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**The Genesis of Secular Politics in Medieval Philosophy:
The King of Averroes and the Emperor of Dante**

Abstract

In contemporary political discourse, the "clash of civilizations" rhetoric often undergirds philosophical analyses of "democracy" both at home and abroad. This is nowhere better articulated than in Jacques Derrida's Rogues, in which he describes Islam as the only religious or theocratic culture that would "inspire and declare any resistance to democracy" (Derrida 2005, 29). Curiously, Derrida attributes the failings of democracy in Islam to the lack of reference to Aristotle's Politics in the writings of the medieval Muslim philosophers. This paper aims to analyze this gross misconception of Islamic philosophy and illuminate the thoroughgoing influence the Muslim philosophers had on their Christian successors, those who are so often credited as foundations of Western political philosophy. In so doing, I compare the ideal states presented by Averroes and Dante – in which Aristotelian influence is intimately interlaced – and offer an analysis thereof as heralds of what we might call the secularization of the political, inspiring those democratic values that Derrida believes to be absent in the rich philosophy of the Middle Ages.

Keywords: Averroes, Dante, Aristotle, medieval philosophy, political philosophy, secularism, democracy, religion

*Poi ch'innalzai un poco piu' le ciglia,
vidi 'l maestro di color che sanno
seder tra filosofica famiglia
Euclide geometra e Tolomeo,
Ipocrate, Avicenna e Galieno
Averois, che 'l gran comento feo.
Dante Alighieri*

Questions concerning democracy, secularism, and religion – intimately intertwined while concomitantly in tension with one another – have pressed upon the minds of such con-

¹ *When I had lifted up my brows a little /The Master I beheld of those / who know,/ Sit with his philosophic family./ Euclid, geometrician, and Ptolemy,/ Galen, Hippocrates, and Avicenna,/ Averroes, who the great Comment made.* (Alighieri 2012, 18-19)

temporary political thinkers as John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, and Noam Chomsky, with roots in the canonical writings of John Stuart Mill, John Locke, and the Founding Fathers of the United States of America. They are questions that lie at the heart of our understanding of politics both within and without, particularly sharp against the backdrop of the "clash of civilizations" rhetoric materializing in today's fear of terrorism and, more to the point, of Islam. So stark and simplistic is the binary drawn between "us" Westerners and "them" Muslims that the only comprehensible manner of conceptualizing it, without the effort of critical reflection, is by labeling them – those seen as coming from a political world dominated by a religion of hate – anti-democratic. Indeed, Jacques Derrida himself, otherwise so carefully nuanced in his philosophical analyses, describes Islam as the only religious or theocratic culture that would "inspire and declare any resistance to democracy" (Derrida 2005, 29).

Despite its shockingly rudimentary presentation, Derrida's conceptualization is not, on the surface, terribly unfounded. He is, after all, writing in an age in which fear of the "Other" is especially visceral, whether in the East or the West. What is more curious is Derrida's attribution of these "failings" of democracy to the Muslim philosophers of the Middle Ages, and particularly to the absence of Aristotle's *Politics* in their writings. This negligence, he says, had a

symptomatic, if not determining, significance, just like the privilege granted by this Muslim theologico-political philosophy to the Platonic them of the philosopher king or absolute monarch, a privilege that goes hand in hand with the severe judgment brought against democracy. (Derrida 2005, 32)

This meager image presented by Derrida can only be the result of contemporary discourses on Islamic politics, or the "politicization" of Islam, that fuels blinding fear thereof. Indeed, Derrida himself concedes that he is following the opinions of "certain historians and interpreters of Islam today" (Derrida 2005, 32), suggesting a lack of critical evaluation that is, unfortunately, an apt representation of much of today's scholarship on politics in the Muslim world. Nonetheless, the emphasis placed on Islamic philosophy warrants critical attention. For Derrida, the political writings of the Muslim philosophers primarily have recourse to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Plato's *Republic*, reducing the intricacies of Islamic philosophy to disappointing oversimplification.² Rather than take into consideration the sociopolitical context of the age – or indeed, acknowledge the explicit endorsement of monarchical rule in the subsequent writings of medieval Christian philosophers – Derrida instead general-

² Derrida fails to mention, as well, that the appeal to Plato's *Republic* rather than Aristotle's *Politics* was due to the simple fact that the *Politics* were physically unavailable to the Muslim philosophers of the Middle Ages.

izes the writings of the Muslim philosophers as the foundation of the democratic failings of Islamic states today.

In the following paper, I analyze this gross misconception of Islamic philosophy and illuminate the thoroughgoing influence the Muslim philosophers had on their Christian successors.³ Much of Islamic philosophy's connection to Christian philosophy is tied to (Peripatetic) Islamic philosophy (*falsafa*)'s attempt to reconcile reason and revelation, "remaining faithful to both Aristotle . . . and to one's religion" (Stone 2007, 137). Ibn Rushd (Averroes, Latinized) was especially critical in the survival of Aristotelian philosophy – evinced by his masterful Commentaries on Aristotle's works – and Aristotelian influence is clearly evident in his own philosophy. Indeed, so influential were Averroes' writings on the Greek philosophers that his branch of radical Aristotelianism – called Averroism by his followers – was a point of substantial controversy during the infamous Parisian Condemnations of 1277. Even following their denunciation, Aristotelianism and Averroism thrived in Venice and Padua where, in fact, "Averroes [seemed] to have been taken more seriously than [Thomas] Aquinas" (Stone 2007, 137).⁴

Given his lasting impression upon the intellectual work of his successors, I take Averroes as my central figure of analysis, as both an illuminating point of contact between Islamic and Greek philosophy, and as a central component of the intellectual exchange between medieval Muslim and Christian philosophers. Of his works, I examine his political texts – particularly the *Decisive Treatise* and several of his Commentaries – in the context of his Peripatetic background in order to illustrate the nuanced relationship between reason and revelation – secularism and religion – in the state. In order to further elucidate Averroes' impact on subsequent Christian writings, I turn to Dante Alighieri's *Monarchy* as a text both exalting and critical of Averroism. As a thinker whose life overlapped with the Parisian condemnations and whose intellectual upbringing is decorated with Aristotelian influence, Dante provides an especially unique foil to the Muslim scholar. Indeed, so profound was Averroes' impact on Dante that Averroes – "che 'l gran comento feo" (Alighieri 2012, 19) – was given "special attention for his intellectual achievement" (Schildgen 2007, 115), exemplified by his

³ This is not to say that their works did not impact those of the medieval Jewish philosophers; Moses Maimonides, in fact, credits Averroes' Commentaries on Aristotle as hugely influential in his own philosophical development. The scope of this paper, however, does not admit space for this particular discussion, whose richness truly warrants an analysis of its own.

⁴ This is especially apparent in the writings of such Italian philosophers as Pietro Pomponazzi, Alessandro Achillini, and Marsilius of Padua. Indeed, the influence of Aristotle and Averroes on Aquinas himself was so significant that he refers to them explicitly throughout the *Summa Theologiae*.

privileged standing alongside such illustrious thinkers as Socrates and Aristotle in the *Divine Comedy*.

Using Aristotle – the "Father of Political Science" – as the foundation of their respective theories alongside critical exegesis of their respective Scriptures, both Averroes and Dante introduce conceptualizations of the state that are, I posit, heralds of what we might call the secularization of the political. The shadow of Aristotle is cast throughout this analysis, with his notion of *Eudaimonia* interlaced throughout Averroes' and Dante's constructions of the state and as the guiding force of their political theories. Neither philosopher advances the state as a *democracy*, to be certain – and on this note there is some truth in Derrida's claim – but the values each philosopher promotes are closely aligned contemporary theories of liberal democracy and liberalism more broadly. Ultimately, I contest Derrida's generalization of Islamic writing as a profound disservice to the complex reality of Islamic medieval philosophy and propose that, even if not democracy, the Muslim philosophers and their Christian successors were essential to the development of a secularist thought we still find integral to Western political philosophy today.

1. Averroes and the Unity of Truth

In order to properly assess the significance of his writings, it would do us well to situate Averroes within his historical moment and the atmosphere of intellectual hostility in which he was a central figure. In so doing, the terrain and motivation of his philosophical analyses may not only offer a more nuanced understanding of his ideal state, but prefigure the fate of Islamic philosophy both within the Muslim world and in the worlds of its Christian and Jewish neighbors. Averroes (1126-1198), a polymath of the medieval period, was notable amongst his contemporaries for integrating the teachings of the Greek philosophers with an understanding of Islam that, due to its rationalist approach, did not maintain popularity among Muslim scholars in the centuries following his death. Indeed, even within his own life Averroes witnessed considerable backlash against his methodology and Islamic *falsafah* – Peripatetic, rational philosophy – writ large. More than his Commentaries, Averroes is remembered principally for his defense of Aristotelianism against charges of heterodoxy raised by the *mūtakallimūn* – practitioners of scholastic theology – and, especially, Ash'ari theologian Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī.⁵

⁵ See Averroes' response to Ghazālī's *The Incoherence of the Philosopher* (*Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*) in his, suitably titled, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* (*Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*) [see Al-Ghazālī 2000]. Nevertheless, the impact of al-Ghazālī's treatise, as is well known, initiated the irreversible shift of Islamic

Despite the protestations of his opponents, Averroes was deeply committed to articulating the theoretical consistencies between scripture and philosophy, both through close Qur'anic exegesis and by means of a comprehensive philosophical rehabilitation of Aristotle. As noted by Catarina Belo, "Averroes was renowned in the Latin Middle Ages as the Aristotle commentator par excellence, and he consciously endeavored to restore Aristotle's original thought and purge it from distortions accreted to it by his predecessors in the Islamic tradition" (Belo 2009, 417).⁶ As such, Averroes was firmly in the philosophical theater of his contemporaries – Muslim and Jewish alike – in his commitment to the reconciliation of Aristotelianism with scripture, and remembered in particular with regard to his sophisticated argument for the unity of truth:

Since this Law is true and calls to the reflection leading to cognizance of the truth, we, the Muslim community, know firmly that demonstrative reflection does not lead to differing with what is set down in the Law. *For truth does not contradict truth*; rather, it agrees with it and bears witness to it. (Averroes 2002a, 8-9, my emphasis S.A.)⁷

Not only does this declaration reinforce the compatibility of Aristotelianism and the Qur'an, but it also served as the foundation for Averroes' criticism of the *Mutakallimūn*. Because he held that Qur'anic truths and philosophical truths were one and the same, Averroes was of the opinion that few were properly capable of embarking on the philosophical endeavor to truth and should, instead, accept those articulated in scripture as given. Indeed, Averroes' *Decisive Treatise* enumerates three classes of interpretation corresponding with three classes of readers of the Qur'an: the philosophers, the dialectical theologians (*Mutakallimūn*), and the multitude, each of whom learned by means of philosophical demonstration, dialectical theology, and rhetoric, respectively.

and philosophical scholarship away from the Peripatetic school and, in due course, *falsafah* declined under increasing politico-legal support of Sufi and kalām traditions.

⁶ Averroes was nevertheless deeply indebted to al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, both of whom wrote extensively on the nature of the Active Intellect and set the groundwork for Averroes' own analyses on the subject (see Davidson 1972).

⁷ Nonetheless, there was great controversy surrounding the "unity of truth" doctrine – particularly in Christian Europe – which, among other factors, prompted the banning of Averroist texts in the Condemnations. Under certain readings, Averroes was understood to have suggested the existence of two separate and distinct domains of truth: one "religious" and one "philosophical." Averroes, however, explicitly denounces this reading in the *Decisive Treatise*, as noted above. For an extensive analysis of the "double truth" controversy (see Heller-Roazen 2006).

Averroes justified his reconciliation of these interpretive methods with an exegetical analysis of Qur'anic verse 3:7, which is itself cited at various lengths throughout the *Decisive Treatise*. The Qur'anic verse itself reads:

He it is Who has sent down the Book upon thee; therein are signs determined; they are the Mother of the Book, and others symbolic. As for those whose hearts are given to swerving, they follow that of it which is symbolic, seeking temptation and seeking its interpretation. And none know its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say: "We believe in it; all is from our Lord." And none remember, save those who possess intellect. (Nasr 2015, 129-132, 3:7)⁸

For Averroes, no one save Allah and those adept in demonstration – those who "possess intellect" – were the proper (and sole) knowers of the true interpretation of religious text.⁹

⁸ In most translations of the verse, the penultimate sentence focuses exclusively on Allah as the knower of the true meaning behind the "ambiguous" verses, suggesting that there exists no human mind capable of comprehending the divine truths. To this day it stands as a point of contention, particularly because the original Arabic transcription of the Qur'an lacked punctuation altogether, making it difficult for the reader to gauge the precise delineations between the "interpreters" discussed in the verses. For example, Majid Fakhry's translation of the verse states that "As to those in whose hearts there is vacillation, they follow what is ambiguous in it, seeking sedition and intending to interpret it. However, no one except Allah knows its interpretation. Those well-grounded in knowledge say: 'We believe in it; all is from our Lord'; yet none remembers save those possessed of understanding!" (Fakhry 2000, 54, 3:7). Contrarily, Islamic scholar Farid Esack notes that, "if one ignores the full stop and proceeds, then one arrives at an entirely different meaning: 'None save God *and* those whose hearts are rooted in knowledge know their actual meaning'" (Esack 2005, 58). Given Averroes' commitment to the compatibility of reason and revelation, we may safely assume that it is Esack's reading – and Nasr's translation as used above – that he and his contemporaries would have invoked during the medieval era. Nasr, too, notes that, "taken as a whole, the genre of Quranic exegesis includes the dimension of interpretation known to the medieval Western world as the literal, moral, allegorical, and anagogical" (Nasr 2015, 131, 3:7). Indeed, Averroes himself devotes considerable attention to analyzing those "well-grounded in science" – as distinct from the dialectical theologians and the "rhetorical people, who are the overwhelming multitude" (Averroes 2002a, 26) – as the ordained interpreters of ambiguity in the Qur'an.

⁹ Although outside the scope of this analysis, Averroes' understanding can be further strengthened by the reading of his "First Intellect" as articulated in Richard C. Taylor's translation of the *Long Commentary on the De Anima* in which the First Intellect is, effectively, God. However, because the First Intellect is also pure intelligence by definition, it necessarily follows that the First Intellect embodies "knowledge" of the intelligibles; God, in other words, is pure intelligence. Averroes' understanding of immortality as union with the Active Intellect – that which is the progenitor of intelligibles to the rational agent – thus illustrates precisely how man is capable of attaining knowledge of God's divine

Those lacking the intellectual capacities to engage syllogistically with scripture, on the contrary, were to accept the parables as transcribed, lest they would fall into doubt and stray from the truth: "If the beliefs based on the literal sense of the divine Law are taken away from the non-philosophers who do not understand the allegorical sense, because they required intellectual abilities for understanding it, then these non-philosophers will fall into nihilism" (Fraenkel 2008, 120). Accordingly, Averroes cautioned against the promulgation of philosophical truths to the multitude, a position which drove his charge against the *Mūta-kallimūn*, who, "by declaring... corrupt beliefs to the multitude... [had] become the reason for the multitude's and their own perdition in this world and in the hereafter" (Averroes 2002a, 27).¹⁰ Fundamentally, the heart of Averroes' argument reified a unity of truth understood through divergent mediums: one by means of philosophy; the other by means of the Qu'ran.

Averroes' integration of philosophical principles with revelation is most evident in his unparalleled Commentaries on Aristotle's works.¹¹ Indeed, it is by appeal to Aristotelian doctrines that Averroes reconciles the paradox of immortality as illustrated in the Qur'an with the Peripatetic denial of individual immortality, not only for affirmation of their compatibility, but also as a key theorization undergirding his entire political philosophy.¹² Averroes' clearest analysis of immortality appears in his Commentaries on Aristotle's *On the Soul* read through the lens of his Islamic perspective. Aristotle's own theory on the intellect is, infamously, a source of frustration due to the brief and ambiguous explanations given in not only *On the Soul*, but also the *Posterior Analytics* and *On the Generation of Animals*, to say nothing of the countless efforts made by his successors to parse out his distinction between the passive ("potential") and active ("agent") intellects. For our purposes, however, a general summation will suffice.

In *On the Soul*, Aristotle postulates that the duality of passivity and activity is to be found in all things, manifested as the "protean potentiality of their matter and the active and

truths. See footnotes 14-16 for further elucidation on the Active Intellect and the controversy surrounding Averroes' position on the First Intellect.

¹⁰ We might notice here the similarities between Averroes' denunciation of the *mutakallimūn* and Socrates' denunciation of the sophists in Plato's *Republic*.

¹¹ These Commentaries are subsequently taken up as the authoritative interpretations of Aristotelian philosophy by such Christian thinkers as Thomas Aquinas and Pietro Pomponazzi. Aquinas in fact challenges Averroes' Doctrine of Immortality and offers his own interpretation thereof in *On the Unity of the Intellect Against Averroists*. For a detailed reading on the controversy surrounding Averroes' Doctrine of Immortality, see Mohammed 1985.

¹² Immortality itself is further crucial to the Muslim philosophers' justification of the ideal state, as it serves as the motivating impetus for living in accordance with virtue in the Islamic tradition.

productive art or agency that allows them to realize their potentials" (Goodman 2003, 132).¹³ In the case of objects of knowledge – which for Aristotle are always true – the passive intellect of the rational being is that which "can become all things" (Aristotle 1981, 51) but without content, until the agent intellect actualizes its potentiality by illuminating the intelligibles thereto: "the [potential] intellect only receives the intelligibles which exist in it when the [potential] intellect is perfected by the agent intellect and illuminated by it" (Averroes 2009, 333). The active intellect, then, is essentially what makes the intelligibles (objects of knowledge) comprehensible to the intellecting subject by actualizing the intellectual potentiality therein.

Averroes builds upon this theme throughout his philosophical tenure, such that his Aristotelian approach would harmonize with the metaphorical illustration of immortality described in the Qur'an, poetically painted in evocative images of either Heaven or Hell.¹⁴

¹³ See also Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* II.19 (Aristotle 1991, 138-139).

¹⁴ Averroes grappled with Aristotle's conceptions of the passive and active intellects throughout his philosophical career, reading and critiquing the theories of his Muslim predecessors – particularly those of Ibn Sina and Ibn Bajja – and ultimately reconciling Aristotle's notion of the soul with Alexander of Aphrodisias' interpretation of *On the Soul*. The idea of the Active Intellect was one that resonated deeply with the Muslim thinkers, "because it arose in philosophical argument, offered to answer a question, and responded to the need to connect knowing with God" (Goodman 2003, 150). According to Herbert Davidson, "no less than seven of Averroes' compositions treat the subject of human intellect formally – while others do so incidentally" (Davidson 1992, 262). Averroes' precise positions on the First Intellect and the Active Intellect change shape even throughout his own three Commentaries on *On the Soul*. Indeed, as established in footnote 9, *The Long Commentary* suggests an equivalence between the First Intellect and God. It must be noted, however, that Averroes' mature position on the matter remains a matter of controversy; in particular, Alfred Ivry offers the most significant counterpoint to Davidson's analysis, as his translation of the *Middle Commentary* posits the First Intellect as pure Intellect, rather than as analogous with God. Much of the disagreement between Davidson and Ivry is due to the fact that Averroes is known to have gone back to his Commentaries at different stages of his philosophical tenure and changed his position therewithin. There is no guarantee, in other words, that the *Long Commentary* contains Averroes' final position on the ambiguity of the First Intellect. Indeed, Ivry is of the position that "one text served as the source for the other (...) I have given my reasons for believing the *Long* is the source of the *Middle*" (Ivry 1997, 155). The ongoing debate about Averroes' ultimate position on the matter has significant implications on our reading of Averroes' doctrine of immortality today; however, it is unequivocal that the Commentary available to Averroes' Christian successors – and the one believed to be definitively used by Aquinas, Dante, and Marsilius of Padua – was *The Long Commentary*. Thus understood, Dante's understanding of God is very much in line with a reading of the First Intellect as Allah, and for the purposes of this paper, it is enough for us to accept Averroes' position as articulated in *The Long Commentary*. My accepting the Davidson reading, however, does not imply that I subsequently accept *The Long Commentary* as Averroes' ultimate position on the First

Averroes, following Alexander of Aphrodisias' interpretation of the Aristotelian intellect, theorizes the intellect as a "disposition" within the soul – human intelligence – encompassing two functions,

one of which is the producing of intelligibles and the other is the receiving of them. By virtue of producing intelligibles, it is called agent, while, by virtue of receiving them, it is called passive, though in itself it is one thing. (Averroes 2002b, 112)

Contra Aristotle, however, Averroes' conceptualization of the external Active Intellect is deeply imbricated in a complex cosmology in which it – the "last of the primary intelligences" – is "the cause of human thought" (Davidson 1992, 225).¹⁵ Human intelligence, in its purest form, is one with the Active Intellect, and the Active Intellect is, hence, the perfection of the human intellect. Indeed, we may understand the Active Intellect as "both external and our own, divine and within us," and, accordingly, "Averroes elevates what is intellectual in us, locating human rationality not beside but within the Active Intellect" (Goodman 2003, 151, cf. 159).¹⁶ More simply, it is the nature of the passive intellect to receive the intelligible forms, and it is accordingly toward the Active Intellect that man strives for unity through performance of his function as a rational being. This philosophical ascent traces the journey of man's mortal life toward immortality and, indeed, because the Active Intellect is incorporeal and immortal, so too does man become when his intellect attains perfection.¹⁷ To be sure,

Intellect; I do not here take a stance one way or another. For a brief outline of Davidson's position (see Davidson 1972, particularly 220-222). For a more nuanced reading of Ivry's position, see Ivry 1995. For an excellent overview of the Ivry-Davidson debate (see Taylor 2012, particularly 269-273).

¹⁵ My capitalization of Active Intellect is a reflection of Averroes' rendering of the Active Intellect as the Tenth Intelligence, or the final of the celestial spheres, that gives form to the sublunary realm. For a more comprehensive articulation of Averroist cosmology, see Averroes' *On Aristotle's Metaphysics and Parva Naturalia*. Davidson offers a meticulous analysis of these and other Commentaries in *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect* (1972).

¹⁶ Averroes' understanding of "human intellect" is the intellect *in potencia* alongside an active intellect – derivative of the Tenth Intelligence – that exists in each of us, able to receive the objects of knowledge from the celestial Active Intellect. This is a conceptualization that is doubtlessly inspired by Alexander of Aphrodisias, who "saw the Active Intellect at work in our processes of thought, anchoring the capabilities that differentiate rationality from mindlessness. To make sense of this work of the Active Intellect, he spoke of a *nous thyrathen*, a mind within us that is externally derived" (Goodman 2003, 151). By Aristotle's own articulation, this mind – the active intellect within the rational subject – is untouchable by death: "when separated [from the body], it is *as such* just that [i.e. intellect], and only this [part of the soul] is immortal and eternal" (Aristotle 1981, 51).

¹⁷ The relationship between intellectual perfection and (moral) virtuosity merits brief elucidation, as it often generates perplexity among scholars even today. In Averroes' Commentaries (and those of many of his predecessors), the primacy of intellectual proficiency appears to subdue the ethical dimension of

this rendering of immortality is a radical departure from the vision of individual immortality poeticized in the Qur'an, which Averroes himself denied. Rather, immortality is attained through union of the human intellect with the celestial Active Intellect; in essence, it is the return of the immortal intellect to its progenitor, and it is to this progenitor that all human intellects endeavor.

So understood, Averroes' theory of immortality is delicately woven into the tapestry of his political philosophy, which draws yet again from Aristotle by virtue of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as from al-Farabi's thesis on the perfect state. Indeed, al-Farabi is widely considered the herald of political philosophy in Islam (and graced with the title of "Second Teacher" by his successors, the "First" being, of course, Aristotle) due in large part to his *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, within which he conceptualizes the ideal state as an integration of the Platonic structure of the *Republic* with the Aristotelian notion of *Eudaimonia*.¹⁸ Aristotle's understanding of *Eudaimonia* as the "chief good" or the end to which all men aim, alongside his further qualification of man's end as "activity of the soul and actions in accordance with virtue" (Aristotle 2000, 12), were especially conducive to integration with the principles outlined in the Qur'an – those of living the virtuous life, or that which would reward man with "earthly happiness in this life and supreme happiness in the life beyond" (Alfarabi 2001, 13). Averroes, writing in the footsteps of al-Farabi, doubtlessly held this theologico-political reconceptualization of the state in mind – concomitant with his own understanding of the "life beyond" – while crafting his Commentaries on Plato and Aristotle.¹⁹ As such, though the structural architecture of Averroes' ideal state appears Platonic, the spirit thereof is thoroughly Aristotelian.

virtuosity that serves as the cornerstone of religious scripture. The most cogent interpretation – and the one I take as conforming to the spirit of the texts – is the existence of a moral dimension to the intellectual virtues themselves, particularly if following Socrates' assertion that 'to know the good is to do the good' (see *Gorgias* 460b, *Meno* 87c, and *Apology* 37a [Plato 1997] for variations on this theme). Indeed, if it is through philosophizing that one may attain immortality, then there certainly must exist an element of virtuosity in the act of philosophizing itself; man's intellect as desiderative of knowledge imbues the very notion of intellectual curiosity a moral dimension. Coupled with Averroes' adoption of the Aristotelian notion of man, we may extend these virtues into the realm of sociality, ensuring that the true philosopher, the embodiment of the soul in accordance with virtue, is always, accordingly, virtuous in his rapport with his fellow men. As such, although the non-philosopher lacks the theoretical virtues of the philosopher, her capacity to live in accordance with the moral virtues of faith elevates her to the status of the philosopher in practice. I thank Dr. Lenn E. Goodman for his helpful insight on this matter.

¹⁸ This is most clearly articulated in al-Farabi's *The Attainment of Happiness*.

¹⁹ For an excellent overview of al-Farabi's influence on Averroes in this regard, see Fraenkel 2008.

Just as Aristotle's man is a social and political being, so too did Averroes hold that the state is the necessary theater in which man is able to attain his end: "to acquire his virtue a man has need of other people. Hence he is political by nature" (Averroes 1974, 5). In Platonic fashion, it is the Ruler in particular who is tasked with implementing and maintaining the state that is capable of doing so; she is the figure – the political leader with knowledge "of the spheres of the body and of the soul alike" (Aristotle 2000, 20) – in possession of the theoretical understanding of man's end and the practical understanding of its realization. She is, more simply, the philosopher, or harbors at the very least "a philosophic nature, for in choosing the things with a view to knowledge and wisdom [s]he is by nature virtuous" (Averroes 1974, 16). More salient, however, is that she is aware of the variations in interpretive capacities of her people and has the judgment to guide them by whatever manner of education best suits them:

[t]his government can only come into being if it is possible – and perchance happens – that the king is a philosopher . . . the philosopher, according to the primary intention, is the one who has attained the theoretical sciences [by virtue of] the four conditions that have been enumerated in the books on demonstration [i.e. theoretical, deliberative, moral, and practical virtues]. One of those conditions is that [s]he have the ability to discover them [sc., the theoretical sciences] and to teach them. (Averroes 1974, 71)

The medium by which the ruler guides the masses are of two kinds: demonstrative arguments or imitation. Understanding that promulgation of philosophical arguments would confound the non-philosophical masses into nihilism, the ruler accordingly must "establish the opinions in their souls through rhetorical and poetical arguments" (Averroes 1974, 10). It is religion, thus, that opens their eyes and minds, utilizing vivid metaphor and winsome language to unfurl their imaginative faculties to the inimitable divine truths so vibrantly professed. The Qur'an, in other words, is the rhetoric of philosophy – an imitation to be sure, but one for whom the masses, "believing what they endeavor to believe of [what pertains to] knowledge of the first principle and of their final cause, as far as it is in their nature to believe, is useful with regard to the other moral virtues and practical arts" (Averroes 1974, 10-11).²⁰ Through its imagery of the afterlife, especially, the Qur'an provides the impetus needed to persuade the masses to live virtuously both in soul and in practice, ensuring their immortality:

²⁰ Al-Farabi himself proposes that "[religion] imitates the classes of supreme happiness – that is, the ends of the acts of the human virtues – by their likenesses among the goods that are believed to be the ends. It imitates the classes of true happiness by means of the ones that are believed to be happiness" (Alfarabi 2001, 45).

once the moral virtues and practical arts are established in their souls in this first way they can also be led toward performing the actions of these arts and virtues through the two kinds of arguments together, namely persuasive and affective arguments, which will move them toward the [good] qualities. (Averroes 1974, 11)

The office of Averroes' ruler is synonymous with that of the "king," "Lawgiver," and "Imam," all whose connotations are decidedly secular. (Although the term "Imam" as understood in common parlance often represents a religious leader, Averroes endorses the literal, originary definition thereof: "*imam* 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" [Averroes 1974, 72].) Prophethood, it should be noted, is never cited as a necessary condition for rulership; when mentioned, it is a remark made in passing solely to clarify that "it would be with respect to what is *preferable*, not out of necessity" (Averroes 1974, 72, my emphasis). The prophet-ruled state Averroes has in mind is unquestionably the *umma* (community of Muslims) under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad, which, for the Muslim thinkers, exemplified the most perfect constitution of the state. Since the time of the Prophet had passed well before Averroes' writing, we may safely infer that he is not prescribing the implementation of a "religious" state at all; following his Doctrine of Unity, the *sharī'a* and the truths of philosophy are, after all, one and the same. Though religion is considered by the Muslim philosophers to be an imitation of philosophy – less rigorous in its demonstrative argumentation and analogization of the first premises (referring to the nature of God and immortality) by means of imagery that would be most accessible to the unphilosophical – it provides the same justification for the life of virtue as does the philosophical attainment of intellectual perfection. It is not by Averroes, in fact, but by al-Farabi that this notion is most elegantly articulated:

[i]f [the knowledge of the beings] are known by imagining them through similitudes that imitate them, and assent to what is imagined of them is caused by persuasive methods, then the ancients call what comprise these cognitions religion... For both [religion and philosophy] supply knowledge about the first principle and cause of the beings, and both give an account of the ultimate end for the sake of which man is made – that is, supreme happiness. (Alfarabi 2001, 44)

Though the forms of understanding are distinct, the essences therein remain identical: the philosopher knows that it is through the cultivation of a virtuous soul that man attains immortality, and it is through virtuosity in deed that his soul is made virtuous.

It would be reductive (and indeed, specious) to interpret Averroes' state as a theocracy; it much more clearly conforms, rather, to the Platonic meritocracy of the *Republic*, with the virtuous and most intellectually proficient as those tasked with rulership. In reality, Aver-

roes staunchly *opposes* any conservative declaration prohibiting philosophical reasoning and engagement with the Greek philosophers; for him, doing so is a violation of the Book itself: "totally forbidding demonstrative books bars from what the Law calls to, because it is a wrong to the best sort of people and the best sort of existing things" (Averroes 2002a, 22). Although religion does occupy a significant role therein, it certainly does not play as integral a role in the structural actualization of the Muslim state as Derrida presumes. Indeed, despite its rejection of democracy – a rejection that is prevalent in the writings of Plato and Aristotle themselves – Averroes' state fully embodies the ideals of virtue, reasoning, peace, and political harmony that are taken up by Western, "secularist" and democratic political philosophers in his wake. To overlook this is not only historically irresponsible, but also an unfortunate injustice that perpetuates the dogmatic belief in the intellectual superiority of the West over the East that has, for centuries, contaminated our ability to cultivate peace between one another.

2. Dante and the two Suns

Following the reconquest of Sicily and the Iberian Peninsula in the twelfth century, Arabic texts (as well as Arabic translations of ancient Greek works) were assimilated into the Latin translation movement of the twelfth century and made available to Christian scholars in Europe. The dissemination of Aristotelian and Averroist writings quickly kindled a hotbed of controversy and debate among religious authorities – particularly for their rejection of individual immortality and potential to inspire heretical scholarship that might undermine the authority of the Papacy – which ultimately ignited the infamous Condemnations of 1270-1277.²¹ More precisely, "the rationalizing approach to the knowledge of divine things" was

²¹ The Oxford and Parisian Condemnations – administered by the Bishop of Paris, Étienne Tempier, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Kilwardby – proscribed the teaching of Aristotelian and Averroist doctrines, principally for the perceived "double truth" theory they advanced. The Condemnation of 1277 enumerated 219 banned propositions, motivated primarily by the difficulty of subordinating Averroism and Aristotelianism under the more Neoplatonic Augustinianism of the schools of theology (or, more simply, the difficulty of subordinating Averroism and Aristotelianism under the theology of the Catholic faith). As articulated in the *Condemnation*:

some students of the arts in Paris are exceeding the boundaries of their own faculty and are presuming to treat and discuss, as if they were debatable in schools, certain obvious and loathsome errors (...) For they say that these things are true according to philosophy but not according to the Catholic faith, as if there were two contrary truths and as if the truth of Sacred Scripture were contradicted by the truth in the sayings of the accursed pagans. (Kilma et al., 2007, 180)

the match that fueled "fierce confrontations within Christianity and Islam . . . as the inherent danger of heresy or apostasy emerged" (Schildgen 2007, 128).

Concomitant to the Condemnations was a period of theologico-political turmoil in Florence, of which Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) was a firsthand observer. Heir to a family fully immersed in the grim sociopolitical climate eclipsing Florence, Dante was witness to the tumultuous religious and political developments dividing the Florentine *Guelphs* – of which he was a part – and the *Ghibellines*, or, those supporting the Papacy and those supporting the Holy Roman Emperor, respectively. In the aftermath of the later schism within the *Guelphs*, Dante aligned with the Whites amidst his disaffection with the growing encroachment of Pope Boniface VIII in the political affairs of the Holy Roman Emperor.²² Indeed, his repudiation thereof is visible throughout the *Divine Comedy*:

Repeatedly in the great poem and in several of his letters, Dante excoriated the Florentines for the violence, factionalism, and instability of their politics, for their excessive pursuit and consumption of wealth, and, worst of all, for their criminal resistance to what he considered the divinely ordained authority of the Roman emperor. (Najemy 2007, 236)

Dante's blistering criticisms of the Florentines is very much a product of his disillusion with Papal corruption, the civil factions engendered by the unending politico-religious turmoil, and especially, his own exile following the Black-led *coup d'état* in November of 1301. Accordingly, Dante's philosophy reflects a clear demarcation between political and religious institutions, seen not only in his *Monarchy*, but also in his magnum opus, the *Divine Comedy* which, in many ways, is a culmination of the author's philosophical background²³:

Excellent analyses of the Condemnations and the "double truth" controversy are given by Walter Principe (Principe 1985) and Ali Ghorbani Sini (Sini 2013).

²² For an exhaustive overview of Dante's Florence (see Nejemy 2007).

²³ We should also recognize the distinction in mediums of transmission between the *Divine Comedy* – poetic and metaphorical – against the syllogistic methodology of the *Monarchy*, the first read in the Italian vernacular while the second is written in Latin. In much the same way as Averroes' endorsement of rhetoric as the educational tool for the masses, Dante, too, has a very specific audience in mind for the *Comedy*. (The purposive nature of his linguistic commitments suggest as much.) While the means of communication used by the general public was the vulgar tongue (Italian), only the religious and political elites were versed in Latin. Indeed, the allegorical spirit of the *Comedy* shines light upon the allegiance of poetry and theology "as a means to express the inexpressible," and in thoroughly Averroist fashion, the poem "suggests that theological truth can only be mediated through poetic language" (Schildgen 2007, 117). Dante's faith in the beauty of language as revelatory is further strengthened by his ennobling the Augustan poet Virgil as the guide of the protagonist Dante in the *Inferno*: thou [Vir-

*Men, therefore, need restraint by law, and need
a monarch over them who sees at least
the towers of The True City. Laws, indeed,*

*there are, but who puts the nations to their proof?
No one. The shepherd who now leads mankind
can chew the cud, but lacks the cloven hoof
[. . .]*

*The bad state of the modern world is due –
as you may see, then – to bad leadership;
and not to natural corruption in you.*

*Rome used to shine in two suns when her rod
made the world good, and each showered her its way:
one to the ordered world, and one to God.*

Now one declining sun puts out the other (Alighieri 2003, 422; 423)

The verses above plainly evince man's need of law and an authority to enforce it; however, like Averroes' philosopher-ruler, Dante's monarch, too, "sees . . . the towers of The True City," or life beyond death attained through virtue and good deeds on earth. The monarch is not fully divorced from religion, but neither is she the "shepherd who . . . lacks the cloven hoof" who leads mankind in Dante's present (unmistakably a reference to Pope Boniface VIII). Dante furthers his critique of Papal authority by crediting "bad leadership" as the cause of the modern world's spiritual and religious failings. Instead, Dante elevates the status of the Roman Empire – the most harmonious age in man's history, as he writes in the *Monarchy* – as the time in which the "two suns" shined. The two suns – representing the temporal and spiritual realms – reveal the "ways" to the temporal world and the heavenly world, illuminating man's path to virtue on earth to ensure blessings of immortality once reunited with God. Just Aristotle's marks of honor and perfection embrace the two spheres of body and soul, Dante's vision of the Roman Empire is one in which the two suns illuminate the graces of earth and heaven.

God is, of course, the Biblical God; unlike Averroes' appeal to a cosmology of Intelligences, Dante's understanding of man's supreme end of immortality – individual rather than universal – is equivalent to his arrival at the Heavenly Kingdom. That this is inconsistent with Averroist and Aristotelian conceptions of man's end – the life of virtue realized through

gil] art my master, and my author thou,/ thou art alone the one from whom I took / the beautiful style that has done honour to me (Alighieri 2012, 5).

contemplation and subsequent intellectual immortality – was certainly apparent to Dante. Indeed, Dante rejected the Aristotelian object of contemplation of a Supreme Being as different in kind from the Biblical God, no less than Averroes' denial of individual immortality.²⁴ Nevertheless, Dante manages to bridge the seeming impasse between the philosophical life and the religious afterlife through his division of the two realms and, subsequently, the two "ends" toward which man strives: "while the earthly end is centered on philosophy and the perfection of man's natural virtues, the heavenly end absorbs philosophy into the specifically Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity" (Weinrib 2005, 86). In keeping with his Catholic faith, Dante further holds that "the enjoyment of God's beatitude cannot be reached through philosophy alone" (Weinrib 2005, 86). Although the Aristotelian and Averroist philosophies are in many ways incompatible with Dante's orthodox devotion to Christianity, the virtues of Aristotelian ethics, for him, are very much in accord with the Biblical precedent of the moral life in the service of a "higher" being, *id est*, God.

Dante's *Monarchy* more precisely articulates the delineation of reason and revelation in the context of man's social and political life. Indeed, so explicit does he make the distinction between politics and religion that he appears to cache an argument for the separation of church and state: "the *De Monarchia* contains groundbreaking thought on the theory of the secular state, such that Dante may rightly be called a significant figure in the development in Western political theory" (Derek 1991, 328). The architecture of *Monarchy* is beautifully constructed, with each section seamlessly shepherding the next, stylistically philosophical in a manner reminiscent of Aristotle's own writings. *Monarchy* is divided into three books, almost dialectical in nature, elucidating his philosophically inspired understanding of political theory as a means of criticizing the encroachment of papal influence in the affairs of secular (political) power.²⁵ By focusing primarily on the status of the temporal world, Dante holds fast to the philosophical understanding of man's end as "temporal felicity of the human race . . . [defined] as the full exercise of the intellectual and moral virtues" (Davis 2007, 266)²⁶, and it is within this schema that the status of the monarch is fully developed.

²⁴ Contra Aristotle and Averroes, Dante's *Convivio* reveals "Avicenna, al-Ghazālī, Plato, and Pythagoras [as] his authorities on the nature of the soul" (Schildgen 2007, 114). See Schildgen 2007 for a lovely elucidation of the Islamic influence underpinning Dante's integration of philosophy with Christianity.

²⁵ The imagery of the two suns – which, in *Monarchy*, Dante calls the "two great lights" – materializes most unambiguously as the "Roman Pope and the Roman Prince" (Dante 1996a, 64).

²⁶ Dante more fully explores the nature of the intellectual soul in Canto XXV of the *Purgatorio* (Alighieri 2003, 502-503), which is itself influenced in no small part by Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals* (see Boitani 2007).

In the spirit of his Greek and Muslim predecessors, and as indicated above, Dante establishes man's (earthly) end, or "highest potentiality," as "his intellectual potentiality or faculty" whose realization cannot be undertaken if not collectively, as "the human race, through whom the whole of this potentiality can be actualized" (Dante 1996a, 7).²⁷ The function of mankind as a whole, then, is "constantly to actualize the full intellectual potential of humanity, primarily through thought and secondarily through action (as a function and extension of thought)" (Dante 1996a, 8). Dante focuses primarily on the need for action, and, accordingly, the state emerges as the natural and necessary context in which man is to attain his end in practice. Dante's understanding of man's end as extensive to all of mankind motivates his promotion of a unitary state with a single ruler to direct mankind thereto.

Greco-Islamic background notwithstanding, Dante likens the structure of the state to divine organization, as "mankind most closely resembles God when it is most a unity, since the true measure of unity is in Him alone" (Dante 1996a, 13). And because the afterlife is the Kingdom of Heaven, it is only fitting that this unitary state takes the shape of a monarchy; God, after all, is spiritual "king of all earth" (Psalm 47:7), the King in whose service each man, through his obedience to the monarch, ultimately lives and breathes. Accordingly, Dante advocates for a *single, world* monarchy, a universal political community or federation of states subject to a single sovereign monarch tasked with maintaining order therein. It is a sentiment echoed in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, in which Dante declares that, for him, "the whole world is a homeland" (Dante 1996b, 13). The monarch of this global empire accordingly governs "those matters which are common to all men and of relevance to all . . . by a common law" (Dante 1996a, 25), by extension promoting a version of secular cosmopolitanism – tasked with upholding justice, as "the world is ordered in the best possible way when justice is at its strongest in it (Dante 1996a, 15) – that is itself deferential to the will of God.²⁸ Because the art of governance consists both in understanding man's end and creating and enforcing laws that will guide her subjects thereto, Dante's monarch is, unequivocally, and much like Averroes' ruler, also the philosopher.

²⁷ This vision of the intellect is drawn explicitly from Averroes, who, per Dante, "is in agreement with this opinion in his commentary on the *De anima*" (Dante 1996a, 7).

²⁸ Bracketing its religious motivation, Dante's appeal to a (universal) monarchy rather than a republic is likely also to have been borne from his rejection of "not only Florence and its politics, but the whole idea of the city as the proper and natural form of political association" (Najemy 2007, 238). Indeed, Dante's elevation of the monarchy as the form of government most faithful to God is entirely consistent with his belief in "the necessity of the empire as the sole reasonable warranty against the sinister spirals of violence" and factionalization "splintering" his Florence (Mazzotta 2007, 10).

The secular elements of Dante's theory are further reinforced by his obeisance to the pagan Emperor Augustus as the ideal representative of the virtuous monarch. Rather than appeal to such a Christian emperor as Constantine – who, in fact, Dante believed to be especially corrupt rather than emblematic²⁹ – Dante affirms the pre-Christian Roman Empire as the one "founded on *right*," not only by the "light of human reason but also by the radiance of *divine authority*" (Dante 1996a, 31, my emphasis). It was the Augustan Empire that was most emblematic of the spiritually and politically pure monarch of Dante's imaginings; through the construction of laws aimed at the common good of mankind, it exemplified those virtues held in the highest, divine regard:

Thus it is clear that whoever has the good of the community as his goal has the achievement of right as his goal. Therefore if the Romans had the good of the community as their goal, it will be true to say that the achievement of right was their goal. That the Roman people in conquering the world did have the good of which we have spoken as their goal is shown by their deeds, for, having repressed all greed (which is always harmful to the community) and cherishing universal peace and freedom, that holy, dutiful and glorious people can be seen to have disregarded personal advantage in order to promote the public interest for the benefit of mankind. (Dante 1996a, 40)

It is these values – peace, freedom, generosity, and, especially, justice – that Dante believes are integral to both the state and the monarch for inspiring the moral flourishing of mankind, rather than its domination: "his ideology of empire posits the universal dominion of the monarch, who is concerned with administering justice rather than with conquering new territories" (Ascoli 2007, 56). Indeed, these are the values that Christ himself advocates, and for this reason Christ, on Dante's account, "acknowledged the validity of . . . the edict of Augustus" (Dante 1996a, 59).

Despite her supreme political authority – justified most vividly in Book III wherein Dante rebukes clerical arguments allowing "papal usurpations of imperial power" (Davis 2007, 267) – Dante is nonetheless careful not to bestow upon the monarch *religious* authority in any capacity. To be sure, Dante never denounces the role of the Papacy as an institution; he in fact concurrently holds that the authority of the temporal monarchy owes its power to the heavenly sphere, insofar as the temporal realm "receive[s] from [the spiritual realm] the capacity to operate more efficaciously through the light of grace which in heaven and on earth the blessing of the supreme Pontiff infuses into it" (Dante 1996a, 72). The Papacy reigns supreme in all matters of religion, offering spiritual guidance *alongside* the political guidance of the monarch. Inasmuch as there exist two lights, two suns, two kingdoms, and

²⁹ See Book II of *Monarchy*.

two ends, mankind is in need of both the Emperor and the Pope; the first to lead it to its earthly end and the second to lead it to its spiritual end.

Much like Averroes and the philosophers before him, Dante highlights the singular importance of the Monarch's intellectual capacities in conjunction with the Pope's religious authority: while "the emperor relies on philosophical teachings to lead men to their human goal of temporal happiness, the pope relies on theological teachings to lead men to the divine goal of salvation" (Davis 2007, 257). Dante illustrates how, just as the tragic poets of his age were masters of their craft once they had "true affinity with [the illustrious vernacular]" of Italy, so too is it "the case with other customs and symbols of authority" (Dante 1996b, 47), appealing to the practical and theoretical virtues expected of both Monarch and Pope.

3. A Return to the Medieval, Today

Both Averroes and Dante were well attuned to the controversial natures of their theories and expected that, given the religio-political contexts of the societies in which they were writing, they would draw controversy. Indeed, not only did they anticipate retaliation, but in many ways worked to facilitate it. One of the keenest points of contact between the two philosophers lies in Dante's biting charge against the *Decretalists* – those who engaged in exegetical analyses of papal decretals in the context of church discipline – and others who argued that the Papacy had legitimate authority to intervene in the affairs of the state. On Dante's account, the *Decretalists* interpreted the "two great lights" as signifying "a greater light and a lesser light – so that one might rule the day and the other rule the night; these they took in an allegorical sense to mean the two powers, i.e. the spiritual and the temporal" (Dante 1996a, 69). Most striking about Dante's denunciation is the similarities it shares with Averroes' charge against the *Mutakallimūn* who, according to Averroes, deliberately interpreted the Law in such a way as to delegitimize the role of reason in affairs of religion and politics. Further, both Averroes and Dante felt that the *Mutakallimūn* and *Decretalists* aimed to undermine the authority of philosophy through endorsing a hierarchal chain of authority: the subordination of earthly power under heavenly power, which would, thereby, position religious and theological offices above that of the ruler. Any adherence to the tenets of rational philosophy was subsequently met with charges of heresy from religious authorities who, by Averroes' and Dante's estimations, endeavored to consolidate material as well as spiritual authority rather than uphold the virtuous truths and practices of God's Books.

Averroes and Dante were fierce proponents of man's intellectual capacities, and from this conviction advocated societies reflective of precisely those virtues that capable men, by means of their rational faculties, could comprehend and actualize. Although distinct in their

methodologies in significant ways, it would be inequitable to deny the secular elements – particularly Aristotelian – undergirding their approaches to political philosophy, not by disputing religion, but rather by using scripture to demonstrate the spiritual and practical compatibilities of reason and revelation. By appeal to their Greek predecessors, each philosopher espoused the flourishing of mankind and held faithfully to the authority of a virtuous ruler – the exemplar of practical and theoretical reasoning both – to guide mankind thereto. The common denominator in both of their political works is the indispensable role of *philosophy itself* within the state:

The emperor... presides over the moral world. It is his duty to put the ethical teachings of philosophers, especially Aristotle, into effect . . . Each needs the other, for the imperial authority without the philosophical is dangerous, and the philosophical without the imperial is weak. (Davis 2007, 259)

It is this loyalty to philosophy – a philosophy inspired principally by the writings of Aristotle – that lends secular elements to both Averroes' and Dante's conceptualizations of the state, of the role of reason in understanding and organizing the affairs of man while never losing sight of the preeminence of the divine.

Textual particularities aside, both philosophers offer invaluable insight into the religio-political climates of their time, and to reduce either's work to mere generalizations is to overlook the stunning pluralism and nuanced complexities embedded in the beginnings of Western secularism. Derrida himself would have done well to heed their profoundly historico-philosophically informed analyses of religious and political affairs. Indeed, in light of the devolution of Western, "secularist" democracy to some of the most frightening forms of populism and fanaticism thus far witnessed, it is perhaps unbridled democracy, that deserves scrutiny under the lens of philosophical criticism. By rethinking our methodology and sensitivity to historico-political context in a manner similar to that offered in this analysis, we may embark on a new understanding of the role of the secular today. And the reintegration of medieval philosophical thought – the intellectual acuity of which is presciently relevant – would provide a welcome voice in the ever-ongoing dialogue of politics and religion.

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