translation by Ralph Lerner—very few in-depth scholarly studies have been written on any aspect of this unique writing.¹³ Therefore, to borrow a favorite expression of Averroes, “there is room for inquiry here.” For the above reasons, my discussion of the question of the relationship between philosophy and Islam in the thought of Averroes will focus on those aspects of the *Commentary* that pose a problem from the perspective of, or imply an engagement with, Islamic Law. To begin with, as we shall see, this question is particularly significant in light of Averroes's engagement with Plato's *Republic*.

a “wish” or “prayer.” The best regime is the regime for which one would wish or pray (Aristotle, *Politics* 1260a30, 1265a18–19, 1295a27–30, 1331b20–21, 1332a29–33; Plato, *Republic* 457d4–9, 540d1–3, *Laws* 709d, 841e4–6). Its actualization is improbable; only “some divine chance” can bring it about. The best regime is not meant to be one “which most cities can share” (Plato, *Republic* 592a11; Aristotle, *Politics* 1295a31). If one follows Gutas's way of thinking, one must conclude that Plato and Aristotle did not have a political philosophy either—a rather questionable claim. See Dimitri Gutas, “The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 1 (2002): 23–24.

- 13 A notable exception remains Charles E. Butterworth, “Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule: A Study of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's 'Republic'*,” *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 9:1 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1986), 1–95. Also, Catarina Belo profitably discusses the relationship between the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* and the *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid* in chapter 5 of this volume.

The Radicalism of the *Republic*

As was mentioned, the status of the Law is much more prominent in medieval Islam than its theoretical dogmas, and the conflict became more pronounced in the field of Law than in metaphysics or psychology. It is therefore reasonable to study the conflict of philosophy and Islam more through the lens of Islamic political philosophy than that of speculative philosophy. One advantage of this approach in the case of Averroes in particular is the specific character of Averroes’s thought as it relates to his social status: one must bear in mind that Averroes was first and foremost a Muslim judge, responsible for the interpretation and application of Islamic Law. Furthermore, nowhere was the conflict between Islamic Law and philosophy more likely than in Averroes’s *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* because that dialogue itself constitutes Plato’s most iconoclastic work. While the other substantial political statement of Plato—namely, the *Laws*—could be viewed as a conservative manifestation of the common prephilosophical traditions with a philosophic twist, the *Republic* is such a consciously radical work that even the literary participants in the dialogue themselves occasionally attest to the bewildering nature of Socrates’s suggestions. When Socrates suggests that philosophers—those stargazers and strange individuals who tended to fall into wells, who could not find the way to the marketplace, and who not only ignored what their neighbors were doing but who were even unaware of whether they were men or beasts—must take the reins of the city; or when Socrates argued that women, whose Greek traditional virtue was to not be even heard by the others, should begin exercising and ruling alongside men and wrestle naked, the interlocutors express their unease.¹⁴ The Islamic conception of the philosopher, and the Islamic Law’s view of women in medieval times, were not much different from that of the Greeks, and one can therefore imagine similar reactions from Muslims. In other words, in his *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* Averroes was not confronted by abstract ideas about the heavenly bodies or the faculties of the human soul but with concrete considerations dealing with the practices of daily life under an Islamic regime in his time. Surely there are also more abstract ideas in the *Republic* and in Averroes’s *Commentary*—for example, the religiously correct conception of the invisible

14 Plato, *Theaetetus* 174a, *Philebus* 173c–d; Helen P. Foley, “Women in Greece,” in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Michael Grant and Rachel Kitzinger, vol. 3 (New York: Scribner, 1988), 1302; Plato, *Republic* 452a–c, 473c.

beings, the relationship between human acts and divine recompenses in the afterlife, the moral status of divine commands—which can be discussed from the point of view of Islamic orthodoxy. But because of the legalistic character of medieval Islam and the ambiguous character of many of these issues in Islamic theology and scripture, it would be difficult to provide a fruitful comparison between Platonic-Averroistic positions and Islamic ones.

In what follows, I will try to concentrate on the more practical and, from the point of view of the medieval Islamic Law, more crucial aspects of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."* I will first briefly discuss Averroes's indications regarding the question of *shari'a* in the Platonic regime. Next, I will examine the question of the virtues and obligations specified in Islamic Law. Then I will discuss the question of warfare and the status of women in the best regime.

The *Shari'a* of the Best Regime

One should bear in mind that the relationship between Islamic Law and the philosophy of Plato is not an alien subject imposed externally on Averroes's writings. This is shown by a simple observation: the most remarkable aspect of Averroes's reading of Plato's best regime is that this regime also seems to have a *shari'a* of its own.¹⁵ For instance, Averroes claims that the citizens of the Platonic regime refrain from the possession of gold or silver because it is prohibited by their *shari'a* (41, 44).¹⁶ This seems to lead to the obvious conclusion, highly attractive to scholars who claim that for Averroes there is a perfect harmony between philosophy and *shari'a*: Plato's best regime corresponds to the regime founded on the basis of Islamic Law. It is therefore not surprising that Rosenthal speaks of "Averroes's identification of the Ideal State with the Islamic, i.e., *shari'a* State, and the conviction of the

15 Of course, this observation is true if the Hebrew word *torah* and its derivatives in the text available to us are translations of the Arabic *shari'a* and its derivatives, which I believe is a reasonable assumption.

16 All the references in parentheses refer to the page numbers of Rosenthal's Hebrew edition which are also indicated in the margins of Lerner's translation. For the translations, I use *Averroes On Plato's "Republic,"* trans. Ralph Lerner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974). References to the Qur'an correspond to chapter and verse numbers (*sūrah* and *'āyah*).

superiority of the religious law.”¹⁷ This claim even draws on some historical evidence presented in Averroes’s *Commentary*—namely, that “the governance of the Arabs in early times” also “used to imitate the virtuous governance” (89). According to Rosenthal, this is a reference to the rule of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*al-khulafā’u r-rāshidūn*).¹⁸ The same point seems to be made when Averroes tries to illustrate the military might of the perfect city of the *Republic* by referring to the conquest of Persia at the time of the early caliphs (44). What seems to be problematic here, however, is that Rosenthal’s view does not precisely correspond to what Averroes actually says. More precisely, Averroes speaks of the Arabs in early times, the period that ended with the rule of Mu‘āwiya, not as those who *possessed* the best regime but rather as ones who “imitated” it. The imitation of a thing does not seem to be the thing itself, although it can be a close approximation. Furthermore, one might ask whether “the Arabs in early times” actually includes the reign of the Prophet. If this passage refers only to the first four caliphs, this might signify that those four caliphs imitated the best regime that originally existed in Muhammad’s time—and then this would mean that Muhammad was a Platonic philosopher-king, and that the early Islamic city was, properly speaking, an exact copy of the best regime as it is described in the *Republic*. One might claim that this is actually an absurd suggestion: no traditional account conceives of Muhammad as a philosopher-king; there is no evidence that he went through the philosophic training resembling what is depicted in the *Republic*.¹⁹ But is this a reasonable objection? The idea that Muhammad was some kind of philosopher seems to have been a rather common idea among the *falāsifa*, and one must be careful not to reject it out of hand, or to consider it merely as a kind of bow to common prejudices in order to win tolerance and avoid persecution in an environment hostile to philosophy.²⁰ Be that as it may, as we have mentioned before, what further complicates the issue is that in his commentary, Averroes seems to use the word *sharī‘a*

17 Averroes, *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* trans. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1956), 299.

18 *Ibid.*, 291.

19 Lawrence V. Berman, “Review of Averroes’ *Commentary on Plato’s ‘Republic.’*” Edited with an Introduction, Translation, and Notes by E. I. J. Rosenthal. Reprinted with Corrections,” *Oriens* 21–22, no. 1 (1969): 436.

20 See Rasoul Namazi, “The Qur’an, Reason, and Revelation: Islamic Revelation and Its Relationship with Reason and Philosophy,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 43, no. 3 (2017): 423–25 and the notes.

when speaking about the best regime of the *Republic* as well as for Islamic Law properly speaking (see, e.g., 41, 44, 47). The relationship between such terms as *sharī‘a*, *nāmūs*, and *al-sharī‘a al-insāniyya* (human law) are too complex to dissect here.²¹ One thing, however, is quite clear: Averroes seems interested in pointing us repeatedly toward the relationship—perhaps harmony, perhaps conflict—between Islamic Law (“our Law” 44, 63, 66) and the laws existing under Plato’s best regime.²² Although these observations are certainly significant for understanding Averroes’s view of the relationship between Plato and *sharī‘a*—and one should therefore keep Averroes’s passing remarks in mind—the ambiguity inherent in Averroes’s style of discussing these issues in the form of a commentary prevents us from reaching a satisfactory conclusion. One thing we can claim with some degree of certainty, however, is that our question is also Averroes’s question. To have a more

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- 21 For a very difficult discussion of this question, see Leo Strauss, “The Law of Reason in The Kuzari,” in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), 95–142. For a shorter and interesting discussion, see Berman, “Review of Averroes’ Commentary,” 437. See also Joel L. Kraemer, “Naturalism and Universalism in Maimonides’ Political and Religious Thought,” in *Me’ah She‘arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isador Twersky*, ed. Ezra Fleischer et al. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001), 47–81, and the translators comments in Alfarabi, *The Political Writings: “Selected Aphorisms” and Other Texts*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 128n6; Alfarabi, *The Political Writings: Volume II Political Regime and Summary of Plato’s Laws*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 111–12, as well as Muhsin Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 213–15.
- 22 Perhaps Averroes’s statement about “in this time of ours and in our Law” and “Laws existing in this time of ours” (63, 66) means that “our Law” or other monotheistic “Laws existing in this time of ours” are equivalent of “the present Law” or more precisely, to borrow Machiavelli’s words, “the present religion.” Averroes and Machiavelli seem to agree that there is nothing final, ultimate, or unique about “the present religion.” Cf. Averroes’s comment about the divine things (47) with Qur’an 33:40 and Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 6 (I Preface). One can even make the claim that Averroes argues for the total independence of the science of the best regime from the divine things: those divine things are entirely and exclusively within the purview of the divine science (21, also 47). Whether this is a promotion or demotion remains an open question.

fruitful understanding of this question, though, one must concentrate on the more practical aspects of Plato’s regime and Averroes’s treatment of them.

Virtue and Obligations of *Sharī‘a*

One major and rather obvious problem with identifying the best regime of the *Republic* with the city ruled by *sharī‘a* is the litany of conspicuous differences between the characteristics of Plato’s regime and well-known precepts of Islamic Law and Islamic teaching in general.²³ A general conflict is that between the Muslim view of happiness and the view of happiness put forth by Plato and championed by Averroes. It is true that Averroes speaks of “human perfections” in the plural form, as if there are several types of perfections available to human beings of different quality, but the highest perfection of man in the best regime is that of the philosopher, a status from which all but a few individuals with extraordinary capacities are barred (23). In a sense, the whole mission of the Prophet—that is, to bring the possibility of happiness to all mankind—seems incompatible with this elitist view advertised by Averroes.²⁴

The same difficulty exists also in the case of courage, the main virtue necessary for warfare. The question of warfare in medieval Islamic Law has both collective and individual aspects. It is not only the question of the Islamic regime engaging in warfare; it also concerns the duty of every Muslim to participate in warfare as a religious obligation. This can be seen in the prominence of this theme in the Qur’an, which encourages believers to fulfill not only their common religious duties but also to participate in war in the name of Allah. One can therefore surmise that, historically speaking, some Muslims participated in war for religious reasons, although one should be very careful to distinguish the classical understanding of this duty with the ideas invented by the contemporary religious fanatics, ideas that have

23 As a way to contrast Averroes’s statements in the *Commentary* with orthodox Islamic Law, in the footnotes I also refer to relevant passages in Averroes’s own treatise on Islamic Law, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*.

24 This view can be attributed to Alfarabi as well. See Leo Strauss, “Fārābī’s Plato,” in *Louis Ginzberg: Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945), 381; Shlomo Pines, “Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājjā, and Maimonides,” in *Collected Works of Shlomo Pines*, ed. Moshe Idel and W. Z. Harvey, vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 404–31.

no precedent in classical sources.²⁵ But according to Plato, the best regime is considered courageous thanks to the courageous character of its fighting members.²⁶ Averroes argues the same point, apparently because the whole duty of engaging in warfare applies only to a part of the population (cf. 24 and 49.18–21 with 49.1–5). In the same way that a man must grow up with the sport of horseracing if he is meant to succeed in that sport, “so ought to be the case in the art of war” (28). Training in the art of war is a presupposition for participation in warfare and exercising the virtue of courage. But this training is reserved exclusively for a certain part of the population. In other words, if a Muslim regime is organized around Plato’s suggestions, those who are not members of the guardian class cannot properly exercise the virtue of courage; nor can they fulfill the obligation of participating in warfare. One can even claim that Averroes’s strategy consists of transforming participation in warfare from a religious duty incumbent on every believer to a purely political role that concerns the rulers exclusively (see 80.24, Lerner’s comment on this passage, and 80.29). When Averroes discusses this issue in his treatise on Islamic Law, he emphasizes the fact that engaging in warfare is a communal obligation (*farḍ al-kifāya*)—that is, “when some undertake it the rest are absolved of it.”²⁷ This would mean that not every citizen is obligated to undertake this duty if there are enough citizens who do. But as we shall see, even this is not without difficulty because of the rather limited number of citizens in Plato’s best regime: it probably cannot rely exclusively on its guardian class to defend itself, at least not in the postclassical age of empires.

We are therefore not surprised to see that the virtue of liberality is not a shared virtue either. Averroes begins his discussion of whether “the virtue of liberality is in all parts of this city or only in one part of it” rather cautiously by promising to “investigate [it] later on.” He seems to point to the problematic character of the question by emphasizing that “there is room for inquiry here” (24). Later on, it turns out that some virtues, including liberality, are in

25 Although the fanatics would, as is expected, dispute our claim. We will soon have the occasion to say more about this question. How the eclipse of traditional Islamic sciences led to the current abuses is explained in John Walbridge, *God and Logic in Islam: The Caliphate of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 157–70.

26 Plato, *Republic* 429b.

27 Averroes, *The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer: A Translation of Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*, trans. Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee and Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, 2 vols. (Reading: Garnet, 1994), 1:454.

need of instruments or external things for their practice: “liberality has need of wealth so that, by means of it, it might perform acts of liberality” (72). We are not concerned here with the needy and the poor, who, because of their poverty, cannot perform acts of liberality, but rather with the guardians, who, despite being the embodiment of the virtues, lack liberality because they have no private property. One might respond that they are exempted from paying the obligatory religious duty of *zakāt* because they do not meet the minimum amount of wealth that makes *zakāt* obligatory (*niṣāb*); but then they cannot give alms (*ṣadaqa*) either.²⁸ This seems to be the reason Averroes refrains from fulfilling his promise to tell us if liberality is the virtue of one part of the city or of all the citizens.

The other aspect of Islamic Law whose existence or nonexistence in the best regime seems significant concerns the status of *ḥudūd*, *qiṣās*, *ta‘zīr*, and the like—that is, the punishments traditionally sanctioned in medieval Islamic Law and believed to have their sources in the Qur’an and Ḥadīth.²⁹ Such punishments—which, by the way, were supposed to be meted out by Muslim judges such as Averroes himself—seem to be nonexistent in the virtuous city, or more precisely are reserved for some specific and nontraditional marginal cases. The discussion of punishments appears in the context of what Averroes calls two ways of teaching (29). The first way of teaching, which consists of different kinds of arguments and which Averroes considers “natural,” will “mostly be possible only for whichever of the citizens grew up with [virtues] from the time of his youth.” The second way of teaching, which is “the way of coercion and of chastisement by blows,” is reserved for “enemies, foes, and him whose way it is not to be aroused to the virtues that are desired of him.” According to Averroes, such violent measures “will not be applied to the members of the virtuous city,” unless in the context of “the art of war and military training” or for instilling discipline in “children, youths, and servants.” Such methods are for Averroes characteristic of the “cities that are not good,” in which the rulers “castigate their people by means of disgrace, occasional flogging with rods, and execution.” Later on, Averroes explains the reason for the nonexistence of such measures in the virtuous city: the citizens of the best regime “are beset by none of the evils besetting the citizens of these cities” (58). On this basis, one should say that the *sharī‘a* of the virtuous regime, at least from the point of view of punishments, would not

28 See Averroes, 1:283–323, 319, 295–313.

29 On this subject, see the rather detailed discussion of punishments in Islamic Law in Averroes, 2:478–553.

resemble the one existing in “these cities” that apply the traditional precepts of Islamic Law. To put it differently, Islamic Law does not promise to root out bad natures as the Platonic regime seems to do. One more far-reaching consideration is the perplexity caused by Averroes’s remark about the condition of the citizens of the best regime and the absence of punitive measures in such a city. Was the *shari‘a*, as it was originally instituted, which included such punitive measures, according to Averroes, meant to organize an inferior regime compared to the regime founded on the *shari‘a* of Plato?

The Question of Warfare

Islamic Law, as a system of regulations and rules, is comprised of Allah’s commands and prescriptions, which are meant to guide the life of Muslims. Islamic Law, therefore, includes more than personal duties and obligations regarding human behavior in its private sphere. It contains more than criminal law, prescriptions of personal behavior, religious worship, and matrimonial law. The principles of the relationship between the Islamic association par excellence, the *umma*, and non-Islamic associations—especially the most radical form of relationships, namely *jihād*—are also a part of Islamic Law. Considering the supreme political importance and character of warfare, it is obvious that this issue would also appear prominently in Averroes’s *Commentary*.

To acquire a proper understanding of *jihād* and Averroes’s conception of it, one must bear an important issue in mind. Contrary to common misconceptions, in medieval Islam *jihād* was not an instrument of converting unbelievers to Islam or of spreading the word of Islam to other lands by the sword. The defensive aspect of *jihād* aside, its most important objective should be understood in mainly political terms, terms common to all expansionist empires in history: the medieval conception of *jihād* is fundamentally of a territorial—that is, of a *political* character. Warfare is in the service of the defense of the lands under the control of the rulers as well as the acquisition of new lands. If such considerations are stated in religious terms, like the expansion of the “Abode of Islam” (*dār al-Islām*), this should not mislead us into believing that what was at issue was the conversion of unbelieving populations or individuals to Islam by the sword. In fact, following clear Qur’anic principles, Islamic Law prohibited forced conversion of the unbelievers (Qur’an 2:256). Furthermore, in most cases, perhaps because of purely mercenary calculations, conversion of non-Muslims was not the preferred course

of actions in the eyes of the conquerors. The conquered populations, the so-called “people of *ḍimma*” (*ahl ul-ḍimma*), were obligated to pay a special tax to their Muslim rulers, and their conversion would have meant the elimination of an important source of revenue.³⁰ Interestingly, however, Averroes’s understanding of *jihād* in his commentary is in this regard more in line with common Western misconceptions than classical practice. He seems mainly concerned with the conversion of the nonvirtuous foreigners to the virtuous way of life through warfare, rather than the expansion of the territory of the virtuous city. This seems to be mainly owing to the specific characteristics of Plato’s best city, which differ from the expansionist Muslim *umma*, a difference of which Averroes is clearly aware. The Platonic virtuous city is of limited size and is not meant to include all mankind. In harmony with this consideration, Averroes reports, Plato imagined his city to have “but one thousand warriors.” His city certainly is not small, but it is not very large either; it is at least not so large as to correspond to a universal association of all men; it is not large enough “to wage war with all the inhabitants of the earth” (45, 46). But Averroes makes some comments on this issue showing that this limit is not the main issue either. Plato’s suggestion “is in accord with his time and according to the nations that were near to them.” In other words, these limits are not set in stone, and if Plato “had comprehended this time of ours he would know that this is absurd” (46). The issue, therefore, is not the practical consideration of subjugating the whole of mankind but its desirability; Averroes is much more interested in the rather marginal issue, from the point of view of Islamic Law, of conversion by force.

This issue is treated under the heading of the two ways of teaching discussed earlier: although punishment, coercion, and chastisement with blows have no place in the *sharīʿa* of the virtuous city, they “will be necessary with respect to the other nations,” with whom “nothing will be without war.” That this concerns the issue of conversion is made explicit by emphasizing the fact

30 Cf. Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 89–90, 92; Asma Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 210, 240, with David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 25. See also Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 40–53, 49; David Wasserstein, “Conversion and the Ahl Al-Ḍimma,” in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 4, *Islamic Cultures and Societies to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Robert Irwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 184–208.

that this “is the way in which matters are arranged in those Laws belonging to this our divine Law.” Averroes clarifies this connection further by indicating that the objective of this use of force is not the teaching of virtue or other general moral habits; “war” is precisely one of the ways “that lead to God (may He be exalted!),” the other one being “speech” (26). If what Averroes alleges about Aristotle, on the authority of Alfarabi, is to be believed, this would mean that courage—the virtue of war *par excellence*—is a preparation for the art of war, for participating in what Aristotle (allegedly) calls “the wars of the virtuous city” (26). Now, it turns out that Plato, contrary to his pseudostudent Aristotle, does not agree with this point, and believes that courage has a more defensive end, “guarding against what might possibly harm the city from without” (26). Then comes a dense back-and-forth discussion of the merits of Plato’s view, according to which the end of courage and the art of war are not to educate other nations in virtue or to lead them to God (27). Whatever Averroes’s last word on this subject is—which remains an apparently intentional ambiguity—he confesses in the end that, if Plato is correct in claiming that such an enterprise encounters problems that make the conversion of all of mankind to the ways that lead to God impossible, one must conclude that those people who lack the necessary nature for receiving such an education “would be worthy of being either killed or enslaved, and their rank in the city would be that of the dumb brutes” (27).

Averroes would not want us to suspect for a moment that the question of warfare is a real point of conflict between Islamic Law and philosophy; hence he quotes later on the saying of *the* Lawgiver: “I have been sent to the Red and the Black.” Averroes’s tactic here is to point to the fact that “Plato does not favor” this view, while claiming simultaneously that the Islamic position does not wholly fall outside the realm of philosophy, because this traditional position is also “Aristotle’s opinion, and it is the indubitable truth” (46).³¹ It would be a mistake, however, to believe that such tactics succeed in hiding the main issue. In the end, Plato’s position is that when strife breaks out among the citizens of the virtuous city and those who are of “their class and [speak] their language in common with them,” those who are of the same “stock and place,” the virtuous city should not “destroy their houses, cut down their trees, or enslave them.” Such strife, according to Averroes, resembles that which “breaks out between members of a single household or

31 See the English translator’s comment: “There is no positive identification of what work of Alfarabi is being referred to here.” *Averroes on Plato’s “Republic,”* trans. Ralph Lerner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 12n26.27.

between lovers.” To clarify his point, Averroes mentions “Greeks, for example,” who should not “enslave Greeks.” But when he mentions that during strife, the opponents should “be called ones who have gone astray” rather than “unbelievers,” and points to the fact that what “Plato asserts differs from what many Lawgivers assert,” we begin to suspect that Greeks are not actually the best examples of such an issue (59–60). Would not Muslim sectarian wars and war against the unbelievers be better examples of the difference of opinion between Plato and “what many Lawgivers assert”? If this is the case, it would mean that, despite Averroes’s masterfully evasive tactics, the conflict between the Islamic view of warfare and the wars of the virtuous city remains a sore point. As mentioned before, Averroes tends to be fixated on what seems to be a rather marginal and exceptional issue in Islamic Law—that is, the question of the conversion of unbelievers by force. Considering that this issue lacks, from the point of view of practice as well as Islamic jurisprudence, the importance that Averroes accords it in his commentary, one suspects that he has something more urgent in mind. Could one say that the issue of warfare is the perfect point of entry for questioning the claim of universality inherent in any universal religion?³²

The Women of *Sharī‘a*

The remarkable character of the *Republic’s* view of women and Averroes’s commentary on it has not escaped the attention of scholars. Plato and Averroes have a considerably more favorable view of the female sex than other major philosophers.³³ The Platonic view of women in the best regime is intimately connected with his egalitarian perspective on the relationship between men and women, as well as the communism of wives, children, and property. To begin with, Plato claims that men and women must fulfill the same tasks, perform the same roles, and receive the same education as the

32 See Joshua Parens, *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions: Introducing Alfarabi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 129n29.

33 For a bibliography on Plato and feminism, see Morag Buchan, “Plato and Feminism,” in *Women in Plato’s Political Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 1999), 135–54. For Averroes’s view of women, see E. I. J. Rosenthal, “The Place of Politics in the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 15, no. 2 (1953): 251–52; Catarina Belo, “Some Considerations on Averroes’s Views Regarding Women and Their Role in Society,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20, no. 1 (December 6, 2008): 1–20.

male citizens of the best regime. They can therefore be members of all three classes of citizens, including the class of soldiers and philosopher rulers, and perform the same tasks: there exist consequently priests as well as priestesses in the best regime.³⁴ This leads to the idea that the strict separation between men and women—common in the Greek society in which women stayed most of their lives indoors—must be abolished.³⁵ The women of the best regime are depicted as participating in military exercises, even as wrestling naked alongside men.³⁶ Socrates also proposes the abolition of private property, which goes hand in hand with the abolition of the private family sphere. As the habitations of the guardians are all in common, there is no private space, and all guardians should have access to the residences of other guardians.³⁷ The institution of marriage is also put at the service of the city. The members of each class marry among themselves in order to give birth to children like themselves. The family is reorganized in such a way that citizens of the same age are considered each other's sisters and brothers, all older citizens their mothers and fathers, and younger citizens their children. As the "siblings" are supposed to marry each other, and because active measures are taken to make it difficult to distinguish those who are born from the same parents, a high chance of incest among members of the guardian class exists in the best regime.³⁸ Socrates also takes the possibility of sexual relationships between those guardians who are over the appropriate age of reproduction into account, a form of free love without the intention of producing children, on the condition that this does not lead to procreation—which would mean the institutionalization of abortion in the virtuous city.³⁹

It is worth remembering that these suggestions of Socrates in the *Republic* are clearly indicated to be radical and outside the accepted norms of the Greek society of his time. We should not, therefore, be surprised that they prove to be outside the field of orthodox ideas from the point of view of medieval Islam as well. Right from the beginning, the idea of the equality of men and women is problematic according to a traditional understanding of

34 Plato, *Republic* 461a.

35 *Ibid.*, 451d.

36 *Ibid.*, 452a–b.

37 *Ibid.*, 416d.

38 *Ibid.*, 461d–e. See the discussion in Stanley Rosen, *Plato's "Republic": A Study* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 166, 179, 191.

39 Plato, *Republic* 461b–c.

Islamic Law.⁴⁰ The subordinate status of women in traditional Islamic Law means that they cannot fulfill the same tasks as men, and that women cannot occupy positions of authority that presuppose they would be granted a degree of superiority over men. Hence the resistance of even some conservative contemporary religious authorities to the idea of women occupying administrative or political positions by claiming that, according to Islamic Law, women cannot exercise *wilāya* over men—that is, cannot “have power over” them.⁴¹ The same is true of the status of women as religious authorities, acting as judges (*qāḍī*), or even leading men in prayer.⁴² If we ignore these points, and the fact that participating in warfare was not considered a duty for women by traditional authorities, more practical issues arise that make the Platonic suggestions regarding women problematic. The mere presence of women in public is incompatible with the regulations of clothing, or *hijāb*, which requires covering the body from head to toe, the so-called “private parts” (*‘awra*). Regardless, having any direct bodily contact with those who are not part of *mahārīm* (first-degree relatives, some second-degree relatives, and some in-laws) is forbidden in Islamic Law, which puts strict barriers between men and women in society. Together, these precepts meant, just as in the case of Plato’s Greek society, that the proper conduct for women was that that they be neither heard nor seen outside their home, which usually entailed a form of seclusion—for instance, the institution of gynaeceums or harems.⁴³

40 For understanding the traditional status of women see Averroes, *The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer*, 1:161, 164–65, 2:45–46, 87, 413, 484–85, 500, 513, 559.

41 Shaheen Sardar Ali, “Women’s Human Rights in Islam: Towards a Theoretical Framework,” *Yearbook of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law Online* 4, no. 1 (1997): 137; Niaz A. Shah, “Women’s Human Rights in the Koran: An Interpretive Approach,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (November 2006): 887–88; Syafiq Hasyim, *Understanding Women in Islam: An Indonesian Perspective* (Jakarta: Solstice Publishing, 2005), 132–34. See also Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, trans. Mary J. Lakeland (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 1–2. For Averroes and the *wilāya* of women specifically, see Averroes, *The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer*, 2:13, 2:488.

42 On the traditional view of women leading men in prayer as well as the question of female judges, see Averroes, *The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer*, 2:553–554, 1:121, 161.

43 See Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 90–94. In this respect, Avicenna

In his treatment of the sections related to the question of what Socrates calls “women’s law,” Averroes begins by saying that, according to Plato, the guardians must copulate with women who have the same natures and have gone through the same training.⁴⁴ Averroes asks whether Plato’s suggestion is true, whether there are “warriors, philosophers, rulers, and the rest” among women. It turns out that men and women have the same natures, and their difference is only one of degrees. Averroes does not see any difficulty in women being warriors, rulers, or philosophers. He is aware that “some Laws ruled out women’s being priests,” or more precisely, acceding to “the high priesthood,” but he explains that it is only because “it was thought that this class existed only infrequently among them” (53). Averroes does not believe so, and he therefore objects directly to what is customary “in these cities,” which place women “at the service of their husbands and [confine them] to procreation, upbringing, and suckling.” In these cities, women resemble plants, “a burden upon the men,” and this is a cause of poverty (54). Averroes claims that all this is self-evident, but when he begins explaining the radical consequences and details of Plato’s suggestions, he switches from speaking in the first-person to explaining things in the form of commentary, by repeatedly prefacing and concluding these ideas with “He said,” “Plato asserts,” “he holds,” and so on. “We ourselves will explain here briefly what Plato asserts about these things” (54): Plato explains that these female guardians “have no cover on them when they practice gymnastic with the men”; they “will be with the men in the same place”; women will “be common to all the men, no one woman living alone with one man as is the case in these cities”; the copulations will be exclusively “between brothers and sisters”; and a man “will not have a child of his own and women of his own” (54.17, 54.18, 55, 56, 58). Averroes believes that “there is room for inquiry” as to whether, as Plato suggests, those who have passed the proper age of copulation should be permitted to copulate for the sake of ejecting superfluous semen (56). Such an inquiry would have probably shown the problematic character of Plato’s suggestions from the point of view of Islamic Law, and would explain why “these cities,” which have their own *shari‘a*, do not implement laws akin to

reflects the traditional view: See Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 373–74 (Cairo 450.14–451.6). For the traditional view reflected in Averroes’s treatise on Islamic Law, see Averroes, *The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer*, 1:36–38, 126–28, 502, 2:2.

44 *Republic* 457b.

those recommended by Plato. The distance between Islamic Law as practiced by Averroes’s contemporaries and Platonic ideas must have been clear to anyone with eyes to see. One cannot call the question of the community of women and children a side issue for Averroes either, because, after all, he calls the community of children and women “one of the most necessary of things” for the establishment of the virtuous city (57).

I should emphasize that we are here concerned with central questions as they were seen through the lens of traditional authorities. The question is not about some minor and inconsequential issues: whether non-Muslim female enemy combatants could be lawfully killed is not decisive—it is more important to see whether women can be considered an essential part of warfare and of an Islamic regime’s own legitimate military enterprise.⁴⁵ Whether women are allowed to bare their faces or not is not crucial—it is, rather, critical whether they can be citizens of the Islamic association, socializing with men.⁴⁶ Whether women can lead other women or their own relatives in household in prayer or not is not crucial—it is decisive whether they can become full-blown Muslim authorities and political leaders.⁴⁷ The question is not about the point of view of some marginal sect either: the idea that *jihād* is a duty for women as well as for men is attributed to the Khawarij; the Qarmatians were considered heretics because it was claimed that among them women were not veiled, were monogamous, and that women and men mingled and socialized together.⁴⁸ As one can clearly see from Averroes’s

45 Belo, “Some Considerations,” 8.

46 Belo, 17n48.

47 Belo, 15, 16. If the terms used by Averroes in the original Arabic were *imām* and *imāma kubra* (53), he would have been referring not only to the person leading the public in prayer but also to the political role of the caliph. See Rosenthal, “The Place of Politics in the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd,” 250–51; Jameleddine Ben-Abdeljelil, *Ibn Ruschds Philosophie interkulturell gelesen* (Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, 2005), 29n24; Adrian Sackson, *Joseph Ibn Kaspi: Portrait of a Hebrew Philosopher in Medieval Provence* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 204n132, 286n109; Shaheen Sardar Ali, “Women’s Human Rights in Islam: Towards a Theoretical Framework,” 138.

48 Hussan S. Timani, *Modern Intellectual Readings of the Kharijites* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 97. For this question and also for a good overview and bibliography about the status of women in medieval Muslim societies, see Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 66, 99.

own treatise on Islamic Law, these are not the ideas with which Averroes must have been concerned while commenting on Plato's *Republic*.

Conclusion

What I have tried to demonstrate is the reality of the tension between what Averroes presents as the virtuous city and the well-known precepts of Islamic Law as those were widely recognized in his time. My aim was to show that the issue of the relationship between the Platonic model and Islamic Law cannot be easily depicted as one of perfect harmony, and that it would be a mistake to presuppose that Averroes, as a knowledgeable thinker and practicing judge, may have been unaware of these conflicts and tensions. Some of these issues are clearly referred to in Averroes's commentary, and others are so apparent that it is unreasonable to believe Averroes was unaware of them. It is also clear that Averroes tends to emphasize certain conflicts while still refraining from passing a direct judgment that might decide the affair one way or another. What Averroes actually thought about these issues cannot be known with certainty. It is perhaps characteristic of very old writings, written during times in which perfect frankness was not a matter of course, that they confront us with more questions than answers.

One final issue that must be taken into account is the pitfall of mistaking the historico-intellectual character of such inquiries with the more socio-political concerns of our contemporary thinkers, intellectuals, and citizens. It is certain that the principal elements of the traditional understanding of the Qur'an and Ḥadīth, as reflected in the consensus of the jurists of the major schools and in an orthodox understanding of Islamic Law, are *not* uncontroversial; more progressive interpretations of these sources are conceivable. There is some evidence that women participated in warfare during Muhammad's lifetime; the Prophet's wife Aisha was an authoritative transmitter of traditions, and a legal authority, and some Muslim women in the early and medieval period imposed monogamy on their husbands. There is ample material for formulating a system of Islamic Law more compatible with modern ideas and the aspirations of Muslims who wish to live in harmony with unbelievers and believers of other religions — religions which have also gone through a comparable long process of modernization and reformation, which we tend to forget. The orthodox Islamic Law is the result of different historical developments, the background of Islamic societies (which had much in common with non-Islamic societies of their time), and decisions

made by the traditional authorities in the first centuries of Islamic history, as well as passages in the Qur’an and *hadith*, some of which are ambiguous and some of which are not. Changing any one of these elements would have had a considerable impact on what was and is considered Islamic Law and orthodox Muslim belief. But these questions, as well as other issues and practices, which are generally important in their own right and are especially important from the contemporary and practical point of view, are different from an inquiry into the proper historical context for reading Averroes’s commentary. These two issues must be distinguished in any reasonable attempt at understanding historical texts like those of Averroes. Such historical inquiries can be a first step in the inquiry into Averroes’s commentary as potentially being a subtle attempt, worthy of imitation, in reforming the religious perspective of his contemporaries.

Chapter Eight

An Indecisive Truth

Divine Law and Philosophy in the *Decisive Treatise* and *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"*

Karen Taliaferro

“Of what use,” Ralph Lerner asks in his introduction to Averroes’s *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* “is this pagan closet philosophy to men who already hold what they believe to be the inestimable gift of a divinely revealed Law, a *sharī‘a*?”¹ In other words, once one has God’s direct revelation concerning how to live, does one need philosophy? The answer to this question matters both for the standing of *falsafa* (Hellenistic philosophy) in Islamic intellectual history as well as for ongoing disputes in Islamic societies concerning the respective roles of *sharī‘a* and human wisdom. Does divinely revealed Law, *sharī‘a*, yield the same knowledge as philosophy, or *ḥikma* (literally “wisdom”), to use Averroes’s terms in the *Decisive Treatise*? Or is there something necessary in each that the other cannot supply? This question conceals something of a dilemma. If the first formulation is correct, one or the other of *sharī‘a* or *ḥikma* would seem to be redundant—a charge Averroes himself addresses in the *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* as

1 All references to Averroes’s *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* unless otherwise noted, come from Ralph Lerner, trans., *Averroes on Plato’s “Republic”* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), here xiii. I use Lerner’s numbering. As a note, throughout this essay, “Law” with a capital L is used to designate divine law (*torah, sharī‘a*).

I discuss below.² If, on the other hand, philosophy is needed in addition to *sharī'a*, this can call into question the sufficiency of revelation. This returns us to Lerner's question above, for if the *sharī'a* represents the fullness of divine revelation, to claim that it *needs* the merely human *ḥikma* may be blasphemous. This essay addresses the relationship between *sharī'a* and human wisdom through a reading of Averroes's *Decisive Treatise* and his *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."* I attempt to show that Averroes's firm reliance on teleology in the *Commentary* complements what would otherwise appear to be the primacy of *sharī'a* in the *Decisive Treatise*. Together, I argue, these two texts paint a clearer picture of the interdependence of *ḥikma* and *sharī'a* than either would alone suggest.

Traditional interpretations of the two works suggest dramatically different messages of Averroes concerning the respective standings of *sharī'a* and *ḥikma*. Ralph Lerner and E. I. J. Rosenthal, each a translator of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* (hereafter *Commentary*), disagreed rather sharply on the status of *human wisdom* vis-à-vis *sharī'a* in Averroes's thought. To Rosenthal, in both the *Decisive Treatise* and the *Commentary*, Averroes "establishes in unequivocal terms the supreme authority of the Sharī'a."³ Lerner, by contrast, writes that the *Commentary* "point[s] to the utility, relevance, even necessity of political science" such as that discovered by the Greeks and further developed by the *falāsifa* (*Hellenistic Muslim philosophers*). To Lerner's Averroes, this political science is "far from being superseded by the sharī'a" but is rather still urgently needed in Averroes's own time.⁴

In revisiting this issue, this essay considers nuances in both the *Decisive Treatise* and Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* especially the latter's Second Treatise, in which Averroes compares and contrasts conventional views on the end of man (conventional, that is, to his Almohad-governed society) with those of the *mutakallimūn* and finally with his own views on the matter. His discussion draws out shared traits, as well as differences, among the views that bear heavily on our interpretation of the relationship

2 See 66.15, which I discuss in part II of this chapter.

3 E. I. J. Rosenthal, "The Place of Politics in the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 15, no. 2 (1953): 246. Rosenthal draws this conclusion from four of Averroes's works, including the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* the *Decisive Treatise* (*Faṣl al-Maqāl*), the *Incoherence of the Incoherence* (*Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*), and the *Exposition of the Methods of Proof* (*Kashf 'an Manāḥij*).

4 Lerner, *Commentary*, xiii–xiv. Concerning the first quotation, Lerner cites 21.7 and 105.5–6.

between *sharīʿa* and human wisdom in Averroes's thought. Overall, it is clear that Lerner's view of the connection between divine Law and human wisdom is certainly more plausible than that of Rosenthal, which is not well supported by the text. Nevertheless, Rosenthal's reading, in its own way, does help elucidate the nuances of Averroes's very carefully forged harmony of divine Law and human wisdom.

I. *The Decisive Treatise: Sharīʿa's Case for Philosophy*

In *The Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom*, Averroes famously asserts that *ḥikma* (wisdom, often translated as "philosophy") is in harmony with *sharīʿa*, for, in his words, "truth does not oppose truth; rather, it agrees with it and bears witness to it."⁵ If we are to take Averroes at his word, it would seem that *sharīʿa* and *ḥikma* inform each other. With Thomas Aquinas, and to some extent Maimonides as well, neither reason nor revelation can, on its own, reveal the fullness of truth; each one requires the other.

Yet this treatment of *sharīʿa* and human wisdom raises an important issue. Averroes establishes the obligation to study philosophy through a divine command: he opens the *Decisive Treatise* by stating, "That the Law calls for consideration of existing things by means of the intellect and for pursuing cognizance of them by means of it is evident from various verses in the Book of God . . . [Qur'an 59:2] 'Consider, you who have sight' . . . and so on, in innumerable other verses."⁶ The task of philosophy is thereby justified not on its own terms or for any self-evident worth, but because reflection is commanded by God. In fact, Averroes describes his task in the *Decisive Treatise* as "investigat[ing], from the perspective of Law-based reflection, whether reflection upon philosophy (*ḥikma*) and the sciences of logic is permitted, prohibited, or commanded . . . by the Law."⁷ In other words, the fundamental question of inquiry, prior to what philosophy itself says, is whether the Law (*sharīʿa*) commands or allows it in the first place. Philosophy is thereby effectively restrained from the outset: *sharīʿa* is the prior truth; what one

5 All references to the *Decisive Treatise* are from Averroes, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, trans. Charles Butterworth (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2008), here p. 9, par. 12.

6 Averroes, *Decisive Treatise*, 2, par 2.

7 Averroes, *Decisive Treatise*, 1, par. 1.

may discover through *ḥikma* is limited to what is compatible with it. (This is why it must first be established whether *sharīʿa* indicates a divine sanction of *ḥikma*, rather than the other way around.) If this is correct, then Averroes's unity of truth is less of an achievement than it appears in such striking statements as "truth does not oppose truth." The harmony turns out to hinge on whether Averroes has rightly understood the Qur'anic command to "consider," as well as the other "verses of the Book of God" that he has in mind—a fine starting point, but not one that is immune to refutation.⁸

Of course, as Charles Butterworth points out, the *Decisive Treatise* is framed as "something of a plea before a tribunal in which the divine law of Islam is the sole authority."⁹ In other words, in no way does Averroes preclude another, even better, basis for studying philosophy than that the *sharīʿa* enjoins it, but it is the role of the *Decisive Treatise* to make the case on that particular basis. As Butterworth notes, although Averroes "defends or explains [*ḥikma*] in terms set by [*sharīʿa*], he does not thereby concede its [i.e., *ḥikma*'s] subservience. . . . Neither priority nor ascendance is at issue; the connection to be determined eventually is close to one of parity—that is, agreement on all levels."¹⁰ Butterworth is surely correct in this; nevertheless, the text does seem to assert that, rather than explain how, philosophy will always agree with Law. If that agreement is simply an a priori one, is it not circumscribed and predetermined? If so, it seems that philosophy is in fact precariously close to being "subservient" to the Law. If not, however, then perhaps a hierarchy is indeed necessary in the final analysis, for either *sharīʿa* or *ḥikma* will need to serve as the explanatory principle in interpreting the other.

Given this uncertainty—if the *Decisive Treatise* should turn out not to be so decisive after all—then perhaps Averroes's commentary on one of the pre-eminent works of *falsafa* can elucidate his rationale for studying philosophy, and thereby help answer Lerner's question: "What is the standing of pagan philosophy in the Muslim community?"¹¹ Put differently, if studying philosophy requires divine legal sanction, then it would seem unusual that Averroes

8 The context of the Qur'anic command, found at 59:2, is quite different from Averroes's use of it. There, believers are warned to "consider" the divine punishment inflicted on the People of the Book who did not believe Mohammad's message.

9 Butterworth, introduction to Averroes's *Decisive Treatise*, xx.

10 Butterworth, introduction to Averroes's *Decisive Treatise*, xx.

11 Lerner, *Commentary*, xiii.

would bother to study, much less comment on, a work like Plato's *Republic*, which was written before the *shari'a* was given. Reading Averroes's commentary, then, might give us fuller insight into why a Muslim should study *hikma*.

II. *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"*: Man's End as a Philosophical Question

One possible explanation to the puzzle outlined above, that of how *hikma* and *shari'a* cohere, is that the *Decisive Treatise* was of a more popular genre than Averroes's philosophical works, a sort of *haute vulgarisation* essay intended, as Shlomo Pines said of Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, "not for complete philosophers, but for perplexed ones"—for Muslims seeking to understand their faith in light of human wisdom.¹² When writing to fellow philosophers, on the other hand—as he surely would be doing in his *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"*—Averroes could be more forthcoming about the proper status of philosophy. This generic difference would explain why, in the *Decisive Treatise*, "the question of the right to practice philosophy seems to be a question which religious law should decide," whereas "in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* Averroes views philosophy and the philosopher as having the supreme authority."¹³

Pines's explanation surely contains a great deal of merit; he is not alone in suggesting that Averroes's position might have been more foundationally philosophical than religious.¹⁴ Still, it may be possible to read the two pieces as less conflicted, even duplicitous, than the foregoing might imply. I submit that a key to understanding Averroes's views on the relationship between *shari'a* and *hikma* is his description of man's end in the *Commentary's* Second Treatise, at least when this text is read in light of the *Decisive Treatise*. The doctrine expounded is in itself hardly revolutionary; that the Commentator on Aristotle would conceive of man as having an end, a *telos*, is surely

12 Shlomo Pines, "Notes on Averroes's Political Teaching," trans. Alexander Orwin (in present volume), especially pp. 158–59.

13 Ibid.

14 I have in mind Richard Taylor's comment that Averroes "deliberately chose not to reveal that the foundation of this legal treatise, the Unity of Truth, is in fact taken directly from Aristotle"—that is, from *Prior Analytics* book 1, ch. 32, 47a8–9 (according to Taylor's analysis). See Richard Taylor, "'Truth Does Not Contradict Truth': Averroes and the Unity of Truth," *Topoi* 19 (2000), 6–7.

obvious. What may not be obvious is how Averroes's harmony of *sharī'a* and *hikma* can perhaps *only* work with and through this teleological conception of humanity.

Averroes asks whether the end of men is “nothing more than preserving and protecting their bodies and preserving their senses,” or whether man “has an end that has something better in it than existence at the level of the necessary.” He naturally opts for the latter position, then considers what that “something better” might be. Some people think it is wealth, some honor, others pleasure, and others dominion (65.30–66.5).¹⁵ But what does Averroes say it is? At first, he doesn't tell us, at least, not in his own voice. Rather, he mentions what “the Laws [*torot*] existing in this time of ours assert concerning this matter,” which is that man's end is to do “what God (may He be exalted!) wills . . .”¹⁶ According to this view, the Law expresses the will of God, and its morality is also “identical with the intention of philosophy in genus and purpose.” Moreover, “in the opinion of all these [i.e., who take this position], the good, the bad, the useful, the harmful, the beautiful, and the base are something existing by nature, not by convention.” Thus, what is good is good by nature—that is, universal—and the good is reflected equally in philosophy and in the divine Law. In this view, “whatever leads to the end is good and beautiful, and whatever hinders one from it is bad and base” (66.15–23). Morality is aligned not only with divine law but with human ends—which, again, are to do the will of God. A virtuous circle, and a decisive harmony.

This position is a convenient one: it brings together the will of God, Divine Law, philosophy, and nature. But is this Averroes's own opinion?

15 As mentioned earlier, all references to the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* come from the Lerner edition. Note that the Rosenthal edition has different numbering.

16 I take *torot* to translate *sharā' i'* (and *torah* as *sharī'a*) primarily because it is the most direct translation and secondarily because I am following Lerner's lead in understanding capital-L “Law” as having divine connotation (see his note on 26.16, where he states explicitly that “Law” “is used in this translation consistently and exclusively to render *torah* [= *sharī'a*]; p.12). Nevertheless, I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that we cannot be certain that what Samuel ben Judah translated as *torah* or *torot* was always *sharī'al sharā' i'*, for in Samuel ben Judah's Hebrew translation of Averroes's *Middle Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, *torah* was used for *nāmūs*. Still, I think the assumption is justified here owing to the context: if the Law states that man's end is to do the will of God, it seems that it must find its origin in divine law at some point.

There are at least two reasons that it could not be. The first, more immediately apparent, reason is that Averroes introduces the discussion by addressing “what the Laws existing in this time of ours assert,” and he finishes by pointing out that “many of those of our region hold this opinion concerning this Law of ours” (66.22); this implies that the foregoing opinion is not his own.

The second reason, however, may be that this view is still too closely linked to God’s will as the basis for studying philosophy, as discussed in the context of the *Decisive Treatise*. Again, according to the above view, man’s end is to do God’s will—but “the only way of knowing this matter of what it is God wills of [man] is prophecy” (66.14). But if the end of man can only be known through prophecy, not through philosophy, this apparent harmony of divine Law and philosophy is only that: apparent. Even if the will of God is “identical with the intention of philosophy in genus and purpose,” one must ultimately only know both through revelation. And if revelation is the source of all such knowledge, then philosophy is reduced to handmaid status—decidedly different from the “milk-sister” (*al-ukht al-raḍī‘a*) Averroes calls it in the *Decisive Treatise*.¹⁷

It is perhaps important, then, that Averroes immediately moves on from his discussion of “the Laws existing in this time of ours” to “the people of our nation known as the Mutakallimūn,” whose ideas about God’s will Averroes describes in the following terms: “what God wills has no definite nature”; “there is nothing beautiful or base other than by fiat”; and, “there is no end of man other than by fiat” (66.22–25). This way of conceiving of the end of man begins by first laying down attributes of God, then making reality, including man’s end, fit whatever would follow from those attributes (66.30–32). In other words, revelation is the starting point of all inquiry, and “nature” is devoid of any inherent traits; even man’s end can only be declared by God’s will, through “fiat.” Averroes pronounces the *mutakallimūn*’s view as “an opinion close to sophistry, very far from the nature of man, and far

17 Averroes, *Decisive Treatise*, 32, par. 59. I raise this description—one that is perhaps rather obviously not Averroes’s own—because it is important to distinguish it from the interpretation I am ultimately endorsing, which arrives at a similar (though not the same) conclusion through a different path, and the devil (or in this case, the angel) is in the details. In the above position, Law and philosophy are in harmony, but this is only because the harmony is stipulated from the outset and seems to be a happy coincidence rather than a logical harmony. As such, the harmony is a fragile one, one that can be upset whenever one shows this not to be the case.

from being the content of a Law” (66.30). This opinion, it is clear, can effect no harmony between *shari‘a* and *ḥikma*, for it instrumentalizes philosophy for the sake of the Law—and a crude understanding of the Law at that.

On the face of it, the *mutakallimūn* view is a far cry from that held by “those of our region . . . concerning this Law of ours,” for at least partisans of “the Laws existing in this time of ours” hold that good and evil are things existing by nature, not by sheer voluntarist fiat. But one wonders whether, in discussing the *mutakallimūn*’s position immediately after “these Laws existing in our time,” Averroes might not be suggesting that the two views of the Law are closer than they seem at first glance. In a sense, these two views represent Islamic versions of the two horns of the Euthyphro dilemma: in the first instance, that of the “Laws existing in this time of ours,” the Law only declares something to be pious because it is in fact so; wisdom and Law are so aligned that there appears to be near perfect overlap. Of course, this runs not only into problems of redundancy—and as Averroes mentions, some will claim that “these Laws only follow ancient wisdom”—but more fundamentally, there would need to be an independent standard higher than both Law and wisdom or philosophy to which each would recur. The other horn of the dilemma is the *mutakallimūn*’s views, according to which whatever God declares is pious because God so declared it. This leads, in Averroes’s description, to a state in which “all things are possible,” for the pious, or the good, is whatever God in His omnipotence declares it to be (66.15–30)—certainly leaving no room for wisdom or philosophy.¹⁸

It is in the confines of this critique of the *mutakallimūn*, though, that Averroes quietly asserts his own position: “These, then, are the opinions of the multitude concerning the end of man, *which is his happiness*” (67.3, emphasis added). Here Averroes is quite clearly writing in his own voice, not recounting views of either partisans of “the Laws existing in this time of ours,” nor those of the *mutakallimūn*, but rather stating his own opinion about the true ends of man. This tells us two things: first, Averroes is using as a fundament of his reasoning about the end of man a postulate from Aristotle—namely, that man’s end is happiness (see *Nicomachean Ethics* book 1, chapter 4).¹⁹ This is important in its own right, but when we read it in light of the *Decisive Treatise* we can extrapolate a reason for studying *ḥikma*:

18 See Plato, *Euthyphro*, especially beginning at 7a. In *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 6ff.

19 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999).

the justification for studying philosophy is not only that the Law commands it, as the *Decisive Treatise* assumes (at least for the sake of the treatise's argument); rather, one studies philosophy for the same ultimate reason that one does everything else—to obtain happiness.

This brief mention of happiness as man's end is not Averroes's sole reference in the *Commentary*; he proceeds from the present section to a substantial discussion of "what ought to be accepted from the physicist concerning this," which turns out to be the same thing: happiness is man's end (68.9). Here, though, rather than merely asserting happiness as man's end, Averroes walks the reader through an Aristotelian exploration of the relationship of the soul to the body, the human perfections (theoretical, practical, cogitative, and moral, 68.25), and the consequent classes of men, since "it is evident that they [the perfections] are not possible in all individual humans" (68.30). In all of this, however, he does not stray from the Aristotelian principle that happiness is the end of man, even as, one cannot help but think, happiness may not be the end of any *given* man, for this natural classification of men dictates that some men are "lorded over and subject" (69.20–30).²⁰

Why does this not mean that Averroes is subverting the *shari'a* and reverting to a classical Greek notion of the ends of man—that is, one bereft of revelation? That cannot be ruled out; as with the discussion below of what I call "human-divine laws," we must leave open the possibility that his recourse to divine law is nothing but a fig leaf to cover a fundamentally nonreligious philosophical outlook. I do not believe this is the case, however. This is partly, as I discuss below, because Averroes seems to have viewed the activity of philosophy as a sort of act of worship. But beyond that, his very conception of happiness seems to have been Islamized, as it were: in 31.25, Averroes writes, "Hence, if happiness were represented as the health of the soul, and its immortality and eternal life, that would be a fitting story." Happiness is man's end, but, to borrow from Aquinas, it is a blessed happiness, one that takes into account "immortality and eternal life."

20 All of this is in keeping with earlier references to happiness in book 1 of the *Commentary*; in I.30.10, for instance, Averroes quotes Alfarabi in *The Attainment of Happiness* in referring to "ultimate happiness" as "the end of the acts of the human virtues" (30.10). Returning to a more clearly Aristotelian notion (see *Nicomachean Ethics* book 1, chapter 13), at 68.11 he states, "That is why it is said in the definition of happiness that it is an activity of the rational soul that is in accord with what is required by virtue."

III. Human-Divine Law: The *Sharī‘a* of the Philosophers

I have so far in this essay adopted the categories of the *Decisive Treatise*—namely, *hikma* and *sharī‘a*—in the attempt to answer Lerner’s opening question: why study philosophy (*hikma*) when one has revealed Law (*sharī‘a*)? However, unlike in the *Decisive Treatise*, in the *Commentary* Averroes speaks not only of “Law” in its divine sense (*torah*, *sharī‘a*, divine law), but also of a “human Law”—seemingly a contradiction in terms. In 62.28–63.2, he describes what amounts to a virtuous circle that seems to be required in order to ensure the virtuous city: such a city comes about when those who are fit to rule both in body and soul grow up in it—but the virtuous city is required for such people to come into being in the first place. In this context, Averroes suggests that these potential guardians could grow up in such a way that they can go beyond the “general common *nomos*,” or conventional law, but that “their particular Law (*torah*) would not be far from the human Law (*torah*); wisdom would have been completed in their time” (62.28–63.2). What is this human *torah*—and how can there be a human-divine law?

Lerner describes the human *torot* as “the laws by which philosophers govern themselves”; Butterworth, likewise, describes them as “laws grounded in the understanding of the philosophers.”²¹ Going further, Butterworth writes, “the excellence of any particular revealed law is to be judged from the perspective of the human *torot* or *sharā‘i‘* . . .”²² More bluntly, divine law is judged by the human-divine law of the philosophers.

This is a remarkable claim, however, for it suggests that what is typically considered the purview of God, the *torah* or *sharī‘a*, can also issue from (at least some) humans. Still, it is difficult to avoid this conclusion. In the essay translated in the present volume, Pines calls attention to further evidence that *torot* or *sharā‘i‘* can emerge from the philosophers rather than directly from God only. As he points out, Averroes (following Alfarabi) equates “philosopher,” “king,” “Lawgiver” and “Imam” in 61.14, but he states that it is “perhaps” only “preferable, not out of necessity” that this king-Lawgiver-Imam

21 Lerner, *Commentary*, 75; Charles Butterworth, “Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule: A Study of Averroes’s *Commentary on Plato’s ‘Republic’*,” Cairo Papers in Social Science 9:1 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1986), 49.

22 Butterworth, “Philosophy, Ethics and Virtuous Rule,” 48.

should also be a prophet.²³ Pines concludes from this that “it is crystal clear that this city does not need to be equivalent to the Muslim city or any other religious city.” In this case, the Lawgiver—who, again, must be a philosopher, according to Averroes—may himself be able to issue *torah* or *sharī‘a* without speaking directly from God.²⁴ I am not as confident as Pines that this is “crystal clear”; after all, in writing that it is “perhaps” only “preferable” rather than necessary that the Lawgiver-philosopher-king-imam be also a prophet, Averroes seems to be hedging, and we cannot be certain in which direction his hesitancy tended. Still, if indeed there is a human *torah*, which the text seems to indicate, then this passage tells us who the Lawgiving human would be: the philosopher-king, who is also an *imām*.²⁵

Importantly, this notion of a Lawgiving philosopher finds expression elsewhere in Averroes’s writings. As Richard Taylor has pointed out, Averroes writes in his *Long Commentary on the “Metaphysics” of Aristotle* of a “*sharī‘a* specific to the [wise]” (*al-sharī‘a al-khāṣṣa bi-l-ḥukumā*).²⁶ This rather jarring notion of a divine law reserved for the philosophers is justified, to Averroes, because “the Creator is not worshipped by a worship more noble

23 See 61.18: “As to whether it should be made a condition that he be a prophet, why there is room here for [penetrating] investigation. . . Perhaps if this were so, it would be with respect to what is preferable, not out of necessity.”

24 Pines, “Notes on Averroes’s Political teaching.”

25 Averroes tells us precisely what he means by this term in 61.14: “Hence these terms are, as it were, synonymous—i.e., ‘philosopher,’ ‘king,’ ‘Lawgiver’; and so also is ‘Imam,’ since *imām* in Arabic means one who is followed in his actions. He who is followed in these actions by which he is a philosopher, is an Imam in the absolute sense.” There is at least one earlier instance of this human-divine Law. At 26.16–17, speaking of the necessity of the use of war for “the coercion of difficult nations,” Averroes writes, “This is the way in which matters are arranged in those [Laws] belonging to this our divine Law [that] proceed like the human Laws . . .” The context is not especially rich for gathering any further evidence directly from this passage as to the identity of the human *torot*. But it is consistent with the understanding I am here positing, namely, that the human Law (i.e., human *torot* or *sharā‘i*) is the law of the philosophers and as such is at once human and divine: it is human in that it comes from the human philosophers, but because wisdom, *ḥikma*, is ultimately something from God, this Law is at the same time correctly called divine.

26 As I am indebted to Alexander Orwin for pointing out, this could also translate as “*sharī‘a* specific to the wise [people].”

than the knowledge of those things that He produced which lead to the knowledge in truth of His essence—may He be exalted!”²⁷ In other words, the highest worship of God is that of the philosophers precisely because of their philosophical activity.

IV. Can *Hikma* Judge *Shari‘a*?

To interpret Averroes in this light seems fair to the texts as well as intellectually honest: it forges a real accord between *shari‘a* (or *torah*) and *hikma* without feigning a more facile harmony that reduces to the first horn of the dilemma I outlined above. But this claim that the “excellence” of a divine law could be judged by a human law—even the highest human law, a philosophical law, what Averroes is calling the “human *torah*”—does seem to elevate philosophy to a stature that might cast a shadow over the sufficiency of God’s revelation. Can a faithful Muslim hold this?

My interpretation above of the *Decisive Treatise* makes some assumptions that require justification. I have been interpreting Averroes’s maxim that “truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it” to mean that the two forms of truth are semantically interchangeable—that is, that *shari‘a* does not oppose *hikma* but agrees with it and bears witness to it, and that *hikma* does the same for *shari‘a*. But for E. I. J. Rosenthal, this is not the harmony Averroes intended. In the *Decisive Treatise*, Rosenthal writes, Averroes “establishes in unequivocal terms the supreme authority of the *Shari‘a*”—a position that, when the *Decisive Treatise* is taken alone, might seem warranted by Averroes’s framing of the study of *hikma* in terms dictated by the *shari‘a*.²⁸ Likewise, to Rosenthal, in the *Commentary*, although Averroes “considers Platonic notions—conditioned by Greek concepts and institutions—as fully valid general principles, applicable to Muslim concepts

27 Richard Taylor, “Averroes on the *Shari‘ah* of the Philosophers,” in *The Judeo-Christian-Islamic Heritage: Philosophical & Theological Perspectives*, ed. Richard C. Taylor and Irfan A. Omar (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2012), 283. The quotation is from Averroes, *Tafsir mā ba‘d at-Ṭabī‘at*, ed. Maurice Bouyges, 4 vols. (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1938–52). https://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1263&context=phil_fac. The translation is Taylor’s.

28 E. I. J. Rosenthal, “The Place of Politics in the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1953), 246.

and institutions,” he does so in a peculiar way, reflecting a signature “trend in his political thought” of “identify[ing] . . . the Ideal State with the Islamic, i.e., Shari‘a, State,” and insisting on the “superiority of the excellent religious law.”²⁹ On this view, in other words, *hikma* may accord with and bear witness to *shari‘a*, but it does so in a subservient way; it is not clear that *shari‘a* bears witness to *hikma*. The harmony is one of purposes—*shari‘a* shares an identical purpose with *hikma*—but not a harmony of status; rather, the divine law is unambiguously the superior source.³⁰ In this case, the problem I described in part I of this essay—that the *Decisive Treatise* seems to justify the study of philosophy only once one assumes the truth and superiority of the *shari‘a*—is not a problem but rather a premise that is baked into Averroes’s thought.

Were Rosenthal correct, this could mean that Averroes proceeded as he did in the *Decisive Treatise*, justifying the study of *hikma* by means of the divine command, because that is its only final justification (and the final justification, one might speculate, of everything else). And indeed, supporters of this position might ask why else, in that work’s conclusion, Averroes calls *hikma* “the companion of the Law and its *milk* sister”—that is, not its sister, full stop—suggesting that one is the true daughter and the other the adopted one.³¹ Beyond this, the view that *shari‘a* enjoys clear superiority over *hikma* in Averroes’s thought has a good deal of common-sense appeal. After all, as suggested above, a faithful Muslim, an *imām* and a *qāḍī* like Averroes was, could hardly hold that there is any superior obligating source than the *shari‘a* without denying a basic principle of the Muslim faith.

There is another reason, though, that *shari‘a* might be the decidedly “supreme authority.” As Rosenthal pointed out, the *Decisive Treatise* makes clear that the *shari‘a* is for all people, whereas *the* capacity for understanding the fullness of truth varies from person to person (some will understand the highest level of demonstrative truth; some will only understand dialectical or rhetorical presentations of it). All people have access to *shari‘a*, and therefore

29 Rosenthal, “Place of Politics,” 250.

30 Rosenthal, “Place of Politics,” 246.

31 Averroes, *Decisive Treatise*, 32, par. 59. I am indebted to the participants of the tenth colloquium of the Société Internationale de l’Histoire des Sciences et de la Philosophie Arabes et Islamiques (September 2019, Naples, Italy), for a provocative discussion about this term. The critical point to my interpretation is that they are nourished by the same source.

all have access to ultimate happiness.³² *Shari‘a*, Rosenthal writes, provides “a bond that unites the elect few and the masses as *muslimūn*, as believers in Allah, to Whose Will—announced through Muhammad—they willingly submit.” This, for Rosenthal, is in contrast to human law (*nomos*), which is “the imposing creation of the sovereign reason of free but fallible men” and which “recognizes the gulf that separates the elect from the masses as final: it can offer neither Faith nor Hope nor Charity to bridge it.”³³ In other words, it is *through revelation* that all people can receive the means to final happiness, whereas through reason, only the elect—the philosophers—have such access.

Again, this is surely not an astounding position coming from a *qāḍī* and *imām*—of course it would be revelation that would ultimately serve to save all people. But Rosenthal is missing something important in seeing in Averroes’s harmony a simple hierarchy. First and most apparent is his contrast of the *nomos* (human law or conventional law) with the *shari‘a* without addressing the critical third type of law, the “human *torah*” or human divine Law, which, again, functions to judge “the excellence of any particular revealed law” in Butterworth’s description. This is crucial. Rosenthal himself writes that it is the “*excellent* religious law,” not just any religious law, that is

32 Averroes divides “methods for bringing about assent [to the Law]” (*ṭarīq al-taṣḍīq*) into (1) those premises that are certain and generally accepted and whose conclusions are “matters taken in themselves” (*‘arḍ li-natājihā an-akhadhat an-fushā*; [essentially, “literally”]); these do not admit of interpretation. (2) Second are those statements the premises of which are certain and generally accepted but the conclusions of which are “likenesses of the matters intended to be brought forth” (*al-natā’ij mathalāt li-al-umūr allatī quṣīda intājuhā* [essentially, “figurative”]); these do admit of interpretation. (3) Third are those the premises which are not certain but whose conclusions are literal rather than figurative; only the premises of these are open to interpretation. Finally, (4) those statements the premises of which are uncertain and the conclusions of which are figurative; these require interpretation, and—and this is the key point—it is “the duty of the select to interpret them.” The masses do not possess the capacity for demonstrative (*burhānī*) reflection and therefore are not permitted to interpret the Law; the fourfold division of the Law above therefore indicates the limitations set to the understanding of the Law on the part of common people. See Butterworth, *Decisive Treatise*, 24–25, par. 40–41.

33 Rosenthal, “Place of Politics,” 276.

superior to Greek wisdom.³⁴ Surely, this raises the all-important question of how one would know when the religious Law is excellent, and what criteria one would employ in that evaluation—a question Averroes himself alludes to when, in the *Decisive Treatise*, he writes of “injuries” done to the Law (see *DT* 59.25) and when, in the *Commentary*, he complains quite loudly about the treatment of women in his own place and time for being limited to considerations of procreation and nursing.³⁵ In other words, it seems clear that to Averroes, one needs aid in interpreting the Law rightly—in order to ensure its excellence, to use Rosenthal’s terms; indeed, this is one of the principal points of the *Decisive Treatise*. How, then, does one recognize excellence, if not through the study of *ḥikma*—especially as practiced in the *falsafa* tradition that Averroes himself devoted himself to transmitting to the Muslim community?

Yet there is a more foundational problem with this simple hierarchy of *shari‘a* and *ḥikma* that reveals itself in Rosenthal’s own description of the *shari‘a*: “as the declared will of God [the *shari‘a*] is not only starting point and centre for the *falāsifa*; it postulates certain beliefs and convictions which determine their speculation, circumscribe it, and exclude from rational interpretation some of its fundamental pronouncements.”³⁶ It is difficult to understand, though, how this view of the *shari‘a* and *ḥikma* could describe what Averroes articulated in the *Decisive Treatise*, where those with demonstrative (*burhānī*) reflection—philosophers—have the greatest insight into truth. For philosophy, by its very nature, cannot be circumscribed in the manner Rosenthal suggests; it must be free to pursue wisdom however it will. If philosophy were to be limited from the outset by *shari‘a*, it would seem to resemble Averroes’s description of the method of the *mutakallimūn* who first determine God’s attributes, then make reality fit those attributes (66.30).

But one must tread lightly here, for there is the risk of understanding philosophy anachronistically, seeing in *ḥikma* a rarefied and secularized reason that would have been foreign to Averroes. Rosenthal points out, and I largely agree, that what we think of today as “reason” is usually a modern invention.³⁷ This Cartesian-cum-Humean-cum-Kantian exercise of a

34 Rosenthal, “Place of Politics,” 250, italics added.

35 Rosenthal, “Place of Politics,” 252, citing *Commentary* 54.5–15 in Lerner’s numbering; Rosenthal cites his own numbering as I.xxv.6–10.

36 Rosenthal, “Place of Politics,” 276.

37 Rosenthal, “Place of Politics,” 254–255.

blank slate is applied, somehow purely objectively, to reality, and thought to be closer to the truth by virtue of lacking the metaphysical baggage of the medieval philosophers.³⁸ A medieval philosopher, by contrast, would assume metaphysics, even religiously grounded metaphysics, to be a natural part of rational activity. Still, even with this qualification, it is difficult to see how Rosenthal's description of *sharī'a* as being established "in unequivocal terms [as] the supreme authority" over *ḥikma* would be correct.³⁹ The discussion of the end of man in Part II of this chapter shows the depth of the Hellenistic roots in the formation of Averroes's thought; the end of man, he made clear, is happiness—a fundamental tenet of his political thought that cannot be traced to the *sharī'a* as its first source.

38 For more on this point, see Brad Gregory's intellectual history of the secularizing of Western notions of reason in chapters 1 and 2 of *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012). For his part, Rosenthal contrasts medieval philosophy with the modern, secular version of philosophy: "In the Middle Ages there did not exist a so-called speculative philosophy in abstract purity and sovereign independence, but only a religious philosophy which was conditioned by a revealed law that taught truth to perfection; and, we may add, there was only one truth which both 'religion' and 'philosophy' sought after, albeit by a different method" (Rosenthal, "Place of Politics," 254–55). It is relevant but tangential that Rosenthal seems to contradict himself on the question of whether there is such a thing as "pure" human reason that would be the tool of philosophers. Just before the above quotation, Rosenthal writes that "the philosophers *must* attempt a rational interpretation of these beliefs and convictions [given by divine Law]—apart from those inaccessible to human reason—and their results will of necessity agree with *the findings of pure reason*" (254, last emphasis mine). It is difficult not to see in this sentence a suggestion that what the medieval philosophers engaged in was precisely what Rosenthal denies them—namely, the exercise of pure reason. Also, immediately following the quotation in the main body, Rosenthal writes, "The real problem is how to harmonize the *findings of human reason* with the help of the demonstrative arguments of the speculative philosopher, with the teachings of a law divinely revealed through prophecy and embodied in the *Sharī'a*" (255, emphasis mine). Again, if the "findings of human reason" are juxtaposed with revealed prophecy and Law, what sort of reason is that if not mere, or "pure," human reason?

39 Rosenthal, "Place of Politics," 246.

V. An Uneasy Harmony

The foregoing does not mean that Rosenthal's understanding of Averroes's harmony of *sharī'a* and *ḥikma* is wholly backwards and that Averroes actually saw *ḥikma* as sovereign. What it suggests, though—controversially or not—is that *sharī'a* is in some important way incomplete, by Averroes's reading. While indeed it is believed to be the final revelation for how humans ought to live, the overarching thesis that emerges from the *Decisive Treatise* and the *Commentary* is that one in fact needs *ḥikma* to understand *sharī'a*. If, as Butterworth writes, “the inquiry into virtue must be emphasized as long as the human good is not known,” and given that the *Commentary* does indeed investigate the virtues, especially political virtues, it would seem that the nature of the good—in spite of the revealed *sharī'a*—was still an open question to Averroes.⁴⁰ This is traditionally a question for *ḥikma*.

Another way to look at the relationship between *sharī'a* and *ḥikma* in Averroes's thought might be to say that the *sharī'a* provides the substance for inquiry and *ḥikma* provides the order and method for conducting it. The *sharī'a*, in other words, may in a real sense *need* the order and method that *ḥikma* provides. And indeed, according to Rosenthal, this is precisely how Averroes treated the two: his critique of his contemporary political scene “takes the *Sharī'a* as its norm and is waged with the weapons which Plato's and Aristotle's political philosophy furnish.”⁴¹ However, to draw from this a notion that the *sharī'a* is in a simple sense the superior entity is to return us to Ralph Lerner's initial question. Why, if *sharī'a* is superior, should anyone attend to *ḥikma*? Averroes's immediate answer in the *Decisive Treatise* is, in effect, “in order to obey the Law.” But surely this is not his final answer, for why would the *sharī'a* command the study of something the substance of which it has already revealed and superseded? Rather, *ḥikma* must itself offer something, something outside of and in addition to *sharī'a*. If, then, *ḥikma*, can lead to knowledge beyond what *sharī'a* reveals, and if *sharī'a* commands believers to undertake such study, then it seems that the relationship is closer to a symbiotic one than a hierarchical one.

40 Charles Butterworth, “Ethics and Classical Islamic Philosophy: A Study of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's 'Republic'*,” in *Ethics in Islam* 9, Giorgio Levi Della Vida Biennial Conference, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Malibu, CA: Undena), 19–20.

41 Rosenthal, “Place of Politics,” 250.

Perhaps, then, we might adopt a somewhat softened version of Averroes's overall harmony of *ḥikma* and *sharī'a* as compared with Butterworth's above, according to which the human *torot/sharā' i'* judge the "excellence of any particular revealed law." On the view I am advocating, it is philosophy, *ḥikma*, that gives us the starting point of understanding the *sharī'a*, for it is *ḥikma* that allows us to see the proper end of man—namely, happiness. This particular settlement allows us to read Averroes in such a way that we avoid the Islamic Euthyphro dilemma described above, in which the partisans of "the laws existing in our time" and the *mutakallimūn* represent the two horns. Only in this case can both philosophy and divine Law find a place: our inquiry into the nature of human life—through *ḥikma*—leads us to see happiness as man's end, the thing for which everything else is chosen.

But to Averroes, the philosopher's wisdom is ultimately a divine wisdom, leading him—and perhaps him only?—to recognize the divine Law once it was revealed. Does this mean that the human *sharī'a*, the philosopher's Law, judges the particular utterances of the divine *sharī'a*? I am not sure. While, against Rosenthal, I cannot see that the *sharī'a* is the obviously superior form of wisdom, it does not seem to me that Averroes goes quite so far as to name the judge of the divine *sharī'a*. With Alfarabi, he does equate philosopher, Lawgiver, king and imām (61.14), but this, along with most other references I can find, seems to suggest only what the *Decisive Treatise* has declared: the Law and wisdom are in harmony. The question, though, is what to do when that harmony is hidden, and by what means the *sharī'a* and *ḥikma* are to be reconciled, and I am not sure that Averroes gives a clear answer to this.

Still, if my analysis is correct, then the views on Law and wisdom in the *Decisive Treatise* and the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* represent two sides of the same coin: the *Decisive Treatise* begins with the assumption that the divine Law is true, then justifies the study of philosophy on its basis. The *Commentary*, on the other hand, begins with *ḥikma*—both in the obvious sense that the *Republic* is a work of philosophy and in the subtler sense in which Averroes asserts happiness *over* the will of God as the end of man—something that can perhaps only be known to the philosopher. In both works, however, the philosopher is not left to his own devices; rather, "if you said that it is God who singled him out through His eternal providence, you would have made a correct statement" (64.14).

Closing Remarks

I have, in this essay, risked belaboring the question of whether Averroes considered *sharī‘a* and *ḥikma* to be harmonious in a tenable way, avoiding both horns of what I called an Islamic Euthyphro dilemma. Yet I do so to stress the relevance, indeed, the crucial contribution, of Averroes’s works to Islamic thought today. Averroes is too often considered to be a thinker of historical but not contemporary interest; there is no reason he could not be both.⁴² Indeed, if medieval commentators like Averroes, Aquinas and Maimonides struggled to reconcile the ever-shifting sands of science and philosophy with their respective, eternally-the-same, divine teachings, how much more must modern people struggle to understand divine revelation and human wisdom? In Roger Arnaldez’s words, “if he [Averroes] remains current, it is because his personal problem has remained current: that of the savant, or more generally the man of intelligence accustomed to thinking and reflecting, who fails to find within the treasures of his knowledge total satisfaction.”⁴³

Averroes’s harmony was not easily forged, and, partly for that reason, it should not be easily discarded. Nor, I am suggesting, is he entirely clear on the mystery of wisdom and revelation, *ḥikma* and *sharī‘a*. How can they exist in true harmony without either making that harmony itself an article of faith, or making one the judge of the other? Perhaps Averroes’s response would again be, “May God help you with that which you are presently undertaking; and, in His will and holiness, may he remove the obstacles” (105.28).

42 To cite but one example, see Mohammad Arkoun’s characterization of Roger Arnaldez’s introduction to Averroes in Jean Jolivet, ed., *Multiple Averroès: Actes du Colloque International Organisé à l’Occasion du 850e Anniversaire de la Naissance d’Averroès, Paris, 20–23 Septembre, 1976* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978), 55.

43 Roger Arnaldez, “Averroes,” in *Multiple Averroès*, 16.

Part Four

Wisdom, Government,
and the Character of the
Political Community

Chapter Nine

Averroes between Jihad and McWorld

Michael S. Kochin

To the memory of my teacher, Joel Kraemer¹

Those with memories long enough will remember the terms “Jihad” and “McWorld” as used in a 1992 Atlantic magazine article and 1995 book by Benjamin Barber. Back in 1992, “Jihad” was used by Barber as shorthand for tribalism: Jihad, wrote Barber in 1992, “is a retribalization of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed: a threatened Lebanonization of national states in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe—a Jihad in the name of a hundred narrowly conceived faiths against every kind of interdependence, every kind of artificial social cooperation and civic mutuality.”² Barber’s account fails to take seriously the universal claims put forward by actual jihadis: part of the very expensive education we have all acquired since 1992 is that we all know now that jihad for a universal religion is as much opposed to tribalism as is McWorld. In fact, global jihad seems in many respects to be the effective truth of McWorld. Islamic

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- 1 Earlier versions of this chapter were presented at the Midwest Political Science Association and at Tulane University. Thanks to Anna Kochin, Shani Yeshurun, Alexander Orwin, Ronna Burger, the referees for the Press, and the audience at Tulane, for comments and suggestions.
 - 2 Benjamin Barber, “Jihad vs. McWorld,” *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1992, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1992/03/jihad-vs-mcworld/303882/>; Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York: Times Books, 1995).

State in its own way stands for “think globally, act locally” as much as does Greenpeace, Barber’s preferred example.

McDonalds isn’t what it was in 1992, so perhaps we should update Barber’s lingo and write MacWorld for McWorld. Apple may have made a sensible business decision when they refused to cooperate with the FBI to open the phones of the 2015 San Bernardino terrorists, one of whom had come from Pakistan to America on a spousal visa in order to wage war against the infidels; Apple’s calculation seems to have been that there are many more hard and soft Islamists among Apple’s customers throughout the world than patriotic Americans. Could it be that the best practical alternative to endless jihad isn’t the closed tribal society, or even the closed commercial state idealized by Fichte, but a global commercial society in which every McDonalds is Halal, regardless of the language in which the menu appears on the ordering screens?³

Both universalist religion and universalist reason challenge the goodness and justice of the particular political community. In his *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* Averroes expounds Plato’s purported justification the closed and bounded political community on the basis of universally valid principles to which all rational people ought to agree. In analyzing Plato, Averroes’s Plato, and Averroes’s view as distinct from the view he attributes to Plato, there are several questions we have to work to keep separate. First, is there a best regime that is best for all human beings in all times and places? Second, is the best regime limited in size, or might the best regime be universal, governing all human beings in all places?

We must also consider a third question, which somehow got missed in the literature on the first two questions as raised by Averroes. Let us grant that the highest human possibilities are universally available, for if they are not, then only those to whom those possibilities are available are really fully human. The others are effectively slaves or animals, as Averroes harshly puts it (*Averroes on Plato’s Republic*, 27). Does this mean that the whole hierarchy of human possibilities is available in the same way everywhere or at all times? Can we derive a universally valid theory of all regimes from the accessibility in all times and places of political philosophy, of presuppositionless thought about human nature and the best regime? Or do we need to grasp something not reducible to a stylized fact about how a people’s history shapes their souls in order to know what possibilities are available to them? Do we

3 J. G. Fichte, *The Closed Commercial State*, trans. Anthony Curtis Adler (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).

know enough about the political possibilities available to the Kurds of today when we know that the spirited part is strong in them?⁴

Plato's view, according to Averroes, seems to be that not all peoples can achieve the intellectual virtues: there is "but one class of humans disposed to the human perfections and especially to the theoretical ones" (*Averroes on Plato's Republic*, 27.1).⁵ Moreover, political communities must be bounded, and the extent of their proper bounds depends on the variegated nature of their places and climes (46). Averroes distinguishes between Plato's view and his own view, but Averroes's own view has to be extracted from a very difficult passage of his work on Plato's *Republic*. Instead of moving immediately to a direct discussion of Averroes, I want to present a passage from a very late Hebrew Averroist, Shlomo Pines. Pines writes:

In the framework of this article I will touch on only one of the problems that have no connection to religion but are discussed in Averroes's work. It is the problem of the size of the territory and population of the virtuous city. After presenting the opinion of Plato on the need for this city to have a limited size, Averroes continues (46.17ff.):

Yet if these communities be of a determined number intended to limit them, then the truth of this ought to be shown by the conformity of this opinion to the natural climates or all the natural people. This is alluded to in the saying of the Lawgiver: "I have been sent to the Red and the Black." If this be the [correct] opinion, Plato does not favor it; but it is Aristotle's opinion, and it is the indubitable truth.

Rosenthal translates this passage, which has been made hard to understand by Samuel ben Judah or the copyists, as follows (153, line 9ff.):

If a limited number is intended for these communities in their delimitation, then it is right to verify this opinion by [applying to them] the test of natural climes, or of all the natural [distinctions between] (?) human beings. This is hinted at in the statement of the Master of the Law: "I have been sent to the Red and the Black." If this is not the opinion of Plato, it is nevertheless the opinion of Aristotle, and is undoubtedly the truth.

4 Averroes 27.19; on the Kurds and their spirited aspirations, see Yoav Kapshuk and Michael S. Kochin, "Transitional Justice and Territorial Acquisition in the Syrian Civil War—A New New World Order?" https://www.academia.edu/38624736/Transitional_Justice_and_Territorial_Acquisition_in_the_Syrian_Civil_War_A_New_New_World_Order.

5 *Averroes on Plato's "Republic"*, trans. Ralph Lerner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).

As it appears to me, Averroes intends to determine, in accordance with the opinion that he ascribed (wrongly of course) to Aristotle, and which is also his own opinion, that it is desirable to control the number of virtuous cities and increase their size. According to this perspective, the virtuous city can spread across the entire territory of a given climate zone. It is also possible that it include all human beings within it. One may find evidence for this interpretation that seems adequate to me in Averroes's resort to the saying of the Lawgiver. "I have been sent to the Red and the Black." As Rosenthal sees (265nxxii.3), this saying is nothing less than a *ḥadīth* attributed to Muhammad. This *ḥadīth* has come, in general, to point to the universal character of Muhammad's mission, intended for the entire human race. In the note mentioned above, Rosenthal himself refers to several places in other writings of Averroes, which ascribe to the *ḥadīth* this meaning. Despite this, he thinks it probable that in our text this *ḥadīth* has the opposite meaning. It seems to me that there is no justification for this interpretation. Alfarabi held the opinion (see *The Virtuous City*, ed. F. Dieterici, Leiden 1895, 53–54) that one kind among the "virtuous associations" that are "perfect"—that is to say, self-sufficient—is the association that spreads across the entire habited part of the world. It seems probable that Averroes was also of the opinion that the virtuous association can reach that size. We do not know on the basis of which authority he ascribes this opinion to Aristotle, and likewise the opinion that the "virtuous association" can also spread across a climate zone. It is not only that this perspective does not appear in the writings belonging to the Aristotelian corpus, but that it stands contrary to Aristotle's explicit opinion, as expressed in *Politics* 7.4. Even Alfarabi does not attribute this opinion to the Greek philosopher, certainly not in the passage just mentioned. Nor could it be that Galen, whose criticism of Plato's severe restriction in size of the virtuous city. Averroes cites (46.6ff.), refers in Aristotle's name to the opinion that Averroes attributes to the philosopher, unless we could rely on Aristotelian writings that have not come down to us. On the contrary, we must consider the possibility that in attributing the opinion discussed above to Aristotle, Averroes means a passage that is preserved from the *Epistle on the Intellect* that was considered a composition of Aristotle. In this passage the author prophesizes, among other things, that "there will be in the world . . . one association and one order, and all human beings will obey one command and one king." But if we may judge according to the passage that has been preserved, this epistle is wrongly attributed to Aristotle, and Averroes appears to have had a great capacity for discerning the lack of authenticity of pseudo-Aristotelian writings.⁶

6 Shlomo Pines, "Notes on Averroes's Political Teaching," *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (April 1957): 65–84, pp. 75–6; translated by

I think it is reasonable to treat this passage in Pines as a primary source because Leo Strauss and his students Ralph Lerner and Charles Butterworth rely on Pines's reading of Averroes without presenting or assessing Pines's arguments for that interpretation.⁷ To sum up, according to Pines, Averroes teaches, in explicit opposition to Plato, that there can be an excellent or virtuous community that extends over the entire temperate portion of the earth.⁸

Confronted by the manifestly garbled transmission of the text, Pines rewrites Averroes to teach us what we can read with far less difficulty in Alfarabi.⁹ Pines's best philological argument for attributing the doctrine of the unbounded virtuous city to Averroes comes in his endnote 37 (p. 152 n. 45 of Orwin's translation above), where he relies on the distinction in

Alexander Orwin in this volume as chapter 6, pp. 152–54 above, from which this translation is taken.

- 7 See Leo Strauss, untitled manuscript notes on Ibn Rushd, Leo Strauss Papers, box 18, folder 17, Regenstein Library, Special Collections, University of Chicago. To be published in January, 2022 (see Rasoul Namazi, *Leo Strauss and Islamic Political Thought* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022], 221–31); Lerner, 45–46; Charles E. Butterworth, “*Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule: A Study of Averroes’s Commentary on Plato’s ‘Republic,’*” *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 9:1 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1986), 32. Butterworth, unlike Strauss, does not cite Pines, but that may be exoteric accommodation to the exigencies of publishing in Egypt. In any case we can presume that Butterworth got Pines’s view through Strauss if he did not get it directly from Pines. Kraemer, who does cite Pines, appears to hold that Ibn Rushd, like Alfarabi, holds forth as the “ultimate ideal” a “world state ruled by a philosopher king.” See Joel Kraemer, “The Jihād of the Falāsifa,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10 (1987): 288–324, esp. 319. Thanks to Alexander Orwin for supplying me with Strauss’s notes.
- 8 I am not sure how much we should make of this restriction to a given clime; the Ramadan fasts can get awfully long in the Arctic summer.
- 9 For a straightforward world-state or “ecumenical” interpretation of Alfarabi, see Georgios Steiris, “Al-Farabi’s Ecumenical State and Its Modern Connotations,” *Skepsis* 22, no. 3: 253–61. In contrast to Pines and Kraemer, Alexander Orwin asserts that Alfarabi weighs but ultimately rejects the notion that a global political community could constitute a best regime; see Alexander Orwin, “Can Humankind Deliberate on a Global Scale? Alfarabi and the Politics of the Inhabited World,” *American Political Science Review* 108 (November 2014): 830–39; Orwin, *Redefining the Muslim Community: Ethnicity, Religion and Politics in the Thought of Alfarabi* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 159–61.

the Hebrew translation of Averroes's lost original between *shi'ur mugbal* and *mispar mugbal* in 46, lines 16–17, which reads:

ra'oy šeyehiyeh kol qibuš veqibuš mehaqibušim hame'olim lo shi'ur mugbal rešoni lekhol ehad mehem. Ve'ulam im le'elu haqibušim mispar mugbal yekhuvan behagbalatam hineh ra'oy šeyehiyeh ha'emet bezeh hada'at kefi ha'aqlimim haṭiv'iim o kol ha'anašim haṭiv'iim.

Pines claims that that difference in the Hebrew translation between *shi'ur mugbal* and *mispar mugbal* represents a vital distinction in the Arabic that we do not have. The first, *shi'ur mugbal*, means, in Pines's view, that according to Plato the excellent or virtuous communities should only be limited *in size*. The second, *mispar mugbal*, appears to mean, according to Pines in the claim that Averroes makes in his own name, that there would be only a limited *number* of communities.

Rosenthal's translation of the whole passage (46, line 13–21), with all the diacritical marks that Pines omits, a translation that is garbled in keeping with the garbled character of the Hebrew that underlies it, reads:

But perhaps someone will say Plato only meant that it was not right for the community of a single State to be larger than this community, that is, in one locality. Then one could make out of this <State> many States, according to the proper extension. Although this is so, still the matter of this measuring <of size> varies according to localities. But it is proper for each of the ideal communities, that is, for every single one of them to have a limited extension. If a limited number is intended for these communities in their delimitation, then it is right to verify this opinion by <applying to them> the test of natural climes, or of all the natural <distinctions between> (?) human beings. This is hinted in the statement of the Master of the Law: "I have been sent to the Red and to the Black." If this is not the opinion of Plato, it is nonetheless the opinion of Aristotle, and is undoubtedly the truth.¹⁰

Rosenthal thus treats *shi'ur mugbal*, which he translates as "limited extension," and *mispar mugbal*, which he translates as "a limited number," as two ways of saying the same thing—namely, that it is always the case that the ideal community should be limited in size, whether in the size of its population or its extension over the surface of the earth. My exposure to medieval

10 I have used the 1969 edition of Rosenthal: E. I. J. Rosenthal, *Averroes's Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 153.

philosophical Hebrew and to Hebrew versions of Arabic philosophic texts is too limited to treat my personal judgment as a philological oracle, but I think Rosenthal's understanding better comports with the actual Hebrew words.

Rosenthal, I think, is most charitably interpreted reading the passage as saying that every excellent community, in every clime, should be limited in size. The universality of this limitation implies that the excellent community—or, in Rosenthal's translation, the "ideal community"—is available in all climes and places, in keeping with the statement of Muhammad that he has been sent "to the Red and to the Black." The appropriate size of that community, according to Rosenthal's Averroes, depends on the location and clime in which that community is situated.

According to Rosenthal's Averroes, Plato's view is that the excellent community is possible only for certain peoples, and the best community is always limited in size, though what size is best depends on climate and locality. The true view, according to Rosenthal's Averroes, which is also Aristotle's view and which comports with the view of the Prophet Muhammad, is that the best community is possible for all peoples, but that each community should be limited in size, with the right size varying according to clime and locality. Averroes has taken a religious text, the *Hadith*, whose apparent meaning is that the best human community is universal, and reinterpreted it to accord with what he regards as a demonstrable truth—that the best community is in all places and times bounded. This is precisely the interpretative move that Averroes promulgates in his *Decisive Treatise*, a move that Joel Kraemer has called "their artful accommodation to the Islamic lexicon by means of a hermeneutic and rhetorical reinterpretation of root concepts."¹¹

It is hard for me to argue against Pines, even with the support of Rosenthal, because I am certainly not Pines's equal as a scholar of Arabic philosophy. It is also hard to argue against Pines because, of course, we do not actually have an Arabic original of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."* Pines's rewritten Averroes rests logically, I think, on a sophisticated but mistaken use of the concept of infinity that I would like to see sourced back to the Arab Aristotelians: Pines argues from the assumption that if there are only finitely many regimes one of them must be universal, but this is only true if the earth's population is infinite or potentially infinite. Since in reality the earth's population is at all times finite, it can at all times be divided into a finite number of regimes, none of which has to be potentially unbounded, infinite, or universal.

11 Kraemer, "Jihād of the Falāsifa," 291.

The most obvious philological difficulty with Pines's rewritten Averroes, as Pines himself admits, is that Averroes says that Aristotle agrees with him on the potential universality of the best regime, and yet no authentic work of Aristotle exists where Aristotle says the best regime is potentially universal. Averroes might mean something like Alfarabi's *Letter on the Intellect* that Pines mentions, or Aristotle's *Letter to Alexander*, preserved only in Arabic, both of which are considered by the scholarly consensus to be pseudepigraphic.¹² Yet we have the authority of Pines for the claim that Averroes usually knows the difference between the real Aristotle and the fake Aristotle. Was Averroes fooled here or is he fooling his readers?

Rosenthal's version of Averroes's Aristotle holds that the bounded best regime is possible for every people or at least every people in a temperate clime. Rosenthal's Averroes's Aristotle suits the inclusion of Punic Carthage among the best actual cities along with the Greek regimes of Sparta and Crete in *Politics*, book 2, a text scholars consider to be genuine Aristotle. However, as we all know, Aristotle's *Politics* is a text Averroes claims not to have seen (22.5).¹³

In this essay, I have tried to get at the real Averroes behind the quarrel between Rosenthal and Pines. Even more fundamental would be to explore not only whose version of Averroes is correct about Averroes, Plato, or Aristotle, but which provides better insight into our present problems.

In our globalized world, cultural difference may no longer be sustainable. To go back to Ben Barber: "McDonald's in Moscow and Coke in China will do more to create a global culture than military colonization ever could."¹⁴

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- 12 For the *Letter to Alexander*, see Simon Swain, *Themistius, Julian, and Greek Political Theory under Rome: Texts, Translations and Studies of Four Key Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). S. M. Stern, however, regards key passages of the *Letter to Alexander* as authentic Aristotle. See S. M. Stern, *Aristotle on the World-State* (London: Bruno Cassirer, 1968).
- 13 On Carthage as one of the best existing regimes, if not the best one simply, and the significance of this for what one might call the Greekness of Aristotle's thought, see Michael Davis, *The Politics of Philosophy: A Commentary on Aristotle's Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996). It is considered bad form among Aristotle scholars to question the convention of treating as the touchstone for what views are authentically Aristotelian works such as the *Politics*, which Aristotle probably did not literally write with his own hand.
- 14 Barber, "Jihad vs. McWorld." Barber was writing in 1992, before the global internet made the Kardashians cultural icons in all time zones. Steiris argues that cultural difference poses an obstacle to a universal state that universalizing

But a bunch of more or less similar communities, each independent enough to make their own adjustments as geography and climate require, may be the best alternative to genuine pluralism we can hope for. Every such community, will, of course, have to find its own accommodation with the Islam we have and not the Islam Averroes had or the Islam Benjamin Barber imagined. The Islam that threatens to undermine the ability of the political community to be bounded is an Islam that is globalist and fundamentalist rather than localist and traditional.¹⁵

philosophy can overcome. See Steiris, "Al-Farabi's Ecumenical State," 260–61. Steiris does not take up the possibility that this obstacle has been flattened by the global internet and global popular culture.

- 15 On the distinction between fundamentalist and traditional religion the seminal study is Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," *Tradition*, 28 (1994): 64–130.

Chapter Ten

The Essential Qualities of the Ruler in Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"*

Rosalie Helena de Souza Pereira

Political discourse in the Islamic world has a threefold classical heritage—Islamic, Persian, and Greek, each representing a different genre.¹ These three genres of discourse were first elaborated under the same historical circumstances in the tenth century, often by the same authors.

The religious discourse includes the political, since it has a dual function: on the one hand, it aims to safeguard the prophetic tradition; on the other hand, it aims to administer earthly interests. This discourse culminates in the theory of the *imamate* elaborated by the jurist Al-Māwardī, which we shall address later

Of Persian origin, the “mirrors of princes” or royal genre literature portrays the art of ruling and the model of virtue imposed on the prince. It represents a literary genre that predates the emergence of Islam. There are two categories of “mirrors”: those composed through a series of fables, and those organized by ideas and concepts. Those composed of fables, like *Kalila and Dimna*, tell stories with moral content aimed at teaching moral principles to the ruler; the conceptual “mirrors,” meanwhile, deal with the organization of royal duties, while also conveying political and moral instruction.

1 Cf. Hamadi Redissi, *Les politiques en Islam: Le Prophète, le Roi et le Savant* (Paris; Montréal: L'Harmattan, 1998) p. 13.

The influence of Persian and Indian moral thinking in the Islamic tradition precedes the entrance of Greek ethics. Its principal representative is Ibn Muqaffa' (ca. 720–ca. 756), a courtier of Persian origin who gained fame as a promoter of the refined culture that developed under the Abbasids.² Ibn Muqaffa' was known for integrating the literature of Persian and Indian origins into the Arab milieu. His most celebrated work, *Kitāb Kalīla wa-Dimna*, is an Arabic version of the collection of Indian fables dating back to the *Panjantra* and to the *Tantrākhyāyika*; this was “designed to enrich political talent in the reader, unfolding before his eyes the spectacle of the royal political world, with all its activities, struggles, and evolutions, while at the same time explaining to the reader the interests, passions, and motivations that make each of the players act and the causes and consequences of their behavior.”³ The transmission of these fables constitutes one of the first monuments of Arabic prose, in which emphasis is given to profane wisdom that teaches political prudence and at the same time celebrates the virtues of friendship.

Ibn Muqaffa' also composed a manual of good manners called *al-Adab al-Kabīr* (The great book of manners), in which the advice addressed to the rulers and their dignitaries conveys eloquence and palace courtesy. One of the earliest “mirrors of princes” in Arabic, *al-Adab al-Kabīr* contains strictly practical moral teachings, limited to the sphere of good manners and to insight into using the passions of others to one's own benefit. Without any trace of religion, it is closer to the spirit of the Renaissance than to that of medieval Islam.⁴

The *adab* incorporates, in a general sense, literature focused on the formation of the honest, urbane man, who is characterized by good manners and elegant language and who, despite his worldly qualities, fulfills an Islamic ideal. The word *adab* refers to literary prose designed to amuse, edify, and instruct an elite to be appreciated for their social behavior and well-being. Over time, the *adab* began to have a broader meaning, designating the encyclopedic culture that the literate man should possess, as well as didactic treatises of knowledge determined for a specific profession, such as, for example,

2 See Francesco Gabrieli, “Ibn Muqaffa,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden; London: E. J. Brill, 1971), 3:883–85.

3 Ibn Muqaffa', “Apresentação: A Conquista do Sucesso pelo Culto da Inteligência,” in *Calila e Dimna*, trans. Mansour Challita (Rio de Janeiro: Associação Cultural Internacional Gibran, 1975), xviii.

4 Cf. Gabrieli, “Ibn Muqaffa,” 884.

the *adab* of secretaries or the *adab* of judges. The treatises were often embellished with anecdotes, travel accounts, chronicles, and short stories, and they were characterized by a certain literary virtuosity. *Adab* also applies to essays of a psychological and moral nature, a genre that made al-Jāhiz (776–869) famous, giving him an important role in defending the philosophical-religious positions of the Muʿtazilites during the Abbasid dynasty.

Philosophical discourse, which is external to religion but not contrary to it, creates the concept of a political science, the goal of which is to establish norms for human action. To this end, the definition of political science given by Alfarabi in *The Attainment of Happiness* sums up this search within the context of philosophical thought with Greek resonances: “[Political science] consists of knowing the things through which citizens of cities achieve happiness through political association.”⁵

This science consists, then, of revealing the means by which man, in life and within his community, becomes capable of achieving his own perfection. It teaches us to recognize good, virtuous, and noble things, but also to know how to distinguish good from that which hinders the attainment of perfection—that is, vices, evils, shameful actions, and vile things. From this perspective, Alfarabi’s political science devotes space to outlining the qualities necessary for the sovereign and essential for the community under his protection to develop as a whole in search of perfection and true happiness. Averroes takes up these ideas from Alfarabi and revisits them in his *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic.”*

Averroes, a Muslim and judge working in Almohad Córdoba, was aware of the tradition that goes back to the beginnings of Islam about the qualities required for someone to be a caliph. The Arabic word *khalīfa* dates back to Abu Bakr, the immediate successor of Muhammad who governed from 632 to 634: he called himself “successor/vicar of the messenger of God” (*khalīfa rasūl Allāh*) because no one could ever be the successor of God. Although Averroes knows the political-religious discourse formulated by Islamic Law and jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) and remains within this sphere, he elaborates his personal concepts on the theme of the essential qualities of the sovereign according to the philosophical thinking he inherited.

5 Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 13–50, esp. 24.

Islamic Law (Fiqh): al-Māwardī

One of the possible sources of the list of qualities necessary for the designation of someone to the position of caliph is Islamic Law (*Fiqh*). The theory of the caliphate, as it was known, was elaborated in the eleventh century during the period of the Abbasid power's decline; the jurist al-Māwardī was its main exponent.

The shaykh and imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (974–1058) flourished in a time of great political instability for the Abbasid caliphate, which had its seat in Baghdad. In 945, the Buyids, a family of Shiite military chiefs from the shores of the Caspian Sea, began to control the power of the caliphs. Although the Abbasid dynasty survived for three centuries, a new phase in the history of the caliphate was beginning, as the Commander of the Faithful, the caliph, no longer exercised real power, which was in the hands of the military chiefs.

Al-Māwardī does not write as a philosopher but as a jurist. He explains Islamic Law in accordance with the legal principles of the school (*madhhab*) founded by al-Shāfi'ī. His writing, however, covers various areas of knowledge—from exegesis of the Qur'an, to ethics, to language and grammar, to public and constitutional law. Born in Basra, he followed the teachings of the Shafi'ī school, one of the four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence.⁶ He eventually became chief *qāḍī* (judge) in Baghdad. His work, moral uprightness, and courage were widely recognized after he refused the endorsement of the title of Shāhinshāh (King of Kings) for the Buyid prince Jalāl al-Dawla, who had requested it from the Abbasid caliph Al-Qā'im (1031–75), with the approval of several notable jurists. Al-Māwardī, counselor to Al-Qā'im, had already been highly regarded and appreciated by the previous caliph, Al-Qādir (991–1031), for whom he wrote a manual dedicated to explaining the doctrines of the four orthodox schools.⁷ His most celebrated work, however, is the treatise on political science titled *Al-Ahkām al-Sultāniyya wa-al-Wilāyāt al-Dīniyya* (*The Ordinances of Government and Religious Rule*) which, as indicated in the Preface, seems to have been commissioned as a defense of the rights of the position of caliph at a time when that institution was in decline:

6 The other three are Hanifi, Maliki, and Hanbali.

7 See Wafaa H. Wahba, translator's introduction to *The Ordinances of Government* (*Al-Ahkām al-Sultāniyya wa-al-Wilāyāt al-Dīniyya*), by al-Māwardī, Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization (Beirut: Garnet, 1996), xiiiiff.

God—may his power be exalted—ordained to the community (*al-umma*) a chief to succeed the Prophet and protect the creed (*al-milla*) and invested him with authority by entrusting him with leadership of politics (*al-siyāsa*) so that the administration of these affairs could be undertaken in light of the true religion (*dīn mashʿ*) and so that there would be unanimous consensus in pursuit of the admittedly correct opinion (*raʾy matbūʿ*). The *imamate*, therefore, is a principal point established by the principles of religion (*qawāʾid al-milla*) and thanks to which the well-being of the community (*masāliḥ al-umma*) is maintained such that matters of general interest (*al-umūr al-ʿamma*) are guaranteed and all the specific functions (*al-wilāyāt al-hāssa*) emanate from it. For this reason, priority should be given to setting down the rules (*aḥkām*) that concern the *imamate* and its jurisdiction, before all the other religious decrees to ensure that [since the examination of any other religious issue is subordinated to its purview] the arrangement of the rules (*aḥkām*) concerning public functions (*al-wilāyāt*) is carried out, according to the order that suits each category, each in its appropriate place and in accordance with analogical reasoning (that is, according to the similarity of its rules).⁸

The *Ordinances of Government* lays out the foundations on which supreme authority rests, the limits within which it moves, the subordinate offices that emanate from it, and the means on which it draws. As was the custom, the author bases his exposition on the four bases that support the edifice of the Law of the Muslims: the Qurʾan, Tradition (*ḥadīth*), consensus (*ijmāʿ*), and legal deduction by analogy (*qiyās shaʿī*). In this treatise, al-Māwardī presents a lot of historical information, with solutions for divergences among the four law schools, and he resorts to the oldest authorities, thus delineating a coherent set of principles and bringing hitherto scattered elements together. Al-Māwardī assumes that secular material is inseparable from the religious so that the caliphate is considered more than a mere institution; it represents a political-religious system that regulates the entire life of the Muslim community, down to the smallest detail.⁹ As the focal point of the governmental, constitutional, and legal systems, the caliphate integrates all the state functions that derive from it. Ministers, military commanders, provincial governors, judges, religious leaders of prayers and pilgrimages, inspectors of

8 Al-Māwardī, *Ordinances of Government*, 1–2.

9 In Shiite terminology, the preferred designation for the caliphate is *imamate* (*khalīfa = imām*). See, in this respect, Émile Tyan, *Institutions du Droit public musulman*, vol. 1, *Le Caliphat* Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1954); vol. 2, *Sultanat et Califat* (Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1956), 375n1. Al-Māwardī uses the word *imām* to designate “sovereign.” The first chapter bears the title “On the Designation of the Imam.”

public morality, and so on—all these functions come from the obligations and rights of the sovereign and are controlled by him.

Only a small part of al-Māwardī's treatise is devoted to politics as such. This small part, however, is of great significance, because it constitutes the first elaboration of a theory of the state in the Islamic world, the influence of which is still evident today.¹⁰ According to Al-Māwardī, *sharī'a* provides the foundation for any system of government. *Sharī'a* is unanimously followed by all Islamic sects, moderate or extremist, revolutionary, modernist, or conservative. It contains the rules revealed by divine Providence to guide humans in all areas of their lives, both secular and spiritual. It has never been questioned at any time or place in Islamic history and it aims to govern both the rulers and the ruled. For this reason, sultans and military commanders without any religious propensity always invoke the precepts contained in the *sharī'a* to confer legitimacy on their actions.

While offering an intelligent elaboration of the opinions of his time, Al-Māwardī is more than a mere compiler, because his ideas resulted from the demands and circumstances of his own life and times. Owing to the decline in Buyid power at the beginning of the eleventh century as well as frequent military insurrections, the caliphs Al-Qādir and his son Al-Qā'im sought to regain the glory of their predecessors. Al-Māwardī's efforts are therefore explained by the historical context in which the caliphate had lost its prestige and power.

Al-Māwardī does not propose an ideal state in the philosophical terms of Alfarabi or Averroes. He is a jurist, building his theory on what other jurists had already stated, developing a clearer, more comprehensive, and more current definition of the existing opinions.¹¹ He does not engage in abstract

10 The two main works elaborated in this period that remained a reference for all subsequent doctrines are the treatises of Al-Māwardī and Abū Ya'la al-Farrā' (990–1064). Both treatises bear the same title, *Al-Ahkām al-Sultāniyya*, and, with the exception of several divergent solutions—given that their authors belong to two distinct *madāhib* (al-Māwardī was Shafi'i, and Al-Farrā' was Maliki or Hanbali)—the two treatises are almost identical, suggesting that one of the authors copied from the other, as was customary at the time. See Tyan, *Institutions du Droit public*, 2: 263. 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Bağdādī also developed a theory of the caliphate in his treatise *Usūl al-Dīn*, but with more logical overtones. Cf. Muhammad Qamruddin Khan, "Al-Mawārdī," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. Mian Muhammad Sharif, 2 vols. (Delhi: Low Price, 1999), 1:719.

11 It is opportune to cite here Averroes's legal treatise, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid wa-Nihāyat al-Muqtaṣid*. In this work, Averroes points out, analyzes, and

theorizing of any sort, but he associates the opinions of the jurists and adapts them to the historical context of his time.¹² However, Al-Māwardī developed a fixed model of public Law and, in particular, of the caliphate, which has remained virtually unchanged over the centuries.¹³

In the opening words of the first chapter of his treatise *Ordinances of Government*, Al-Māwardī defines “the *imamate*, or the supreme command, as the vicariate of the prophecy to safeguard religious faith and administer world affairs.”¹⁴ The jurist lists the seven conditions required for an imam or caliph to be elected; these are followed by the ten duties and functions of the caliph.

Al-Māwardī’s theories of the caliphate were taken up by Ibn Khaldūn in fourteenth-century North Africa.¹⁵ This fact provides strong proof that they would have been current in the time of Averroes as well.

The Philosophical Approach

Plato’s Philosopher King

The starting point for Plato’s ruler is not religion but the theory of the philosopher-ruler (king), which is informed by the discussions of justice, moral virtue, and the structure of city and soul that have preceded it. His list of the ruler’s qualities is accordingly distinct from anything Averroes would

compares the differences among the Muslim jurists and the different schools of law. His intention, however, is not to make a compilation of the various doctrines, but rather, as he states in several passages, to transmit the expertise necessary for a student of law to become a competent jurist (*mujtahid*). See Averroes, *The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer: Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*, trans. Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee and Mohammad Abdul Rauf, Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, 2 vols. (Reading: Garnet, 1994).

12 Qamaruddin Khan, “Al-Mawārdī,” 719ff.

13 In 1922, Rashīd Ridā, a professor at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, published an important work on this subject. See Rashīd Ridā, *Le Caliphat dans la doctrine de Rashid Rida*, trans. Henri Laoust (Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, 1986). Animated by a religious and apologetic spirit, Ridā proposes adaptations to classical theory in order to make the restoration of the caliphate possible in the contemporary Islamic states.

14 Al-Mawardī, *Ordinances of Government*, 3ff.

15 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), 1:394–96.

have encountered in the Islamic tradition. Plato emphasizes moral virtues. The ideal state should be “wise, courageous, moderate, and just” (*Republic* 427e). Justice and moderation are virtues that everyone should have. Justice is done when each person is recognized as necessary *for* and *by* society. Moderation, in the broad sense, means the ready acceptance by each person of their own social role and the elimination of their personal desires since, in the ideal city, everyone dedicates themselves to what they know how to do best in accordance with the needs of society as a whole. Because of the specifics of their activity, the guardians must have one more virtue: courage. The king, who occupies the highest position in the ideal state, must possess the virtues of the lower strata—namely, justice, temperance, and courage. However, he must also be endowed with wisdom, which makes him the exact image of the ideal State through the four cardinal virtues. Plato thus defends the thesis that it is imperative for the philosophers to rule, or for the kings and sovereigns to become philosophers, because only the philosopher is endowed with the fourth virtue, wisdom. How, then, does one become a philosopher?

In the *Republic*, Plato discusses the qualities and conditions of the philosophical soul on three levels. First and foremost, the future philosopher must have the potential necessary to become a philosopher; for this, he must learn quickly and have a good memory. Second, once equipped with these potential qualities, the future philosopher must constantly desire to attain perfection through knowledge in the domain of the eternal and the immutable, with his desires directed only to the sciences, because “for him whose desires flow in the direction of knowledge and all that is similar to it, pleasure would be only of the very soul, I believe, and as for those of the body, he will set them aside, if he be not a false, but a true philosopher.”¹⁶

For Plato, true knowledge is knowledge of eternal and immutable ideas. This is the knowledge that the philosopher must desire and seek; this is the desired good. Third, he whose desire is focused in the single direction of true knowledge will be diverted from the desire for other things and, consequently, will be moderated in relation to the corporeal pleasures and the love of money. The philosopher who is a real philosopher “has greatness of soul, he is magnanimous and endowed with grace, friend and kin of truth, of justice, of

16 Plato, *Republic* 485d–e. Plato emphasizes that he who is a lover of knowledge (*philomathes*) has a desire to know that goes beyond being inspired by the love of truth (475c); ever since his youth, he has sought knowledge and all his desires are focused only in this direction.

courage and of moderation.”¹⁷ Thus, Plato “combines the three basic qualities that are essential for the philosopher: the potential to attain truth, the desire to attain it, and perfection of the moral and intellectual virtues.”¹⁸

Educated to develop these talents and gaining experience and virtue over time, the philosopher is the only one to whom governing the city can be entrusted.¹⁹ Whoever has attained moral and intellectual perfection has not only the ability to govern the city but also the obligation to lead his fellow citizens “in the direction of good.” Who better than the philosopher to protect the city, since he is the most well-versed in knowledge of the means of administering it, possesses the highest honors, and leads a better life than those who engage only in politics?²⁰

In *Republic VI*, 485b–487a, Plato enumerates the qualities of the future philosopher king by describing the nature of the true philosopher, starting with the conditions necessary for those who should “establish the laws, protect them, and preserve them”:²¹

1. The nature of the philosopher requires the love of a type of knowledge that makes clear the being that always is (485b).
2. Philosophers love the totality of this knowledge and must not renounce any part of it (485b).
3. They must be free from falsehood, possess love of the truth, and refuse to accept that which is false (485c–d).
4. They should be moderate and in no way lovers of money (485e).
5. They must have greatness of spirit, be magnanimous, but be neither servile nor boastful (486a–b).
6. They must be courageous (486b).
7. They must have a good memory (486c–d).
8. They must have a harmonious and elegant nature and an intellect endowed with measure and proportion (486d).²²

17 Plato, *Republic* 487a.

18 Abraham Melamed, *The Philosopher-King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 14.

19 Plato, *Republic* 487a–b.

20 Plato, *Republic* 521b. In the myth of the cave (514aff.), Plato states that, among the prisoners, those who held the power and were acclaimed with honor and glory were those who best knew how to discern the shadows projected on the wall before them (516b–d).

21 Plato, *Republic* 484d.

22 Plato, *Republic* 487a. At 490b–d, Plato repeats the necessary conditions for the philosopher: love of truth and science, abhorrence of lies, moderation,

The first conditions on the list refer to the cardinal virtue of wisdom, while being a lover of justice, courage, and moderation are moral conditions related to the other three cardinal virtues mentioned in the *Republic*.

Plato grants as an alternative that already reigning kings may become philosophers themselves through philosophical education. He is nonetheless categorical in asserting that “if the philosophers are not kings in the cities or if those who today are called kings and sovereigns are not genuine and capable philosophers, and if, in the same person, political power and the philosopher do not coincide . . . it is not possible . . . for there to be a truce against evils for the cities nor, I think, for the human race. Nor, faced with this, to the extent possible, will this constitution of which we speak ever be born and see the light of day.”²³

With this, Plato concludes that society will only be saved if ruled by a philosopher, although he grants to kings the possibility of becoming philosophers through a suitable education. We know, however, that Plato tried to make a philosopher out of the tyrant of Syracuse in vain.²⁴

The Sovereign Ideal of Alfarabi

Averroes would have been familiar not only with Plato but with the Muslim philosopher Alfarabi. In the *Virtuous City*, Alfarabi states that the “first ruler” (*al-raʾīs al-awwal*) should be chief “of all the inhabited part of the earth”—that is, the Islamic Empire—and endowed with twelve innate qualities.²⁵ These qualities are inherited from the opening lines of book 6 of the *Republic*

courage, magnanimity, ease of learning, a good memory; at 491b, courage and moderation are mentioned; at 494b, Plato mentions facility of learning, a good memory, courage, and magnanimity. On the cardinal virtues, see 427e: “our city, if properly founded . . . will be wise, courageous, moderate, and just”; this is the first mention of the four cardinal virtues, temperance/moderation (*sophrosunē*), courage (*andreia*), wisdom (*sophia*) and justice (*dikaïosunē*).

23 Plato, *Republic* 473c–d. In proposing the union of philosophy with political action as a single power, Plato merges theory and practice. According to Georges Leroux, this new royalty devised by Plato breaks with the type of government of the kings of Greek history, raising the question of why Plato conceives of kingship as the ideal of a politically incarnated philosophy. See Plato, *La République*, trans. Georges Leroux (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), 639–40n101.

24 This refers to Dionysius II; see Plato, *Seventh Letter*.

25 Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State (Mabādiʾ āraʾ ahl al-madīna al-fādila)*, ed. and trans. Richard Walzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 246–49.

and they are referenced directly in the treatise *Tahsīl al-sa'āda* (*Attainment of Happiness*), in which Alfarabi affirms that Plato prescribed the qualities required for the philosopher in the *Republic*. In these two works by Alfarabi, however, the arrangement and number of qualities differ slightly. In the treatise on the *Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*, the list of qualities required of the ruler is as follows:

1. To have limbs and organs free from any disability and to be strong enough to be able to easily perform any action that depends on them.²⁶
2. To be, by nature, endowed with acute intelligence and the capacity to perfectly understand everything about what is said in order to apprehend the meaning intended by the interlocutors, according to what they want to express.²⁷
3. To be capable of retaining everything they discover, see and hear; that is, he must have an excellent memory, so as not to forget what he has learned.²⁸
4. To have a spirit so wise and penetrating that only the slightest indication about something is sufficient for him to grasp it.
5. To be highly eloquent so that he can convey with perfect clarity all that he conceives in his mind.
6. To love instruction and learning, and to these he must be easily predisposed without fatigue or pain from the effort expended.²⁹
7. To love the truth and those who are truthful, and to hate falsehood and liars.³⁰
8. To not be avid in eating, drinking, or carnal pleasures, naturally avoiding gambling and detesting the pleasures that come from it.³¹

26 At *Republic* 494b6, Plato affirms that health and physical preparation are indispensable: “the natural qualities of the body should correspond to those of the soul”; and at 498b5, Plato affirms the necessity for youths to take good care of their bodies. For Alfarabi, perfect physical condition is a necessary condition for the supreme commander of the armed forces and leader of the Muslims.

27 See Plato, *Republic* 486c3, 490c11: *eumathēs*.

28 See Plato, *Republic* 486c–d, 490c11, 494b2.

29 See Plato, *Republic* 485b.

30 Love of the truth and hatred of falsehood are among the most noble qualities, according to Plato’s Socrates in the *Republic*. Cf. Plato, *Republic* 485c3, 485d.

31 The intellectual qualities do not suffice if the moral qualities have not been developed from infancy; intemperance must be contained, as the future ruler must not give in to the pleasures of the senses. He must be a *sophron*. See Plato, *Republic* 485c3, 490b5.

9. To have greatness of the soul (*kabīr al-naḥs*)³² so that he remains naturally above villainy and always tends toward noble things.³³
10. To shun gold and silver and all worldly goods.³⁴
11. To naturally love justice and those who are just, and to hate injustice, tyranny, and those who commit them; to show equanimity toward their own and others, encouraging them in this direction; to compensate victims of injustice, giving them all that which he himself holds good and beautiful; to be upright and docile, not having to be either obstinate or stubborn when being just, but stubborn when asked to commit any injustice or villainy.³⁵
12. To have the firm, decisive, and audacious will to undertake, without fear or weakness, what he considers necessary to accomplish.³⁶

The five intellectual qualities (2, 3, 4, 5, 6) and the five moral qualities (7, 8, 9, 10, 11) necessary for the future ruler are listed by order of importance, first the intellectual and then the moral, all of them headed by the first condition necessary for the ruler—to have a perfect body without defects.³⁷ The last quality, courage (or the firm and decisive disposition to do what is required without fear or weakness), ends the list. Alfarabi puts physical integrity in first place because it is evident that, without it, there is no way to develop the intellectual qualities that follow. Likewise, it seems that, without the intellectual qualities, there is no way to develop the moral qualities.

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- 32 This corresponds to *megalopsychos* and *megalopsychia*, words that denote the highest moral perfection in Aristotelian ethics. The *megalopsychos* is someone endowed with great moral perfection. For Aristotle's definition of *megalopsychia*, see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1124a1. Cf. Walzer's commentary on Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, 446.
 - 33 In the *Republic*, Plato uses the term *megaloprepēs*, an expression that to the Peripatetic School came to mean someone generous with their money. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1122a19–30: “(*megaloprēpeia*) is a type of virtue that pertains to wealth . . . as well as to expenditures . . .” Aristotle distinguishes between generosity with money and magnanimity.
 - 34 See Plato, *Republic* 485e3: money and material goods should not be of interest to the ruler-philosopher; he should not be a *philochrēmatos*.
 - 35 Justice is just as important to Alfarabi as it is to Plato, and this is obvious from the way in which Alfarabi dwells on his description of this essential quality in the ruler; see Plato, *Republic* 486b10, 490b5.
 - 36 This is a reference to the Platonic *andreia* (courage).
 - 37 It is interesting to observe that Plato mentions physical perfection (*Republic* 494b6, 498b5) only after warning about the requirements of learning capability, a good memory, courage, and magnanimity.

The last quality on the list, courage, is a condition necessary for the head of the state to maintain order and defend the city from enemy attacks, and the only one that refers exclusively to the unique station of the ruler, since all the others may well be applied to the ordinary citizen, without them necessarily becoming a head of state. These are the intellectual and moral qualities that apply to a philosopher and that, from a broader perspective, may well serve as parameters for comprehensive social reform. However, this consideration is not explicitly present in Alfarabi, as in this passage his interest is focused on the figure of the ruler.

With few differences, the qualities listed in the treatise on the *Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City* are repeated in *The Attainment of Happiness*.³⁸ According to Hans Daiber, the Alfarabian list presented in the *Virtuous City* is a later summary of discussions derived from other works by Alfarabi.³⁹ In *The Attainment of Happiness*, the list differs somewhat from the one Alfarabi presents in the *Virtuous City*, but it also takes its inspiration from the same passage in the *Republic*, and is closer to the Platonic text. Before listing the essential qualities of the ruler, Alfarabi discusses the fact that he must also be a philosopher and introduces the identification of the philosopher with the prince, legislator, and imam.⁴⁰ This theme will be taken up by Averroes in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."* Having identified the ruler with the philosopher, Alfarabi goes on to list "the conditions prescribed by Plato in the *Republic*" that differentiate the true from the false philosopher.⁴¹

1. To distinguish oneself in understanding and perceiving what is essential.
2. To have a good memory and to know how to make the great effort that study requires.
3. To love truth and truthful people, to love justice and the just.
4. To be neither obstinate nor contentious about the things that he wants.
5. To not be gluttonous with food or drink and, by natural disposition, to disdain appetites, money, and the like.
6. To have nobility of spirit and to avoid that which is considered unworthy.
7. To be pious, to yield easily to good and justice, to reject evil and injustice.
8. To be determined to favor righteous and upright things.

38 Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 48.

39 Hans Daiber, *The Ruler as Philosopher: A New Interpretation of Al-Farabi's View*. (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company, 1986), 6.

40 Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 46–47.

41 Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 48.

9. To be educated according to the laws and customs that pertain to his innate disposition.
10. To have absolute conviction in opinions about the religion in which he was raised, to stay firm in the practice of generally accepted virtuous acts, and not to ignore generally accepted noble acts.

With the exception of the ninth and tenth conditions, all the others come from Plato. The tenth is certainly an allusion to obedience to Islamic precepts. The ninth is derived from the Platonic tenet that the noble nature of the philosopher can only thrive if he receives an education that is focused on the virtues mentioned, since without an appropriate education, the best of natures is destroyed and corrupted (*Republic* 494b–495b). Alfarabi reformulates this Platonic requirement, adding that the philosopher-ruler should be educated in the laws and customs “that concern his innate disposition.” Born with a nature predisposed to virtue, he should develop the essential virtues within the limits of the laws and customs of his society—in this case, Islam.

The Ruler in Averroes’s *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic”*

The Essential Qualities of the Ruler

In the first treatise of the *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* Averroes alludes to the essential qualities of the ruler and announces that he will discuss them later. “We shall explain later the other conditions that sovereigns must have regarding moral and speculative virtues. Indeed, the sovereigns in such a city (that is, the ideal) are undoubtedly the sages in whom, together with knowledge, these virtues and the others, which we shall enumerate later, are gathered.”⁴²

42 Hereafter, references to the *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic”* are to three versions: the Latin translation by Elijah Del Medigo, which is available in Averroes, *Parafraasi della Republica nella traduzione latina di Elia del Medigo*, eds. Annalisa Coviello and Paolo Edoardo (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1992); Averroes, *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* ed. and trans. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); *Averroes on Plato’s “Republic,”* trans. Ralph Lerner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974). The page references to these three editions here are as follows: Elijah Del Medigo I, <XVIII, 4>; Rosenthal I.xviii.4; Lerner 39:24–28.

In the second treatise, Averroes goes on to develop the topic of the qualities necessary in the ruler. First, however, he defines the meaning of ruler:

Now, “king” means, in the proper sense, “lord of the cities.” It is evident that the art by which he is lord and governs the cities is completed when all these conditions are met in him. The disposition regarding the legislator is similar, though this name means, first of all, he in whom the cogitative virtue, by which operative things about the peoples and the cities are discovered, is present. Now, he himself requires those conditions. Therefore, these names, namely, “philosopher,” “king,” and “legislator,” are synonymous. Similarly, “priest” (*imām*), because in Arabic, it denotes the one who is trusted in his actions.⁴³ Certainly, the “priest” (*imām*) purely and simply is he in whom there is trust in those actions for which he is a philosopher.⁴⁴

These considerations are a clear reference to the aforementioned passage in Alfarabi’s treatise, *The Attainment of Happiness*.

Averroes states that the word *king*, in its original meaning, refers to those who govern cities. He then adds that it is evident that the art of governing can only be carried out if all the conditions required for the ruler are met in him. These conditions have not yet been mentioned at this point, but Averroes recalls that the same is the case with the “legislator.” Averroes goes on to state that although the word *legislator* indicates someone endowed with cogitative virtue,⁴⁵ “through which practical things about peoples and gov-

43 In Arabic this would be *imām*, the meaning of which is very different from that of “priest.” The *imām* is someone whose actions are the model of upright conduct. Its meaning encompasses military leader, leader of prayer, and, most importantly, leader of the Islamic community; in this case, that leader would be the caliph. The word *imām* originally meant one who formalized knowledge of the norms, the *sunna*. In Shiism, the Ismaili and Imami sects advocate the inheritance of the imamate from Ali through Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, to their descendants. The Ismailis recognize seven imams and the Imamis recognize twelve, with the last of these having entered into occultation in the year 873.

44 Del Medigo II <I, 5–6>; Rosenthal II.1.5–6; Lerner 61:8–17.

45 The meaning of *phronēsis* is clearer in this passage, since it is the *phronimos* who well knows how to deliberate on what is good and useful for himself and for others, cf. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140a25–1140b30. It is possible that Averroes has the Prophet Muhammad in mind regarding the prophetic *sunna*, the model for his legal practices that generated a body of legal doctrines concerning normative conduct. The habits of the Prophet, transmitted by the

ernments are discovered,” the ruler also requires other conditions that will be mentioned later.⁴⁶ It is possible that, in mentioning the legislator, Averroes is referring to the Prophet Muhammad,⁴⁷ because, a few lines later he states that the condition of being a prophet required for the ruler deserves a more in-depth investigation, which will be done in the first part of that science,” that is, in ethics.⁴⁸

Two observations are pertinent to this announcement. First, this statement is significant because it may reveal the anteriority of the composition of the *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic”* in relation to the *Middle Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, as indicated by the verb in the future tense in the sentence that reads (in the Latin translation): *considerabimus de illo in prima parte huius scientiae* (we shall consider this in the first part of this science). Second, in the works of Averroes there is nothing of significance about prophecy, a concept that is amply developed in the works of Alfarabi and Avicenna.

Following this succinct passage, Averroes states that these names—namely, philosopher, king, and legislator—are almost synonyms. This is likewise the case for the term “priest” (*imām*), because in Arabic the idea of the “priest” (*imām*) designates one in whom there is trust because he is wise and is followed in his acts and works.⁴⁹

Having outlined the necessary qualities of a philosopher, and having stated that only philosophers are apt to govern, Averroes goes on to list the “natural” qualities necessary for the sovereign, who must also become a philosopher.

ḥadīth and constitutive of the prophetic *sunna*, assisted jurists and theologians to better determine the content of the Law given in the Qur’an.

46 Del Medigo, II <I, 6>; Rosenthal II.i.6; Lerner 61:3–4.

47 This sentence, however, is very ambiguous, since it is known that the revealed Law was given by Allah, who is the supreme legislator, to Muslims. However, the legislator that Averroes refers to may be the jurist who interprets the divine Law and the sayings of the Prophet and who contributes to the formation of the legal body of norms to be established, as is the case with orthodox schools (*madhāhib*).

48 Del Medigo, II <I, 7>: “Et considerabimus de illo in prima parte huius scientiae”; Rosenthal II.i.7; Lerner 61:17–18. This passage is significant for the dating of the *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic,”* as is pointed out by Rosenthal.

49 Cf. Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 46–47; Elia del Medigo, II <I, 6>; Rosenthal II.i.6; Lerner 61:14–17.

One of them, and the most appropriate, is that he is naturally able to learn the speculative sciences. And this occurs when, by his nature, he has knowledge of that which is in and of itself and distinguishes it from that which is accidental.⁵⁰

The second is that he have an excellent memory that forgets nothing, for it is not possible for one who does not meet these two conditions to learn anything. Otherwise, exhaustion will induce him to give up study and reading.⁵¹

The third is that he love and choose instruction and that it seem to be admirable to him in all parts of knowledge, for one who desires something very much desires all types of it. For example, he who loves wine loves all wines and likewise he who loves women.⁵²

The fourth is that he love truth and justice and hate falsehood and lies, for he who loves knowledge of the entities according to what they are is a lover of truth.⁵³

The fifth is that he despises the appetites of the senses, for he who has a very intense appetite for something turns his soul away from other appetites, and this is the disposition that they (that is, in the philosophers) have, since they deliver their entire soul to teaching.⁵⁴

The sixth is that he be not greedy for money, for money is an appetite. Now, appetites are not convenient in such men.⁵⁵

The seventh is that he be magnanimous (that is, that he have greatness of soul) and desire to know everything and all the entities. He for whom knowing something as it first appears does not seem sufficient is very magnanimous and, therefore, he who has such a soul has no comparison to the others.⁵⁶

The eighth is that he be courageous, because he who does not have courage, particularly he who was brought up in those cities, cannot repel and hate how he was educated through nondemonstrative discourses.⁵⁷

50 Del Medigo II <II, 2>; Rosenthal II.ii.2; Lerner 61:23–24.

51 Del Medigo II <II, 3>; Rosenthal II.ii.3; Lerner 61:25–28.

52 Del Medigo II <II, 4>; Rosenthal II.ii.4; Lerner 61:28–35.

53 Del Medigo II <II, 5>; Rosenthal II.ii.5; Lerner 61:35–62:3.

54 Del Medigo II <II, 6>; Rosenthal II.ii.6; Lerner 62:3–6.

55 Del Medigo II <II, 7>; Rosenthal II.ii.7; Lerner 62:6–7.

56 Del Medigo II <II, 8>; Rosenthal II.ii.8; Lerner 62:7–11.

57 Del Medigo II <II, 9>; Rosenthal II.ii.9; Lerner 62:11–13. We believe that, with this statement, Averroes is referring to the need for the sovereign to know

The ninth is that he be able to move on his own toward what seems good and beautiful to him, such as with respect to equity and other virtues, and he is able to do this because his appetitive soul is intensely faithful to reason and to cogitation.⁵⁸

We should add to this that he have good rhetorical skills, through which he can easily proclaim anything that he is considering and, with this, be shrewd in finding the middle ground rapidly. These are the conditions of the soul that are required of these men.⁵⁹

The bodily conditions, however, are the conditions already expounded with respect to the guardians in terms of good bodily constitution, dexterity, and good preparation.⁶⁰

Note that qualities 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10 apply to the figure of the wise philosopher and 5, 6, and 9 are moral qualities. The eighth defines courage in terms of a confrontation at the level of argumentation contrary to science. The second, a good memory, has been a traditional requirement emphasized by Plato, Alfarabi, and others, such as the jurist al-Māwardī. The last quality in the list, good rhetoric, is not mentioned by Plato, but is also part of the tradition received by Averroes. Moreover, this quality, in Averroes's thinking, is essential for teaching the masses, as Averroes makes clear in the *Decisive Treatise*.⁶¹ As he proceeds to mention the ability to find the middle ground, he clearly has rhetorical syllogism or enthymeme in mind. However, there is nothing to rule out the possibility that he is referring to apodeictic syllogism. In any event, for Averroes, good rhetoric is discourse based on science.

In addition to changing the order in which Plato cites them, Averroes adapts the qualities listed in the *Republic*. Thus, for example, the first quality

how to boldly oppose the claims of the theologians, since the phrase indicates that he must know how to face the nondemonstrative arguments that he grew up with, especially if he grew up in those cities; this is a reference mainly to the theses set forth in his *Decisive Treatise* against the arguments of the theologians (*mutakallimūn*) that detract from the revealed Law and the controversy woven into his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, a work aimed at refuting the theses that the theologian al-Ghazālī defended against the philosophers.

58 Del Medigo II <II, 10>; Rosenthal II.ii.10; Lerner 62:13–15.

59 Del Medigo II <II, 11>; Rosenthal II.ii.11; Lerner 62:16–19.

60 Del Medigo II <II, 12>; Rosenthal II.ii.12; Lerner 62:19–21.

61 Averroes, *The Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2001). Arabic and English.

coincides in part with the Platonic one, since Averroes articulates it under the auspices of Aristotelian philosophy, stating that the philosopher must know how to distinguish the necessary from the contingent. And the third, coming after the first, insofar as the parts of philosophy are mentioned, refers to the classical division of the sciences between theoretical and practical and their subdivisions.

Courage is needed to fight with ideas and not with weapons. We are led to believe that Averroes is referring, above all, to the debates with the theologians, an ever-present issue in his treatises. The sentence about those who were educated “especially in those cities” is a clear criticism of the society of his time that was bound to generate controversy.

Magnanimity is understood as the greatness of spirit to abide by everything that science affirms to be true, thus preventing thought from remaining confined to opinions that do not stand up to scientific scrutiny. Hence, what appears to be true at first glance can only be considered to be true if demonstrated apodictically. This is the main thesis of the *Decisive Treatise*, in which Averroes affirms the importance of demonstration to knowledge of the truths enunciated in the Law against the dialectical argumentation of the theologians.

Love of truth is equated with love of justice since there is no truth without justice. This love of truth and justice is the love of the knowledge of beings according to what they are; therefore, it is love of speculative knowledge. It is surprising that Averroes does not mention justice itself. Perhaps it is because here he is listing the qualities essential to the philosopher and justice is seen only in relation to possession of knowledge. But, as he identified the terms “philosopher,” “king,” “legislator,” and “imām” for the leadership and direction of the city, it is somewhat puzzling that he, who was a practicing *qadi*, did not give greater prominence to justice. Justice, or equity, is mentioned again in relation to the sage, whose appetitive soul is controlled by reason, when he moves in the direction of what is good and beautiful. Thus, in the list of qualities, justice appears to be something obtained only through theoretical knowledge, although we can infer that knowledge of the supreme good—that is, happiness—is the theoretical knowledge of practical political science.

As regards temperance or moderation, it is mentioned in separate qualities, in the control of sensory appetites and in the censure of avarice for money. Since usury is condemned by the Qur’an, perhaps Averroes is emphasizing the need to control this tendency.

Averroes realizes that men endowed with all these abilities are very rare. In response to the objection of an imagined interlocutor, who questions the

possibility of instituting an ideal city with the argument that even though finding men with all these gifts is very difficult, building the ideal city depends on the existence of such men, Averroes counters with the possibility that royal individuals develop the set qualities in accordance with the observance of the promulgated laws. In the first treatise of the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* Averroes states that governance of the city requires above all these good dispositions, rather than constant tinkering with the laws.⁶²

We do not know if Averroes had knowledge of the *Seventh Letter*, in which Plato recounts the frustrating experience of attempting to turn the tyrant of Syracuse into a philosopher. The fact is that the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* defends the Platonic idea of making the sovereign a sage in philosophy, although in the tradition of Aristotle, the need for practical philosophy for this position is also emphasized. Good practice consists of the religious precepts that serve as the foundation of the particular laws. In this sense, the sovereign philosopher must also have perfect knowledge of legislation. And, as we have seen, the terms “king,” “philosopher,” and “legislator” are synonyms of the word *imām*—he who truly leads the people.⁶³

The text presented here is part of a larger project in which we develop the reading that Averroes made of the themes of the essential qualities required for someone to become a sovereign ruler.⁶⁴ For editorial reasons, we cannot present the whole work here, but we simply indicate the possible sources that Averroes used in the elaboration of his *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* on the theme of the qualities required for someone to become a sovereign ruler. In this regard, we mentioned the influence of the fables of Persian and Indian origin, which predate the entry of Greek philosophy into Islamic thought and which served to provide moral and political instruction for the future ruler. Alongside this genre of fables, which are the “mirrors of princes,” legal thought emerged, in which the work of the jurist Al-Māwardī made a significant contribution to the construction of a political thought that would not violate the Islamic Law molded in religious traditions.

62 Del Medigo I <XXII, 7–8>; Rosenthal I.xxii.7–8; Lerner 47:5–19.

63 The idea of the leader of the people recalls the ancient Semitic image of the shepherd leading his flock.

64 For a longer discussion of these themes, see Rosalie Helena de Souza Pereira, *Averrois, A Arte de Governar: Uma leitura aristotelizante da 'República'* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2012), esp. 143–224.

The starting point for philosophical thought as regards the tradition of the qualities required of the ruler, however, is Plato's *Republic*. In the Islamic world, it was Alfarabi who developed the thought about these qualities, and it is on the basis of this Platonic-style framework that Averroes constructs the theory presented in his *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."* It is not our goal here to extend our work, which resulted in a book on the Aristotelizing reading that Averroes makes of Plato's *Republic*. Our intention is simply to point out that Averroes makes use of this monumental work of Plato to introduce a political thought that, in his commentary, goes on to take its foundation in the doctrines of Aristotle, the subject of our study of the Aristotelizing reading that Averroes makes of Plato's *Republic*. It is especially important to note that Averroes follows the philosophical tradition elaborated in Islam, which seeks to harmonize the philosophy inherited from the Greeks with the Islamic tradition.

Chapter Eleven

Natural Perfection or Divine Fiat

Joshua Parens

As a reader of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* one is struck from the beginning by how much he omits from his commentary. Typically, this would be taken to indicate that Averroes does not comprehend Plato's intention. Indeed, the author can seem at times to confirm what many readers assume—namely, that he would rather have commented on a work by Aristotle. We will try to show that his major omissions—that is, of books 1, (most of) 6, and 10, and especially what he substitutes for these omissions—form a coherent pattern and ultimately reveal a profound commentary on the omitted passages.¹ That coherent pattern is already set within the first few pages of the work. From the beginning he seems to focus on the place of the *Republic* in relation to practical science and theoretical science. This comes as little surprise in a commentary on a work devoted to what I would like to call the philosopher-king conceit. The *Republic* is at least

1 Although Averroes omits large portions of other parts of the *Republic*—for example, of book 2—it could be argued that book 2 is central to the First Treatise. Even if Averroes omits large portions of a book, he rarely omits the central trope, as he does for books 1, 6, and 10. Consider, for example, how Averroes exploits the noble puppy image (28.8) to encapsulate what is surely central in book 2: the puppy as a paradoxical image of the warrior-guardian (fierce toward enemies) and the philosopher (gentle toward friends) in one, encapsulating a pivotal argument from book 1 (*Republic* 332a–d), which will be unfolded in books 5 and 6 as the philosopher king conceit. In contrast, omitting the divided line, along with so much else from an account of book 6, is surely striking.

in part Plato's consideration of the relation between theoretical and practical science, as encapsulated in the person of the philosopher-king. Although Socrates does not get around to the centrality of this theme until *Republic* book 5, Averroes is on it from the beginning. He does so in part in order to place his discussion of the *Republic* in relation to his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*—putatively the more theoretical of the two works. Be that as it may, we are most interested in what ties together the omissions of books 1, 6, and 10—and especially what Averroes substitutes for those omissions. We hope to show that the golden thread running through what Averroes substitutes is the theme of human perfection, in at least two senses: the philosopher-king and immortality. In each case, there is some element in Plato's original that Averroes needs to take into another register (from conventionalism in book 1 to fiat transplanted into the Second Treatise; from separate forms in book 6 to the active intellect in the Second Treatise; and from immortality of the soul in book 10 to conjunction with the active intellect in the Second Treatise). In effect, all these omissions are drawn together in the Second Treatise. For that reason, eventually, we will comment more closely on the most relevant section of the Second Treatise (60.17–74.12).

At first the connections among these omissions seem subtle and indirect. Averroes intends to “abstract” the scientific arguments from Plato's (or Socrates's) “dialectical” arguments (21.3–4). Given this, the choice to omit any discussion of book 1 seems traceable to its obviously dialectical character (confirmed at the end of the whole commentary, 105.26). The impression this then leaves the reader with is that the rest of the *Republic* is liable to be more scientific—or at least whatever Averroes abstracts from it will be. This contributes to an air of science and even quasi-theoretical precision that Averroes imparts to his commentary. In reality, the rest of the *Republic* can hardly be considered more scientific or demonstrative than book 1. If anything, the reverse is the case. The *Republic* is shot through with images and analogies that are even further from demonstration than the highly dialectical book 1. In the First Treatise, after his opening discussion of theoretical and practical science, and after skipping our book 1, Averroes moves directly to the discussion of the city of necessity (21.17; *Republic* 369d), which is followed almost immediately by a turn to the one-man-one-art thesis (22.29–23.5; *Republic* 370c) from book 2 of the *Republic*. By skipping book 1, Averroes ignores most extensively the dispute between Socrates and Thrasymachus over justice and whether it is really merely a matter of convention (*Republic* 338d), as Thrasymachus claims. We will return to this observation shortly.

How does book 6 as it is omitted from the Second Treatise fare in comparison? The opening of the Second Treatise hovers somewhere in the vicinity of what has come down to us as the end of book 5 or the beginning of book 6 with the philosopher-king conceit. Such a guardian must possess in effect every perfection. It is the conceit that some human beings can achieve every perfection that is at the heart of Averroes's reflections on the relation between theoretical and practical science. And the main implication of this conceit is that if man can possess wisdom regarding theoretical and practical science, he then deserves to lord it (65.25) over all other competitors for rule. This is, of course, the conceit of the *Republic*, but it is not until one states it as flat-footedly as Averroes states it by translating the conceit into the formula—perfection in theoretical and practical sciences (plus every other perfection: cogitative virtue, practical arts, etc.)—that the magnitude of the conceit becomes apparent.² Both Plato's *Republic* (book 6, end) and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (see the portrait of the theoretical life in book 10) present the philosopher as if he were in full possession of wisdom.³ It is easy to forget how surprising, even somewhat preposterous, a claim this is. Later, when we follow the rest of Averroes's discussion of what it would mean to achieve such perfection, we will see that Averroes is far from sanguine that he or any other philosopher is in such full possession of wisdom or that his lordship ought to be self-evident—yet he feels it incumbent on himself to make such an argument, given the alternative claims of those who seek power, especially the dialectical theologians. So far, we have seen Averroes substituting a focus on the relation between the theoretical and practical sciences for the omissions of books 1 and 6.

When we turn to book 10, for a moment the connection between these omissions appears to be broken. Book 10 is expressly omitted because of its arguments regarding the immortality of the soul—because of what they are and what they imply about virtue, namely, that virtue is a mere means to immortality. These arguments are not the received traditions of Averroes's community, and any teaching about immortality as the reward for virtue weakens devotion to virtue for its own sake, which is paramount for moral perfection (105.11–23). But what does immortality have to do with books

2 This conceit had been stated with just such clarity at least since Alfarabi wrote his *Enumeration of the Sciences*, chapter 5—though without explicit reference to Plato.

3 This may not be so surprising for Aristotle, but it is for Socrates who reminds us so often of the centrality of his knowledge of ignorance.

1 and 6? Isn't the promise of immortality close to, if not identical with, what most think of as human perfection? The more immediately evident connection is not quite as direct: conjunction with the active intellect, discussed in the Second Treatise (74.10). Although Averroes does not state this explicitly in the commentary, the traditional teaching among philosophers by Averroes's time is that conjunction with the active intellect is the means by which one achieves not only immortality but also theoretical perfection, especially whatever knowledge of God human beings are capable of achieving.⁴ Indeed, theoretical perfection is tantamount to immortality, or the reward for the pursuit of philosophy is the traditional religious reward, which Averroes inveighs against because of how it sullies virtue! In brief, the active intellect or the achievement of conjunction with it is, if not the reward, at least the symbol of theoretical perfection. And theoretical perfection in the *Republic* appears to be the key to wisdom and thus philosophic lordship.

The connection between the omission of books 6 and 10 is evident (theoretical perfection and immortality), and their connection back to the First Treatise's opening discussion of the relation between theoretical and practical science exists, even if it is somewhat light or tenuous. But hidden in Averroes's discussion of book 6 in the Second Treatise is a deeper connection back to *Republic* book 1. There, Averroes's offers the parallel to the omitted discussion from book 1. He discusses "fiat."⁵ The dialectical theologians of his time argue that there is no end or perfection of man except by divine fiat. Averroes does not omit a discussion of book 1 so much as he takes it into a different register—indeed into a different treatise of the commentary. He connects this argument about fiat directly to the status of human perfection. Can human beings acquire knowledge of the ends of life (the aim of practical science), or must they rely on God to give them an end by fiat? The connection to the philosopher-king conceit is readily apparent—this conceit

4 See Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

5 *Behanah* (66.26). I thank the editor for pointing out that among the denotations of *hanah* is "convention," and one of the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript for underlining that "convention" would only make sense as a translation in the context of human rather than divine action. Ultimately, what I find interesting is the way that Averroes's discussion of divine fiat parallels Socrates's discussion of Thrasymachean conventionalism. I believe it is reasonable to suggest that fideism played a similar role in Averroes's time to the role played by conventionalism in Plato's time.

could not possibly hold any water if what the dialectical theologians argue is true. (This is the new face of Thrasymachus's argument that justice is purely conventional.) Human beings could not possibly achieve wisdom regarding their own ends, let alone knowledge of the natural order of the whole, if what man's end is depends on divine fiat. This helps explain why Averroes has taken what Socrates contends with in book 1 and transfers it to the heart of his discussion of the philosopher-king conceit.

That we have here hit on a golden thread running through these omissions is supported by closer consideration of the substitution in the Second Treatise of a discussion of the status of theoretical perfection and its relation to all other perfections for the discussion in book 6 of separate forms and the divided line.⁶ To be more precise, Averroes touches on forms more than once; however, the very peak of his discussion of separate forms occurs at a moment when he claims they are merely the assumptions of Plato, and he offers the active intellect in their place (73.28). The connection is that Averroes and his predecessors have used the active intellect to prove the immortality of the soul just as Socrates had used separate forms to prove the immortality of the soul before them.⁷ If Socrates assumed forms, we assume the active intellect.⁸ What makes this strange is that in most histories of Western philosophy Socrates is nearly identified with the forms. They are taken to be his metaphysical theory. Few would suggest the same about the active intellect in the Islamic philosophical tradition. This reminds us that we must not discount the more obvious connection: the immortality of the soul. Still, to claim that forms are merely a supposition of Plato's suggests that Averroes may have a different view of the Platonic teaching than the one widely received in the West today. And what is shaping up to be Averroes's view is familiar to many readers of Alfarabi. As Leo Strauss pointed out decades ago, one of the most striking features of Alfarabi's *Philosophy of Plato* is that it is utterly silent about separate forms or the

6 As Ralph Lerner has observed, a discussion of "the ideas and the divided line," which are generally thought to be the peak metaphysical moments of the *Republic*, have been omitted from the Second Treatise (78n64.28).

7 *Phaedo* 78b–81a.

8 As an anonymous reviewer of this manuscript pointed out, in Averroes's middle commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Averroes speaks in 1.4 of "conjunction" with "the forms," presumably of Plato!

ideas and the immortality of the soul.⁹ The significant difference between Averroes's approach and Alfarabi's is that Averroes draws the reader's attention to his view that forms are merely assumed rather than being wholly silent regarding them. With this introduction in mind, we may proceed to a reading of the portion of the Second Treatise running from its opening to the cave image (at the beginning of our book 7—that is, 60.17–74.12) because it includes Averroes's commentary on the issue of human perfection in light of the philosopher-king conceit, especially a discussion that takes the place of the Platonic discussion of the “ideas and divided line” (64.28–74.12).¹⁰ In what follows, we find something far indeed from the triumphal assertion of the superiority of theoretical science that one might have expected from Averroes in lieu of the divided line, given that the line might be Plato's most potent image of philosophic possession of wisdom. It is all the more striking, then, that Averroes's commentary gives a hesitant account of the rule of theoretical perfection.

Averroes presents the turn from the First to the Second Treatise as the turn from a discussion of the auxiliary guardians to the ruling guardians as philosophers (cf. 60.5–7, 12–16 with 60.17–21). Since Socrates takes up the third wave regarding philosopher-kings at the end of *Republic* book 5, it may be that the Second Treatise covers the end of book 5.¹¹ Having already announced the famous call for the coincidence of philosopher and king (473d), Socrates turns to an exploration of what Averroes refers to as “the natures of these [individuals] and the manner of their education” (60.20–21); this may be a reference to the end of book 5 or the beginning of book 6. Without referring to the forms explicitly at first, Socrates starts to make the case that philosophers are especially interested in knowledge that transcends the many things of our immediate experience—for example, the “beautiful

9 Leo Strauss, “Farabi's Plato,” in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Alexander Marx, Saul Lieberman, Shalom Spiegel, and Solomon Zeitlin (New York: American Academy of Jewish Research, 1945), 357–91, esp. 364 (regarding ideas), and 371–72 (regarding immortality).

10 See Lerner's note to 64.28 on p. 78 of his translation.

11 In what follows, I will refer to Socrates when referring directly to the *Republic*. The reader should remember, however, that Averroes refers only to Plato, in keeping with his claim to abstract only what is demonstrative from the *Republic*.

itself.”¹² By *Republic* 497a, Socrates shifts from the “beautiful in itself” to the “idea of the beautiful itself.” Averroes may be alluding to these passages when he says the philosopher “is the one who longs for knowledge of what is and inquiry into its nature apart from matter. This may be discerned, according to [Plato’s] opinion, in the statement concerning forms” (60.22–23). Although Averroes will have Plato refer to “form” (*şura*) elsewhere, he does not do so often and at least on one occasion does not use the term in the specifically Socratic or Platonic sense but, for example, the “specific form” (*shebeşūrato hameyūhedet*, 68.4).¹³ The reference to “form” here is striking and does, indeed, seem to get to the heart of this first approach to the nature of the philosopher at the end of book 5. Having touched on that heart, Averroes pivots to a discussion of philosophy laden with Aristotelian references and terminology, which stands out because of the iconic character of this Platonic context.¹⁴ The primary “intention” or meaning of philosopher is “the one who has attained the theoretical sciences” (60.24). His preference is for the employment of “demonstrative arguments,” which he employs to teach the few. As for the many, they must be reached by merely “poetic and persuasive arguments” (61.1). To know how to navigate the various kinds of arguments and to determine their suitability for a given audience is not merely a matter of knowledge of the various kinds of arguments but is also the occasion of the introduction of “practical science” and what Lerner renders as “cogitative virtue.”¹⁵ According to Averroes, it is the need to teach the multitude that necessitates the philosopher become king.

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- 12 For the initial reference to the beautiful (or fair [Bloom uses “fair” typically, throwing in the other translations at will] or noble) itself, see 476b. The closest Socrates gets to “form” in book 5 is the striking suggestion that Glaucon might think of opinion as a “form” in contrast to knowledge as a “power” (477e). Glaucon rejects the suggestion.
- 13 The main references to the Socratic-Platonic notion of form are here at 60.23 (“forms” [*şurot*]), 73.27 (“separate forms” [*şurot nivdalot*]), and the unusual and striking 78.7 (“the form [idea?] of the good [*şurat hatov*] in whose existence he believed”).
- 14 As I go on to indicate below and as many authors in this volume will indicate, Averroes followed Alfarabi in treating the philosopher king teaching through this Aristotelian lens, especially in his *Attainment of Happiness*.
- 15 Cf. the complete list: “theoretical virtues, cogitative virtues, practical [arts], and moral virtues” at 68.25–6. As Lerner indicates in his glossary, “cogitation” (*maşhavah*) is the Hebrew equivalent of the Arabic word *fikr*. It is sometimes rendered as thought or calculation. The Arabic term refers to an intellectual

It is amid this discussion of the philosopher-king conceit that Averroes recurs to the relation of prophecy and Law (61.2–20). As Lerner observes, Averroes draws heavily here on Alfarabi's *Attainment of Happiness* and *Virtuous City*, with the possible difference that Averroes refers to the giver of the *shari'a* rather than of the *nomoi*.¹⁶ Although Alfarabi references not only the prophet in *Virtuous City* but also the mechanics of "revelation" (*wahy*) in the section immediately preceding his reference to the man of the highest rank in humanity who would be the perfect ruler, which culminates in his identification as the first ruler and Imam; he mentions neither revelation nor prophecy in the *Attainment of Happiness*.¹⁷ Given that the *Attainment of Happiness* tracks more closely to Plato's *Republic* than does the *Virtuous City*, it is revealing of Averroes to so link prophecy and Law together with the philosopher-king.¹⁸ Although it is obvious to any reader of Alfarabi that one is to think about the relations among prophecy, Law, and the Platonic philosopher-king conceit, Averroes's making explicit the linkage enables us to see Plato in a slightly different light. After all, Alfarabi, as well as Avicenna, had emphasized the special usefulness of the *Laws* even more than the *Republic* in thinking about prophecy and Law.¹⁹ Different vistas come into view when one links the *Republic* so directly to prophecy and Law.

virtue with practical purpose. See, for example, Maimonides's use of the pair *fikr* and *rawiyya* (rendered by Pines as "thought and perspicacity" in *Guide* 1.72, p. 191) and my discussion of these terms in *Maimonides and Spinoza: Their Conflicting Views of Human Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 170–73.

- 16 Lerner, 61.8–16 note. See *Attainment of Happiness*, trans. Mahdi, sec. 58, 43.18 and *Virtuous City*, ed. Walzer, chap. 15, sec. 11. As one of the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript pointed out, Samuel ben Judah sometimes uses *torah* to translate *nāmūs* in his translation of Averroes's middle commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, implying that in the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* he may be inattentive to the difference between law and divine Law underlined by Lerner.
- 17 *Virtuous City*, Walzer ed., 15.10.
- 18 See my *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions: Introducing Alfarabi* (SUNY Press, 2006).
- 19 Alfarabi, *Summary of Plato's "Laws,"* in *Alfarabi: The Political Writings*, vol. 2, "Political Regime" and "Summary of Plato's Laws," trans. Charles Butterworth (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 1.1–2, 7, 9, 14; Avicenna, selection from *On the Divisions of the Rational Sciences*, in *Medieval Political*

Before we get ahead of ourselves, it is worth noting that Averroes tempers the connection he draws between the philosopher-king and the lawgiver, saying that “the case of the Lawgiver is like” that of the king (61.11). Similarly, his linking of prophecy to the philosopher-king is tempered by the acknowledgement that it has yet to be demonstrated that prophecy is a “condition” (*yutnah*) of being the best ruler (61.17–19).²⁰ This has still to be investigated in the first and theoretical part of political science—more closely associated, according to Averroes, with Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. But even if “prophecy” proves to be a “condition,” he suspects that it is “desirable” rather than “necessary.” It appears then that both prophecy and Law have a certain kind of remoteness from the heart of the philosopher-king teaching. This is likely at least in part because the philosopher-king is identified with the best regime, while, over the course of the commentary, Averroes comes to acknowledge that the regime ruled by Law is less than the best regime. Alfarabi also acknowledges, however subtly, the contrast between rule by Law and the rule of living wisdom.²¹ Whether prophecy, then, is desirable for the best regime or merely for lesser imitations may be implied by Averroes’s contrast between prophecy as a merely “desirable” rather than a “necessary” condition of the best regime.

Averroes’s discussion of the characteristics of the philosopher have frequently been remarked on. And it has been underlined more than once that Averroes, like Alfarabi before him, places special emphasis not found in Plato or Aristotle on eloquence (62. 15).²² Otherwise, Averroes’s account of Socrates’s list of natural characteristics of the philosophers, as well as his reasons for the failure of most potential philosophers to be of any use to their cities, does not harbor any striking insights—except insofar as he touches on the matter of whether the city in the *Republic* is possible (62.25–64.28).²³ Indeed, most striking is the similarity of Averroes’s list to Plato’s Socrates’s. Leaving that aside, we remain on this occasion especially curious about the turn away from the ideas and divided line, the start of which is marked by

Philosophy: A Sourcebook, ed. Joshua Parens and Joseph Macfarland, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 75.

20 Rosenthal translates this as “stipulation.”

21 See, for example, Alfarabi, *Political Regime*, trans. Butterworth, sec. 79 through 82 and *Selected Aphorisms*, trans. Butterworth, sec. 58.

22 Cf. the contribution of Rosalie Helena de Souza Pereira to this volume for sources.

23 Orwin will discuss this at greater length in the following chapter.

Averroes's account of Plato's inquiry into the "education and upbringing" of the philosopher (65.5). As we will see, the many kinds of virtues required of the philosopher-king will lead us to a large array of virtues and sciences: practical science, cogitative virtue, "the great moral virtue," theoretical and practical science, and the moral and cogitative virtues (61.10–20). Where these many excellences fit within and what they indicate about the perfection of man will depend at least in part on the status of the objects of theoretical science: active intellect or separate forms.

To broach the subject of man's perfection or end, Averroes once again draws from a discussion more suited to the first part of political science, its more theoretical part (cf. 65.8–9 with 61.17–18). "For every natural being has an end, as has been explained in physics—all the more so man, who is the most noble of them" (65.11). Because man cannot achieve his perfection without the city, "the city is necessary for man's existence" (65.12). Averroes then turns without filling in some missing premises to the question whether man's perfection belongs to each man "in kind" (65.15) or "in relationship" (65.18). Although he explains his contrast—by "in kind" he means belonging to all members of the species equally (as are the natural excellences of other animals), and by "in relationship" he means distributed unevenly across members of the species—this contrast is far from self-explanatory, until it is tied with what immediately precedes it. Given the necessity of the city for man's perfection, it is obvious that man's perfection is had "in relationship." This is how Averroes characterizes "in relationship": "many perfections are for the sake of one perfection and some of them for the sake of others—for this is one in that the many things by it are [made] one." If man's perfection were "in kind," then "all of [the human perfections could] be attained by all people . . . [and] every one of the people would exist for his own sake" (65.22). Unlike other social groupings, such as those of herd animals, cities exist on account of the radically different abilities and needs of different people. Even if the principle of one man, one job is greatly exaggerated in the *Republic*, Averroes here brings out a key underlying significance of it, the significance exemplified even in the city of necessity—that human beings are far more dependent on one another than other animals are on each other. Having said that, Averroes does not simply presuppose the hierarchy of the *Republic*. He resists any automatic concession to the notion that men are possessed of radically different abilities, saying merely "perhaps this is impossible" in response to the suggestion that all men might exist for their own sake, as if without a city (65.22–24).

Given that Averroes already has and will continue to represent the philosopher as possessed of all the greatest perfections of man, he cannot but resist the apparent implication that we are all equally dependent on one another. “If the attainment of all or most of them [sc., the human perfections] is possible for only some people, while nature limits the others to something different than the fulfillment of the perfections, it is evident that the second kind of humans are lorded over and the first kind lord it” (65.24–25).²⁴ The relationship of some people to other people is “identical with” the relationship of some perfections to others. Having said that, Averroes proceeds to inventory the various ends “generally accepted” in his time as good, underlining that the possible ends of man are “undoubtedly infinite” (65.28). The generally accepted ends are divided first into the (a) necessary (bodily preservation; cf. touch) and the (b) preferable (cf. sight). The preferable is then subdivided into (1) wealth, (2) honor, (3) pleasure. And (3) pleasure is then subdivided into (a’) delight of the senses, closer to unexamined opinion, and (b’) the delight of the intelligible. And the preferable is further subdivided into (4) lording it over others while acquiring the preceding three preferable goods (1–3) and further into that which the (5) Law designates as preferable (65.29–66.10).

Having arrived at what the “Law designates as preferable,” Averroes digresses to consider the view of his time regarding what and how it designates what is preferable. The simple answer is whatever God wills it to be. We have arrived at the discussion of divine fiat, which parallels the material on conventionalism from book 1 dropped earlier by Averroes. He encapsulates brilliantly the upshot for his time of Socrates’s dispute with Thrasymachus without even referencing it. The answer that what is preferable is whatever God wills to be so is associated with the Ash‘arite school of *mutakallimūn* or dialectical theologians. It is they who so privilege the attribute of “will” that they come to claim that all that is, is determined by God’s will or fiat. Although Averroes does not refer explicitly to the dialectical theologians until 66.22, one can see the seeds of the Ash‘arite *kalām* in the preceding paragraph, which notes the primacy of God’s will but also recognizes that one can know God’s will only by reference to prophecy (66.11–13). It is the turn to prophecy and Law that evidently prevented the first school of dialectical

24 The words “lorded over” and “lord” are both cognates of *Adonai*, a term used by Jews as a substitute for the name of God. See Lerner’s glossary entry for “Lordship.”

theology—that is, the Mu‘tazilite *kalām*—from galloping down the path of fideism. They inquired into prophecy and Law, realizing that what the Law commands is merely what is taught by “ancient wisdom” (66.17). That is, they saw a convergence between the old and the natural in a manner that is reminiscent of political philosophy. I say “reminiscent” because the specter of “will” somehow distorts the insight regarding the convergence of the old and the natural, culminating eventually in the fideism of the Ash‘arite *kalām*.²⁵ Ultimately, Averroes characterizes this rather extensive discussion of God’s will and what prophecy and Law deem to be man’s perfection as part of “the opinions of the multitude concerning the end of man” (67.1–3). Shocking as this is that he should identify it as such, the shock is lessened a bit by his underlining that the *mutakallimūn* have taken the whole discussion regarding prophecy and Law to the absurd conclusion that man’s perfection is not in keeping with nature but wholly up to divine fiat.

For the moment, Averroes demurs on what the philosophic view is of man’s perfections, pausing to consider what natural science or physics has to say about the matter (67.8–32). This recourse to natural science cannot but remind us of the reference to natural science with which Averroes opened the discussion of man’s perfections (65.11–12). The purpose of the present digression appears to be to buttress the claims of reason by way of the hierarchy of soul over body. All that exists “by nature” in man are “the dispositions” (or potencies) for the relevant perfections. As for the perfections themselves, they are “reach[ed]” only through “will and skillfulness.” This opposition between nature and will haunts the entire discussion of man’s perfection and will play a special role near its end. Why, after having already touched on the difference between nature, on one hand, and choice and will, on the other, would one revert to a consideration of body and soul (67.18), which becomes a consideration of matter and form? Given the generally accepted ends of man mentioned earlier, it appears likely that Averroes will use the superiority of form over matter to establish firmly the primacy of the virtues of the soul and ultimately of reason over any claims made on behalf of (a) bodily preservation or (b1) wealth or (b3b’) bodily pleasure (cf. 65.29–66.10).²⁶ In effect, Averroes shows us that the background from physics evident in the opening

25 Lerner, 82n67.1, here cites Maimonides, *Guide* 1.71 and 73, tenth premise. See also Parens, *Maimonides and Spinoza*, 120–22.

26 I use this lettering here to refer to Averroes’s distinction among the ends of man running from 65.29 through 67.3, which I discussed above. See Lerner’s translation for a similar use of numbers and letters.

of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* provides an enormous amount of rhetorical buttressing against the claims of the multitude. Averroes turns quickly to the distinction between types of rationality adumbrated at the end of book 1 but only treated thematically in book 6: "practical reason and scientific reason." Indeed, he acknowledges that for every being it is the "specific form," or what Aristotle refers to as the "final difference," that properly identifies the nature of the being (68.4).

He turns then to a further articulation of the kinds of reason and virtue associated with reason. As there is "practical reason" and "scientific reason," some "perfections . . . [are] theoretical and others are practical" (68.14–16). Opaquely, yet in a manner pregnant with meaning, Averroes writes, due to "the appetitive part . . . man is aroused by what inquiry requires of him and is connected with it." Reason does not function in splendid isolation from what appeared earlier among simple bodies too as "inclination," but which appears in the living realm of compound bodies in particular as "appetite." The introduction of appetite and reason's dependence on it for its movement, as it were, leads to the eventual complications regarding the question of whether theoretical or practical reason has primacy. For now, there are only three perfections to be reckoned with: "theoretical virtues, moral virtues, and practical <arts>" (68.18). Even if it was easy to establish the superiority of the claims of reason over the non-rational, appetite clouds everything.

Here, Averroes subdivides the "practical <arts>" into those that rely simply on "knowledge of . . . general rules" and those that require in addition "cogitation and thought."²⁷ The latter serves to expand the list from three (theoretical virtues, moral virtues, and practical arts) to four (the preceding three plus "cogitative virtue") (68.25). Now, if there are multiple perfections of man and yet each man is one, then some of these perfections must needs be for the sake of others (68.27). Prior to enumerating the generally accepted views of the multitude regarding the possible perfections or ends, Averroes entertained the possibility of there being some who possess all or most of the human perfections and others who do not; this dichotomy seems to entail lordship (65.23). As we consider the real perfections of man, the likelihood of one man possessing all the real perfections is small indeed. Rather, since some individuals can pursue only some perfections and those perfections are graded or ranked, so the city will consist of a hierarchy of perfections (69.2–3). That the city must have parts and that they must be ranked

27 Lerner uses half brackets (which I've reproduced as angled brackets) to indicate that only some manuscripts supply the noun as "art."

(as the *Republic* seems to argue) is evident, unless it were the case that each was capable of every perfection—in which case cities would be unnecessary. Oddly, then, Averroes appeals to Aristotle's opposition to the notion that nature cannot do anything in vain to explain why there must be lords as well as those lorded over.²⁸ Averroes readily pivots to a version of the one-man-one-job teaching of the *Republic* (69.10). When one puts the observation regarding lordship or hierarchy—namely, that it is natural—together with the one-man-one-job thesis, it becomes all the more obvious that some virtues must be for the sake of others, and that the highest virtue must coincide with “man's ultimate perfection and ultimate happiness” (69.15).

From this point forward, an “investigat[ion]” (69.15) ensues (marked by the frequent interjection of the phrase, “we say”) between practical arts and what is variously referred to as the “theoretical part,” or more simply the “theoretical,” or the “part of reason called theoretical” (69.20, 24, 29)—rather than, say, theoretical perfection, as one might have expected.²⁹ At first, it appears obvious that the theoretical part must lord it over the practical arts, mainly because it is so amply evident that the theoretical part partakes of the preferable rather than the necessary (69.23–24). Now, though some of the practical arts partake of the necessary, it is not obvious that they all partake of the necessary. However, the practical arts appear to be for the sake of something else, if only because they are not valued in themselves, as are their products (69.26). Such an art makes a man worthy of being lorded over (69.28). The strongest argument, however, appears to be the way in which in the individual's soul itself “theoretical sciences” make use of the practical arts (69.31). These arts within us are servile.

Despite this abundance of arguments in favor of the lordship of the “theoretical part” (or perhaps “theoretical sciences”), Averroes admits the possibility that the rule of the theoretical can be gainsaid by the culmination of the practical arts in “the art of governing of the city” (70.3). In view of the enduring uncertainty of the place of philosophy in all premodern societies and in view, above all, of the exemplary fate of Socrates, one cannot but wonder how anyone could imagine the unquestioned rule of the theoretical

28 This is odd because Aristotle argues in his *Politics* (in books that Averroes appears not to have had) for the desirability of ruling and being ruled in turn, which depends on some modicum of equality of those involved in politics. Aristotle, however, does not follow this claim regarding ruling and being ruled in turn to a purely democratic conclusion, as Averroes seems to entertain.

29 69.16, 70.15, 73.25.

sciences. Granted, Averroes will identify this argument against the theoretical as that of the mere “pretenders to philosophy” (70.13). Yet the reply that “we” offer is punctuated by objections not only from the practical arts but also from the cogitative virtues and the moral virtues. More importantly, the leading objection from the practical arts comes not from the everyday servile portions of such arts but from what Averroes first touches on lightly as “ruling or ministerial arts” (71.11). Shortly thereafter, in an analysis of the “cogitative virtues,” these claims are confirmed by underlining the role of the “art of governing cities” as the art that rules all the other arts (71.30).

The argument supporting the primacy of the practical arts or cogitative virtues is their obvious role in rule. This highlights the key drawback in the claim of the theoretical part—namely, that it seems incapable of rule.³⁰ Despite his using Aristotelian distinctions such as between “cogitative [or practical intellectual] virtues” and “practical arts,” Averroes here reproduces quite well the conundrum surrounding the Platonic philosopher-king argument: does it really make sense that philosophers should rule? From the point of view of common sense, “the theoretical sciences are only preparations with a view to action” (70.6). Since it is really the practical arts that most immediately serve the needs and wants of the city’s inhabitants, the theoretical can be portrayed as serving those practical arts that serve inhabitants more immediately (70.7–8). Ultimately, then, the theoretical sciences are just as much in the role of serving, despite their claims to lordship, as are the practical arts—indeed, they belong to the same genus as the practical arts (70.10–12). As a result, Averroes is compelled to reply as Aristotle often does by insisting that theoretical sciences are not practical (70.16). If they do serve, this is not their “primary intention” (70.20).

Averroes then recurs to the argument that theoretical sciences should rule because they partake of what is preferable rather than necessary (70.21). He extends this line of argument by an analogy or a proportion: theoretical sciences are to the practical arts as the intelligible is to the sensible. Here one can see, in the appeal to the intelligible, on the horizon the eventual appeal to the divine, and specifically to the active intellect (73.27)—as that which anchors the claim to rule of the theoretical and as that which enables man to transcend the sensible (that is, to achieve immortality). “The purpose of man, inasmuch as he is a natural being, is that he ascend to that [intelligible] existence as much as it is in his nature to ascend” (70.27).

30 Cf. Orwin, chapter 12 in this volume, in note 20—citing Butterworth, “*Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule*,” 56—and following.

In the meantime, Averroes makes his way in his defense of the primacy of theoretical science by leveraging the superiority of the intelligible over the virtues that the proponents of the practical arts and cogitative virtues uphold as their claim to rule. The theoretical possesses lordship over the volitional (that is, the practical arts and cogitative virtues) because the volitional is so directly connected to the sensible (71.2). Despite the truth that the theoretical sciences are “useful for action and necessary for action,” they are so in the manner that the intelligible is necessary for the sensible (71.8). Averroes punctuates his argument against the proponents of the practical arts with a rare vow “upon my life!” against the suggestion made by some defenders of them that they exist for the sake of the “good and excellent discernment” they provide rather than the “actions and products resulting from them” (71.12–15)! To make matters worse, these proponents of the practical arts come to imagine that the discernment developed in the arts “encompasses knowledge of all things” (71.20). But the intelligibles found in these arts are for the sake of “activity”—and are not universal, as are the intelligibles discovered in the theoretical sciences.

Turning to the cogitative virtues, Averroes leverages the previous argument against the practical arts to put these virtues in their place. He states that “the existence of these virtues is mostly—<or> the existence of the noblest of them [is]—for the sake of the arts” (71.27).³¹ And since the arts are for the sake of the theoretical, it would seem to be an easy business to show that the theoretical trumps the claims to rule of political actors! Yet the references to “mostly” and the “noblest” leave behind a residue. Is Averroes’s insinuation that the political is that residue? One thing is certain: action cannot be so easily shown to be ruled by the theoretical. Averroes begins to acknowledge this by reviewing the divisions among the cogitative virtues. That is, they are “divided”—as are the practical arts: “Just as there is an art <unqualifiedly> ruling over all the arts—namely the art of governing cities—so is there a ruling cogitative faculty—namely the faculty by which the actions of this [ruling] art are materialized” (71.30–33).

31 I have altered Lerner’s interpolation “[is universally]” to read simply “[is]” because the emphasis on the universality within the class of what is noblest risks obscuring the obvious problem that “practical arts” here covers both action and production. Yet the nature of production’s inferiority to the theoretical sciences has been the primary focus of Averroes’s arguments so far. Action, morality, and politics have gone along for the ride with the involved critique of the claim of the “practical <arts>” to rule.

“Cogitative virtues” lack independence from the practical arts narrowly conceived (to exclude action proper), as well as from the moral virtues in human action. “Cogitative virtues” are the clearest expression of the latter member of the pair in the original division of reason into “scientific reason” and “practical reason.” Although Averroes speaks repeatedly of “theoretical sciences” in this passage (64.28–74.12), he never makes mention of “practical sciences.” Given his willingness to speak of “practical science” as the locus of the inquiry in the opening of the commentary (21.8) and even toward the beginning of the Second Treatise (61.2–8), this is striking. Why doesn’t Averroes include “practical science” among the three or four perfections listed in the Second Treatise at 68.17 and 68.25? Perhaps it is implied in the repeated use of “practical” without appending the noun that “practical” modifies.³²

Turning to the moral virtues, Averroes argues that moral virtue is to be ruled because it exists “for the sake of the theoretical intelligibles.” That it is so subordinate is evident “for several reasons” (72.2–3). First, moral virtue is lower and less choiceworthy than the “cogitative part” that guides it. In keeping with Aristotle’s indications that moral virtue is complemented by the practical expression of intellectual virtue—that is, prudence, a term Averroes eschews throughout and that is surely the main or highest form of “cogitative virtue”—intellectual virtue (or as Averroes terms it here, potentially misleadingly, “the theoretical part of the soul”) as such is higher than moral virtue. The reason this is so, according to Averroes, is that cogitative virtue indicates to appetite what “ought to come into being” (72.9). Although appetite is the motive cause, reason is that which determines the fitting end. To drive home his point, Averroes contrasts the appetite and desire that “stems from cogitation and thought” with those that “stem from imagination” (72.3–5).

32 Cf. Lerner’s use of half brackets (which I’ve reproduced as angled brackets) to indicate that only some manuscripts supply the noun as “art.” Given the absence of “practical science” among the perfections, however, a case could perhaps be made that “science” should be supplied rather than “art.” Having said that, Averroes does supply the noun “art” in key portions of his argument (such as 69.16 and 70.3ff.); this supports Lerner’s inclusion of “art” in those passages where in some manuscripts the noun is not supplied. This dropping of “art” or “science” or “power” is highly reminiscent of Aristotle’s procedure in the *Nicomachean Ethics* of employing “political” without the noun it is supposed to modify (see, for example, near the opening, 1094a27). Aristotle is far more reticent to speak of “practical science” than is Averroes in the opening of this commentary.

The former is specific to the human; the latter we share with other animals. Second, other animals share in moral virtue—for example, the modesty of the lion. But that moral virtue is natural to the lion. Moral virtue, again, is human “only by virtue of thought and cogitation”—which is to say, by virtue of the application of “choice and will” (72.15, cf. 67.16). Third, moral virtues as such are virtues “that through them a man serves others” (72.17).³³ By contrast, theoretical science is not the sort of thing that one pursues “that he might serve others” (72.20). Fourth, moral virtues are more in need of matter, the body, instruments, and external goods than are the theoretical sciences (72.22). The freedom from material of the theoretical sciences means that they are “thought to be in a manner everlasting” (72.28). Fifth, the moral virtues are merely “preparatory” for theoretical sciences (72.30). At this point, Averroes appears to conclude his argument intended to demonstrate that theoretical sciences should lord it over the other human perfections (72.32–33).

Yet he continues by considering the interrelation of the various perfections, and the effect of this additional argument is to weaken the claim that theoretical sciences should rule. Even regarding the relation between moral virtues and practical arts, Averroes does not draw definite conclusions about which is for the sake of the other, acknowledging that “there is room in this for <penetrating> investigation” (73.3). Since the relation between the practical arts and moral virtues is unclear, we’re not surprised to see that Averroes is at best able to posit a conditional (if . . . then) regarding the relation between the ruling moral virtue and the ruling cogitative virtue (73.5). Which of these is to rule the other is far from self-evident. One thing is evident, however: the practical arts, the moral virtues, and the cogitative virtues—including the ruling virtue—exist “for the sake of the theoretical part” (72.13–14). Although it is obvious that the end should rule over and guide the means, the end—that is, the theoretical sciences—is only able to play such a ruling role to the extent that it is possessed of wisdom.

33 Aristotle claims this only as something said or held about “justice” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1130a3–5). Maimonides makes a highly similar claim to that of Averroes, as opposed to Aristotle; see *Guide* 3.54, p. 635. In communities ruled by divine law, the focus on moral virtue is so intense that a certain amount of overstatement regarding the other-regarding character of moral virtue should be expected—especially when defending the worth and value of philosophy or the theoretical, which both Averroes and Maimonides are defending at the time that they make these statements.

This truism is exemplified by key moments not only in the first but also in the second part of this practical science—that is, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the present subject of our commentary, the *Republic*—and at this very point in the dialogue (the divided line). The divided line—indeed, the whole *Republic*—seems to rest on a conceit belied by Socrates’s calling card avowal of knowledge of ignorance. There is no moment in the *Republic* that so much seems to presuppose the philosopher’s knowledge of the whole as the image of the line, as becomes amply evident in the mapping of the divided line onto the cave image. Socrates presents the philosopher as if he were in full possession of wisdom. After all, the claim that philosophers should be kings is not liable to hold much water with the city unless the philosopher presents a persuasive image of his possession of wisdom. Aristotle concludes the *Nicomachean Ethics* with a portrait of the theoretical man’s contemplative possession of wisdom such that he can be described as embodying what may be the most widely wished for longing of the human heart—the self-sufficiency and immortality of a god. Without such portraits of theoretical perfection, philosophers would fail to persuade the politically ambitious that they ought at least to pause a moment before assuming tyrannical control of their own cities.

That wisdom proper (that is, theoretical wisdom) eludes even Averroes seems evident from his inability to state definitively whether theoretical science is everlasting or not, and, if it is not everlasting, whether it is due to some choice or (act of) will. That we are unable to determine whether it is or is not everlasting, let alone what those intelligible objects are, suggests that we lack full possession of wisdom. Here, at the peak of his inquiry, is where the active intellect takes the stage. Either the theoretical sciences are everlasting owing to the existence of eternal intelligible objects such as the separate forms or the active intellect or they are not. The precariousness of our lack of possession of wisdom is underlined by Averroes’s lack of resolution of the various alternatives regarding the status of everlasting theoretical objects such as separate forms or the active intellect.³⁴ The way that philosophers have retained the promise of the everlasting theoretical sciences is through some teaching, such as the myth of recollection, which Averroes seems to allude to in his suggestion that the “humors have only submerged them since youth”

34 In the passage running from 73.25 to 74.14, I count at least four different conditionals entertaining different possible relations between intellect and will or choice, on the one hand, and the presence or absence of everlasting theoretical objects, on the other.

(73.27). The alternative to separate forms that the active intellect represents is subject in human life to a similar movement from being submerged to being brought to our awareness that we call prophecy—but with an underlying assumption that the truth they bear is somehow eternally preexistent. Why? Because God is eternal. The alternative, that the theoretical sciences are not everlasting—that is, do not possess everlasting intelligible objects—would mean that theoretical science is somehow generated on the command of human choice or will. In such a scenario, it would seem obvious that theoretical science partakes far more of choice and will than the preceding inquiry would have suggested. At a minimum, such a scenario would call into question the previous arguments that attempt to establish the lordship of the theoretical sciences.

In conclusion, separate forms or the active intellect are merely two of many plausible metaphysical accounts, which are compatible with good political life. Fideism is not one of those accounts. Confirmation of the truth of one of those accounts appears to be beyond human access.³⁵ For that reason, the lordship of the theoretical can never be made wholly secure. It is in this situation that political philosophy, imperfect though it is, achieves philosophy's second sailing.

35 Cf. Leo Strauss, "An Epilogue," in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 206.

Chapter Twelve

Philosopher-Kings and Counselors

How Should Philosophers Participate in Politics?

Alexander Orwin

The most famous, or infamous, proposal in Plato's *Republic* concerns the rule of philosopher-kings. Throughout the long history of the philosophical reception of Plato, this theme has been explored, restated, and rejected in countless ways. One of the most original treatments of it comes from the Andalusian philosopher Averroes, in his *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."* The title of this inventive work must not be construed too narrowly. On every major theme in the *Republic*, Averroes deviates, either by omission, addition, or editorial commentary, from Plato. His treatment of the philosopher-kings will make use of all these techniques. Before turning to this topic, I wish to make some general remarks about the work as a whole.

Averroes announces his departure from Plato in the first sentence of the work, with the somewhat cryptic promise to remove all dialectical arguments from the *Republic* while preserving the demonstrative arguments (CR 21.4).¹

1 Averroes, *On Plato's "Republic,"* trans. Ralph Lerner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974). In Hebrew: Averroes, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* ed. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956). Lerner preserves Rosenthal's page numbers in the margins on his edition, so the citations apply to both texts. Cited as CR. I cite from Lerner's

Dialectic is associated, etymologically and semantically, with dialogue. Sure enough, Averroes expunges not only the dialogue form of the original but also its principal characters.² This choice should not simply be attributed to ignorance: even if we were to assume that Averroes had only a summary of the original, he would surely have known of the existence of the characters Socrates and Thrasymachus through Alfarabi.³ In fact, Averroes himself mentions Thrasymachus and his arguments about justice in his *Middle Commentary on the Topics*.⁴

The form with which Averroes replaces the dialogue can hardly be described as a straightforward treatise. Averroes attributes the arguments he presents to a variety of sources, as indicated by expressions such as “we said,” and “Plato said.” In addition, Alfarabi and Aristotle are often cited, paraphrased, or even plagiarized, in what is ostensibly a commentary on Plato.⁵ This implies a dialogue of sorts between not only Averroes and Plato, but Aristotle and Alfarabi as well. One is tempted to say that the discussions between Socrates, an aged father, a sophist, and several young Greeks

translation. Both Lerner and Rosenthal have valuable introductions and notes; these will be cited under the authors’ own names.

- 2 The one exception is Socrates, whose untimely death is invoked once in a context that is neither dialogic nor directly related to the *Republic* (CR 38.1).
- 3 Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), 66–67. In Arabic, each of the three parts is available separately (only the first two are cited): *Tahṣīl as-Sa’āda*, ed. Ja’afir al-Yasīn (Beirut: Dār al-Andalūs, 1981) (cited as AH); *Philosophy of Plato (Falsafat Aflātūn)*, ed. Franz Rosenthal and Richard Walzer (London: Warburg Institute, 1943), 21.15–22.8 (cited as PP). Furthermore, David Reisman has uncovered an extract from Plato in Arabic that includes the names of Glaucon and Adeimantus as well. See David Reisman, “Plato’s *Republic* in Arabic: A Newly Discovered Passage,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 4 (2004): 263–300, esp. 297–99.
- 4 Averroes, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s Topics*, ed. Charles Butterworth and Ahmad Abd al-Magid Haridi (Cairo: American Research Center in Egypt, 1979), 133.
- 5 Charles Butterworth emphasizes the influence of Aristotle on the work. See Charles Butterworth, “Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule: A Study of Averroes’ *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*,” *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 9:1 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1986), 1–95, esp. 7. While Averroes includes many Aristotelian themes, his direct paraphrases come mainly from Alfarabi. I enumerated these in my previous contribution to his volume.

is replaced by a discussion between four great political philosophers across the ages, orchestrated by the latest representative of this august group. On this point, it is useful to recall Leo Strauss's observation, that no Platonic dialogue relates a discussion among equals.⁶ If dialectic involves a superior person such as Socrates leading less accomplished interlocutors by the hand, then Averroes's new, demonstrative form consists of a dialogue between equals to whom historical accident never granted the opportunity for a face-to-face meeting.

Averroes's treatment of our topic serves as a good example of this new kind of dialogue. It is true that Averroes preserves the core Platonic argument, according to which the establishment of the best city depends entirely on the philosopher-kings, but he himself takes charge of this theme well before he allows Plato to introduce it and dares to challenge Plato on certain key points. The aim of this chapter is to explore the differences between the two philosophers' view of philosopher-kings, and the role of the philosopher in society more generally.

I have been drawn to this topic by certain suggestions in a small selection of scholarly works that examine Averroes's *Commentary*. Avraham Melamed establishes that Averroes's philosopher-king deviates in many respects from Plato's while borrowing many characteristics from Alfarabi.⁷ Charles Butterworth's observation that Averroes's philosopher is less detached from political life than Plato's prompted me to explore the precise differences between the two philosophers on this subject further.⁸ More recently, Christopher Colmo has argued quite persuasively for fundamental differences between Averroes and Plato with regard to the relationship between theory and practice.⁹ Putting these various threads together, I resolved to thoroughly examine how Plato and Averroes differ in their understanding of philosopher-kings.

6 Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 54–55.

7 Avraham Melamed, *The Philosopher-King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Thought*. (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2003), 87–91.

8 Butterworth, "Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule," 47–49.

9 Christopher Colmo, "Wisdom and Power in Averroes' *Commentary on Plato's 'Republic,'*" *Maghreb Review* 40 (2015): 308–18.

Introducing the Philosopher-Kings

The most obvious place to begin our analysis is the passage that introduces the philosopher-kings. Their sudden appearance constitutes a dramatic plot twist in Plato's dialogue. In Averroes's *Commentary*, however, their introduction is relatively predictable, being based on arguments that have been developed from the very beginning of the work. The result is that what could be a very memorable moment in the commentary manages to pass almost entirely under the radar. This is just the first of many differences, stylistic and substantive, between Averroes and Plato.

In the original *Republic*, the debut of the philosopher-kings is enveloped in mystery and drama. Socrates is led to introduce them only after considerable badgering by Glaucon, who understandably wishes to learn about the possibility of the just city. Socrates postpones his answer as long as he can. Toward the end of his sprawling preamble, he warns his interlocutors that "the biggest wave" may "drown [him] in laughter and ill repute" (*Republic* 473c6–8). Far from resisting Socrates's admission of the oddity of the philosopher-kings, Glaucon affirms it, warning him of scorn or even violence should he fail to properly defend his argument (473e6–474a4). Averroes's terse summary of this passage is comparatively matter of fact, omitting any reference to laughter, violence, and contempt: "Since this governance can only come into being, if it is possible—and perchance happens—that the king is a philosopher, and since this also holds for its preservation after it has come into being, and since it was his intention to speak of the natures of these [individuals] and the manner of their education, he began first by describing the philosopher" (CR 60.18–20). Averroes proceeds to portray the philosopher, having said nothing about any response, frenzied, jocular, or otherwise, to his claim to rule, as if it is nothing out of the ordinary.

The absence of shock in Averroes's presentation of philosopher-kings is linked to his more gradual development of the theme. While Plato says surprisingly little about philosophers before they are crowned as kings, Averroes's effort to justify the rule of philosophy begins in his own introduction. In keeping with our earlier observation about the form of the work, none of these arguments are made in Plato's own name. Indeed, Averroes has not even started to comment on the *Republic* proper, when he declares, in a passage enclosed by "we say," that the just city desired by Plato needs to be governed by those who possess theoretical science (CR 23.31–24.3, cf. 22.9). While Averroes has yet to determine exactly what kind of rulers he means, he does indicate in an adjoining passage that the philosopher is a

very rare and special kind of human being (CR 23.7). Even if some readers would fail to put two and two together at this point, Averroes proceeds to remove all doubts about his meaning with statements in the commentary proper, none of which may be traced to any parallel passage in Plato. While Plato consistently obscures the identity of the city's rulers all the way up to the introduction of the philosopher-kings, Averroes brings it immediately into broad daylight, in anticipation of the arguments to come. For example, when Plato ascribes the virtue of the best guardians to certain moral qualities, Averroes adds, with "we shall explain," that "the chiefs in this city are undoubtedly the wise . . . in accord with what we shall recount of this in what is to come" (CR 39.24–27; Plato, *Republic*, 412b–414a). When Plato argues, again somewhat vaguely, that the wisdom ruling the city is a form of knowledge called "good counsel," Averroes specifies that the wise are philosophers, who know the proper human end through theoretical science as well as practical science (CR 48.14–28; *Republic*, 428b3–8). In light of these statements, which build toward the conclusion that philosophy and theoretical science should rule, the actual introduction of the philosopher-kings becomes somewhat anticlimactic.

One might conclude that the more methodical development of Averroes's argument suffices to eliminate the riotous carnival that surrounds Plato's philosopher-kings. The deeper question, however, is whether this difference in dramatic approach entails any difference in political understanding. While Plato's account is certainly more gripping, its emphasis on surprise, laughter, and scorn gives the ready impression that the rule of the philosophers may be something highly contested, not to say implausible. In contrast, one might infer from Averroes's less dramatic exposition that the philosopher-kings are something altogether more straightforward, even obvious. Yet the scattered remarks through which Averroes prepares the introduction of philosopher-kings are not quite as definitive as they seem at first glance: most importantly, they attest to the necessity of these kings in a Platonic context, without arguing anything for, or against, their possibility. On this point, in fact, Averroes preserves one crucial aspect of Plato's teaching. With the phrase, "if it is possible—and perchance happens—that the king is a philosopher," Averroes indicates his agreement with Plato not only about the uncertain possibility of philosopher-kingship, but also about the necessity that there be some kind of coincidence for such a marvel to occur (CR 60.18, *Republic* 473d2–3). Averroes's focus on the importance of coincidence should temper any hopes for the easy realization of philosopher-kings. We conclude that Averroes's introduction of philosopher-kings contains a surprise of its own,

albeit one very different from Plato's. While Plato says little to prepare his leaders for philosopher-kings before he introduces them as something shocking and implausible, Averroes creates the impression that the philosopher's claim to rule is obvious, only to suggest, as soon as he formally introduces it, that its actualization might require a considerable amount of luck. Both philosophers thereby incur the task of proving the possibility of their unusual proposal to skeptical readers, to which each devotes a considerable amount of effort. But what do the respective arguments of both Averroes and Plato actually prove? Without further ado, let us turn to this question.

Does the City Want the Philosophers to Rule?

One of the most salient Platonic arguments against the possibility of the philosopher-kings is the fact that most cities do not seem to want them; indeed, they do not manage to obtain any advantage from their philosophers at all. This objection, introduced by Socrates's interlocutor Adeimantus, is acknowledged by Averroes, who observes that Plato "turned to investigate the cause on account of which these cities, presently existing, do not receive any advantage from philosophers and the wise" (CR 63.6–8; *Republic* 487c4–e3). The ensuing passage, while hardly faithful to Plato in every detail, is never ascribed to anybody else, and reproduces the essence of Plato's argument quite succinctly.¹⁰

Averroes follows Plato in dividing his account into two parts: the first deals with the unwillingness of the cities to make use of the wise, the second, the tendency of the cities to corrupt young people endowed with philosophic natures before they actualize their potential (CR 63.9–10, 63.27; *Republic*, 489d7–e1). The first part is dominated by Plato's ship image, which Averroes conveys in a fashion that brings the essential Platonic dilemma to the fore: none of the sailors on the ship accept the true pilot's claim to knowledge of navigation, denying that such knowledge can even be taught. The ship comes to be ruled by pilots who merely feign the ability to steer it, without giving the true pilot a hearing. Even worse, these pilots are inclined to enforce their convictions through coercion. While Averroes removes the Platonic references to "cutting to pieces" or "throwing overboard" those who challenge the right of this elite to rule, he replaces them with a simile no less

10 Consider the complete absence of "we" between 62.3 and 65.3, in marked contrast to the other passages of Averroes that we have examined thus far.

violent—namely, the stoning of physicians by those who refuse to accept their cures. Averroes emphasizes that such an inability to obtain help from the truly wise continues to describe the situation of “citizens today” (CR 63.9–26; *Republic* 487e3–489c7). The relationship between the potential philosopher-rulers and the broader society that loathes them is just as dramatically hostile in Averroes as in Plato. In this crucial respect, nothing seems to have changed in the transition from Greek cities to Islamic ones: the people and the powers that be in both civilizations are vehemently opposed to allowing philosophers to rule.¹¹

In the second part of the discussion, Averroes emphasizes that most potential philosophers are corrupted by the bad education of the city. They are often transformed into sophists who rule the city at the expense of everything noble. Such people will be a source of great harm to the city, as indicated by their baleful influence on cities in Averroes’s own time. Building on Plato’s reference to “divine fate,” Averroes goes so far as to say that only selection by “the eternal providence of God” could preserve a philosophic nature from corruption (CR 63.27–64.22; *Republic* 493a1–2). Averroes follows Plato in suggesting that divine providence followed by coincidence is required for philosophers to actually rule. It is little wonder that the few philosophers who survive the crucible of the city end up retreating into their own corner, living a solitary life while dreaming of the city that exists only in speech (CR 64.25–26; *Republic* 496d5–e2). Averroes stops short of offering any definitive solution to this predicament: echoing certain passages in Plato, he acknowledges that “it is difficult for this city to come into being” (CR 65.1; *Republic* 499d4–6, 502c5–7).

Those same Platonic passages warn us against equating “difficult” with “impossible”; however, the passages in which Averroes examines the possibility of the city in his own name inspire no great confidence in it. Averroes raises the classic chicken-and-egg problem: if the city must be brought into being by the philosophers, and the philosophers must be raised and educated by the city, should the philosophers or the city come first? If neither can come first, then “what we were laying down in speech and had then thought to be possible is [now seen to be] impossible” (CR 62.22–28). Averroes replies that potential philosophers can be properly educated, and wisdom thereby completed, under the laws of his own time (62.28–63.2). If this is true, it

11 “The simple fact is that the cities of Averroes’ time are as defective as those of Socrates’, or, indeed, as of our own time” (Butterworth, “Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule,” 47).

would follow that the city is not required for the education of the first batch of philosophers. One may present Averroes himself as proof of this statement, but his existence alone hardly demonstrates the possibility of the city, since he never became a ruler or joined any class of philosophers who became rulers. Averroes proceeds to reiterate the need for coincidence: “If it should happen that the likes of these come to rule for an infinite time, it is possible for this city to come into being” (63.3–5). The coincidental has turned into the oxymoronic, since an infinite series of coincidences would soon cease to bear the name. The first ball shot from midcourt might go in, and possibly the second, but would a series of one thousand, even if the shooter were Stephen Curry? The emperor Marcus Aurelius may have happened to be a philosopher, but he was succeeded by the gladiator Commodus. If the rule of the philosophers arises only rarely and coincidentally, it can never acquire the momentum necessary to systematically remake the city and its education in its own image, in a way that might guarantee its perpetuation (cf. *Republic* 501a1–b7).

The foregoing analysis might explain why at the end of the Second Treatise, Averroes purports to agree with Plato, in declaring that the “manner mentioned by Plato”—namely, the expulsion of everyone over ten, “is the best for its [the city’s] emergence” (CR 78.26; *Republic*, 540e–541a). The alternative, hearkening back to the infinitely gradual option mentioned earlier in the Second Treatise, is that “virtuous kings come [to rule] the cities in a succession—one after another and for a long time”: this would eventually bring about good governance at the “end of time” (CR 78.27–29). What are we to make of Averroes’s peculiar messianism? While Plato consigns the city of the *Republic* to a remote barbarian place that none of the interlocutors will ever see (499c), Averroes consigns it to a remote future time in which all his readers, present and even future, will be long dead. We therefore need to take somewhat seriously the possibility that in his haste to bring about the good city in his own time, Averroes does indeed endorse the Maoist degree of violence ostensibly recommended by Plato. Yet Averroes never explains how this mass expulsion should be carried out and passes over in silence an opportunity to urge the complete philosophers of his own time to initiate it (CR 63.2–3). He also implies that the power of aristocrats who love good deeds in the cities of his time might have both the strength and inclination to resist such an obvious atrocity (CR 79.2–8; cf. Lerner, “*Introduction*,” xxviii).

The dialogue between Averroes and Plato about the question of the possibility of philosopher-kings culminates in basic agreement: it would be possible only if philosophers were willing and able to apply cruel, overwhelming

force.¹² Averroes's skepticism might seem puzzling, insofar as it fails to explain the distinctly matter-of-fact way in which he develops his own doctrine of philosopher-kings. This divergence is better explained by another consideration, to which we will now turn.

No Compulsion Needed: The Philosopher is Glad to Participate in Government

Averroes shares much of Plato's skepticism about the possibility of philosopher-kings. It is therefore hardly surprising that he also shares Plato's expectation, that many philosophers will retire from political life. His reaction to their predicament, however, is not quite as resigned. For one thing, Averroes never quite says, with Plato, that the philosopher's lofty thoughts cause him to look down on human life as such, but rather that they induce him to be dissatisfied with common opinion (*Republic* 486a8–10; CR 62.8–10). In Plato's view, the philosopher who takes shelter from the storm and bestial fury of politics is by no means a tragic figure: even if he fails to attain his highest perfection, he dies a tranquil death imbued with hope and cheer—not, by any stretch of the imagination, the worst of fates (*Republic* 496d5–e2). Averroes replaces Plato's soothing words with the more unsettling description of a philosopher who “turns to isolation and lives the life of a solitary” (CR 64.25–26).¹³

This suggestion forms part of a larger dialogue that Averroes quietly initiates with Plato, immediately after introducing the philosopher-kings:

He [Plato] began first by describing the philosopher. He said: He is the one who longs for knowledge of what is and inquiry into its nature apart from matter. This may be discerned, according to his opinion, in the statement concerning forms. You ought to know that the philosopher, according to the primary intention, is the person who has attained the theoretical sciences [by virtue of] the four conditions that have been enumerated in the book on demonstration. (CR 60.20–24)

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- 12 Colmo is therefore only slightly too blunt when he states the following: “Averroes is making the point in an obvious way that the best city can never be realized, not even in our time and under our Law” (Colmo, “Wisdom and Power,” 309).
- 13 Rosenthal plausibly views Averroes's denial of the viability of the solitary state as a retort of Ibn Bajja, who wrote a treatise titled *Governance of the Solitary* (Rosenthal, *Notes*, 273, 281). See note 17 below.

This concise statement is noteworthy in several respects. Its first part is ascribed, repeatedly and obtrusively, to Plato rather than Averroes. It concerns the doctrine of forms, which it qualifies as merely Plato's "opinion." Coming, as it does, in an astonishingly condensed summary of a Platonic passage that distinguishes sharply between knowledge and opinion (*Republic* 476d5ff.), this curt remark risks appearing rather dismissive. It certainly suffices to put some daylight between Averroes and Plato.¹⁴ The distance between the two widens in the second half of the quoted passage: no sooner has Averroes distanced himself from Plato's view of the philosopher than he sees fit to paraphrase Alfarabi's view, drawing, as he so often does, on the *Attainment of Happiness*. For added emphasis, he addresses the reader in the second person: "You ought to know."

As noted in my earlier chapter, philosophically inclined readers would almost certainly have known this text. With the assistance of Alfarabi, Averroes describes the philosopher not as an abstract speculator on the forms but as a master of theoretical science who also seeks to govern cities and nations. The philosopher does this by joining theoretical science to rhetoric, practical science, deliberation, and moral virtue. He cannot reach his ultimate perfection without acquiring all these qualities (CR 60.22–61.7; AH 13 [1], 45–46 [57–58]). The philosopher is therefore identical in meaning not only to the king who governs cities but also to the lawgiver who brought them into being and the imam who is most widely followed by their inhabitants (CR 61.8–16; AH 46–47[59]–61]). It is worth mentioning in this context certain passages of Alfarabi that Averroes does not cite, most notably, passages in which the philosopher seeks wisdom above all and, unlike conventional kings and imams, does not care about holding power or gaining a mass following; indeed, he is indifferent as to whether anybody listens to him or not (AH 43 [53], 49 [64]). Averroes's somewhat selective use of Alfarabi fits the purpose of his staged dialogue between Plato's philosopher and Alfarabi's, which is to cast the former as immersing himself in theoretical speculation and the latter as concerning himself with political power. By invoking his most famous Muslim predecessor in this manner, Averroes gives the impression that Muslims ought to assign a more ambitious political role to the philosopher than their Greek teachers ever did.

14 It is worth noting, however, that Socrates calls his own views about the idea of the good "opinions" (*Republic* 509c3–4). The difference between Averroes and Plato on this question is certainly not clear-cut: I will argue that their disagreement concerning the political role of the philosopher is more evident.

Averroes's conscious disagreement with Plato about this issue emerges most clearly in his commentary on book 7. Plato emphatically denies that the philosophers themselves should ever want to rule, lest their tranquil contemplation of the beautiful things above be disturbed by the drudgery and mud-slinging of this-worldly politics. Content to inhabit the Isles of the Blessed while they are still alive, the philosophers will govern the city only if they are absolutely compelled to do so (*Republic* 486a8–11, 519c4–d2, 540b2–7).¹⁵ The passages in the *Republic* that make this point are consistently suppressed in Averroes's commentary: most strikingly, the very concept of force and compulsion is absent from Averroes's treatment of the philosophic education in book 7.

This discrepancy between Plato and Averroes is already manifest in their respective versions of the cave. As Lerner has pointed out in his footnotes to the text, the prisoners in Plato's cave are bound by chains, while the residents of Averroes's do not face any physical obstacle whatsoever to their escape (CR 74.16–22; *Republic* 514a1–b6). Averroes begins to expound the philosophers' education without stopping to consider whether these future rulers may eventually have to be compelled to go back down into the cave against their will (CR 74.23ff.; *Republic* 515c6, 517a5–6, 519c8–d7). Such compulsion appears superfluous, since Averroes's philosopher-rulers assume the high command of the army from the age of thirty-five onward, and then the government of the city from the age of fifty, all without the slightest complaint. It is true that Averroes's rulers, like Plato's, eventually retire to the Isles of Blessed, but they do so only because of the weakness of age, in contrast to Plato's, who seem eager to escape the drudgery of politics (CR 78.1–5; *Republic* 539e2–540c1). One could argue that Averroes's interpretation harkens back to an older suggestion in the *Republic*, according to which philosophers should retire from political and military duties only when their strength begins to fail (498b8–c4). Yet Plato drops this suggestion from the passage on which Averroes is ostensibly commenting. And if the philosopher-kings are indeed eager to quit the drudgery of politics, why would they wait until the infirmities of old age set in? No comparable pressure to abandon politics exists in Averroes's account. Owing to the philosophers' persistence in politics, pure, undisturbed philosophy is a pleasure reserved for advanced, and otherwise unpleasant, old age. But would the promise of belated gratification, if it indeed follows a life of toil in war and politics, manage to induce

15 For the classic account of this aspect of Plato, see Strauss, *City and Man*, 124–25.

genuine philosophers to govern the city? Since Averroes never acknowledges that war and politics are drudgery, he is able to evade having to answer this question.¹⁶

Averroes justifies his redaction of Plato by making his quarrel with him somewhat more explicit at this point. In defining the Isles of the Blessed, an odd Greek term that many of his readers would have struggled to understand, Averroes offers an unusually personal comment on Plato.¹⁷

By the “Isles of the Blessed” he means, according to what I think, the inquiry concerning the form [idea] of the good in whose existence he believed. If there is someone who believes that there is a good that exists for itself, he will believe that the exercise of the other virtues hinders him from speculation on this. That is why, according to what I think, Plato asserts that at the end of their lives they isolate [themselves] for speculation upon that good (CR 78.6–9)

By employing such awkward expressions as “Plato says . . . according to what *I think*” (emphasis mine), Averroes assumes an editorial stance. Plato “believed” that the highest and only self-sufficient goal for humans is speculation on the form of the good, from which all other virtues, including political virtues, hinder them. If this holds true, then retirement to these islands, where the philosophers can freely contemplate this form, would be an incomparable blessing at any time in their lives. In introducing the form of the good at this juncture, Averroes cleverly displays his awareness of a famous Platonic passage and theme over which his commentary superficially

16 This paragraph develops Colmo’s observation that despite omitting the passages that describe politics as drudgery and injustice, Averroes never quite explains why the philosophers should be “willing to rule” (Colmo, “Wisdom and Power,” 309).

17 If I am not mistaken, these islands, along with Asclepius (CR 37.21), are the only names from Greek mythology preserved by Averroes. The Isles of the Blessed recur in a reference to the same passage of Plato in Averroes’s *Epistle on the Conjunction of the Intellect*. While Averroes does not tell us what he thinks about Plato in that passage, he praises participation in politics, criticizes withdrawal from it as impossible in his time, and laments the incompleteness and obscurity of Ibn Bajja’s writings that claim the contrary. See Averroes, *Epistle on Conjunction with the Active Intellect with Commentary of Moses Narboni*, trans. Kalman Bland (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1982), 108–09 [Heb. 146–47]. Alexander Green discusses Moses of Narbonne’s own view of this passage in the following chapter.

appears to skip.¹⁸ Averroes distances himself from Plato's words and beliefs in this passage, just as he distanced himself from Plato's "opinion" in an earlier discussion (60.22). It is revealing that both passages concern the theory of forms and its relationship to philosopher-kings. Taken together, they show how the theory of forms, and especially belief in the form of the good, leads the philosopher away from concern with government and human things more generally, into speculation on matters that transcend them. A view of philosophy that justifies any political activity on its part would therefore need to seek an alternative to Plato's forms. Yet Averroes's own stance remains elusive: as careful as he is to attribute the theory of forms solely to Plato, he is just as careful to never tell us directly what he himself thinks of it.¹⁹ Averroes's own view of the relationship of philosophy to practice has yet to be satisfactorily articulated. In attempting to tackle this issue, we need to consider the account of theoretical science that Averroes gives in his own name.

Theoretical Science and Governance

Any full account of Averroes's attitude toward Plato needs to consider the lengthiest "digression" in the work, in which Averroes interrupts his commentary midstream to address the question of the highest human end in his own name. Beginning with a "we" and ending with "Plato said" (CR 65.3–74.13), this digression appears to take the place of Plato's theoretical discussions in book 5 and 6 of the *Republic*, while presenting Averroes's own view of theoretical science and its relationship to practice in language generally more typical of Aristotle. Unable to provide a full discussion of this dense and difficult passage in the framework of this short chapter, I will extract the points that seem most relevant to this particular argument.

Averroes does not hesitate to proclaim the superiority of theoretical science to practice. This could lead, however, to two very different conclusions: either theoretical science ignores practice as utterly beneath it, or it governs

18 Averroes speaks of the form (*šura* in both Hebrew and Arabic) of the good rather than the "idea," a term whose translation into the Semitic languages is not nearly as definitive. I am not convinced that this Aristotelian term implies any difference in meaning.

19 Averroes speaks "in terms such as to disassociate himself from Plato's doctrine" (Butterworth, "Ethics, Philosophy, and Virtuous Rule," 49). We should emphasize that disassociation is somewhat less than outright repudiation.

and guides practice. It is possible to find in Averroes passages that point in both directions. Averroes states initially that the possessors of theoretical science are somehow lords of those who possess merely practical science. His argument for this claim, however, does not dazzle in clarity or precision: theoretical science rules over practical science because it is “preferable” to it as well as its ultimate goal (CR 69.17–70.2). We may certainly grant both these points without insisting that the former directs the latter’s every move. Perhaps it is the deliberate vagueness of this argument that permits Averroes to present so strong an objection to it: however airily one might discourse on the superiority and power of theory, the governance of cities is quite obviously a practical art—indeed, the highest practical art (70.3–4, 71.30–31). To the extent that theoretical science assists in governance, it too must direct itself toward practice. Theoretical science does not transcend practical science, at least with regard to the task of ruling: it would be more accurate to say that the two are mutually dependent members of the same genus, as is the case with the ruling art of agriculture and those arts that are subordinate to it. Averroes denigrates this view by ascribing it to fake philosophers and unexamined opinion, but this *ad hominem* attack does not constitute a convincing refutation (CR 70.5–14; Butterworth, “*Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule*,” 56).

Averroes does proceed to refute this opinion, but at the price of detaching theory even further from practice. According to the new argument, theory transcends practice as completely as intelligible existence transcends practical existence, as its end, form, and efficient cause: the use of the verb “ascend” to describe our efforts to reach it is more than vaguely reminiscent of the *anabasis* out of Plato’s cave (CR 70.23–30; *Republic* 517b4). But does such causality imply any meaningful governance or rule on the part of the intelligible existence, or rather inexorable, unchanging emanation of sensible existence from it? The same question must be asked about the relationship between theory and practice. In declaring that the main purpose of theoretical science is not to serve others, Averroes would seem at first glance to argue that it ought to rule. On deeper consideration, however, one may wonder whether anybody other than a horrid despot responsibly desires to govern people whom he refuses to serve in any way. By equating the governance of the philosophers with service later in the work, and the governance of tyrants with the refusal to serve, Averroes merely increases the reader’s bewilderment on this point (CR 70.19–20, cf. 85.29–86.8).

This enigma is not definitively resolved by Averroes’s account of the hierarchy of theory and practice. Averroes insists that theoretical science is

“necessary and useful” for practice, just as intelligible existence is necessary for sensible existence, but the only concrete example of such usefulness—namely, the value of scientific knowledge of agriculture for tilling fields—is relegated to arguments attributed to opponents (CR 70.9–10, 71.6–8, 20). Despite Averroes’s dual focus on the highest practical art of governance and the highest theoretical pursuit, he never articulates any working relationship between the two. He rather makes it abundantly clear that theory and practice each operate in their own respective realms, with the realm of theory being the loftier one. But does theory desire, let alone claim, lordship over practical activities whose goals it does not share (71.1–2, 72.21–22)? This lordship appears to stem from the fact that theory is somehow the cause of the existence of practice, but then the same doubt recurs: how does causality entail direct rule (71.10–11, cf. 70.23–25)? As Colmo incisively puts it, “But must one either rule or be ruled? Are these the only alternatives?” (Colmo, “Wisdom and Power,” 315).

Averroes eventually justifies the superiority of theoretical science by asserting its self-sufficiency and its relative independence from matter (CR 72.26–28).²⁰ This statement implies, however, the most Platonic of the possibilities mentioned at the beginning of this section: why should so free and transcendent an activity bind itself voluntarily to the impure acts and qualities of the lower world? These qualities may exist for the sake of theoretical perfection (72.29–32), but does it necessarily follow from this possibility that they must serve and obey it? Averroes’s argument lurches quite precipitously back in the direction of the view that he appears to reject in Plato: the philosopher gains his happiness by continuous contemplation of sublime, eternal beings, leaving him with neither the time to devote himself to practical human affairs nor the inclination to sully himself with them. It remains, however, to determine the nature of these beings, and on this point Averroes presents himself as decidedly agnostic. He brings up once again Plato’s forms, but merely as one conjecture among many, including the quasi-Aristotelian active intellect or perhaps other kinds of intellects. He does not regard any of these concepts as certain enough to justify the claim that the theoretical sciences are everlasting. Averroes thus insinuates that the thoughts attainable by human beings may never be eternal at all. Rather, the matter needs to be investigated

20 As Butterworth aptly puts it, “the theoretical sciences serve nothing, are affected by nothing, exist for the sake of nothing but themselves” (Butterworth, “Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule,” 56). See also Colmo, “Wisdom and Power,” 315–16.

further in physics, a project that as far as I can tell is never initiated, let alone consummated, in the present work. Averroes then “returns” to Plato (73.25–74.13). The “controversy . . . over the rational part of the soul” that pervades the “opinions of the philosophers” is consciously left unresolved (67.4–5).

Averroes does append one more comment on this subject, toward the end of the work. It appears at first glance to possess great weight, as the only argument in the entire work that Averroes calls “demonstrative.” But I share Christopher Colmo’s suspicion of this claim: the putative demonstration hinges on a fairly weak analogy between being full of food and full of knowledge and truth, with the latter being nobler, more complete, and more lasting than the former on account of its proximity to “eternal things.”²¹ Besides, this argument does not add much to what Averroes says in the more substantial passage that we have just discussed. Even if the pleasure of the intellect is indeed the highest and longest-lasting pleasure, Averroes is unable to determine whether it is truly eternal, admitting that it may perish on account of change and flux (CR 104.12–25). The implication is that even philosophers may fall sick and die, or otherwise be unexpectedly distracted from their calling. Averroes’s final reference to Plato’s opinion about the happiest life once again illustrates his own inability to fully vindicate it.

The dialogue between Averroes and Plato about the question of philosopher-kings may be summarized as follows. Both agree, for most of the same reasons, that philosopher-kings are implausible in cities that are not rushing to recruit them. Plato, however, sees this as a blessing in disguise for philosophy, whose real mission lies in the contemplation of eternal beings situated above and beyond the vicissitudes of human life. Averroes replies that the existence of such beings, as well as the capacity of humans to constantly meditate on them, appears somewhat doubtful. He cannot verify Plato’s belief in forms, or his conclusion that philosophy consists exclusively in contemplating them. He cannot conclude, with Plato, that the philosopher looks down on any participation in political life. Without reducing philosophy to crude practical use, or even denying that its main focus ought to be theoretical, Averroes therefore leaves open the possibility that the philosopher may spend some time dedicating himself to current political concerns. As he says more bluntly elsewhere, withdrawal from the cities is impossible

21 I owe this insight to an unpublished paper: Christopher A. Colmo, “Alfarabi in Averroes’ *Commentary on Plato’s ‘Republic’*” (Paper, Midwest Political Science Association 77th Annual Conference, Chicago, IL, April 5, 2019).

in his time (Averroes, *Epistle on the Intellect*, 109 [146]).²² Averroes's less dismissive attitude toward the philosopher's political involvement is reflected in his early and aggressive promotion of the value of philosophic governance, well beyond anything found in parallel passages of Plato: it hints that political life would indeed be much improved, if wise men and philosophers participated in it. Since Averroes knows that direct rule of the wise is unlikely, as well as too demanding on the time of the philosophers, he contents himself with a merely advisory role, as becomes clear in the Third Treatise.

A Pale but Useful Imitation of the City

I have argued that Averroes envisages a greater political role for the philosopher than Plato does. With regard to Averroes's novel purpose, the city of the *Republic* itself risks becoming something of a red herring, not to say an albatross around his neck. It is by no means clear how its most notorious proposals, including the radical reform of education, the abolition of private property, and the practice of eugenics, help prepare the philosopher for any useful political role in the actual cities of his time.²³ Averroes anticipates this problem and does not hesitate to face it. Near the beginning of the Third Treatise, he recasts the virtuous government accordingly.

Averroes begins by dividing this government into two sorts, the rule of one king and rule of several good men. Taken from an earlier stage in the *Republic*, before Plato had even introduced the philosopher-kings, it is not clear what relevance this division still has (CR 80.21–22; *Republic* 445d3–6). It is certainly not repeated by Plato in book 8, the official subject of Averroes's commentary at this point. Yet Averroes's own distinct purpose soon becomes clear, as he proceeds to divide and dilute the virtuous government in order to make it more compatible with actual, Muslim regimes (CR

22 Rosenthal conveys this aspect of Averroes's thought and activity admirably: "Since the philosopher cannot rule except in the Ideal State, he must serve the community in another capacity." Rosenthal then provides a useful Latin quotation from an obscure work of Averroes, in which he acknowledges his extensive public duties. See E. I. J. Rosenthal, "The Place of Politics in the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 15, no. 2 (1953): 246–78, esp. 247–48.

23 See the chapters in this volume by Belo and Namazi for further consideration of these passages.

80.27–81.8). His inspiration is once again Alfarabi—in this case a passage from the *Selected Aphorisms*.²⁴

Averroes prefaces his novel account of the virtuous governance with a new list of the ruler's qualities. This list appears brief, matter of fact, and unobtrusive: it includes wisdom, prudence, good persuasion, good imagination, and capability for war or jihad. To grasp its importance, one must appreciate how sharply it differs in emphasis from the parallel list in the Second Treatise, which is based on Plato rather than Alfarabi (CR 80.23–26, cf. 61.20–62.20; *Republic* 485a–487a).²⁵ The earlier list focuses overwhelmingly on the intellectual virtues, at the expense of what are normally deemed political virtues. The philosopher-ruler is so intensely devoted to wisdom and truth that his very courage and moderation tend primarily toward those ends. These qualities grant him the fortitude to despise the pleasures and prejudices, or “nondemonstrative arguments,” of the cities in which he grows up, so that these temptations do not derail his pursuit of knowledge (CR 61.23–62.12; *Republic* 485a10–487a5). His moral virtue is thus reduced to a handmaiden of his theoretical virtue. Even the philosopher ruler's eloquence is directed more toward expressing “thoughts while he is speculating” than persuading the people on political matters. His bodily health and strength still appear to matter, but almost as an afterthought that is left over from the earlier guardian education (CR 62.19–20). The later list, in contrast, subsumes the intellectual virtues into the generic category of wisdom while bringing persuasion, imagination, and military strength to the fore. No longer dwelling wistfully on the qualities required to philosophize, the new list centers on the abilities needed to effectively rule. It signals a dramatic transformation in the character and preoccupations of the ruler—from philosopher-king to something much closer to a conventional king.

Having redefined the ruler, Averroes proceeds to dilute his qualifications still further, remaining faithful to Alfarabi in so doing. He accepts what Alfarabi identifies, in the same aphorism mentioned above, as a second-best alternative, and even a third and a fourth: with each compromise, governance becomes more divided and more imitative, so that by the fourth stage, it is dependent on a group of rulers, including a king, a warrior, and a jurist, all of

24 Alfarabi, “The Selected Aphorisms,” in *Alfarabi: The Political Writings*, trans. Charles Butterworth (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), no. 58.

25 Melamed perceives the difference between the two sets of qualities and their sources without delving into the reasons behind Averroes's choice of two such distinct lists (see Melamed, *The Philosopher King*, 88–91).

whom merely follow and interpret ancient laws (CR 80.27–81.7). Averroes proceeds to make explicit what was at most only implicit in Alfarabi: the fourth and final arrangement “was the case with many of the Muslim kings” (81.7–8). Inheriting the remote, pagan regime of Plato, Averroes has managed to dilute it to the point where it actually existed among Muslims of the past and may even serve as a model for Muslims at present. This is no mean feat. One has to ask, at the very least, whether it is only the qualities of the rulers that have changed. If the regime follows some version of Muslim law, as a Muslim king would presumably have to do, it is hard to see how it could retain Plato’s abolition of private property, introduction of women into the public sphere, and eugenics (cf. Lerner, “*Introduction*,” xx, xxiii).²⁶ Alfarabi, as far as I know, mentions none of these notorious proposals in any of his writings. Averroes, by contrast, appeared to be a willing supporter of them in the First Treatise, as well as a savage critic of the institutions of existing cities (CR 41.17–19, 54.5–10): now, however, he follows Alfarabi by passing over this subject in silence.²⁷

Averroes’s transformation of the Platonic city at the beginning of the Third Treatise affects his argument in the remainder of the book. While Plato describes the decline of the virtuous regime in a mythic fashion attributed to the Muses without establishing any clear relationship between most of the regimes actually discussed and the governments of his time (cf. *Republic* 544c1–d4, 545d8), Averroes describes the same decline according to natural science while citing specific governments existing in his time or the Islamic past (CR 87.21ff.). We restrict ourselves here to the occasions where Averroes invokes the virtuous regime. He introduces a notion alien to Plato—namely, the imitation of this virtuous regime on earth (CR 89.30). Not only is Plato silent about this idea, but he implicitly rejects it at end of book 9. The city is a pattern in heaven that exists nowhere in earth, except within the soul of the

26 Judging from Alfarabi’s Arabic, the term employed in this passage is probably *sunna*, a term commonly rendered in English as “Muslim tradition” and translated into Hebrew as *hoqim*. In fact, Alfarabi also introduces the plural of *shari‘a* (“Selected Aphorisms,” 58); while the Hebrew translation of this term does not appear in this part of Averroes’s text, an expression that almost certainly means jurisprudence does (*mišpat*, 81.1–5).

27 In fact, Catarina Belo has argued that Averroes’s views on women are even more radical than Plato’s. See Catarina Belo, “Some Considerations on Averroes’ Views Regarding Women and Their Role in Society,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20, no. 1 (December 6, 2008):1–20, as well as her contribution to the present volume.

philosopher (*Republic* 592e10–b6). One could say that Averroes, who explicitly rejects the Myth of Er and book 10 more generally (CR 105.15–25), replaces the imitation of happiness in the other world with imitation of the virtuous regime in this one. It remains to explain this novel form of imitation and its political purpose.

Averroes says that Muslims at the time of the prophet did no more than “imitate the virtuous governance” (89.30).²⁸ It is fair to assume that even this imitation is inferior to the original. If the finest generation of Muslims merely imitated this regime, even less should be expected of later generations. The early Almoravids “imitated the governance based on the nomos,” while the early Almohads “resembled” the same kind of governance (CR 92.5–10). Does the “virtuous governance” mean the original as described by Plato, or the watered-down, Islamicized version articulated by Averroes at the beginning of the Third Treatise? There are strong reasons to suspect the latter. These historical Muslims regimes would not have possessed any of the institutions of Plato’s city that had to do with family, property, or the rule of the philosophers.²⁹ It is therefore hard to see how they could imitate the original Platonic city in any meaningful sense. In contrast, Muslims could easily imitate the virtuous regimes that depend on jurisprudence and respect for the laws laid down by their predecessors (81.2–5). The best actual regimes appear to be mere imitations of the best feasible Muslim model described by Alfarabi and Averroes: according to the fourfold descent from perfect Platonic regime down to the Muslim king and finally the imitation of him, this regime may be only fifth best.³⁰ This indicates the degree of compromise that would be required for a philosopher to offer practical political advice. Yet Averroes seems more convinced than Plato that this compromise is worth it—as, it seems, was the great Christian Platonist Thomas More. As More puts it in his own name in *Utopia*, “There is another, more politic (*civilior*) sort of philosophy, which knows its role and adapts itself to it,

28 For another interesting interpretation of this imitation, see Shlomo Pines, “Notes on Averroes’s Political Philosophy,” p. 139. Pines places greater weight than I do on the possibility of ascending from the imitation to the original.

29 Rasoul Namazi highlights the incompatibility of the Platonic city with Muslim *shari‘a* in his contribution to this volume.

30 Most importantly, as Butterworth observes, “philosophy . . . is not available to the ruler and rulers of these otherwise virtuous regimes” (Butterworth, “*Philosophy, Ethics, and Virtuous Rule*,” 73).

keeping to its part in the play at hand with propriety and decorum.”³¹ More worked in various capacities for Henry VIII, and Averroes did so for the Almohad caliphate, but both managed to find time to compose enduring philosophical works. In Averroes’s case, this permitted him to address the “troubles of the time” associated with the prevalence of inferior regimes such as oligarchy and democracy, which seduced citizens into their own private ends at the expense of the effective military defense of the Muslim community and its common good (CR 84.14–15, 92.4–8, 103–8.12, 105.4–6). With warlike Christians lurking at the doorstep, these constituted a very grave danger (27.9).

The ambiguity of Averroes’s addressee and purpose emerges in the dedication that comes near the end of the Third Treatise. It is characterized by an unusual use of pronouns, which is uncharacteristically lost in Lerner’s translation. The Hebrew employs the singular “you” in the first sentence of the paragraph, only to switch to the plural “you” immediately after speaking of the “troubles of the time” (CR 105.4–6). The rest of the paragraph, which gives effusive thanks for all the help Averroes has received in writing the work, retains the plural (105.6–10), but the concluding dedications returns to the singular (105.27).³² Both the singular and plural passages include an invocation of divine help and guidance to the addressee. It is not easy to discern to whom each refers, especially since, in other works, Averroes uses the polite plural form to refer to the rulers.³³ We must therefore consider the context of this particular case. The plural *you* addresses not merely patrons but those who offered Averroes genuine help in the pursuit of “all that we have longed for in the sciences” (105.7). While rulers might flatter themselves in fancying that this refers to them, its more likely object is Averroes’s fellow philosophers—Plato, Aristotle, and Alfarabi included. Having interpreted the plural you in this way, we can then agree with Rosenthal, that the

31 Thomas More, *Utopia: Latin Text and English Translation*, ed. George M. Logan, Robert M. Adams, and Clarence H. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 97. Translation modified.

32 Since Hebrew and Arabic have exactly the same singular and plural pronouns, no Hebrew translator would have any reason to render this inaccurately.

33 See Averroes, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, trans. Charles Butterworth (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2008) 38.2, 42.14. To further complicate the matter, the ruler in the *Decisive Treatise* is addressed in the third person singular (33.6).

singular *you* refers to the ruler who was probably Averroes's patron.³⁴ So, while the work is addressed to the ruler insofar as it responds to the crisis of its time, it is inspired by the philosophers, and composed for them insofar as it takes up the universal themes inherited from Plato's *Republic*.

The advantage of this approach is that Averroes gets to wear two hats. He is not only the radical, Platonic philosopher who articulates the "city in speech" (CR 62.28, 64.26–27) but also the loyal Muslim who manages to connect this regime with a model that could lead his people away from their present decadence back toward their glorious past. He is therefore able to address his commentary to his princely patron and present the *Republic* as a work that can respond to the crisis of his time. Averroes tempers his call for return to an older, sterner Muslim regime with a recognition that this regime, in comparison to the highest Platonic model, is imitative, derivative, and decidedly fifth best. In large part owing to the influence of the *Republic* and its account of what a truly perfect regime would entail, the idiosyncratic form of Muslim revivalism that Averroes promotes is a moderate one, free from the all-too-common temptations of utopian fanaticism. At the same time, Averroes argues to the philosophers that the temptation to withdraw from politics in the name of their perfect but unrealizable regime is an unfortunate one, rendering their existence unnecessarily isolated and solitary. By making the compromises required to adapt the Platonic regime to actual circumstances, the philosophers make their regime more useful as a model, and themselves more useful as counselors, to rulers. They should not need to be compelled to do what is both good for their societies and good for themselves.

34 See Rosenthal, *Notes*, 300. In insisting that the plural *you* also refers to the patron, Rosenthal fails to provide any convincing explanation for the use of both singular and plural. To the concern of overinterpretation, raised by some reviewers, I would reply as follows: What other understanding of the text accounts for this strange usage? Or are we supposed to regard dismiss it as an inexplicable error?

Part Five

Averroes's Reception
in Europe

Chapter Thirteen

Three Readings of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* in Medieval Jewish Thought

Alexander Green

The ethical and political writings by late medieval Jewish philosophers are generally seen to be rooted in two fundamental classical texts, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Plato's *Republic*.¹ Yet, regarding the *Republic*, medieval Jewish thinkers likely had no direct access to it.² It was Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles's translation of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* into

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- 1 I owe a large debt and a thank-you to Abraham Melamed who allowed me to read an unpublished article of his titled "Averroes' Political Ideas in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Philosophy." He brought to my attention some of the sources that I was not aware of and a few of the English translations are his, as I note below. Thanks also to Steven Harvey and Warren Zev Harvey for their feedback and very helpful suggestions.
 - 2 One Jewish philosopher to use the *Republic* before Averroes was Judah Halevi in the *Kuzari*. See *Kuzari* 3:3–3:5 and 3:19. However, it appears that Halevi read an epitome or a synopsis of the *Republic*. Franz Rosenthal argued that Hunain ibn Ishaq (809–73) translated Galen's synopsis, which was used by Averroes for his commentary. See Franz Rosenthal, "On the Knowledge of Plato's Philosophy in the Islamic World," *Islamic Culture* 14 (1940): 387–422; Gerard Boter, *The Textual Tradition of Plato's "Republic"* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 280; Steven Harvey, "The Greek Library of the Medieval Jewish Philosophers," in *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, ed. Cristina D'Ancona (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 494–95.

Hebrew in the 1320s that gave Hebrew readers some access to the *Republic* and made it the central classical text on political philosophy for Jewish thought. Indeed, it was used by Jewish thinkers for several hundred years thereafter. This chapter will focus on the question of how Plato's *Republic* came to influence medieval Jewish thought; in doing so, it will attempt to map out three distinct trends in how Jewish thinkers of the medieval period interpreted the *Republic's* core ideas.³

Samuel Ben Judah of Marseilles and the Translation into Hebrew

The introduction of Plato's *Republic* into Jewish discussions on the nature of the political community took place after Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles's translation of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* from Arabic into Hebrew was completed in 1320 and revised in 1321 and 1322.⁴ Samuel came from an established family in Provence that had acquired wealth over multiple generations. He studied philosophy with Senor (Don) Astruc de Noves and translated works on logic and astronomy. The movement of translating the great works of science and secular philosophy from Arabic into Hebrew, which had been started in Provence by Samuel ibn Tibbon (ca. 1165–1232) in the first decades of the thirteenth century and been furthered, in large part, by his son, Moses ibn Tibbon (ca. 1195–1274), his son-in-law, Jacob Anatoli (1194–1256), and his grandson, Jacob b. Makhir (ca. 1236–1304), was gradually coming to an end after the prodigious activity of Qalonimos ben Qalonimos (ca. 1286–1328) in the first decades of the fourteenth century. It had already begun to transform Judaism into what some

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- 3 Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968). There are two English translations from the Hebrew of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."* Those are *Averroes's Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* ed. and trans. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge, 1956); and *Averroes on Plato's "Republic,"* trans. Ralph Lerner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974). The Rosenthal edition also has a critical Hebrew text, which we will be using. We will be following the Lerner version for the English translation.
- 4 Lawrence V. Berman, "Greek into Hebrew: Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles, 14th century Philosopher and Translator," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 289–320.

have termed a philosophic religion.⁵ The deficiency in this model of philosophic religion is that it was overly focused on natural science and mostly ignored practical philosophy.⁶ But the translation of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* and Averroes's *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* by Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles affected a significant shift in light of this larger trend of marginalizing ethics and politics. Samuel's motivations for translating these works are not fully clear. Lawrence V. Berman surmises that, on a personal level, his interest in political philosophy may have arisen from the fact that he came from a wealthy family that played a prominent part in communal affairs.⁷ However, viewed from a broader societal perspective, the interest in a form of politics guided by reason and not by the authority of revelation reflects the conflict happening in the 1320s between the pope and the Holy Roman emperor over the question of who was the leader of Christendom in secular matters. Later in this decade, the dispute between Pope John XXII and Emperor Louis of Bavaria led to the excommunication of Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham. This brought Marsilius to write his *Defender of the Peace* (1324) and William of Ockham to compose his many political writings advocating a form of separation of powers. Berman raises the possibility here as well that these historical events may have been factors in Samuel's interest in carrying out these translation projects.⁸ Either way, these works had not yet been translated into Hebrew, and Hebrew-reading scholars were likely interested in fulfilling this lacuna in the Hebrew library. Notwithstanding Samuel's motivation in translating Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* into Hebrew, the Jewish readership of these works over the next few hundred years led to varying

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- 5 Carlos Fraenkel, *From Maimonides to Samuel Ibn Tibbon: The Transformation of the Dalalat al Ha'irin into the Moreh ha-Nevukhim* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007).
- 6 Rafael Jospe, "Rejecting Moral Virtue as the Ultimate Human End," in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, ed. William Brinner and Stephen Ricks (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 185–204; Yehuda Halper, "Da'at Harambam and Da'at Samuel Ibn Tibbon: on the Meanings of the Hebrew Term Da'at, and their Relationship to the Central Questions of the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide of the Perplexed*," *Da'at* 83 (2017): 47–68.
- 7 Lawrence V. Berman, "Greek into Hebrew," 293.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 294. See also Ramon Guerrero, "La Transmisión a Europa de Averroes," in *Averroes y los Averroísmos, Zaragoza, Actas del III Congreso Nacional de Filosofía Medieval*, ed. J. M. Ayala Martínez (Zaragoza: Sociedad de Filosofía Medieval, 1999), 113.

and divergent interpretations of the *Republic*, disclosing the centrality of this work for debates on the nature of political philosophy. Jewish thinkers who cited or utilized the ideas of *Republic* were using Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles's Hebrew translation of Averroes's *Commentary*, though they did not often state explicitly that it was Averroes's commentary.

First Reading: The Impossibility of the Ideal Philosopher-King and the Politics of Self-Preservation (Levi Gersonides and Joseph Ibn Kaspi)

The first trend in interpreting Plato's *Republic* can be perceived in the work of two medieval Jewish philosophers and biblical interpreters living in Provence in the early fourteenth century: Levi Gersonides (1288–1344) and Joseph Ibn Kaspi (1279–1340).⁹ While each philosopher attempted to synthesize Maimonidean and Averroistic thought in their own way, they both cite the *Republic* in their works and they share a common skepticism about the possibility of a synthesis of philosophy and politics as embodied in a prophetic philosopher-king. Instead, they suggest that politics should focus on self-preservation.¹⁰

9 Another philosopher living around the same time who does refer to Plato's *Republic* but whom I had to leave out of the discussion here is Nissim of Marseilles. See Howard Kreisel, ed., *Ma'aseh Nissim* (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 2000), 382–83. I am not certain at this point whether this one citation is part of a larger political philosophy. Interestingly, Gersonides and Nissim of Marseilles both cite the title of the *Republic* as *Medinah ha-Hashuvah*, which does not appear in Averroes's commentary but is the title used in the translations into Hebrew of Alfarabi, while Ibn Kaspi refers to it as *Sefer Hanbaga le-Aplaton*. See Alfarabi, *Sefer Hatalot ha-Nimtzaot (The Book of Principles)* in *Sefer ha-Asif*, ed. Herschell Filipovski (Leipzig: K. F. Köhler, 1849), 45, 47; Gersonides, *The Wars of the Lord: An Annotated Critical Edition of Treatises 1–4*, ed. Ofer Elijor (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press, 2018), 223; and Adrian Sackson, *Joseph Ibn Kaspi: Portrait of a Hebrew Philosopher in Medieval Provence* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 266.

10 This theme is developed further in my books *The Virtue Ethics of Levi Gersonides* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), chapters 1 and 5, and *Power and Progress: Joseph Ibn Kaspi and the Meaning of History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019), chapter 1.

Gersonides cites the *Republic* twice in his theological work, *Wars of the Lord*, both times when discussing the nature of astrology. In *Wars* book 2, he gives a unique astrological explanation for the division of the political community into classes with set occupations.¹¹ This is in response to the myth created by Socrates in the *Republic*, a myth that conveys the notion that everyone is born with a god-given metal—either gold, silver, or iron and bronze—and the metal a person is born with determines his occupation, whether that be an auxiliary, a farmer, or a craftsman.¹² Averroes summarizes Socrates's myth in saying that "Plato cleverly provided that a story be adopted in the city by which the guardians and the rest of the multitude may be persuaded to transfer their offspring from class to class."¹³ Interestingly, Averroes does not use the term "noble lie" in this section, simply referring to the myth as a "story" (*sippur*). But Averroes clearly understood and approved of such false myths being presented to the multitude for the purpose of maintaining order in a society, as he indicates earlier in the commentary. There he states that "the chiefs' lying to the multitude will be appropriate for them in the respect in which a drug is appropriate for a disease" and "untrue stories are necessary for the teaching of the citizens."¹⁴

Gersonides raises a challenge to this scheme. He argues that in Socrates's myth, especially as presented by Averroes, some individuals will be dissatisfied with the occupation that they are given and will try to change occupations, creating conflict and instability. In contrast, Gersonides proposes a different model in which "all the crafts are perfected in a more superior way [by the heavenly bodies] than in Plato's scheme of a perfect state."¹⁵ In other words, Gersonides seem to suggest that nature takes care of the distribution of character types related to occupational talents. While Socrates presents the distribution of occupations as based upon a noble lie, Gersonides's critique implies that it will not be a successful one. This is because Socrates's proposed

11 This has been analyzed by Howard Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2001), 355; and Esti Eisenmann, "Social and Political Principles in Gersonides' Thought," in *Religion and Politics in Jewish Thought: Essays in Honor of Aviezer Ravitzky*, ed. Brown Benjamin, Menachem Lorberbaum, Avinoam Rosenak, and Yedidia Z. Stern (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2012), 322–24.

12 Plato, *Republic* 415a–c and *Averroes on Plato's "Republic,"* trans. Lerner, 36–37.

13 *Averroes on Plato's "Republic,"* trans. Lerner, 36.

14 *Ibid.*, 24.

15 Levi Gersonides, *The Wars of the Lord*, trans. Seymour Feldman, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984–99), 2:36 (2.2).

method for allocating occupations ignores the role that the heavenly bodies play in ensuring people are guided to a specific occupation. Gersonides writes that:

Even though choice, which stems from reason, has the power to upset this order, this occurs rarely. For, since this order bestows upon the craftsmen a desire for that which it decrees, a craftsman does not leave his craft for another. We therefore observe that men who work in trivial or despised crafts do not leave these jobs for other work, although they have the capacity to transfer jobs. Indeed, we see people beginning to learn such lowly and despised jobs in preference to better jobs. If they do leave the former crafts, however, it is for the sake of attaining human perfection, although there are very few people of this sort. Moreover, even if we admit that choice inclines men to other jobs, this happens only rarely, and it is not impossible even on this supposition that all the crafts necessary for society are found, since their occurrence frequently emanates from the order coming from the heavenly bodies, as has been shown.¹⁶

Here Gersonides argues that the providential power of the heavenly bodies determines an individual's occupation within a political community in a more perfect way than is found in Plato's *Republic*. This is based on his assumption that human temperament is governed by astrology and hence that it will affect an individual's choice of occupation in a way more properly conducive to ensuring the correct fit.¹⁷ This also means that one's inborn natural temperament will incline that person toward a specific occupation. Gersonides thus gives an explanation for the well-known phenomenon involving different people having skills for different kinds of jobs and usually being happy doing those jobs. Furthermore, Gersonides suggests that a noble lie is not necessary since the heavenly bodies arranged humanity in such a way that conflict can be avoided; indeed, individuals who use reason to overcome their astrological determination do so for the sake of greater perfection. He returns to this theme in *Wars* book 6, where he discusses how the political community described in the *Republic* is one in which the ideal leader focuses on one craft only and not on all the other crafts. He compares this to the work of the biblical God whose single "craft" in ruling the universe is ordering the heavenly bodies through the active intellect.¹⁸ In other words, Gersonides suggests that God can more effectively structure society

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 168–69 (4.3).

18 Ibid., 3:340–41 (6.1.17).

through the heavenly bodies than a philosopher can through his own reason and constructed myths.¹⁹

Gersonides shifts the role of constructing an ideal political community away from the philosophic ruler (and of humanity in general) and assigns it to the direct emanation of the heavenly bodies, which more effectively perform the task of optimizing the division of labor in society. Political philosophy is thus in his view an astrological discipline. This implies that the laws of the perfect plan of the universe are fashioned through the perfect equilibrium of the active intellect and the divine mind. As such, Gersonides frequently refers to God's relationship to the world by using the expression, "law, order and equilibrium" (*nimus ve-ha-seder ve-ha-yosher*).²⁰ In fact, God's conception of justice in the moral sense is tied in with his ordering of the universe in the scientific sense. This means that the universe is fundamentally fair owing to the order that God introduced in the construction of it. Hence, for Gersonides, justice is a natural phenomenon, since divine justice is something that operates through the just construction of nature and does not require human law to impose it. The implication is that there is an enduring standard of divine justice at work in the universe. This divine justice operates through the construction of nature since it was through it that God created the world beneficently for humanity.²¹ Yet despite the fact that the heavenly bodies order human affairs, Gersonides admits to two caveats: (1) the zodiacal position of a heavenly body at a given time is repeated only

19 Gad Freudenthal, "The Physical and Epistemological Foundations of Levi ben Gershom's Astrology: Providence and Israel's Redemption within the Natural History of Humankind," *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 19, no. 1 (November, 2019): 116–19. Warren Zev Harvey noted in a private e-mail exchange on this point that "according to Plato's theory someone might conceivably be compelled to be a firefighter, even if that person had no talent for that job. If that person is compelled, he or she will be unhappy and perhaps rebel. Plato gives no explanation why some people enjoy being firefighters and others hate the job, while Gersonides' astrological model does answer this question" (Warren Zev Harvey, e-mail message to author, March 16, 2021).

20 Gersonides, *Wars of the Lord*, 3:136 (5.3.5).

21 Ibid.; *Commentary on the Torah: Leviticus*, vols. 1–2, ed. Baruch Braner and Eli Freiman (Jerusalem: Macalipot, 1993), 2:233 (Lev 18:24–30; Intellectual Lesson #9); Menachem Kellner, "Gersonides, Providence and the Rabbinic Tradition," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42, no. 4 (1974): 681–82.

once in a thousand years and astronomers have not been successful in tracing the movements of heavenly bodies, and (2) the determinism of the heavenly bodies only suggests a likely future outcome, since in all these cases human beings have the freedom to override the outcome that the stars imply.²² Thus, instead of trying to comprehend and overcome the stars, the practical intellect should focus its efforts on achieving physical self-preservation through cultivating arts and virtues in order to withstand the impact of the whims of fortune as mostly predetermined by the stars. Human beings do not have God's providential tools for self-preservation through physical organs or instincts, but instead have the power of reason, specifically in the form of the practical intellect that can create arts or perfect certain virtues of physical self-preservation.²³

Joseph Ibn Kaspi delves into even greater depths than Gersonides in summarizing the particular details of the *Republic*, in composing his epitome of the Hebrew translation of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."*²⁴ It is difficult to get a sense of where Ibn Kaspi stands from a perusal of the epitome, since it is mostly a summary of Averroes's commentary. As Adrian Sackson, who put together the critical edition, notes, "Ibn Kaspi's purpose in summarizing the *Republic* (and the *Ethics*) thus seems to be primarily educational: His intention was to transmit knowledge rather than to formulate new philosophical arguments."²⁵ The minor additions that Ibn Kaspi makes, which Sackson lists in his impressive scholarly work, include additional biblical and Judaic examples to Averroes's summary, such as his mentioning Elijah and Job when describing Socrates's willingness to face death.²⁶

It is particularly difficult to ascertain the editor's voice in such an epitome since, unlike in Averroes's *Commentary*, Ibn Kaspi seems less interested in developing the ideas of his predecessor in his Epitome. Ibn Kaspi's interpretation of the *Republic* can be better determined by examining how he uses political ideas influenced by Plato's dialogue, especially in other writings where he is more forthright. In reading his biblical commentaries, it appears that the central lesson Ibn Kaspi draws from the *Republic* is that rule

22 Gersonides, *Wars of the Lord*, 2:33–36 (2.2) and 177 (4.5).

23 Ibid.

24 A critical edition of *Terumat Kesef* on the *Republic* is in Sackson, *Joseph Ibn Kaspi*, 263–94.

25 Sackson, *Joseph Ibn Kaspi*, 190.

26 Ibid. For a complete analysis of these points where Ibn Kaspi makes minor additions to Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"*, see Ibid., 204–11.

by philosopher-kings is highly unlikely, and that absent this, it is necessary for the philosopher to be separate from the nonphilosophic citizens in order to avoid problems. Indeed, one can see the importance of this position for Ibn Kaspi in his biblical interpretations. In *Ṭirat Kesef* he states that he has no intention of seeking friendship with others, referring in a derogatory way to the masses as animals and using an analogy of an individual with a candle looking to "light the flame," a metaphor for his social relations with others:

My custom was to minimize friendship with other human beings and I was very careful not to speak about important matters. This was due to my dismay regarding my lack of knowledge of that which is beyond me. I will not be consoled by my superiority over horses and mules. Therefore, my customary way of acting with my contemporaries was analogous to that of an individual who gets up from his bed [in the middle of the night] to do some chore at home and has no candle. He takes a wick and goes to the extinguished stove filled with ash to look for a burning coal or a spark of fire to light his wick. If he finds some, he will light his wick and if not, he will go back to sleep. This is the way I act with regards to other people. If one of them has a spark of fire, of what I consider the true religion, I continue speaking with him. If not, I leave his home in peace and close the door.²⁷

Similar to statements in Averroes's *Commentary*, Ibn Kaspi thus recommends as much separation as possible between the philosopher and the nonphilosophers, allowing contact with the mass of ordinary human beings only in cases where he discerns a potential philosopher whom he could awaken to thinking and other higher things.²⁸

However, Ibn Kaspi's rejection of the ideal of philosophic rulers in the *Republic*, as summarized by Averroes, does not mean that he rejects political involvement for the philosopher. Though he does not say this explicitly, he implies that the *Republic* does not get at the true nature of politics. For Ibn Kaspi, politics is guided by the animalistic drive for competition and the battle for survival between kingdoms. The struggle for power and the taking of revenge by one kingdom against another is what leads to the constant fluctuations and upheavals in history. In *Tam haKesef*, Ibn Kaspi asks the question, "who does not know, and who does not see constantly the revivals (*tequmot*) and collapses (*neflot*) of constantly alternating (*mithalfot*) nations

27 Joseph Ibn Kaspi, *Ṭirat Kesef*, ed. Isaac Last (Presburg: Abraham ben David Alkalai and Son, 1905), 8.

28 Averroes, *Averroes on Plato's "Republic,"* trans. Lerner, 78.

(*le'am ve'am*)?"²⁹ There is a task for the wise in history of the sort played by prophets as knowledgeable consultants and wise counselors. In other words, he warns that those who are wise should not attempt to become leaders but should instead become advisers to leaders in guiding them in the right political decision-making about how to navigate between competing and warring kingdoms. Prophets have the ability to glean knowledge of contingent and probable matters based on an insight obtained through experience (*nissayon*) in the world and by witnessing world events; this teaches them how practical matters generally turn out.³⁰ Because the specific outcomes are rooted in the variability of matter, this form of knowledge cannot be known with demonstrative certainty; philosophical proofs will therefore not help the prophet predict the future with certainty. By looking at the specific makeup of the material factors of the person, time, and place through his keen powers of observation, the prophet can best determine the probable outcome and advise leaders on the best course of action. Like Gersonides, Ibn Kaspi is skeptical of an "utopian" approach to politics, an approach that he sees as the message but also the weakness of Plato's teaching in the *Republic*.

Second Reading: The Danger of Politics for the Philosopher: The Necessity of Isolation (Moses of Narbonne and Joseph Ibn Shem Tov)

The second trend in interpreting Plato's *Republic* can be seen among two medieval Jewish philosophers living in northern Spain in the middle of the fourteenth century and the fifteenth century: Moses Narbonne (ca. 1300–1362) and Joseph Ibn Shem Tov (1400–60). In their reading of the *Republic*, the ideal of a philosophic city is not meant to be taken as a serious possibility, but they are concerned to show the impossibility of such a project. The philosopher should choose a life of solitude and loneliness, away from his fellow citizens; he should only commune or communicate with other philosophers,

29 Ibn Kaspi, *Tam ha-Kesef*, ed. Isaac Last (London: Narodiczky, 1913), 42. English translation in Sackson, *Joseph Ibn Kaspi*, 299.

30 Ibn Kaspi, *Tam ha-Kesef*, 20. For an analysis, see Shlomo Pines, "Jewish Philosophy," in *Studies in the History of Jewish Thought: The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines*, vol. 5, ed. Warren Zev Harvey and Moshe Idel (Jerusalem; Magnes Press, 1997), 28; Pines, "On the Probability of the Re-Establishment of a Jewish State according to Ibn Kaspi and Spinoza," *Iyyun* 14 (1963): 294.

even if they live in other countries, in order to achieve union with the active intellect. This is also the message of the Islamic philosopher Ibn Bajja (1085–1138) in his *Governance of the Solitary*, which recommends minimal political involvement. A more extreme form of separation is advocated in the work by the Islamic philosopher Ibn Tufayl (1105–1185) in his philosophic parable, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.³¹ *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* is the story of Hayy who grew up on a deserted island and comes to independently discover all the truths of natural and divine science. Only later in life does he meet another human being who accidentally comes to the island. After befriending this individual, Hayy tries to return with him to his political community in order to enlighten everyone there and teach them how to understand the doctrines of the divine law non-literally, for the literal meaning gives only a similitude of truth. As is to be expected, Hayy is unsuccessful; he learns that it is not possible to enlighten an entire society, and returns to live in solitude on the deserted island. The conclusions of Ibn Bajja and Ibn Tufayl are plausible interpretations of the *Republic* and ones that Averroes adopts in his *Commentary*.³² He summarizes the *Republic* to show that political communities do not benefit from the involvement of philosophers for two reasons: first, most inhabitants of political communities do not care to follow the recommendations of the wise, and second, those who aim for wisdom do not possess all the necessary qualities for leadership, and so will end up doing more harm than good. In a non-virtuous city, therefore, a truly wise philosopher must avoid irritating or even inadvertently harming his fellow citizens, thereby turning them against him. He agrees with the conclusion that, if possible, he should choose a solitary life.³³ One might say that Ibn Bajja and Ibn Tufayl learned a vital lesson from Socrates's experience. Socrates tried to teach the multitude, but only

31 Ibn Bajja, "Rule of the Solitary (*Tadbīru'l-Mutawahhīd*)," in D. M. Dunlop, "Ibn Bājjah's *Tadbīru'l-Mutawahhīd* (Rule of the Solitary)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* (n.s.) 77, nos. 1–2 (1945): 72–81; Ibn Tufayl. *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*, trans. Lenn Goodman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

32 Steven Harvey, "The Place of the Philosopher in the City according to Ibn Bājjah," in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy. Essays in Honor of M. S. Mahdi*, ed. Charles Butterworth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 230.

33 Averroes, *Averroes on Plato's "Republic"*, trans. Lerner, 75–78 (63.5–64.28). In emphasizing the more skeptical side of the *Republic*, this reading minimizes the argument according to which the true philosopher is needed to rule or at least advise the ruler for his own welfare and that of the city (64.30–65.2).

irritated them, and they killed him. A smart philosopher keeps away from the multitude.

The Jewish philosopher who adhered closely to this perspective was Moses of Narbonne. He wrote a commentary on Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and added a summary of Ibn Bajja's *The Governance of the Solitary*.³⁴ He makes explicit usage of the terminology of Samuel ben Judah's Hebrew translation of Plato's *Republic* at the end of his commentary on the Hebrew translation of Averroes's *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction* (*Iggeret 'Efsharut haDvequt*). The last two chapters deal with political issues regarding the question of whether an individual who has reached conjunction with the active intellect should isolate himself from society or be involved in the political community. The following are Averroes's comments as they appear in Narbonne's Hebrew version:

And yet an objection does arise here in that it may be asserted that it would appear from this treatise that the regimen of one who attains felicity is the regimen of the solitary. But it has already been stated in political science that his felicity will be attained by men and that he is part of society. The answer: this is true insofar as nothing exists in this society to impede the attainment of felicity. On the contrary, all that exists in that society is an aid for its attainment because that society existed to aid in the attainment of this felicity. Accordingly, Plato believed that when the great philosophers reached old age, they were relieved from governing, whereupon they retired from active life and proceeded to the "Isles of the Blessed," free to speculate upon the intellect. However, in these states separation from and forsaking of mankind is impossible. Hence it will be that due to his association with men, one will acquire those forms which impede the attainment of felicity. Abū Bakr ibn al-Sa'igh (Ibn Bajja) has already sought to establish the order for the regimen of the solitary in these lands. However the book is incomplete, and its intention, moreover, is difficult to fathom.³⁵

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- 34 E. I. J. Rosenthal, "Political Ideas in Moshe Narboni's Commentary on Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy B. Yaqzan*," in *Hommage À Georges Vajda*, ed. Gérard Nahon and Charles Touati (Louvain, 1980), 227–34; Abraham Melamed, *The Philosopher-King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought*, trans. Lenn Goodman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 58–60.
- 35 K. P. Bland, ed., *The Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect by Ibn Rushd with the Commentary of Moses Narboni* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1982), English translation, 108–9; Hebrew text, 146–47.

Averroes concludes, and in a manner that is apparently affirmed by Narbonne, that Ibn Bajja's ideal of complete separation from the political community is unrealistic and impossible. The political community exists as a necessary tool to assist individuals in reaching perfection and it is not possible to simply abscond from it. Narbonne explains Averroes's position further in his comments:

By stating, *this felicity will be attained by man and he is a part of society*, he means that man, who is political by nature, needs society. And by stating, *that society existed to aid in the attainment of this felicity*, he means—when the leaders are golden, i.e., philosophical. By this [society], he is alluding to a Platonic polity and to that which resembles it. He [Plato] stipulates *great philosophers* in order that the speculative intelligibles be perfected and so that a second disposition be created with them. By stating, [they] *proceeded to the "Isle of the Blessed,"* he means just as he explains, *free* for speculation upon the Active *Intellect*. What Plato calls the "Isle of the Blessed" the Torah calls the Garden of Eden. Eden is the felicity and the conjunction. Jacob called it "the-House-of-the-Lord" (Gen. 35:15). David called it "the Mount-of-the-Lord" (Ps. 24:3). "But the name of the city was Luz at the first" (Gen. 28:19). It is pointed to with the finger, "This is my God, and I shall extol Him" (Ex. 15:2).³⁶

In interpreting Averroes and in following Ibn Bajja, Narbonne does not advocate complete isolation from society, but isolation within a political community. Philosophers are "strangers" (*gerim*) who physically dwell in a political community but who intellectually live in a separate realm from the society around them.³⁷ He makes this case by using the language of Samuel ben Judah, and in referring to the philosophers as "golden" (*zehavi'im*), based on Plato's parable of the metals. Although this term is not mentioned by Averroes himself in the *Epistle on Conjunction*, he likewise uses the same Hebrew term for "Isles of the blessed" that Samuel ben Judah did—*Iyei haHatšlaha*.³⁸

The Castilian Jewish philosopher Joseph Ibn Shem Tov develops the ideal of isolation and seclusion to a greater extreme than Narbonne. Shem Tov is in this respect closer to the model of Ibn Tufayl. Ibn Shem Tov wrote an

36 Ibid. English translation, 110; Hebrew text, 149.

37 Melamed, *The Philosopher-King*, 59.

38 For the source of these Hebrew terms in the Samuel ben Judah translation, see *Averroes's Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* (Rosenthal), 40 and 78. They originate from Plato, *Republic*, 415a–c and 450b.

important work titled *Kevod Elohim* (*The glory of God*) whose purpose is to examine Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and determine whether it, with its special focus on the meaning of human happiness, is in agreement or disagreement with the Bible.³⁹ But he also makes frequent usage of the *Republic*. He writes as follows:

Since this bliss and contemplation are not necessarily a social condition, but a state of solitude and isolation from mankind and political affairs. This is why wise men sought deserts and caves, and Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai and his sons dwelt twenty-two years in the cave and Elijah lived solitary in the mountains. And the sages of the nations of the world introduced many descriptions of the governance of the solitary, the Divine philosopher; And Ibn Tufayl composed a precious book called *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, discussing this, and also Ibn Bajja composed the *Governance of the Solitary*; And Averroes said the same at the ending of the *Epistle of Conjunction*. It was already made clear by this wisdom that this purpose will be achieved for humans in a political association since man is political by nature. However, people strived for isolation since the states were wicked, making the achievement of the ultimate purpose difficult to achieve, and their leader's evil, contemptuous of wisdom and knowledge. And Plato already hinted at this in his book on Governance (*Sifro behanhaga*). And Maimonides said in chapter 51 of the third part (of the *Guide*) that this means that the purpose after the apprehension of the knowledge of God, blessed be He, is to be in total devotion to Him, and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him. Mostly this is achieved in solitude and isolation. Hence every pious man frequently stayed in solitude and does not meet anyone unless it is necessary.⁴⁰

There is no doubt that Ibn Shem Tov was reading Samuel ben Judah's Hebrew translation of *Averroes's Commentary on Plato's "Republic"*. Ralph Lerner notes that excerpts and paraphrases of the text can be found throughout *Kevod*

39 Ruth Birnbaum, *An Exposition of Joseph Ibn Shem Tov's Kevod Elohim (The Glory of God), A Fifteenth-Century Philosophical Work* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 19–20.

40 *Kevod Elohim*, 12b.–13a. This translation into English is by Abraham Melamed's in "Averroes' Political Ideas in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Philosophy." Another source that also discusses the *Republic* is Ibn Shem Tov's short commentary on Averroes's *Epistle on Possibility of Conjunction*. See Shaul Regev, "Joseph Ibn Shemtov's Short Commentary on Averroes' *Epistle of Conjunction*," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2 (1982): 92–93.

Elohim.⁴¹ One finds in both Narbonne and Ibn Shem Tov the assertion that isolation and seclusion are points of agreement between Plato and the Jewish tradition, expressed equally in the *Republic* and the Bible, as well as among the Rabbis. The difference between Narbonne and Ibn Shem Tov can be seen in the extreme measures that they believe one has to take in isolation from others: for Narbonne this means finding solitude while still necessarily being active in the political community; for Ibn Shem Tov isolation requires a complete physical departure from corrupt political communities.

Third Reading: The Limits of Reason in Constructing a Perfect City and the Necessity of God (Joseph Albo and Isaac Abarbanel)

The third trend among medieval Jewish thinkers in their interpretation of Plato's *Republic* is the tendency to use the text polemically in order to illustrate the limits of human reason's ability to independently construct an ideal political community, which, in their view, requires the help of God through a divine law. This can be found in the writings of two important late medieval Jewish philosophers: Joseph Albo (1380–1444) and Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508).⁴² Albo and Abarbanel were designated as representatives of "Judaism" in disputations and other formal relationships with Christians, each one making the polemical case for the superiority of Judaism over Christianity, albeit in very different ways.

In Joseph Albo's *Book of Roots* (*Sefer ha'Iqqarim*), a work dedicated to expounding the central dogmas of Judaism, he cites the *Republic* as an example of a conventional law, a law constructed by human reason without God. Albo produces a categorization of law, dividing it into one of three types: natural law (*dat tiv'it*), conventional law (*dat nimusit*) and divine law (*dat elohit*). Natural law is universal to all peoples, times, and places and its purpose is to subdue wrong and promote right, to prevent certain behaviors like theft, robbery, and murder, with the goal being to ensure the stable existence of the political community. In fact, Albo is one of the first medieval Jewish

41 Lerner provides a list on *Averroes on Plato's "Republic,"* trans. Lerner, 159.

42 This spelling of Abarbanel's last name follows Shnayer Z. Leiman, "Abarbanel and the Censor," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 19 (1968): 49n1.

thinkers to use the term “natural law” to refer to a universal moral law.⁴³ His second category refers to the conventional law that is created by wise law-givers to suit a specific time and place; this type of law is designed to make people act better and to improve the political community. His third category is divine law which is intended to guide people to spiritual happiness and immortality through certain actions and opinions.⁴⁴ Albo argues that the divine law is the highest form of law, viewing conventional law as inherently flawed without the aid of divine law. One of his criticisms of conventional law is that human legislators always have a bias toward one deficient extreme, as opposed to the ideal middle road; they therefore cannot determine the proper human balance required for a perfect law, which leads them to legislate the extreme of behavior into law.⁴⁵ The proof-text he brings for this argument is derived from Plato’s *Republic*.⁴⁶

Do you not see that Plato erred greatly in this, declaring the base to be noble, for he maintained that the women in a city ought to be shared by the men in a given order. It is as though you were to say that the women of the rulers be shared by all the rulers, and the women of the merchants be shared by all merchants, and similarly the women of those practicing a particular craft be shared by all those of that craft. This is a thing that the Law (*haTorah*) has

43 The uniqueness of Albo’s formulation of “natural law” has been an important topic discussed in the scholarly literature. See Ralph Lerner, “Natural Law in Albo’s Book of Roots,” in *Ancients and Moderns: Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss*, ed. Joseph Cropsey (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 132–47; Marvin Fox, “Maimonides and Aquinas on Natural Law,” in *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 130; David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: The Idea of Noahide Law* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 176–94; Dror Ehrlich, “A Reassessment of Natural Law in Rabbi Joseph Albo’s *Book of Principles*,” *Hebraic Political Studies* 1, no. 4 (2006): 413–49. Ari Ackerman has shown that Albo was preceded on using the term “natural law” in this way by Zerahia Halevi Saladin. See Ari Ackerman, “Zerahia Halevi Saladin and Joseph Albo on Natural, Conventional and Divine Law,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2013): 315–39.

44 Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-Iqqarim (Book of Principles)*, trans. and ed. Isaac Husik, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1929–30), 1:78–80 (1.7).

45 *Ibid.*, 81–82 (1.8).

46 Plato, *Republic*, 457b–466d.

rejected, and even the Noahic Law [. . .] Indeed, Aristotle has censured Plato's opinion in this matter.⁴⁷

This reference by Albo is a restatement of Averroes's ultimate conclusion regarding the equality of men and women according to the *Republic*. While Socrates may speculate, in book 5 of the *Republic*, about the hypothetical proposition whereby men and women will have the same political roles so that children will be raised collectively and hence will not know their parents, Averroes draws a practical conclusion from this discussion. Averroes writes:

Hence it is [a subject] fit for investigation whether there exist among women natures resembling the natures of each and every class of citizens—and in particular the guardians—or whether women's natures are distinguished from men's natures. If the former is the case, then as regards the activities of the city, women would have the very same standing as men in those classes, so that there would be among them warriors, philosophers, rulers and the rest. But if this is not the case, then women are only fit in the city for activities that men in general are unfit for, as if you were to say upbringing, procreation, and the like. And we say that women, in so far as they are of one kind with men, necessarily share in the end of man. They will differ only in less or more; i.e., the man in most human activities is more diligent than the women, though it is not impossible that women should be more diligent in some activities, such as is thought concerning the art of practical music . . . If this is so, and the nature of men and women is of one kind, and the nature that is of one kind turns to only one activity in the city, then it is evident that the women in this city will practice the [same] activities as the men, except that they are weaker at it.⁴⁸

Albo's critique of Plato's *Republic* is that Plato is too liberal in believing that men and women have the same nature and thus should have the same roles in society. Albo views this as the natural outcome of conventional laws,

47 Albo, *Sefer ha'Iqqarim*, 82 (1.8). Here I am using Lerner's more accurate translation over that of Husik. See the English translation in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), 244–45.

48 Averroes on Plato's "Republic," trans. Lerner, 57–58. For a further discussion of Averroes's liberal position on women, see Catarina Belo, "Some Considerations on Averroes's Views Regarding Women and Their Role in Society," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20, no. 1 (2009): 1–20.

whereby decision making is at the whim of human lawgivers who believe they can construct laws and individual behavior in whatever way they desire. In contrast, he argues that the Torah, even going back to the Noahide laws, is aware of sexual differences between men and women and makes their different behaviors part of their legal structures. Indeed, it seems that Albo views the *Republic* as a text meant to show the problems of a humanly constructed political community where God and the Torah have no role.

However, Albo is not consistent in this critique. He references ideas from the *Republic* and cites them as those of Averroes without mentioning Plato. One also finds an example of this later in the *Book of Roots* concerning the Platonic class system and in which he defends its hierarchical order. He writes that:

The ancient philosophers were therefore all agreed, as Averroes says, that there is one principle in the absolute sense of the word one, and that by it all the various things of existence were ordered first for one purpose [. . .] as the head of a state assigns certain people to do a given work and no other, that it may be done in a perfect manner, and assigns other people to do another kind of work exclusively, and so on with the different kinds of work. Thus he makes some to be tailors, some to be weavers, some to be builders, and in this way are completed all the arts needed in the state, and the order of the state is perfected. And yet all the many arts come from the first head though he is absolutely one.⁴⁹

Albo cites an abridged conclusion of the myth of the metals as originating from Averroes, without mentioning Plato's name as was done in the other example, and instead suggesting that it is a common philosophic view. Perhaps by presenting this opinion as held by all ancient philosophers, his presentation detracts less from his critique of Plato. In other words, he is suggesting that not everything that is written in Plato's *Republic* is wrong, such as the class system described in the text. Moreover, it seems that for Albo, that argument about class is not uniquely Platonic. If the *Republic* is the paradigm of a conventional law, it reveals that its legislators do not always have the proper discrimination to determine what to include and not to include. Hence, they might have just gotten lucky in including a few correct things! However, for Albo, what is egregiously problematic is the gender neutrality underlying the ideal Platonic state. For Albo, this is

⁴⁹ Albo, *Sefer ha-Iqqarim*, 2:277 (2.13).

an example of why divine law given by God through a prophet is a necessary correction to conventional laws.

Isaac Abarbanel also cites the tripartite division of society in many places in his biblical and rabbinic commentaries.⁵⁰ One example occurs in his *Commentary on the Later Prophets*, in his interpretation of Jeremiah 9:22–23:

The prophet assumed that every people (*'am*) and political community (*kibbutz 'anashim*) is divided, as political theorists (*medini'im*) state, into three parts. The first part comprises the wise men, thinkers, philosophers, and men of law, and all those who deal with books. The second consists of warriors and includes kings and officers and deputies and their subordinates, magistrates who rule the people with force, and every man who rules by might. And the third part consists of the tillers of the soil along with craftsmen and scribes, all of whom belong to this part. These three parts are called in their language: *oratori*, *difensori* and *lavoratori*.⁵¹

At other points in his commentaries, he directly identifies the tripartite scheme with Plato. In his commentary on Genesis 10, he draws a comparison between Noah's three sons and the three classes in the state:

And of Ham he said Canaan shall serve them, meaning that Ham's favorite son Canaan would serve Shem and Japheth. Just as the philosopher [=Plato] in his book on the leadership of the state [= *hanhagat hamedinah*, i.e., the *Republic*] assigns to the sages the lust for power and mastery and to the class of the tillers of the soil the lust for servitude and domination.⁵²

Abarbanel makes a significant modification to the tripartite scheme in removing leadership from the philosopher and making it part of the rank of the guardians, whose job it is to defend the city. Part of the reason for this

50 Plato, *Republic* 415a–c and *Averroes on Plato's "Republic,"* trans. Lerner, 36. For a list of citations and some quotations, see Melamed, *The Philosopher-King*, 67–74.

51 Isaac Abarbanel, *Commentary on the Later Prophets* (Jerusalem: Torah veDa'at, 1957), 332. The English translation here is from Melamed, *The Philosopher-King*, 68.

52 Isaac Abarbanel, *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Genesis 10:1. The English translation is Abraham Melamed's. Abarbanel also cites the *Republic* on Deuteronomy 24, but it appears to be a mistaken reference. See Melamed, "Averroes' Political Ideas in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Philosophy."

may be that Abarbanel has a much lower estimation of power and leadership. He argues that political power is uncontrollable and ultimately leads to tyranny and oppression. By changing this small detail in the tripartite structure of the political community described in the *Republic*, Abarbanel is hinting at a limitation of the Platonic model of politics.

In making the guardian class into the rulers, he is suggesting that there is no such thing as a just leader since all leaders use force for their own personal advantage. He writes that “the existence of a king is neither necessary nor obligatory for a people. Rather, it is very harmful and involves tremendous danger.”⁵³ The ideal political regime is theocracy, the direct rule of God and the nullification of all human political power, such that in the messianic days, a theocracy will be reestablished. In the meantime, Abarbanel strongly advocates a system of government like the Venetian republic—that is, a system of government that did not exist in the medieval Islamic world, in which power is not concentrated in one individual and there are term limits, thus weakening the possibilities for tyranny.⁵⁴

Conclusion

Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles’s Hebrew translation of Averroes’s *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic”* made a prodigious contribution to the development of medieval Jewish philosophy. It gave medieval Jewish thinkers a new language and set of tools. It allowed a diverse set of Jewish philosophers, such as Gersonides, Ibn Kaspi, Moses of Narbonne, Joseph Ibn Shem Tov, Joseph Albo, and Isaac Abarbanel, the ability to envision the ideal political community and discern how the Torah can be the basis for organizing a society. These medieval Jewish thinkers did not read Averroes’s *Commentary on Plato’s “Republic”* simply to agree with its ideas but responded independently and originally to it by creating their own formulations. Indeed, these thinkers came up with three distinct readings of the *Republic*: the realist reading, which involved a critique of the *Republic* as ignoring the realistic and competitive nature of the world; the intellectualist reading, which presented a defense of the *Republic* as advocating isolation and seclusion for the philosopher; and the theological reading, according to which the *Republic* shows the limits of the intellect’s ability to establish and maintain a rational society.

53 Ibid., 206. The English translation is in Ravitzky, *Religion and State*, 109.

54 Isaac Abarbanel, *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Deuteronomy 17:14.

Chapter Fourteen

The Two Hebrew-into-Latin Translations of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"*

Method, Motivation, and Context

Michael Engel

Introduction

Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* was translated twice into Latin; both translations were made from the Hebrew version of Samuel ben Judah of Marseille.¹ The first translation was done by Elijah Del Medigo (ca. 1455–93), a Crete-born Jew, who spent most of his life in northern Italy, Crete being at that time under Venetian rule.² Although a devout Jew, Del

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- 1 On the life and professional activity of Samuel ben Judah of Marseille, see Lawrence V. Berman, "Greek into Hebrew: Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles, Fourteenth-Century Philosopher and Translator," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 298–99 and 317–19. On Samuel, see also the introduction and the chapter by Alexander Green in this volume.
 - 2 For details concerning Del Medigo's life and intellectual biography, see David Geffen, "Faith and Reason in Elijah Del Medigo's Behinat Hadat"

Medigo's immediate intellectual milieu was Christian, mostly made up of figures related in some way to the university of Padua and to powerful circles in Venice. Most of Del Medigo's literary output was in Latin—including his Hebrew-into-Latin translation of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"*—and he himself translated some of his own original Latin works into Hebrew. Thematically, Del Medigo focused almost solely on the works of Averroes. His translation of Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* was part of his general endeavour of translating and commenting on the works of Averroes, while working at the service of his Christian patrons—namely, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Domenico Grimani. On his return to Crete, toward the end of his life, Del Medigo composed his Hebrew work *Behinat haDat*, which became his most celebrated work. In that work Del Medigo examines the relation between Judaism and rational thought, determining the rational nature of Judaism as opposed to the irrational character of Christian dogmas.³

(PhD diss., Columbia University, 1970); David Geffen, "Insights into the Life and Thought of Elijah Medigo based on his Published and Unpublished Works," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 41–42 (1973–74): 69–86; Alberto Bartòla, "Eliyahu del Medigo e Giovanni Pico della Mirandola; la testimonianza dei codici Vaticani," *Rinascimento* 33 (1993): 253–78; Giovanni Licata, *La via della ragione: Elia del Medigo e l'averroismo di Spinoza* (Macerata: Eum, 2013); Michael Engel, *Elijah Del Medigo and Paduan Aristotelianism: Investigating the Human Intellect*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). For studies focusing on Del Medigo's relations with Pico, see all the works mentioned above as well as Bohdan Kieszkowski, "Les rapports Entre Elie del Medigo et Pic de la Mirandole," *Rinascimento* 4 (1964): 41–90; Giovanni Licata, "An Unpublished Letter of Elijah Del Medigo to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 'De nervis et sensu tactus,'" *Rinascimento* 54 (2014): 175–87; Fiammetta Papi, "Osservazioni linguistiche sulla lettera di Elia del Medigo a Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (ms. Paris, BnF, Lat. 6508)," *Studi linguistici italiani* 46 (2020): 26–42.

- 3 The question concerning the potential influence of Averroes's commentary on the *Republic* and Del Medigo's *Behinat haDat* is a fascinating one that has yet to be explored systematically. As *Behinat haDat* almost certainly had a certain impact on Spinoza in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (as noted by Carlos Fraenkel and Giovanni Licata), we may witness here a case of the indirect influence of Averroes's commentary on Spinoza via Del Medigo. (Carlos Fraenkel, who argues for such an indirect influence, does not focus his attention on the *Republic* commentary, but on Averroes's *Decisive Treatise*). However, as the *Behinat haDat* was composed originally in Hebrew and in a

The second translation was by the Jewish physician and translator Jacob Mantino (d. 1549). Mantino, a Jewish physician who lived most of his life in Italy, had close relationships with bishops and cardinals to whom he dedicated several of his translations and he was the personal physician to Pope Paul III.⁴ Mantino translated many of Averroes's commentaries, and was, according to Dag Hasse, "the most prolific and most acclaimed among all Renaissance translators of Averroes."⁵

Del Medigo's translation was never printed during the Renaissance; it was discovered by Paul Oscar Kristeller in a Siena manuscript and published as a critical edition in 1992.⁶ Mantino's translation, first published in 1539, was printed four times during the Renaissance, yet has never received a modern edition.⁷ This chapter begins with a general overview of the two transla-

setting entirely different from that of Del Medigo's Hebrew-into-Latin translations, I will not discuss this possibility here. See Carlos Fraenkel, "Spinoza on Philosophy and Religion: The Averroistic Sources," in *The Rationalists: Between Tradition and Innovation*, ed. Carlos Fraenkel, Dario Perinetti, and Justin E. H. Smith (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 27–43; Giovanni Licata, *La via della ragione*.

- 4 For studies on Mantino's life and work, see David Kaufmann, "Jacob Mantino: Une page de l'histoire de la Renaissance," *Revue des études juives* 26 (1893); Samuel Kottek, "Jacob Mantino, a 16th Century Jewish Physician and Scholar Related to Bologna," In *Thirty-First International Congress of the History of Medicine*, ed. R. A. Bemabeo (Bologna, 1990), 179–85; Roland Hissette, "Guillaume de Luna—Jacob Anatoli—Jacob Mantinus: propos du commentaire moyen d'Averroès sur le *De interpretatione*," *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 32 (1990): 142–58; Dag Hasse, *Success and Suppression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 79–82.
- 5 Dag Hasse, *Success and Suppression*, 79.
- 6 Averroes, *Parafrafi della Republica nella traduzione latina di Elia del Medigo*, ed. Annalisa Coviello and Paolo Edoardo Fornaciari (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1992). See also Mauro Zonta, review of *Parafrafi della Republica nella traduzione latina di Elia del Medigo*, ed. Annalisa Coviello and Paolo Edoardo Fornaciari, *Henoch* 14 (1992), 354–61.
- 7 The four editions mentioned by Dag Hass are (1) *Averrois Paraphrasis super libros De republica Platonis nunc primum latinitate donata Iacob Mantino medico hebraeo interprete* (Rome, 1539); (2) *Averrois Paraphrasis in libros De republica Platonis* (Venice, 1552); (3) *In Platonis libros De republica Paraphrasi* (Venice, 1560); and (4) a Venice edition from 1578. All the references to Mantino's translation in this chapter are to the 1560 Venice edition. See Hasse, *Success and Suppression*, 356.

tions, discussing their different nature in light of the different circumstances surrounding their production. I then move to describe the earliest known employment of Del Medigo's translation in a philosophical work—that is, the philosophical treatises of Del Medigo himself.

Context, Motivation, and Sources

As has been mentioned, Elijah Del Medigo's translation of the *Republic* commentary has come down to us in a single manuscript, Siena G.VII.32 (dated 1491), and the translation itself was made in the preceding decade.⁸ Despite the temptation to view this translation as part of the emerging Platonic spirit of the Italian Renaissance, it is clear that Del Medigo's chief interest in the text and his motivation for translating it was not Plato. Del Medigo was operating in Padua for most of his professional life, where the curriculum of the local famed University was dominated by Aristotle's works and Averroes's commentaries on them. In fact, we find in Del Medigo's philosophical works repeated criticisms aimed at Plato's epistemological and ontological doctrines, reiterating familiar critiques by Aristotle. We also see in his personal remarks that Del Medigo was explicitly hostile toward the philosophical activity in Florence at the time, which was focused on and inspired by Plato's philosophy.⁹ Del Medigo's motivation in translating the work was therefore not Plato but Averroes, as he was engaged all throughout his professional career with both translating and explicating Averroes's Aristotelian works and commentaries. Del Medigo in fact had envisioned the establishment of a unified corpus of Averroes's works and commentaries, by translating from

8 See Paul O. Kristeller, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and his Sources," in *L'opera e il pensiero di Giovanni Pico nella storia dell'umanesimo* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1965), I, 58, 118–1; Geffen, *Insights*, 72. The translation is found in fol. 158ra–188ra. For a description of the manuscript see Coviello and Fornaciari, *Parafraasi della Republica*, xxiii–xxv.

9 For instance, in the first of the *Two Investigations*, Del Medigo explicitly refers to Plato in fol. 1r, 13v, 15r, 15v, 16v, 17v, 18r, 19r, 22v, 30v, 40v, 46r, 46v (folio numbers are given according to MS Ambrosiana Heb 128). In the vast majority—though not all—of these references, Del Medigo is criticizing Plato while representing the Aristotelian position regarding themes such as the nature of separate forms and the eternal nature of intelligibles. Del Medigo's engagement with Plato has been mentioned by several scholars yet deserves a separate study, which I hope to carry out in the future.

Hebrew into Latin those that were not available to a Latin readership.¹⁰ With regard to Del Medigo's original compositions, those were aimed at narrating, explaining, and elaborating key ideas and doctrines from Averroes's works on logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics. In the case of the *Republic* commentary, both these aspects of Del Medigo's activity come to the fore, as he translated the work and cited passages from it in his own Averroist treatises, contextualizing these passages within the wider framework of Averroes's thought. This will be illustrated in detail in the second part of the chapter.

Like Del Medigo's motivation in translating the *Republic* commentary, the characteristics of his translation, such as the style, syntax, and terminology, should also be understood in light of his general activity and overall aim. Put simply, Del Medigo cared much about content, yet very little about style. He did not wish—and apparently was not able—to write in a Latin style that would impress Renaissance humanists or satisfy the editors of the newly printed editions (although some of Del Medigo's translations and also some of his original works were printed in the fifteenth century).¹¹ Del Medigo simply wished to transmit the content of Averroes's works to his readership, which was exemplified by figures such as Pico and Grimani, and to do so as accurately as possible, with accuracy for Del Medigo being tantamount to literalism. The often-heard criticism of Del Medigo's deficient Latin style, made by his contemporaries as well by modern scholars, is not misguided, but should be put in a wider context. The fact that Del Medigo's Latin abilities

10 This chapter focuses on Del Medigo's contribution to the Latin-scholastic culture of Renaissance Italy. Del Medigo, however, is often mentioned in the context of "Jewish philosophy." For a critical assessment of the manner in which his figure is usually depicted by scholars of Jewish thought, see my "The Academic Reception of Beinat ha-Dat: Criticizing Jewish Historiography," in *Zwischen Orient und Europa: Orientalismus in der deutsch-jüdischen Kultur im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Chiara Adorisio and Lorella Bosco (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2019), 53–61. My main claim is that scholars who have studied Del Medigo's thought in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have done so by largely ignoring the Latin materials that comprise the main bulk of his work, which includes translations, treatises, letters, and dedications. Scholars have instead focused mainly on Del Medigo's celebrated Hebrew work *Behinat ha-Dat*, and by so doing have established an intellectual biography that remains partial and biased.

11 For a full list of Del Medigo's works, including references and detailed information concerning those which were printed, see Engel, *Paduan Aristotelianism*, 123–30.

were far from perfect was surely picked up on by his Christian patrons as well, but it is telling that this did not stop them from seeking his services.

Mantino seems to present us with a different case.¹² Similarly to Del Medigo, Mantino focused his attention mainly on works by Averroes.¹³ However, while Del Medigo's main concern was to establish Averroes's authority on firmer textual grounds, introducing new materials based on Hebrew sources, Mantino was more preoccupied, or so it seems, with the literary tastes of Renaissance readership, and was more of a "professional" translator, to use an anachronistic term.¹⁴ While Del Medigo was paid for his services as well, Mantino's "professionalism" stands out, since, living a generation after Del Medigo, he was fully immersed in the new world of sixteenth-century printing, and probably well aware of the commercial aspect and potential of the printed editions.¹⁵ An indication of Mantino's motivation in this respect is that he often translated commentaries that were already available to a Latin readership, doing so on stylistic grounds only, answering an apparent commercial demand determined by the literary tastes of a sixteenth-century readership with a humanist orientation. In the case of the *Republic* also, Mantino's translation followed an existing one, that of Del Medigo, and according to a recent discovery by Giovanni Licata (to be discussed below), the former was aware and made use of the latter's translation. Such considerations were entirely alien to Del Medigo, as may be judged not only from his functional, literal, and somewhat unattractive Latin style, but also from the fact that all his translations were of works that did not previously exist in Latin.

12 While reading this study one should keep in mind that research on Mantino's translations is ongoing, and some of its conclusions may be modified or qualified accordingly in light of future findings. However, the main conclusions presented in this study seem certain enough. See, for example, Giovanni Licata, *Secundum Avenroem. Pico della Mirandola, Elia del Medigo e la "seconda rivelazione" di Averroè* (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, forthcoming); Michael Engel, "Jacob Mantino and the Alleged Second Latin Translation of Averroes's Long Commentary on the *De anima* III.5 and III.36," in *Averroes and Averroism in Medieval Jewish Thought*, ed. Racheli Haliva, Daniel Davies and Yoav Meyrav (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

13 Mantino also translated sections from Avicenna's *Canon*. For the most recent listing of Mantino's translations, see Hasse, *Success and Suppression*, 74.

14 See Hasse's analysis of Mantino's motives in *Success and Suppression*, 79–83.

15 Dag Hasse refers to Mantino as "the most prolific and most acclaimed among all Renaissance translators of Averroes." See Hasse, *Success and Suppression*, 79.

To illustrate these points, I present in the table below the very first lines of both translations, comparing them to the Hebrew:

Hebrew (Rosenthal, 21.3–7)	Latin (Del Medigo, 3)	Mantino (335v, H)
<p><i>Hakavanah bezeh hama'amar haḥṣat mah sheyikhleluhu hama'amarim hameyuhasim el Aplaton behanhagah hamedinit mehama'amarim hamada'im velehaser hama'amarim hanishu'im mimenu.</i></p>	<p><i>Intentio in hoc sermone est declarare illud quod continent sermones attributi Platoni in sua politica ex sermonibus scientificis, ac dimittere sermones famosos et probabiles in ipsa positos</i></p>	<p><i>Praesentis operis propositum est summatim excerpere ea, quae Plato sub demonstrandis ratione in libro de Republica explicavit, his tamen praetermissis quae probabilia videntur</i></p>
<p><i>The intention of this treatise is to abstract such scientific arguments attributable to Plato as are contained in the Republic by eliminating the dialectical elements from it (Lerner's translation)</i></p>	<p><i>The intention of this treatise is to declare what the scientific arguments ascribed to Plato in his Republic contain, and to remove the generally accepted or probable arguments from it.</i></p>	<p><i>It is proposed in the present work to briefly summarize what Plato expounded in a demonstrative fashion in his book, the Republic, while omitting that which seems merely probable.</i></p>
<p><i>Venedaqdeq bekhoh zeh hebeq ser min hama'amar ela ki biglal sidur halimud ra'ui shenaqdim haqdamah yesudar bah halimud 'al seder ki Aplaton onnam benih zeh hasefer ahad hasefarim yesh lo bez'ot hahokhmah.</i></p>	<p><i>Intendendo semper brevitatem. Sed propter ordinem doctrinae debemus praepone propositionem qua ordinatur doctrina secundum ordinem. Nam Plato composuit istum librum post alios libros editos ab eo in ista Scientia</i></p>	<p><i>Verum ut ordo doctrinae seruetur, nonnulla exordiri oportet, et quibus doctrina ipsa quodam ordine deinceps tradetur nam Plato in quosdam alioeiusdem scientiae libros hunc etiam postea collocavit</i></p>

We shall be strict in speaking succinctly of all this. Yet on account of the ordering of the teaching, we ought to preface an introduction in which the [subject of] study is presented in due order, for Plato set down this book only after other books of his in this science.

We always aim at brevity. But on account of the order of the teaching, we ought to set forth a preface in which the teaching is placed in order. For Plato composed this book after publishing other books in this science.

Still, so that the order to the teaching may be preserved, it is necessary to begin with a small introduction, in which the teaching is conveyed successively in a certain order, for Plato placed this book after certain others in this science.

The discrepancy is obvious, as Del Medigo is supplying word-to-word translation and Mantino is supplying more of a paraphrase, leaning much more toward the literary norms of the Renaissance humanists.¹⁶ As the editors of the modern edition of Del Medigo's translation have noticed, his style at times obstructs intelligibility.¹⁷ However, and as the table above illustrates, its literal nature enables modern readers to use it as means for monitoring the original Hebrew text. In the case of Mantino, as rightly noted by Rosenthal, there is little sense, given the periphrastic nature of the translation, to include it as a textual witness in the critical apparatus, and the latter refers to it only in the notes to the English translation.¹⁸

16 "The extreme literalness of del Medigo's translation has left its stamp on the Latinity" (Hasse, *Success and Suppression*, 83). However, note that Mantino's *excerperere* is more faithful to the Hebrew *hafṣata* than Del Medigo's *declarare*. As I mention in this chapter and as I will elaborate elsewhere, in several cases where Del Medigo's translation is evidently relying on bad readings in the original Hebrew manuscripts, Mantino's version reflects what must have been, in the context of Averroes's original composition, the correct reading. In the current case—though this is mere speculation—del Medigo may have read *hava'at* for *hafṣata*, omitting the *ṭet* and reading the *shin* as *alef*.

17 "Uno scrupolo che giunge talvolta a redere quasi inintelligibile il senso generale del discorso" (Coviello and Fornaciari, "Introduction," x).

18 See Coviello and Fornaciari, "introduction," xi; Rosenthal, *Republic*, 8. Rosenthal's comment concerns the inclusion of the Mantino translation in the apparatus. It does not mean, of course, that his translation should be excluded from analysis of the Hebrew translation. In fact, in a forthcoming article, I

In short, the two Latin versions are underlined by two different textual approaches. Del Medigo's Latin style, which is undoubtedly conditioned by the author's limited command of the language, nonetheless serves Del Medigo as means to an end, which is to reflect, as accurately as possible, the content of Averroes's works, and to supply a literal translation, reflecting both the sentence structure and terminology of the Hebrew. In the case of Mantino, his Latin served him as a means but also as an end, as he was supplying new translations to texts that were already available to Latin readers, having the linguistic aspect as the sole justification for these translations. One should emphasize, however, that this is not a clear-cut dichotomy. Del Medigo, as we have mentioned, was also paid for his services, and in that regard was no less of a "professional" translator than Mantino.¹⁹ And we cannot rule out a priori that Mantino had genuine interest in the philosophy of Averroes. However, the two cases do teach us that the activity of Jewish authors in the Renaissance was at times conditioned by different motives, and despite the temptation—partly justified—to refer to the activity of Del Medigo and Mantino, alongside Abraham de Balmas and others, as constituting a translation "movement," one should also be aware of the unique circumstances that set the translations apart.²⁰ As we shall see presently in the case of Mantino, one should at times even approach different translations made by the same translator according to their peculiar aims and circumstances.

Mantino's *Republic*: Between Translation and Revision

Certain questions come up with regard to Elijah Del Medigo's translation of the *Republic* commentary. For instance, (1) What Hebrew manuscript(s) was he using? (2) Did these manuscripts survive (or else, which of the surviving

illustrate how certain discrepancies between Del Medigo and Mantino in fact reflect different readings in the Hebrew manuscripts.

19 Cf. Geffen, "Insights," 73.

20 Dag Hasse, for instance, refers to Del Medigo and Mantino collectively, as translators who both "translated Arabic or Hebrew works in response to a demand for new translations of Averroes and Avicenna" (*Success and Suppression*, xvii). Hasse is certainly right in his general characterization but, as I try to show in this chapter, Del Medigo appears to draw inspiration from Averroes on a personal level as well.

manuscripts contain a version closest to the that employed by Del Medigo)? (3) Did Del Medigo collate several manuscripts and was he thus also acting as an editor? (4) How do the manuscript(s) he used reflect the Arabic version that is now lost? Some of these questions were addressed in the critical edition by Coviello and Fornaciari and in Mauro Zonta's review of the edition. One undisputed fact, however, is that the translation was certainly made from the Hebrew, and, until proven otherwise, it is certain that Del Medigo had no earlier Latin model in front of him while translating the text. In the case of Mantino, however, some of his "translations" appear more as revisions of existing Latin texts, with or without a consultation of the Hebrew sources. As was mentioned above, the commentary on the *Republic* belongs to cases where an existing Latin translation preceded that of Mantino, and the following questions thus immediately arise: (1) Was Mantino aware of the existence of Del Medigo's translation, and if so, (2) did he make use of it? (3) If Mantino was employing Del Medigo's translation, did he also make use of the Hebrew, or did he merely revise Del Medigo's text?²¹ If Mantino did use the Hebrew, then (4) to what extent did he rely on the Hebrew and to what extent did he rely on the existing Latin? (5) Did the Hebrew manuscripts consulted by Mantino—if indeed he consulted the Hebrew—reflect the same tradition as the ones employed by Del Medigo? If not, could the divergence between the Latin translations reflect different versions in the underlying Arabic? To answer—or, at least, to engage with—all or some of these questions requires close scrutiny of Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic sources, accompanied by philological, codicological, and terminological analyses, an investigation that goes well beyond the confines of the present chapter, and that I intend to pursue elsewhere. In what follows, I will limit myself to some remarks concerning the nature of Mantino's translation, and its relation to that by Del Medigo.

The first point to be emphasized is that Mantino's translations cannot be assessed collectively. The latter clearly exercised different translation and revision techniques at different times and with regard to different works. His translations of the *Republic*, of sections III.5 and III.36 of the long commentary on the *De anima* and of the epitome of the *Metaphysics*—to mention but three examples—all reflect a different methodological approach, and all

21 This, in fact, was my tentative conclusion concerning Mantino's "translation" of the long commentary on *De anima* III.5 and III.36 in a forthcoming article. See Michael Engel, "Alleged Second Latin Translation."

are underlined by a different mechanism at work.²² In the *Metaphysics* commentary, which is the first translation of a text unknown to Latin readership, Mantino is employing standard and familiar scholastic Latin.²³ It could be that in such cases, where Mantino is translating an unknown text for the first time, style plays very little role, if at all, and that here Mantino was assuming a methodological approach close to that of Del Medigo.²⁴ At the other extreme we find Mantino's translation of the *LCDA* III.5 and III.36, which, most likely, was a revision of Michael Scot's thirteenth-century Arabic-into-Latin translation, and we cannot even be sure whether Mantino had consulted a Hebrew source while conducting this revision (my guess is that he did not). With Mantino's translation of Averroes's commentary on the *Republic*, the case seems less decisive. On the one hand, there are clear indications that Mantino had used a Hebrew source and that this is not a mere revision. For that we find two indications. First, Mantino's style, vocabulary, and syntax are all remarkably different from those of Del Medigo, while in the case of the *LCDA* the proximity between Mantino's and Scot's style is undeniable. The table below records these differences in the opening passage of the *Republic* and the *LCDA* III.5:

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- 22 The linguistic discrepancy between some of Mantino's translations renders it possible—if not plausible—that some of these were falsely attributed to him, and I intend to explore this possibility in a separate study. For current purposes this suspicion is bracketed, and I refer to all translations attributed to Mantino as indeed the fruit of his own labor (alone or in collaboration with Christian peers, as will be discussed below).
- 23 See my forthcoming article, where I point to the fact that Mantino, in his translation of Averroes's middle commentary on the *Categories*, retranslates the same expressions that he himself uses in the Epitome of the *Metaphysics*. See Michael Engel, *Alleged Second Latin Translation*.
- 24 In a forthcoming publication Giovanni Licata argues that there existed, in fact, an earlier, but now lost, version by Del Medigo of the Epitome of the *Metaphysics*. See Licata, *Secundum Avenroem*.

Commentary on Plato's "Republic"**Del Medigo**

Intentio in hoc sermone est declarare illud quod continent sermones attributi Platoni in sua politica ex sermonibus scientificis, ac dimittere sermones famosos et probabiles in ipsa positos

Mantino

Praesentis operis propositum est summatim excerpere ea, quae Plato sub demonstrandi ratione in libro de Republica explicavit, his tamen praetermistis quae probabilia videntur

Long Commentary on the *De anima* Michael Scot

And accordingly it has no nature, except for the nature of potentiality for receiving intelligible [lit. intellected] material forms.

It therefore has no nature, except for the natural of potentiality so that it may receive intelligible, material forms.

Et sic nullam habet naturam secundum hoc, nisi naturam possibilitatis ad recipiendum formas intellectas materiales

Mantino

Sic ergo nullam habet naturam, nisi naturam possibilitatis ut possit recipere formas intelligibiles materiales

As can be seen, in the case of the *LCDA*, Mantino's text is evidently a revision as it partly reiterates Scot's own formulations, while this is not the case in the two translations of Averroes's commentary on the *Republic*. This alone, however, is not a decisive proof that Mantino used the Hebrew, as he perhaps employed more invasive and radical revision techniques at times. A much stronger indication, which I, following the footsteps of Coviello and Fornaciari, have recently come across is that a certain divergence between the terminology of Del Medigo and Mantino stems from mistakes in the Hebrew copy used by Del Medigo. In short, there are strong indications that Mantino's translation of Averroes's commentary on the *Republic* was made from the Hebrew.

Yet other findings point in a different direction. In his forthcoming monograph, Giovanni Licata has identified in a Modena manuscript certain evidence that Mantino was, in fact, revising Del Medigo's translation with the help of the Hebrew, and that his revision was subsequently refined by a Christian author into a model that comes close to classical Latin.²⁵ This finding could add context to Mantino's professed admission concerning his skills in classical Latin: "For I confess that have not attained it" (*fateor enim me eam non esse assecutum*).²⁶

It is difficult to determine with certainty what Mantino was doing in his translation of the *Republic* without a broader perspective concerning his activity as a translator, a perspective that presupposes the close analysis of individual works. However, it is hoped that a patient analysis of sources, accompanied by a careful and tentative elaboration of hypotheses that are open to criticism, may promote our understanding concerning the activity of this enigmatic figure. Currently, and with regard to the *Republic* commentary, we may assume that Mantino had *certainly* employed the Hebrew version, and *probably* had access to and employed Del Medigo's translation as well.

The *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* in Del Medigo's Original Works

The previous sections dealt with the production of the translations and the possible relation between them. It is more difficult, however, to determine what their impact was. A survey of contemporary and past scholarship on Renaissance philosophy in general, and Renaissance political thought in particular, seems to suggest that the influence of the two translations was not significant. Quentin Skinner, for instance, contrasts the "negative" Augustinian account of a human political society and the Aristotelian positive account, and he does not mention either Plato or Averroes in that regard. Skinner says that Giles of Rome, for instance, "whose *De regimine principum* remained one of the most widely cited contributions to its genre throughout the Renaissance," was heavily influenced by Aristotle's work, as

25 See Licata, *Secundum Avenroem*.

26 Cited in Hasse, *Success and Suppression*, 80.

was Marsilius of Padua.²⁷ When referring to Plato's thought, Skinner mentions Platonism as the background of Florentine republican ideals, but he does so while referring to Ficino as the mediator of these Platonic doctrines, not Averroes.²⁸ There are, however, certain exceptions. In their notes to their edition of *Theophrastus Redivivus*, an anonymous anthology from the seventeenth century that gathers antireligious arguments from various scholastic sources, Guido Canziani and Gianni Paganini have noted passages on the pedagogical function of myth that correspond to passages in Averroes's commentary on the *Republic* (referring to Mantino's translation).²⁹ More recently, Giovani Licata, in his forthcoming monograph, has identified a possible influence of Del Medigo's translation on Pietro Pomponazzi. Licata argues that Pomponazzi's paraphrase of the *Republic* (more specifically, of *Republic* 389b–c) was based not on Ficino's translation of that work but on Del Medigo's translation of Averroes's commentary on it. This reference by Pomponazzi was recorded in a lecture he gave at Bologna in 1514, where he was discussing more generally Averroes's commentary on the *Physics*.³⁰ Yet apart from these isolated mentions, there is not much available information in modern scholarship concerning the impact of these translations. One possible cause for the absence of Averroes's commentary from the accounts and surveys by Skinner and others, is that, compared to the more "canonical" Averroes's translations of the thirteenth century, the *Republic* commentary was translated late, and only received significant circulation through the printed editions of Mantino's translation in the sixteenth century. The commentary thus did not have sufficient time to enter the living circulation of scholastic authoritative works. This explanation is also valid for explaining the relatively scant scholarly treatment of the influence of other commentaries by Averroes that were translated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Yet another explanation may lie in the studies themselves. Many commentaries on Aristotle and Averroes written by fifteenth-, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholastics still remain unstudied, and we may discover that some of them do contain treatments of this work. For instance, Jason Denores, who

27 See Quentin Skinner, "Political Philosophy," in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 389–453, esp. 396.

28 See *ibid.*, 428–29.

29 *Theophrastus Redivivus*, ed. Guido Canziani and Gianni Paganini (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1981–82), 30n17.

30 See Licata, *Secundum Avenroem*.

was born in Cyprus around 1530 and died in Padua in 1590, was a professor of moral philosophy at the university there, and published works that were printed in Venice. In other words, Denores was part of the very same intellectual climate in which both Del Medigo and Mantino operated. He could have had access to the commentary, and certainly to Mantino's translation, which was already circulating in Denores's vicinity during his lifetime. His commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*, which survived in three manuscript and two printed editions, may include references to Averroes's commentary on Plato's work as well.³¹ The same is true of Antonius Montecatinus, a professor of philosophy in Ferrara between the years 1568 and 1599, who knew Hebrew and wrote his own paraphrase of Plato's *Republic*, which has never been studied.³² A systematic study of commentaries and paraphrases by figures such as Denores and Montecatinus may alter our perception of the impact of the Latin version of Averroes's commentary. In what follows, I wish to make a step in that direction, and offer selected examples of what is certainly the earliest reception of Del Medigo's translation—that is, to show how Del Medigo himself employed his own translation in his original compositions.

As was indicated above, one ought to examine Del Medigo's activity as translator in light of his overall endeavor, in which his original compositions played a key role. In these works, Del Medigo attempted to explain central doctrines by Averroes, some (e.g., the commentary on the *De substantia orbis*) of which were written as running commentaries, while others, such as the *Two Investigations*, were written as independent tractates. Common to all these works is Del Medigo's tendency to integrate passages from different works by Averroes in an innovative manner, at times removing passages from their original context and employing them in an entirely different discussion.³³ Many of these cited passages are from commentaries that Del Medigo himself had translated for the first time, including the long commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, the epitome of *De anima*, and the *Commentary on Plato's "Republic."*

The first example is taken from Del Medigo's commentary on the *De substantia orbis*, dedicated to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, where Del Medigo

31 See details in Charles Lohr, "Renaissance Latin Aristotle Commentators: Authors N-Ph," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33 (1979): 541–42.

32 See details in Charles Lohr, "Renaissance Latin Aristotle Commentators: Authors N-Ph," 595.

33 See the examples in Engel, *Paduan Aristotelianism*, 18–19.

is citing the commentary on the *Republic*, and, addressing Pico, explicitly mentions the fact that he had translated it for him (Vehe'etaqtiha ani lekha belashon Latin / *et ego transdixi eum vobis latine*).³⁴ This commentary survived in both Hebrew and Latin, Del Medigo having been responsible for both versions.³⁵ The *De substantia orbis* is a cosmological work where Averroes relies heavily on the *Physics* and the *De caelo*, and where he addresses various contested themes in natural philosophy and metaphysics.³⁶ However, the employment of the *Republic* commentary in this particular context does not directly concern any of the themes discussed, but may be labeled “metaphilosophical.” Del Medigo here describes the Jewish multitude, which is conditioned by religious customs and traditional beliefs (*ya'iqam haminhag* in Hebrew, *impediuntur a consuetudine* in Latin) to the extent that its members take biblical narratives such as the story of creation literally, while for Del Medigo such stories were mainly introduced to delight the hearers (*asher yunhu lehit'aneg bnei adam bešmi'atam*)—that is, for didactic purposes.³⁷ This state of affairs, according to Del Medigo, reflects the Platonic dictum, which in Rosenthal's translation reads “he who has no courage cannot reject the non-demonstrative arguments with which he grew up, especially one who has grown up in these States.”³⁸ According to Teicher, in his review of Rosenthal's translation, this is the most sensational passage in Averroes's list

34 Paris, heb 968 fol. 3r; Vatican City, BAV, Vat. Lat. 4553, fol. 2r. (In English this should read: I translated it for you into the Latin language.)

35 For information concerning the manuscripts, see Licata, *De substantia orbis*.

36 A critical edition of this work is currently under preparation. See Michael Engel and Giovanni Licata, *Elijah Del Medigo's Commentary on Averroes's De substantia orbis: Critical Edition of the Hebrew and Latin Text, English translation, Notes and Introduction* (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming). See also Giovanni Licata, “Problemi della tradizione a stampa del *De substantia orbis* di Averroè,” *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Classe di Lettere e Filosofia* 2 (2019):559–80.

37 Paris 968, fol. 2v; Vatican 4553, fol. 1v.

38 “Mi še'in lo gevurah lo yukhal lim'os mah šegadal 'alav min hama'amarim habiliti moftiim.” Elsewhere I will analyze the relation between the formulations of the *Republic* commentary in the Sienna manuscript of the translation itself, and in the Vatican manuscript, which contains Del Medigo's commentary on the *De substantia orbis*. Teicher, in his review, revises Rosenthal's translation and offers the following instead: “He who lacks courage cannot despise the non-demonstrative teachings in which he has been brought up, especially if he has been brought up in our countries.” See Teicher, review, 191.

of qualities required of the philosopher-king. According to Teicher, “the category of ‘non-demonstrative teachings in which one has been brought up’ is, according to Averroes, that of the traditional form of revealed religion; and his stipulation that the ruler should have the courage to despise traditional religion is indeed revolutionary.”³⁹ Yet Del Medigo, in employing this passage, is not interested in the qualities that a philosopher-king should possess, nor is he here discussing political philosophy. Del Medigo is citing Averroes while lamenting his own personal condition, criticizing the intellectual state of affairs within the Jewish community in Padua and with which he had troubled relations. Following Teicher’s reading of this passage, we may therefore see in Del Medigo a concrete manifestation of “the courage to despise traditional religion,” an instance where a central figure of fifteenth century Italian Averroism finds the courage to practice—or at least to preach—an unorthodox position toward traditional religion. In other words, this passage clearly shows—again, possibly in opposition to Mantino—that Del Medigo’s engagement with Averroes also had a personal aspect.⁴⁰

The second example is from Del Medigo’s *Two Investigations*, again written at the request of Pico. The Latin original is now lost, but we have a Hebrew translation made by Del Medigo himself, of which two manuscripts of the entire treatise and one containing part of the text survived.⁴¹ In contrast to the previous example, here the employment of the *Republic* commentary serves Del Medigo as an integral part of his philosophical discussion. The context here is Del Medigo’s polemical engagement with his adversaries, and especially with the Paduan Thomists.⁴² The discussion is complex and multilayered, yet some understanding of the context is essential in order to make sense of Del Medigo’s employment of the Platonic text here.

Drawing on various epistemological and psychological considerations, Del Medigo reiterates Averroes’s reading of Aristotle and determines that, from a philosophical perspective, we must assume that the human intellect is a single substance that exists independently of individual humans. One of the objections to this interpretation of Aristotle’s psychology, which Del

39 Teicher, review, 192.

40 Cf. Geffen’s discussion in *Insights*, 75–77.

41 For the most recent analysis of the treatise and of the surviving manuscripts see the introductory chapter in Engel, *Paduan Aristotelianism*.

42 See Ambrosiana Heb 128 fol. 46r; Paris Heb 968 146v. See also Michael Engel, “Elijah Del Medigo’s Critique of the Paduan Thomists,” *Medioevo* 38 (2013): 295–312.

Medigo himself mentions, is that if the intellect were a separate substance, shared by all humans, this would not be compatible with the religious principle of reward and punishment in the afterlife. Del Medigo answers the objection not by illustrating what would be a true, philosophical understanding of the principle of reward and punishment, as one might expect from a Jewish philosopher. Instead, he rejects the principle altogether, and he does so by referring explicitly to two works—Aristotle’s *Ethics* and Plato’s *Republic*, and to Averroes’s commentaries on these works. In both works, Del Medigo tells us, we find a formulation of the principle that virtue is its own reward. The entire *Ethics*, according to Del Medigo, is built on the principle that humans do good when they act according to what is essentially good, which means acting according to the prescriptions of the intellect. The *Republic*, he says—here referring explicitly to Averroes’s commentary on the work—likewise teaches us that one who acts not for the outcome of that particular act cannot be regarded as the agent of that outcome. In other words, if one does good in order to enjoy the fruits of heaven, we cannot refer to that person as an agent of virtue.⁴³ Del Medigo adds:

He, for example, who has forsaken the pleasures of this world only to gain pleasures in the world to come, did not forsake the pleasure because they are bad, but in order to attain greater pleasures.⁴⁴

And he continues further below:

43 Elijah Del Medigo, *Two Investigations*, Paris 968, fol. 146v. “Zeh šeqer gadol ki kol sefer hamidot banui ‘al zeh šelo yihiyeh ha’adam ba’al ma’alah im lo šeyif al haṭov ba’avur haṭov be’ašmo vehu šeya’ašeh ha’adam kefi mah šeyitnehu hašekhel velbn rušd bi’er me’od bahanhagah ha’aplaṭonit še’ašer yif’al haṭovot lo ba’avur šeyifa’l po’al hāma’alah hineh lo yifa’l po’al hāma’alah.” In English this should read: “This is a great falsehood because every book of ethics is built on the notion that humans will not possess goodness if they do not perform good deeds for their own sake, and this is what a human being does according to what the intellect gives him. And Averroes made very clear in his *Commentary on Plato’s ‘Republic’* that whoever performs good deeds for some purpose other than performing the actions of virtue does not perform the actions of virtue.”

44 Elijah Del Medigo, *Two Investigations*, Paris 968, fol. 146v. “Vezeḥ ki ašer ya’azov ta’anugav ba’olam hazeh ‘al derekh mašal kedei šeyašig ta’anugim ba’olam haba hineh lo ‘azav hata’anugim leheyotam ra’im veomnam ‘azavam lehašig ta’anugim yoter gedolim.”

For we seek wisdom because of [the attainment of] knowledge in itself, which is also the perfection of our soul, as Aristotle explained in his *Ethics*.⁴⁵

Del Medigo thus employs Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* and the Platonic notions explicated by Averroes while arguing for a central Averroist doctrine—namely, the unicity of the human intellect. He does so not by reformulating a religious tenet philosophically, but by simply rejecting the principle, perhaps a concrete instance of “rejecting the non-demonstrative arguments on which he grew up.”

In the third and last example, taken again from the *Two Investigations*, Del Medigo argues that:

But whoever understands that the theoretical sciences are not eternal, and that the last perfection is attained through the conceptualization of the separate intellects, also understands that perfection has two types, first and last. The first [type of perfection] is that which the person himself attains, the second he gains through proximity. And this has to be investigated by the natural scientist.⁴⁶

The context of the discussion is Del Medigo's reading of Averroes's *LCDA* III.36, where, according to Del Medigo, we learn that the attainment of human felicity—that is, of union with the active intellect—is a byproduct, so to speak, of our attainment of intelligibles.⁴⁷ As in the previous example, Del Medigo is citing the *Republic* commentary in the course of a philosophical argument. Yet here, the passage is not taken from its original context, as Del Medigo claims that Averroes is making the same point in the *Republic* commentary and in the *LCDA*. In other words, here Del Medigo finds *direct*

45 Elijah Del Medigo, *Two Investigations*, Paris 968, fol. 174r. “Vezeh še'anaae' nevaqeš haaaqeš h ba'baaq hayedi 'ah ' ' aedi vehi gam ken šlemut nafšenu ka'ašer bi'er hafilosof bamidot.”

46 Elijah Del Medigo, *Two Investigations*, Paris 968, fol. 174r. “Ve'ulam mi šeyir'eh še šehaḥokhmot ha' iyyuniot einan nišḥiyot veki hašlemut ha'aḥaron šiyur hanivdalim hineh mehamevo'ar šehašlemut ešlo bet minim rishon ve'aḥaron hineh harishon hu mah šeyiqneh 'ašmo vehabet hu mah šeyiqneh 'al derekh hasmikhut vezeh yeḥuyav laḥqor mimenu baḥokhmah haṭiv'it.”

47 See Michael Engel, “Reconstructing Averroes's Theory of Conjunction and Immortality in 15th-Century Padua: A Possible Source for Pico's 900 Theses,” in *La lama del sapiente: Saggi sulla filosofia di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*, ed. Giovanni Licata and Pasquale Terracciano (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, forthcoming).

support in the *Republic* for a psychological/epistemological principle that Averroes elaborates elsewhere. Del Medigo in fact is almost surprised by this direct correspondence, and he describes to the reader—again, to Pico—his immense joy on discovering that passage.⁴⁸

In these three examples, viewed collectively, we encounter Del Medigo's creativity as both translator and author, manifested in his treatment of Averroes's commentary on the *Republic*. Not only does he translate for the first time a work that never before appeared in Latin; he is citing from it in different contexts and in order to illustrate different points. Moreover, he does so from the view point of a devout peripatetic. Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* has the function of baptizing (or, rather, rendering *kosher*) this work in the eyes of Del Medigo, enabling him to employ and cite from it in the context of reestablishing Averroes's corpus, explicating the latter's ideas, and using it as a source of personal inspiration for Del Medigo himself.

Conclusion

This survey has attempted to inform the reader about the nature of the two existing Latin versions, and the employment that Elijah Del Medigo made of the translation in his own original works. The information we possess concerning the reception of both Latin translations of *Averroes's Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* in philosophical discussions of the fifteenth century and beyond is very scanty. It is hoped that further studies concerning the reception of these translations, as well as other research concerning the Hebrew-into-Latin translations of the Renaissance period, will be carried out. Such research should take into account the following points, which the current study has tried to establish: (1) that the translations do not consist a single homogenous body, and that different and even contrasting motivations and contexts at times manifested themselves in the translations of the same author, Mantino being a prime example; (2) that the translations ought to be

48 Elijah Del Medigo, *Two Investigations*, Paris 968, fol. 174r: “Velakhen Ibn Rušd bebet mehahanhagah ha'aplaṭonit beve'uro qarov lasof . . . 'ad kan leshono vekamah šamaḥti keshemaṣati zeh besof aḥar šenišlam li ha'iyun bezeh.” “As Averroes makes clear near the end of the second treatise of his commentary on Plato, ‘whoever understander that the theoretical sciences are not eternal . . .’ and so on. His speech continues until here, ‘and how happy I was to finally find this, so that my reflection into this [matter] was complete.’”

studied not only for their impact within the Aristotelian/Averroist tradition but as a means of understanding various phenomena concerning the intellectual activity during the Renaissance, and in particular for the nature of the activity of Jewish authors in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy who were working in the service of their Christian patrons.

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