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PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICAL THOUGHT: REFLECTIONS AND COMPARISONS*

MUHSIN MAHDI

The dialogue called *Laws* or *On Legislation*, where Plato sets forth the best possible political order, begins with a question regarding the origin of laws: the Athenian Stranger asks his two companions whether they attribute their laws to "a god or some human being."[1] When Alfarabi recognized that Plato's *Laws* asked questions pertinent to divine laws – that it was, as Avicenna maintained afterward, the standard work on prophecy and the divine law – philosophy turned to politics and political philosophy proper emerged in the Islamic community. Though the question whether "a god or some human being" was the giver of their laws was answered definitively and emphatically by the followers of the revealed religions, many questions still needed discussion and clarification: the relation between God, the man who serves as the intermediary, and the religious community; the extent to which divine laws regulate man's private and communal life; the reach of the religious community beyond national and geographic borders; and the relation between what is revealed and what is attainable by the unassisted human mind.

Questions such as these were also of concern to the theologians and jurists of the revealed religions and formed what is known as their political thought, which was not a continuation of pagan political thought or classical political philosophy. The victory of the revealed religions over the religions of pagan antiquity transformed what had been the prepolitical basis of political life as well as the prephilosophic basis of philosophy. Men's perception of the world about them and their views about pleasure and pain, the useful and the harmful, good and bad, virtue and vice, happiness and misery, and this world and the next – all underwent radical change. No one who did not

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[1] Plato *Laws* 624a1.

recognize the new conditions could henceforth lead or rule them; no one could explore practical or theoretical matters with them, impart knowledge to them, or engage them in a dialogue on the nature of things – including political things – except by starting from their new perception of the world and of themselves.

The reintroduction of political philosophy into these religious communities was, therefore, a task that demanded more than the recovery of the classical tradition, itself no mean task in the new circumstances. For reasons that have not yet been fully investigated or understood, political philosophy did not begin its career in the new environment until the tenth century of the Christian era, when Alfarabi succeeded in reviving the political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, and thus liberating Socratic philosophy from Christian theology and initiating what became the main tradition of philosophic thought in the Islamic community. It was not until the twelfth century that political philosophy penetrated Judaism through Maimonides, and not until the thirteenth that it penetrated Latin Christianity through the Averroists, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas.

To speak about philosophy and political thought in the times of the revealed religions – "in our time" as philosophers used to say in those times – can mean speaking about a special branch of philosophy such as the one treated by Aristotle in the *Politics*. It can mean speaking about all of philosophy and all of religion; the way philosophy approaches religion, develops a philosophy of religion, and deals in this context with theology and jurisprudence as practiced in the revealed religions; or about the way philosophy proposes new ways of conducting theological and legal investigations in a particular revealed religion. Or it can mean speaking about how a religious tradition approaches philosophy, transforms it and subordinates it to theology, and makes its peace with it; or about how a divine law proscribes or sets limits to philosophic inquiry. These questions have for long been dominated by the attractive thesis proposed by Etienne Gilson, who submerged the relation between philosophy and revelation in Latin Christianity in what he called a "Christian philosophy"[2] – a thesis imitated by

[2] Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 5, where the reader can find the argument against Adolph Harnack on this issue.

some students of Islam and Judaism who speak of a comparable "Islamic philosophy" and "Jewish philosophy," and some students of comparative philosophy who speak of a more general "religious philosophy." "Christian philosophy" in this latter sense is absurd and deserves Heidegger's remark that it is no more credible than a round square.[3]

What needs to be investigated is how political philosophy reoriented itself to face the new environment of the revealed religions, what difficulties it had to surmount, what opportunities it took advantage of, and, above all, what problems it found worthy of reflection and inquiry. To do so, one need not necessarily abandon the use of "Islamic," "Jewish," or "Christian" in tagging the philosophy practiced in the communities adhering to these revealed religions; one need only abstain from prejudging the nature of the relation between philosophy and the religious sciences.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE REVEALED RELIGIONS

Arabic and Islamic political philosophy, like Arabic and Islamic philosophy in general, appears to be a synthesis of Aristotelianism, Platonism, and Neoplatonism. These three traditions were not strangers to one another. Aristotle may have modified Plato's thought in fundamental ways, but Plato was often his point of departure. Contemporary students of Arabic and Islamic philosophy should be careful not to be misled by the fashion that dominated the history of Greek philosophy for some time, one which saw Plato and Aristotle as opposed to one another and considered earlier attempts in Hellenistic and medieval times to look for common themes in their thought or possible agreements between them to be historical misunderstandings rather than legitimate interpretations. Similarly, Plotinus and the other Neoplatonists were careful students of the writings of the two great masters. The Platonists (the Academics), the Aristotelians (the Peripatetics), and the Neoplatonists had much in common and interacted constantly. In a sense, they formed a single tradition of "divine" philosophers, and distinguished themselves from the "naturalists" among the pre-Socratics and from the Epicureans and the Stoics. They were

[3] Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by Ralph Mannheim (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1961), p. 6.

aware that they disagreed about important issues, including the nature of the supreme principle, and concerned with understanding the grounds of their agreements and disagreements.

Although it is not reasonable to suggest that Arab and Muslim philosophers were totally ignorant of those differences and disagreements, one must recognize that their writings present the modern reader with a difficult problem. Many of them appear more interested in stressing the unity of the philosophic tradition than with explaining its diversity; they tend to hide rather than publicize differences of opinion about difficult and unresolved issues in philosophy. Not being modern historians of philosophy, they were concerned primarily with the issues themselves rather than with their genesis. And they seem to have thought it more important that the potential philosopher not be discouraged by disagreements among philosophers and fall prey to the doctrines of the skeptics and the preaching of those who claimed that disagreements among philosophers prove that philosophy is a fruitless enterprise. There was, finally, the impact of the revealed religions, which presented philosophy – all philosophy – with a massive and unprecedented challenge.

The consequences of this challenge for political philosophy were far-reaching. The revealed religions are based on the premise that the supreme principle of the world, the maker, originator, creator of the universe and all the beings in it, has revealed to man, indirectly through angels and prophets or directly by His Incarnation, the highest and most comprehensive knowledge man can ever hope to obtain about God Himself, his own soul, the purpose of life on earth, how he ought to conduct himself here, and his final end or the rewards and punishments that await him in the world to come. Compared to this revealed knowledge, what man has tried and keeps trying to achieve by his own efforts is at best incomplete or confused, at worst erroneous. Seen from this perspective, the highest wisdom of paganism will appear as dark ignorance or unfulfilled yearning. To begin with Aristotle's political philosophy, the view that practical life is self-sufficient and closed upon itself and that man can live a good, virtuous, and noble life without necessarily possessing correct opinions about God, obeying His commands, or caring for salvation in the world to come would now seem the height of foolishness and

pride. As for Plato's view that theoretical wisdom is not available to man, that he is condemned to a life of quest and search, and that practical and political life should be seen in the light of this quest and placed in its service – all this was no doubt a true account of man's condition before the coming of revelation. What Plato would have had to add but could not have even guessed, is that wisdom is not available to man as long as he relies on his own devices; God in His mercy can terminate the state of bewilderment and ignorance; and man may obtain the object of his wish, though not through philosophy. And now that the object of man's wish has been obtained, his life on earth must be based on revealed knowledge, his practical and political life placed at the service of his salvation, and everything subordinated, not to philosophy, but to the quest of what he has now been assured is true virtue and wisdom and perfection. The Neoplatonists' view, finally, that the principle of the world is beyond being and theoretical knowledge, and that the way to imitate Him is ultimately through practical devotion and spiritual activity (an *ergon* rather than a *logos*), may be a truer account than the accounts of both Aristotle and Plato. Yet here again, man's unaided effort only intuited the ultimate Mystery from His veiled appearance or emanation in the natural world. Now, however, the ultimate Mystery has chosen to reveal itself to man and teach him how to conduct his life, alone or in association with others, in order to achieve life everlasting in the presence of this ultimate Mystery. The natural and limited wisdom achieved by Neoplatonists about the ultimate Mystery, the structure of the universe, and the human soul through which the ultimate Mystery reveals itself, and what man must do to achieve his salvation – all this must be set aside; man must now believe in God's own revelation of Himself and obey His commands.

In the case of each revealed religion, there followed centuries of sustained effort on the part of philosophers to understand the implications of the revelation and come to terms with them, and equally sustained efforts on the part of theologians and jurists to define how and to what extent religion can make use of philosophy. Different attempts were made to set limits to each party's claims or harmonize them by redefining the one, the other, or both. All this came to form part of the Western tradition, making it difficult to imagine that philosophy and the revealed religions were not always on intimate terms. Yet

Arabic and Islamic philosophy, like medieval philosophy in general, remains almost unintelligible unless one recovers the difference in the origin and perspective of philosophy and the revealed religions, the initial incompatibility of their claims, and the realization in each camp that the other camp presents a serious challenge and an alternative way of life. Only the seriousness of the conflict can explain the interest in accommodation during the late Hellenistic and early medieval period.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PHILOSOPHY

Initially, the claims of the revealed religions were not directed against a particular philosophic school, but against philosophy as such, against the "idea" of philosophy and the premise that philosophy is the best way of life and the path to the most comprehensive knowledge available to man. Gradually, it became clear to philosophers, just as it was clear to the theologians and jurists of the revealed religions, that division in the rank of philosophers was detrimental to the cause of philosophy – theologians and jurists exploited it at every opportunity – and that it might be prudent to make up their differences and present a common front wherever possible. This did not mean that they were now ready to hold incompatible views or that the Peripatetics were ready to embrace Epicureanism. There was sufficient community of interest and doctrinal affinity between Academics, Peripatetics, and Neoplatonists to make room for the formation of a common front. It did not take them long to realize that almost all of Aristotle, or the essential Aristotle, was unacceptable to the revealed religions, that certain Platonic doctrines were readily accepted by theologians, and that Neoplatonism was welcomed with open arms in certain theological circles. When the indisputable success of the revealed religions finally convinced Hellenistic philosophers that coexistence, accommodation, and a more harmonious relation with the revealed religions was the only prudent and practical alternative to the fruitless defense of decaying pagan religions, the most urgent question was how to protect and preserve Aristotle. This was achieved by hiding him from public view.

The common front marched to embrace the revealed religions

with Plotinus (the other-worldly Greek sage who enchanted everyone with his divine speech) in front, followed by the divine Plato, with Aristotle kept in the background, hardly to be seen, and not to be read by students unless prepared for reading him first by Plotinus and then by Plato. It is well known that at some undetermined date a clever fellow decided that Aristotle deserved to become known as the author of certain extracts from Plotinus' *Enneads* and Proclus' *Elements of Theology* put together under the title *The Theology of Aristotle*. Some like-minded students of philosophy (smiling smugly, no doubt, under their beards) thought this a capital idea and attributed to him other Neoplatonic writings also. After that, whenever one of their coreligionists repeated the accusation that Aristotle believed in the eternity of the world or did not believe in survival after death, they could say to him: "This is not quite fair. Look at what he writes here. Could *this* be said by someone who believes in the eternity of the world or denies survival after death?"[4] Another way to protect and preserve Aristotle was not to teach most of his works in public sessions, but read them in private sessions only; still another, to cover his writings with commentaries, interlaced with Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines.

Finally, there is the curious case of Aristotle's *Politics*. This book seems to disappear from view in the late Hellenistic period and throughout the medieval period, until the second half of the thirteenth century. It must have always been there, since the Latins encountered no difficulty in finding manuscripts of it when they went to look for them. Yet during the revival of interest in Aristotle's works in Hellenistic and early medieval times, when they were translated into Latin, Syriac, and Arabic, hardly anything was said about this book. No one knows whether or how much of the book was translated into Syriac or Arabic; and if anyone wrote a commentary on it in Greek, Syriac, or Arabic, we know nothing of it. Philosophers in the Islamic community knew of the book and the subject matter it treated, but did not expound its doctrine in detail. If they had no access to it, one would expect them to miss it and to mention

[4] Consider Alfarabi's treatment of these questions in *The Harmonization of the Opinions of Plato and Aristotle (al-Jamᶜ Bayna Ra'yay al-Ḥakīmayn Aflāṭūn al-Ilāhī wa-Aristūṭālīs)*, edited and translated into German by Friedrich Dieterici (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1890 [text], 1892 [translation]). New edition and English translation by Fauzi M. Najjar, forthcoming.

this fact, which — with one notable exception — is not the case. The only philosopher who needed to say something about this question was Averroes, who planned to comment on all of Aristotle's writings. He did not say that the book was not translated into Arabic or that his predecessors had no access to it – only that *he* could not get hold of it and therefore would comment on Plato's *Republic* instead. He gave no indication that this substitution presented certain problems or that Plato's *Republic* might not agree with the spirit or letter of Aristotle's *Politics* – things he, as the most knowledgeable student of Aristotle's works, must have known. He read and commented on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he could find (in bk. 6) Aristotle's main discussion of practical and political science, and on the *Rhetoric*, where he could find Aristotle's classification of the regimes. He was in a position to form a clear idea of Aristotle's view of political science. Yet he proceeds as though it went without saying that if after finishing Aristotle's *Ethics* one could not come across his *Politics*, Plato's *Republic* would do just fine.

One could, I suppose, insist that the disappearance of the *Politics* was just an accident and that men like Averroes could not tell the difference between Aristotle and Plato in any case. But such statements are not quite convincing: they do not take into account the question of the compatibility between Aristotle's *Politics* and the revealed religions or the implications of introducing this book into the discussion of political philosophy at a time and within a context where Plato, or a combination of Plato and Plotinus, could do much more to clarify political life as it then existed and avoid the kind of frontal attack on religion about an issue (the self-sufficiency of practical wisdom) that was no longer vital for the fate of philosophy. Aristotle's view of the self-sufficiency of political life could be studied and understood in a less exposed context, in the *Ethics* and the *Rhetoric*, for instance.

The counterpart of "hiding" Aristotle's political science is the recovery and exposition of Platonic politics. Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* became the basic textbooks of Arabic and Judeo-Arabic political philosophy, a state of affairs that has no parallel in Latin Christianity, where Aristotle's *Politics* was translated in the thirteenth century and Aristotle's *Politics*, rather than Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, became the basic textbook of political philosophy. Again, a purely historical

account of the survival of texts and of the influence of earlier traditions is neither sufficient nor helpful in clarifying the character or intention of political philosophy as developed in the Islamic community and, later, in the Jewish community, and in Latin Christianity, respectively.

To begin with, one might have expected the situation in the Islamic community and in Latin Christianity to be the reverse. After all, Islam is thought to be more of a political, this-worldly religion, certainly it pays more attention to things that appear to be exclusively this-worldly. Therefore, Aristotle's *Politics* should have appealed to philosophers in the Islamic community as the more "realistic" account of political life in which worldly things retain their relative independence and dignity. Plato's writings, on the other hand, should have been especially appealing to Christian theologians. His transpolitical, "idealistic," "other-worldly" views and his best city somewhere "in heaven" had in fact appealed to the Church Fathers (e.g., to Augustine) in the Hellenistic period. Furthermore, the Plato transmitted to philosophers in the Islamic community was a "Hellenistic," ascetic, divine, and other-worldly Plato whose way of life was contrasted to that of a this-worldly Aristotle.[5] This was the received account, which they had to modify and correct. The traditional Plato transmitted to them was a nonpolitical Plato, a Plato for whom philosophy was an exercise in and preparation for death. Plato was still known as the author of the *Republic* and the *Laws* and the *Statesman*, but the immediate political context of these works had been lost sight of.

This background does not explain the Plato recovered and expounded by Alfarabi and his Muslim and Jewish followers. What Alfarabi presents is, in a sense, an un-Platonic interpretation of Plato, at least of Plato as seen by the Hellenistic traditions (Athenian as well as Alexandrian) and their survival in the medieval period. For he presents a decidedly political Plato whose other-worldliness is accidental and whose views of the relation between this-worldly affairs and other-worldly affairs are more adequate than those of Aristotle. In short, from a historical point of view, Alfarabi's Plato or Platonic politics had not existed earlier. It was Alfarabi's own creation or recreation, and, in any case, its framework must be sought in his

[5] See the reports in Alfarabi's *Harmonization* cited above, n. 4.

understanding of political life and political science, which in turn motivated the recreation of Platonic politics from the translations and summaries available to him.

This is true also of Aristotle's *Politics* in Latin Christianity. Aristotelian politics did not exist before the thirteenth century in any of the traditions from which the Latin West drew its scientific inspiration: the Hellenistic tradition, the earlier Latin medieval tradition, or the Arabic and Judeo-Arabic traditions. The supernatural, transpolitical end of life in earlier Christian theology, the doctrines of the Beatific Vision, Grace, and Faith, and the relative independence accorded to the law of Caesar, may have prepared the ground for a self-sufficient political science, which was then developed with the help of Aristotle's *Politics*. But its immediate framework is the new reformation of theology by Albert and especially Aquinas, who articulated and developed the full implications of the distinction between the supernatural and the natural, a distinction that in some respects corresponds to Aristotle's distinction between practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom.

THE PROBLEM

We must therefore keep an open mind regarding the extent to which the Christian religious tradition in the Latin West facilitated the effort of philosophers like Albert and Aquinas to understand the intention of Aristotle's *Politics* as well as the extent to which Aristotle's *Politics* facilitated their effort to understand the Christian religious tradition's view of political life. Similarly, we must keep an open mind regarding the extent to which the Islamic religious tradition facilitated the effort of philosophers like Alfarabi to understand the intention of Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* as well as the extent to which Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* facilitated their effort to understand how Islam viewed political life.

To the extent that we turn away from the interesting but by no means always decisive questions of the availability of texts, and of antecedents and influences, to consider the intention of the philosophers themselves and what they mean to achieve through their activities as political philosophers, we tend to assume, with some justification, that the religious tradition is not only an independent factor, but in some sense the fundamen-

tal and determining one: that it motivates philosophers to reinterpret earlier thinkers and philosophic traditions so as to agree with or justify their own religious tradition. It is of course true that, as a political phenomenon, a religious tradition is better established, more stable, more authoritative, and more comprehensive than the philosophic tradition developing within it. However, this is not true of the *interpretation* of the religious tradition, whether by philosophers or the larger group of persons we call "intellectuals," who in this case are the jurists, theologians, mystics, and men of letters. Interpretations are usually presented as clarification or reform; this should not prevent one from realizing that a religious tradition is also susceptible to interpretations – and in a way that can affect its core – that make it agree with or justify certain philosophic points of view. One cannot, for instance, simply assume that when Alfarabi looks at Islam with Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* in mind, or when Aquinas looks at Christianity with Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics* in mind, he is confined within a circle whose immovable center is religious faith or belief. It is possible that the way faith or belief is formulated as a result of such an approach is no longer the prephilosophic view of faith or belief, but the result of a complex process of transformation and interpretation. This is an issue that deserves to be treated cautiously and in measured steps.

For instance, it is true that Plato's *Laws* provides a political framework for understanding divine laws, prophetic legislations, and communities based on them; Aristotle's *Politics*, on the other hand, does not discuss these themes, and the priestly class here is part of the city, not the element defining the city. But does Plato's *Laws* suffice – that is, does Plato's analysis of the laws of Minos suffice for the analysis of the prophets' divine laws? What Minos learned from Zeus is significantly different from what Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad learned from God. Also, Minos is not like Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad. These were men who, in broad daylight, performed miracles, promulgated new laws, and organized communities that followed their laws. And their laws are independent of place rather than being essentially connected to a given locality. They are unchangeable and their continuity is unbroken: a living chain of men constantly recovers and transmits their laws. In the case of Christianity and Islam, they are also universal, applicable to all men, using war and

proselytizing as legitimate means to spread the message. The differences between Minos' laws and these divine laws are obvious enough; and philosophers in the Islamic and Jewish communities who investigated prophecy and revelation with the help of Plato's *Laws* must have been aware of them. In what sense, then, did they believe that Plato's discussion of an ancient Greek phenomenon could help them conduct their discussion – the only full-fledged theoretical discussion available to us today – of the founding acts and the founders of the revealed religions?

As for the situation in Latin Christianity, there is no political philosophy properly speaking until Aquinas. Two courses were open during the thirteenth century. First, to follow Alfarabi, Avicenna, Averroes, and Maimonides, and develop and apply the Platonic model. This was the course followed by Roger Bacon, but it did not flourish or continue in Latin Christianity. Second, to start afresh by taking Aristotle's *Politics* as the model and developing a new approach. This entailed drawing a distinction between the natural and the supernatural realms, sharply limiting the scope of political philosophy, and leaving the rest to be dealt with by theology. Political philosophy would now be limited to human laws and human affairs; and the central problem of political philosophy in the Islamic community – the relation between natural, conventional, and divine laws – would be raised and discussed in a theological rather than political-philosophic context. When Dante and Marsilius of Padau set about to extricate political philosophy from its presumed subservience to theology, they needed to modify and supplement Aristotle's political philosophy so as to be able to discourse on the central political question of the time: the relation between the Holy Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Church.

JURISPRUDENCE AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

To understand political philosophy as practiced in the Islamic community one must begin where its authors began: with coherent reflection on political life in the Islamic community. Like his fellow citizens, a Muslim political philosopher identified himself with the Islamic religious community, the *umma*.

The notion of a religious polity no longer has currency in our political lexicon, but this does not alter the fact that these philosophers lived in a religious community in which this notion was a reality that dominated men's minds, largely defined their political allegiances, and determined their social intercourse in war and peace. The Islamic religious polity in which political philosophy began its career in post-Hellenistic times was a community in which a single divine law, originally revealed to a prophet-lawgiver, regulated, or claimed to regulate, the lives of all its members along with ancillary legal systems (administrative, public, customary) that the divine law recognized. What are for us commonplace distinctions – such as "public" and "private," "religious" and "secular" – do not have the same weight in the divine law as in our modern legal systems.

As a citizen of such a religious polity, the political philosopher began his reflection with an attempt to understand the origin, character, and aim of the divine law, which determined what his fellow citizens regarded as true or false, virtuous or vicious, noble or base. As a good citizen he held himself bound by the legal determination of these matters, and believed or acted in accord with that law's injunctions. The precise determination of these matters fell within the scope of jurisprudence, which the Islamic community considered to be the science of the divine law par excellence. Jurisprudence is based on certain sources handed down from the divine lawgiver. These are things that it accepts, does not question, and regards as axioms. From these sources, and while taking into account the lawgiver's intention (that is, the reasons behind his promulgation of the law and what he aimed to achieve by it for his community), jurisprudence proceeds to infer the legal determination of matters not explicitly determined by the lawgiver. Now to the extent that the jurist does not reflect on these sources, but restricts himself to making inferences from them, he is not in a position to understand them or even to justify and defend them. He restricts his horizon and activity to the confines of his own law; he is not even able to offer a complete account of his own legal system. (What was known in the Islamic community as the science of the roots or fundamentals of jurisprudence limited itself to the study of the methods of ascertaining the sources of the law and the accepted ways of inferring particular rules from them.) From the outset,

then, the political philosopher was obliged to widen his horizon beyond that of the jurist if he was to attain any coherent understanding of the divine law to which he adhered.

As a good member of his own religious community, he had to accept the opinions and perform the actions enjoined as legally binding in his own divine law as determined by the jurist. But as a political philosopher he needed to go beyond jurisprudence and to attempt to understand the foundations upon which the Islamic religious community rested. He had to ask questions that the jurist was neither required to ask nor capable of asking: Why does a political community need to be a religious community? Why does the ruler or legislator of the political community need to be a prophet or the representative of a prophet? Why does a political community need to be governed by a divine law? These questions inevitably led him to inquire into the different kinds of political communities, rulerships, and laws, and to ascertain their relative merits. This inquiry disclosed the universal need of the human species for political association and the diversity of the possible and actual forms of political association. It showed the diversity of opinions regarding man's end or perfection and regarding the means of achieving his end. And it revealed that the members of various political communities believed in opinions and performed actions that owed their origin to three different sources: some were due to the human nature common to all men, others were due to reason and convention, and still others were of divine origin.

The diversity of opinions about human things and the conflicting claims of these diverse opinions pointed to the need for an inquiry that could replace the opinions about these matters with knowledge of them — with knowledge available to man as man. In short, the very existence of these diverse and conflicting human opinions seemed to demand the kind of activity performed by political philosophy. This was the perspective of the political philosopher, as distinguished from the perspective of his fellow citizens. His new horizon was wider: it included and yet went beyond their (and his own) horizon as good citizens. Like them, he believed in and acted according to the requirements of the divine law. For them, belief justified and vindicated itself. They were not troubled by the claim of those who did not believe in any religion or divine law, but pursued their life according to their own light, nor driven by

a sense of wonder that finds no rest until beliefs are vindicated or replaced by the highest knowledge possible for man.

Political philosophers discovered this new horizon in the writings of classical political philosophers, especially in the political writings of Plato and Aristotle. These writings confronted them with a fundamental and far-reaching challenge: that their religious beliefs (in this case, their religious beliefs about the end of man and the political regime that would best promote this end) be subjected to a searching inquiry, the results of which should vindicate or replace these beliefs. The political philosophers were those members of the Islamic community who took up this challenge rather than remaining satisfied with calling Greek philosophy foreign, attempting to refute it without understanding what it meant to say, or burying their heads in the sand. In so doing they were not always understood or supported by their coreligionists.

THEOLOGY: NATURAL AND REVEALED

Political philosophy must be distinguished from theology and the political thought of theologians. To understand this distinction, one needs to go beyond the writings of the political philosophers themselves. Some of them were theologians also, but all of them, even those who were not themselves theologians or were critical of theology, were well acquainted with it and provide some of the most penetrating accounts of its principles and history. Theology of course came into being long before political philosophy in the Islamic community and, subsequently, in the Jewish community. It was the first answer to the challenges posed by Greek thought and the thought of various pre-Islamic religions. It had little to do with its namesake among pagan philosophers, notably Aristotle. For Aristotle, theology is the inquiry into divine things or the first principles as far as this is accessible to the unassisted human mind – as distinguished, that is, from the account of divine things given by mythographers, poets, legislators, and the ancestral tradition. In Latin Christianity, the inquiry into divine things that does not need necessarily to be based on divine revelation, but is accessible to the unassisted human mind, was called "natural" theology in contrast to "revealed" theology.

Unlike natural theology, revealed theology takes its principles from the information about divine things disclosed by God Himself to His prophets or through His own Incarnation; these principles are not necessarily self-evident to the unassisted human mind, but become evident by belief or faith and only to the man who has this belief or faith.[6] It attempts to clarify or interpret this revealed information (as embodied in the Koran and the sayings, life, and activities of the Prophet), to prove its possibility, and to defend it against those who oppose it – against skeptics and unbelievers or against those who believe in the veracity of other revealed principles. So, unlike the principles of natural theology, accessible to the unassisted human mind and therefore are not limited to a particular political or religious community, the principles of revealed theology are accessible only to members of a particular religious community who believe or have faith in the original revelation and in the truthfulness of the person who transmits that information. Like jurisprudence, revealed theology pertains to the particular religious community in which it thrives. There exists a multiplicity of revealed theologies corresponding to the multiplicity of religious communities. They may follow a rational or scientific method and even the same method or methods; this does not alter their multiplicity or the fact that their sphere of operation is limited to the religious community to which they belong. It is possible to speak of "natural" theology as such, that is, irrespective of the political or religious community within which it is pursued; it is not possible to do so regarding revealed theology. Revealed theology is inconceivable without a particular divine revelation and it pertains

[6] "Let everyone," [Don Quixote] cried, "stand where he is, unless everyone will confess that there is not in all the world a more beauteous damsel than the Empress of La Mancha, the peerless Dulcinea del Toboso."

"Sir Knight," [a jester and a very clever fellow from among the Toledan merchants] said, "we do not know who this beauteous lady is of whom you speak. Show her to us, and if she is as beautiful as you say, then we will right willingly and without any compulsion confess the truth as you have asked of us."

"If I were to show her to you," replied Don Quixote, "what merit would there be in your confessing a truth so self-evident? The important thing is for you, without seeing her, to believe, confess, affirm, swear, and defend that truth. Otherwise, monstrous and arrogant creatures that you are, you shall do battle with me." Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, translated by Samuel Putnam (New York: Viking Press, 1949), vol. 1, p. 45.

essentially to the religious community within which it is pursued: it is in a strong sense Islamic, Jewish, or Christian theology.

One can speak of political theology as a specialized theological discipline treating political things on the basis of the revealed teaching. However, because theology is concerned with the clarification and support of the fundamental opinions and actions laid down for a religious polity by its founder, there is a sense in which all theology is political theology. Indeed, this political motive and function seems to lie at the origin of revealed theology, not in Islam alone, but in all three revealed religions. They all had to meet the challenge of Greek philosophy; each was confronted with the refusal of the members of the other religious communities to accept the new revelation and with their arguments against it; and each was threatened by internal dissensions and heresies that called into question the generally accepted interpretation of the original revelation. Jurisprudence (the science of determining what the religious community must believe in or do on the basis of inferences from the sayings and acts of the founder of a particular religious community) was neither meant nor able to meet these contingencies. Hence there arose the need for a skill or science to argue in defense of the principles embodied in the revelation forming the foundation of the religious community and argue against all those who oppose these principles, whether on the basis of philosophy, another revelation, or internal innovations.

There were many reasons why political philosophy had to pay particular attention to theology. To begin with, there was the political impetus that gave rise to theology. (Revealed theology in the Islamic community arose in response to differences concerning the legitimate ruler of the community as well as to clarify and defend God's justice and its implications for man's life on earth.) Next, theology was making every effort to offer a rational clarification of the highest and most fundamental beliefs on which the opinions and ways of life of the religious community rested, and to defend them by every means at its disposal. Furthermore, theology was the religious science most open to the call of reason. All this required the political philosophers to delimit the respective spheres of theology and political philosophy, distinguish their respective principles and aims, and define the proper relationship between them.

THEOLOGY AND JURISPRUDENCE

Theology occupied an important, but definitely ancillary, place within the religious sciences in Islam. It was never considered the highest religious science or the "queen" of the sciences as in Latin Christianity. That position was occupied by jurisprudence, whose practitioners were the custodians of the divine law. The authority to ascertain the principles of the law rested with them; they determined how it should be applied in new circumstances, and, what is more important, they alone had the final authority to pronounce on what constituted true belief and right action. When, in ninth-century Baghdad, the Mu^{c}tazilites attempted to force judges and jurists who were not of their persuasion to confess to their theological doctrines, there was widespread resistance. Theology was not given the authority to pronounce on its own on any serious theoretical or practical matter pertaining to the Islamic community. Its function was to defend what the jurists considered the true meaning of the divine law. Jurists, like philosophers and mystics, were not particularly concerned about the kind of rational method theology used; they judged it by its practical results. They harbored and encouraged it when they needed it; they kept a close watch on it and reprimanded it whenever it seemed to be arousing doubts in the minds of the believers, drawing them to useless and dangerous discussions, or turning them away from their legal obligations.

Political philosophy showed a curious mixture of admiration for the practical utility of theology and contempt for its theoretical claims. Seen from the perspective of philosophy and logic, all revealed theology is at best dialectical, rather than demonstrative, science because its principles are not ascertainable by, or self-evident to, the unassisted human mind but are received and accepted by a particular group of people on the authority of the person to whom they were revealed. To the believer, the person of faith, revealed information is more worthy of acceptance than other kinds (including those principles ascertainable by, or self-evident to, the unassisted human mind). But none of this alters the dialectical character of these principles. Hence philosophers called theologians dialecticians and their science a dialectical science. Furthermore, philosophers emphasized the practical aim of theology and of its arguments for the beliefs and way of life of a particular religious

community and against all those who oppose these beliefs and that way of life.

Theology could base its theoretical claim on the argument that the unassisted human mind could not demonstrate the existence of things said to be essentially beyond its power. The demonstration must, then, rest on divine revelation, that is, on information provided by the divine law. This argument crops up again and again among theologians, and it is at the basis of Ashᶜarite theology and of the distinction between things "supernatural" and things "natural" in al-Ghazālī and Aquinas. The difficulty, nevertheless, is that either there is no scriptural proof for this view of theology, or ancestral tradition and the learned did not agree that this way of conceiving theology is demanded by the divine law. As a result, this understanding of what theology is and the nature of its principles could not assume the status of a valid and binding *interpretation* of the divine law. The authority to make such an interpretation rested with jurisprudence. Hence, in order to ascertain the binding character of this theological position, a Muslim needed to have recourse to jurists for a legal opinion on the matter; or, if the philosopher himself happened to be an accredited jurist, as Averroes was, he had to consider the divine law and himself determine the legal status of theological opinions as well as of the practice of theology.

Most Muᶜtazilite theologians, on the other hand, assumed that everything is available to the unassisted human mind, provided the human mind is given time and applies itself to knowing them. They argued that prophecy and revelation are necessary because humans need to be instructed about things required for their well-being in this world and the next. Although some humans could know these things given sufficient time and mental power and application, there was at the time of the coming down of revelation a disparity between what humans knew and what they needed to know. What humans know at any time is subject to a great many accidents, and in any case not all humans know what they need to know well enough to act upon it. Revelation is an act of divine grace that removes these accidental shortcomings, rather than an imparting of information about things whose very nature is such that the unassisted human mind, by its very nature, has no access to them.

The question, then, is whether this interpretation of the

knowledge supplied by the divine law, or the former theological position, is the correct one. The evidence of the divine law tended to support this interpretation, or else lead one to suspend judgment and say that the divine law enjoins knowledge of all things but does not specify their nature or the method to be pursued in knowing them. Every Muslim will then have to know the nature of things as far as this is possible, using the best method available. It is therefore not surprising that philosophers in the Islamic community could arrive at the position that this meant knowing the highest things by using the best method – that is, by using demonstration and achieving science as far as possible. If any theoretical thing in the divine law requires interpreting, this task should be assigned to the philosopher rather than the theologian. The position of philosophy in the Islamic community can therefore be formulated as follows: the divine law sets forth the principles that govern the beliefs and the actions of the Islamic community; the legal determination of what the community must believe and do is entrusted to those who are best equipped to make legal inference, namely, the jurists; the interpretation of the theoretical things in the divine law, on the other hand, should be entrusted to those members of the community who, in turn, are best equipped to perform this function, namely, the philosophers.

Having deprived theology of its claim as the best way to know theoretical things, philosophy remains nevertheless keenly aware of the practical function of theology, which gives almost all of theology an eminently political character. Being a practical discipline, political philosophy aims at a practical end, the preservation of the good achieved by the community and improving or reforming it to achieve a higher good. As an independent discipline, political theology could not perform this function adequately. To preserve what is good in a community, and to improve and reform it, one needs the guidance of someone who knows or who makes it one's business to know the highest perfection possible for man and society and who also develops the capacity to find out what is best for a particular community at a particular time. Hence political philosophy insists on the requirement that the philosopher train himself to perform both functions or that theoretical knowledge go hand in hand with the practical virtues. Through this combination, the philosopher will be able to perform

for his community the necessary function of the political theologian: help it preserve the good that is present and direct it to the good toward which it should aspire on the basis of his knowledge and prudence. Thus Islamic political philosophy considers political theology a subsidiary function of political philosophy, and in so far as philosophers address their fellow citizens with the aim of instructing them in political things – things in which they want them to believe or which they want them to do – they invariably speak and write as political theologians — that is, they defend certain beliefs and actions and argue against others. Their surviving writings, then, are not purely theoretical or scientific writings, but practical or political writings that presuppose the theoretical or scientific understanding of the issues involved while taking into account the conditions and character of the community they address.