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Averroës the Aristotelian Muslim

Rectifying the Ernest Renan Depiction

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INTRODUCTION

'Abū l-Walīd Muḥammad ibn 'Aḥmad ibn Rushd of Cordoba (1126 - 1198) is known in the West as “Averroës” and “the Commentator” due to his extensive commentaries on Aristotle which were widely acclaimed by the Medieval and Renaissance Jewish and Christian intellectual communities. A polymath in Arabic-Islamic Spain and Morocco, he served the Almohad Caliphate as a judge, physician and philosopher. Among his intellectual descendants can be counted the likes of Maimonides, Albert Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Siger van Brabant, Augustino Nifo, Baruch Spinoza and possibly Dante Alighieri and Ralph Waldo Emerson; such was his influence during the height of the Renaissance in particular that in Raphael's allegorical masterpiece, *The School of Athens*, he can be found mysteriously peering over the shoulder of Pythagoras, reading a tome on the theory of music. Much of the allure of the Commentator, if not also a root cause of his persistent fame, lies in the puzzle presented by his system of thought. Due to multiple and overlapping problems of transmission, translation and interpretation, it has never been *precisely* clear what he believed, particularly with regards to the doctrines of mainstream or orthodox religion. Was he a sincere and devout Muslim, or was he a radical Aristotelian with only a superficial connection to the Islamic tradition, as it were, an arch-rationalist hiding in Muslim clothing?

The influential French Orientalist Ernest Renan (1823 - 1892) appears to lean toward the latter view, specifically in his two works *Averroès et l'Averroïsme* (1852) and “L'islamisme et la science” (1883), which had a profound impact upon the academic discourse concerning the thought and life of Averroës (1126 - 1198) and his intellectual “successors” in Medieval and Renaissance Scholasticism. Renan fixates upon the heretical aspects of the Commentator, to the point where a loyal reader might reasonably question whether Averroës actually believed in Islam. Unfortunately, however, a deeper examination of textual evidence, particularly that of the Arabic Averroës as opposed to just his Latin “ghost”, reveals the contrary: that the Commentator was in fact a serious and committed Muslim.

Part of the complexity of Renan's depiction is its positivistic aspects, in which he converts Averroës into a symbol useful to justify French colonial intervention in the Arabic-Islamic world. The long-term effect of this symbolization upon the perception of the Commentator, both in the West and the Islamic world, has been distortive: “Renan set the agenda for later scholars, who investigated [the heretical] aspects in far greater depth than any other part of the Averroistic tradition,” says Craig Martin, even though “Renan's emphasis on heresy tells more about his own relation to organized religion than Averroës' [sic].”¹ Yet, we must be precise in how we fix such blame, for Renan's depiction is as deeply shaped by a lack of access to the latter's Arabic works as it is the former's positivistic and national prejudices. For reasons simply beyond his control, Renan must rely upon Scholastic and Church critiques of what is essentially a Latin-speaking ghost when devising his analysis of Averroës: “The reception of these translations of Averroës' commentaries by Christian philosophers may be described [as] ambivalent,” explains Harry A. Wolfson, adding, “They praised him as commentator and condemned him as theologian.”² The fixation on heresy that characterizes Renan's work, and which implicitly carries with it a more quiet charge of atheism (at least insofar as commitment to Islam is concerned), therefore ultimately lies in the incompleteness of his source materials, a problem that has only been rectified in the last century and of which I would like to avail ourselves today.

An important work that fortune deigned to block to Renan is the *Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl wa taqrīr mā baina ash-Sharī'a wa-l-ḥikma min al-ittiṣāl* or *The Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom*, which Richard C. Taylor has described as the “theoretical foundation” of Averroës' system,³ and which I shall be using as my case study to counter the distortive aspects of Renan's depiction of the Commentator. An investigation of the syllogistic and intertextual aspects of the *Decisive Treatise* should suffice to reveal the following: (a) that Averroës identifies philosophical content in scripture, and in particular, uses the Qur'ānic verse Q. III:7 as the foundation of his argument for a tripartite division of humanity; (b) that Averroës likewise hinges the supremacy of the philosophers within

1 Martin, “Rethinking Renaissance Averroism,” *Intellectual History Review*, vol. 17, is. 1 (2007): p. 6.
2 Wolfson, Harry A., “The Twice-Revealed Averroës,” *Speculum*, vol. 36, is. 3 (July, 1967): p. 374.

this tripartite division upon their *per se* cognizance of God (albeit) understood as an Aristotelian Prime Mover; and (c) that his conception of a religious law uniquely suited for philosophers is not at the expense of mainstream Islamic Sharī'a (albeit he does not seem to consider Islam as the intrinsically “*best*” or “*truest*” religion as much as the most recent in an ongoing religious evolution). My task here, then, is not to overthrow Renan's depiction but to rectify it according to presently available textual evidence.

I would also like to note that, besides attempting to rectify Renan's depiction, I hope my research here is useful as a lesson against measuring the extent of a philosopher's religiosity by his orthodoxy. I believe that such was the fundamental mistake committed by Renan, and more generally, too often by thinkers and scholars throughout Modernity.

ERNEST RENAN'S DEPICTION OF AVERROËS

In *l'Averroïsme*, Renan focuses upon certain religious heresies linked to Averroës' name in the Latin tradition, particularly the eternity of the world, monopsychism (and the concomitant denial of the persistence of the individual soul after death), and “Double Truth” (*double vérité*), the notion that there is one truth for the general public and another, superior one for Aristotelian-trained philosophers whose content supplements or abrogates that of the former. This last heresy seems to have particularly fascinated Renan. Concerning it, he writes,

“La philosophie est le but le plus élevé de la nature humaine; mais peu d'hommes peuvent y atteindre. La révélation prophétique y supplée pour le vulgaire. Les disputes philosophiques ne sont pas faites pour le peuple, car elles n'aboutissent qu'à affaiblir la foi. Ces disputes sont avec raison défendues, puisqu'il suffit au bonheur des simples qu'ils comprennent ce qu'ils peuvent comprendre. Ibn-Roschd s'efforce de prouver contre Gazzali, par des versets du Coran, que Dieu commande la recherche de la vérité par la science ; que le philosophe seul comprend vraiment la religion; qu'aucune des

3 Taylor, Richard C., “Providence, Determinism and Moral Responsibility in Averroës,” lecture presented at *Fate, Providence and Moral Responsibility: A Conference in Honour of Carlos Steel*, Leuven, Hoger Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte, 27 November, 2010.

sectes qui divisent le monde musulman, ascharites, baténiens, motazales, ne possède la vérité absolue, et qu'on ne peut obliger le philosophe à prendre parti entre ces différentes sectes.”⁴

Averroës (or more archetypally-speaking, the Averroistic philosopher) is portrayed here as believing himself to transcend the petty doctrinal squabbles of the various religious sects due to his possession of *vérité absolue*. Furthermore, philosophical enlightenment appears to entail something of a paternalistic stance vis-à-vis the general public:

“Les croyances populaires sur Dieu, les anges, les prophètes, le culte, les prières, les sacrifices, ont pour effet d'exciter les hommes à la vertu. Les religions sont un excellent instrument de morale, surtout par les principes qui leur sont communs à toutes, et qu'elles tiennent de la raison naturelle. L'homme commence toujours par vivre des croyances générales avant de vivre de sa vie propre, et lors même qu'il est arrivé à une manière plus individuelle de penser, au lieu de mépriser les doctrines dans lesquelles il a été élevé, il doit chercher à les interpréter dans un beau sens. [...] Le sage ne se permet aucune parole contre la religion établie. Il évite toutefois de parler de Dieu à la manière équivoque du vulgaire. L'épicurien, qui cherche à détruire à la fois et la religion et la vertu, mérite la mort.”⁵

Particularly damning is that Averroës maintains his independence of mind to the point that he considers all religions as essentially alike, and that adherence to one is simply the result of a rational assessment: “Aux époques où plusieurs religions sont en présence, il faut choisir la plus noble. C'est ainsi que les philosophes qui enseignaient à Alexandrie embrassèrent la religion des Arabes, sitôt qu'elle vint à leur connaissance, et que les sages de Rome se firent chrétiens, dès que la religion chrétienne leur fût connue.”⁶ In short, the impression given of the Commentator is of a radical elitist.

4 Renan, Ernest, *Averroës et l'Averroïsme*, nouv. éd. (2002), Maissonneuve et Larose, Paris: p. 128.

5 Ibid.: pp. 128-129.

6 Ibid.: p. 129.

Now, it is actually true that the Commentator in his fuller Arabic form does believe in the supremacy of the philosophers very much in the manner that Renan has described; the difference lies in the subtle emphases Renan makes *around* his description. Consider his assessment of Double Truth. Although he defends Averroës against the charge of dissimulation, writing, “Ibn-Roschd ne se dissimule pas que quelques-unes de ces doctrines, celle de l'éternité du monde, par exemple, sont contraires à l'enseignement de toutes les religions,”⁷ it is not true that the Commentator believes his doctrines were contrary to the teachings of Islam, much less all religions – to the contrary. Yet, the *implication* is worse: the *vérité absolue* supposedly claimed by Averroës must stand at odds with orthodox Islamic society to such an extent that perhaps the Muslim authorities are not entirely wrong to condemn him as “un hérétique et un mécréant”.⁸ If so, it seems reasonable to interpret Averroës' writings as actually an attempt to hide his true beliefs from prying eyes via the smoke and mirrors of arcane argumentation. Renan implies as much when he makes the shocking move of siding, albeit tenuously, with Averroës' *bête noire*, al-Ghazzali: although “on ne peut douter qu'il n'y ait beaucoup d'exagération dans ces déclamations de Gazzali,” nevertheless, “peut-être aussi Gazzali n'avait-il pas absolument tort, et les philosophes méritaient-ils le reproche d'inconséquence ou de restriction mentale. Dieu le sait.”⁹

We must also look into the deeper positivistic structure of Renan's framework to see how he quietly imbues the Commentator with a decidedly un-Islamic and even anti-religious character. According to Renan, Averroës was the central figure of an historical drama between religious dogmatism and *libre pensée*, the latter ultimately coming to be embodied in the industrial French republic. *L'Averroïsme* opens with this sweeping statement:

“La vie d'Averroës occupe la durée presque entière du XII^e siècle, et se lie à tous les événements de cette époque décisive dans l'histoire de la civilisation musulmane. Le XII^e siècle vit définitivement échouer la tentative des Abbasides d'Orient et de Omeyyades d'Espagne pour créer dans l'islamisme un développement rationnel et

7 Ibid.: p. 126.

8 Ibid.: pp. 33-35.

9 Ibid.: p. 131.

scientifique. Quand Averroès mourut, en 1198, la philosophie arabe perdit en lui son dernier représentant, et la triomphe du Coran sur la libre pensée fut assuré pour au moins six cents ans.”¹⁰

Renan's remark here that *libre pensée* would not return to the region until 600 years later is a blunt reference to Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. It serves a double-sided symbolic purpose, marking Averroès' death as a turning point for European and Islamic intellectual history while also justifying the former's eventual conquest of the latter.¹¹ Both the righteousness and the scientific nature of the *libre pensée* re-conquest of Muslim lands Renan indicates in this passage from “L'islamisme”:

“Des deux conséquences qu'entraîne le manque d'esprit scientifique, la superstition ou le dogmatisme, la second est peut-être pire que le première. L'Orient n'est pas superstitieux; son grand mal, c'est le dogmatisme étroit, qui s'impose par la force de la société tout entière. Le but de l'humanité, ce n'est pas le repos dans une ignorance résignée; c'est la guerre implacable contre le faux, la lutte contre le mal. La science est l'âme d'une société; car la science, c'est la raison. Elle crée la supériorité militaire et la supériorité industrielle. Elle créera un jour la supériorité sociale, je veux dire un état de société où la quantité de justice qui est compatible avec l'essence de l'univers sera procurée. La science met la force au service de la raison.”¹²

Combat against falsehood has been afoot for all of human history, but the nod to Napoleon's invasion indicates that Renan here envisions an imminent culmination or even conclusion to the war, with the French technological nation-state as a kind of vanguard of *libre pensée*. The Islamic world, which in Renan's view is not by nature irrational, at least in a specifically superstitious sense, *could* have had the privilege of occupying this role; instead, it chose

10 Ibid.: p. 21.

11 Von Kügelgen, Anke, *Averroes und die arabische Moderne: Ansätze zu einer Neubegründung des Rationalismus im Islam*, Leiden/New York, 1994: p. 414, quoted in: Wild, Stefan, “Islamic Enlightenment and the Paradox of Averroes,” *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, vol. 36, is. 3 (*Islamic Enlightenment in the 18th Century?*) (November 1996): pp. 385.

12 Renan, Ernest, “L'islamisme et la science,” Ancienne Maison Michel Levy Frères, Paris, 1883: p. 23.

ignorance résignée, i.e., the fatalism of overbearing religious dogma. Consequently, it stands in need of liberation – essentially from itself.

To transform the Commentator into this fulcrum of history, Renan employs a two-fold methodology. First, there is the constant focus upon heresy, already explored above. What Renan is doing via this narrative of orthodoxy and its discontents is to evolve an earlier historiography concerning the origins of Western Modernity: “Even though Renan gave a fresh start to the study of the Averroistic tradition, many of his conceptions carried forward the seventeenth-century French tradition that linked Averroists, particularly Pomponazzi and Cremonini, to libertinism and atheism,” explains Martin. “Renan retained the earlier identification, but interpreted them as proponents of a secular learning that is analogous to science.”¹³ Second, he eviscerated Averroës himself of any Islamic authenticity. By positing the Commentator as the grandfather of Western Modernity, Renan risks more than just an irony, but a paradox. The ambivalence can be found in the texts: we find Renan nearly contradicting himself, at one point in *l’Averroïsme* asserting Averroës' reasonable commitment to Islam,

“Peut-on révoquer en doute la parfaite bonne foi de tant de grands esprits des siècles passés, lesquels ont admis sans sourciller certaines croyances qui, de nos jours, troublent la conscience d'un enfant? Il n'y a pas de dogme si absurde qui n'ait été admis par des hommes doués en toute autre chose d'une grande finesse d'esprit. Rien n'empêche donc de supposer qu'Ibn-Roschd a cru à l'islamisme, surtout si l'on considère combien le surnaturel est peu prodigué dans les dogmes essentiels de cette religion, et combien elle se rapproche du déisme le plus épuré,”¹⁴

only to turn around in “L'islamisme” and portray Islam as anti-rational, writing, “L'islamisme, en réalité, a donc toujours persécuté la science et la philosophie.”¹⁵ A close reading reveals that Renan endeavored to solve this problem by portraying Averroës as a Muslim only outwardly and who inwardly *really* belongs to the Aristotelian tradition, now posited as a universal tradition, a

13 Martin, “Rethinking Renaissance Averroism”: p. 3.

14 Renan, *l’Averroïsme*: p. 125.

15 Renan, “L'islamisme”: p. 16.

system of knowledge that transcends language, culture and religion, and which develops incrementally over the course of generations to eventually result in modern science and the latter's concomitant political and industrial advances:

“Je n'ai point cherché, Messieurs, à diminuer le rôle de cette grande science dite arabe qui marque une étape si importante dans l'histoire de l'esprit humain. [...] Entre la disparition de la civilisation antique au sixième siècle, et la naissance du génie européen au douzième et au treizième, il y a eu ce qu'on peut appeler la période arabe, durant laquelle la tradition de l'esprit humain s'est faite par les régions conquises à l'islam. Cette science, dite arabe, qu'a-t-elle d'arabe en réalité? La langue, rien que la langue. [...] Cette science n'est pas arabe. Est-elle du moins musulmane? L'islamisme a-t-il offert à ces recherches rationnelles quelque secours tutélaire? Oh! en aucune façon!”¹⁶

Besides the emphasis on the Aristotelian character of Averroës and Averroism, it is clear from *l'Averroïsme's* very beginning, not to mention its subsequent chapters, that such universalism was doomed to conflict with the particularism of Arabic-Islamic culture: “Le véritable génie arabe, caractérisé par le poésie des Kasidas et l'éloquence du Coran, était absolument antipathique à la philosophie grecque.”¹⁷ These remarks, by the way, also serve to cast a light on the considerations above: for one, the full heretical extent of the Commentator's commitment to this universal tradition is probably what, in Renan's view, al-Ghazzali correctly surmises; for another, it is also no surprise that Averroës' books are burned and his doctrines banned. In fact, Averroës' perhaps foolish decision *not* to completely dissimulate actually helps Renan's larger intellectual project, for it serves as useful testimony to the notion that conflict between *libre pensée* and the dogmas of religion is perennial and inevitable.

I have endeavored to treat Renan's views briefly, but in doing so, I am aware that there may be nuances in his thought to which I am not doing proper justice. A deeper analysis of his *oeuvre* is in order to determine with even greater precision precisely how Renan treats the Commentator, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it should be clear from the above that

16 Ibid.: pp. 14-16.

there is a very careful attempt on the part of Renan to construe Averroës as not really committed to Islam as a religion, indeed, as *his* religion, and not merely – or, more accurately, *only* – as a useful vehicle to educate and guide weak-minded masses.

We can, however, take a moment here to treat at least one aspect of Renan's treatment of the Commentator, if not in its precise textual details, then in the framework which informs it: namely, it is uncertain whether the *guerre contre le faux* envisioned in these texts is waged *by* or *via* human reason. It is an important, as it were, Hegelian difference, for the faceless and legion-like *implacabilité* of the *guerre contre le faux* that so defines human history, as though the war possessed its own inner character, suggests a *Geist*-like quality to *libre pensée*. In the least, Renan's hypothetical universal tradition appears to be the *l'esprit humaine*, either by another name or in its essence, working now through modern scientists as it previously did with their philosophical forebearers among the Aristotelian-Averroists, to chip away the willful ignorance of dogma so as to advance the cause of knowledge and justice. The *coup de grâce* in this regard comes in “L'islamisme”: “Ce beau mouvement d'études est tout entier l'œuvre de parsis, de chrétiens, de juifs, de harraniens, d'ismaéliens, de musulmans intérieurement révoltés contre leur propre religion.”¹⁸ However, lest we attribute historical determinism to Renan, in another important work, his famed “Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?” (1882), he states, concerning the constitution of a nation:

“Une nation est une âme, un principe spirituel. Deux choses qui, à vrai dire, n'en font qu'une, constituent cette âme, ce principe spirituel. L'une est dans le passé, l'autre dans le présent. L'une est la possession en commun d'un riche legs de souvenirs; l'autre est le consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer à faire valoir l'héritage qu'on a reçu indivis. L'homme, Messieurs, ne s'improvise pas. La nation, comme l'individu, est l'aboutissant d'un long passé d'efforts, de sacrifices et de dévouements. Le culte des ancêtres est de tous le plus légitime ; les ancêtres nous ont faits ce que nous sommes. Un passé héroïque, des grands hommes, de la gloire (j'entends de la véritable), voilà le capital social sur lequel on assied une idée nationale.

17 Renan, *l'Averroïsme*: p. 79.

Avoir des gloires communes dans la passé, une volonté commune dans le présent; avoir fait de grandes choses ensemble, vouloir en faire encore, voilà les conditions essentielles pour être un peuple. On aime en proportion des sacrifices qu'on a consentis, des maux qu'on a soufferts. On aime la maison qu'on a bâtie et qu'on transmet. Le chant spartiate: 'Nous sommes ce que vous fûtes; nous serons ce que vous êtes' est dans sa simplicité l'hymne abrégé de toute patrie.”¹⁹

Since we may safely assume he has the French technological nation-state in mind here, that means the *l'esprit humaine* can only operate via the voluntarism of individual human beings acting in concert together as a motivated collective. Moreover, their motivation for doing so is clearly more passionate than it is rational – perhaps ironic or contradictory, considering the scientific character of the society these enlightened actors establish. Emotion does nonetheless appear to have its own logic, as there is a directly proportional relationship between perceived sacrifices and accomplished goals, but this is far from the Hegelian *logos*. In terms of Averroës, we find this sentiment reflected when Renan makes the following disarming assessment in *l'Averroïsme*, in which he criticizes the Commentator for possessing what amounts to emotional inhumanity: “On voit qu'il ne faut pas demander une extrême rigueur à la doctrine d'Ibn-Roschd sur les rapports de la philosophie et du prophétisme: nous nous garderons de lui en faire un reproche. L'inconséquence est un élément essentiel de toutes les choses humaines. La logique mène aux abîmes”²⁰ (interestingly, if we read this carefully, we see that Renan is not criticizing Double Truth *in toto* as much as Averroës articulation of it – the Commentator becomes an example of over-confident reason). I should note that, as I shall discuss at the end of this paper, I actually share Renan's criticism here of Averroës' rather Spock-like character.

Some of Renan's other assessments of Averroës are also not far off the mark in my view. For one, it is not inaccurate that Aristotelianism does in some way constitute a universal tradition; Averroës himself would have been inclined to agree, as would any student of the Peripatetics

18 Renan, “L'islamisme”: p. 16.

19 Renan, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?", lecture presented at the Sorbonne, 11 March 1982: http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Qu%27est-ce_qu%27une_nation_%3F

20 Renan, *l'Averroïsme*: p. 130.

who has deeply engaged their works, myself included. Moreover, it is likewise not inaccurate to portray Aristotelianism as a kind of *libre pensée* vis-à-vis religious orthodoxy, although one would do well to remember that the Peripatetics had their own dogmas, as well. This is evidenced, at least *a posteriori*, by the fact that the rise of Europe envisioned by Renan entailed as much the shedding of Aristotelianism as it did Christianity, combined in the visage of Scholasticism. The historian Jacques Pirenne notes, “Scholasticism henceforth accepted rationalism in a sense that it admitted that philosophy must prove the existence of God, but it accepted it only within a religious framework which imposed upon it the tutelage of revelation.”²¹ Similarly, the encyclopedist Henry Smith Williams wrote these somber words not even two decades after Renan's death:

“The oppression which weighed upon [...] Europe contributed to the maintenance of barbarism, less by rendering difficult and sometimes dangerous the acquisition of knowledge, than by taking away all attraction from the exercise of the mind. Thought was a pain to those capable of judging the state of the human species; of studying the past, of comparing it with the present; and of thus foreseeing the future. Danger and suffering appeared on all sides. The men who, in France, Germany, England, and Spain, felt themselves endued with the power of generalising their ideas, either smothered them, not to aggravate the pain of thought, or directed them solely to speculations the farthest from real life – towards the scholastic philosophy which so vigorously exercised the understanding, without bringing it to any conclusion.”²²

Along these lines, that Modernity has a genealogy stretching back to the Commentator – Renan's essential thesis – is a perfectly defensible view, for as Vern L. Bullough points out, “Sometimes it is not so important what a person actually says as what he is believed to have said, and this

21 Pirenne, Jacques, *The Tides of History*, vol. 2, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1963: p. 173.

22 Williams, Henry Smith, ed. “The Vanguard of the Renaissance,” in *Historian's History of the World*, vol. 9, The Encyclopedia Britannica Company, New York, 1907: p. 200.

particularly true of Western ideas about Ibn Rushd,”²³ and “It was not so much the so-called Averroists themselves who were important in the history of science, but those influenced by their teaching.”²⁴ But with that said, it is now time to determine what the actual person of Averroës says, so let us proceed to the *Decisive Treatise*.

THE STRUCTURE AND THESIS OF THE *DECISIVE TREATISE*

For this study, I shall be using the 2008 critical edition prepared by Charles Butterworth, obeying his division of the *Decisive Treatise* into seven chapters (I-VII) and 60 sections. As Butterworth notes, there appears to be two general parts or phases of the *Decisive Treatise*, the first from I:1 to IV:37 and the second from V:38 to the conclusion in VII:60.²⁵ There is a definite shift in tone between these: the first phase feels closer to the spirit of the initial statement of purpose in I:1; the second phase, however, moves further afield, leaving behind investigation for outright adjudication and social policy. The writing process of the *Decisive Treatise* is obscure and invites speculation. It would not be so simple as to say the book was originally two separate texts, since the philosophical case studies of III:16-22, which seem to presage the Commentator's other apologetic works, the *Kitāb al-Kashf 'an manāhij al-adilla fi 'aqā'id al-milla* and the famed *Tahāfut at-Tahāfut* (which may actually be mentioned in VII:59²⁶), while building upon the *Ḍamīma* (which is directly referenced in III:17), all of which gives the impression of a third originally separate text. Therefore, it is almost certain that Averroës heavily edited and re-edited this book – one imagines piles of semi-completed manuscripts piled on his desk that he cannibalizes into multiple iterations before settling upon the present one.

23 Bullough, Vern L., “Medieval Scholasticism and Averroism: The Implication of the Writings of Ibn Rushd to Modern Science,” in *Averroes and the Enlightenment*, Mourad Wahba and Mona Abousenna, eds., Prometheus Books, Amherst, 1996: p. 43.

24 Bullough, pp. 48-50.

25 Butterworth, Charles, trans., Averroës, *The Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom, with Epistle Dedicatory*, Brigham Young University, Provo, 2008.: pp. xxi-xxii.

26 They may have still been in the writing stage: “We would love to devote ourselves to this intention [i.e., defending philosophy and distinguishing between good and heretical beliefs] and carry it out thoroughly; and if God prolongs our life, we shall establish as much of it as we can” (VII:59). In the same passage he also seems to hint at the hope for the eventual establishment of a *Rushdiyya*.

Still, the shift in tone between the two phases is pronounced and must be accounted for, however provisionally. One could envision the first phase as the main body of the book, which would mean that the text really ends at IV:37, the remaining chapters being more appendices and expansions than a full-fledged second phase. This is a reasonable view, but it seems to me that the sections after IV:37 are not so ancillary. The Commentator repeatedly pauses to re-state the arguments of prior chapters before proceeding, and he does so frequently in syllogistic form. The effect is one of re-consolidation, thrust, re-consolidation, thrust, resulting in a rather impressive syllogistic momentum that Averroës rides to argue for his fundamental thesis: namely, that philosophers have a role essentially like that of the Guardians in Plato's *Republic* due to their greater cognizance of God. Consequently, I offer the following preliminary picture: at least three originally semi-independent texts may be discernible: (a) the defense of Aristotelian philosophy as a legally sanctioned activity up to II:10 and then resuming at III:25 until concluding at III:33; (b) the philosophical case studies in between at III:16-22, which have been rather masterly weaved into that defense; and (c) the long sprint through a rehearsal of the epistemological sociology established in the first phase through an elaboration of its implications for social policy, these elements comprising pretty much the entire second phase from V:38 to VII:60, and which were probably a later elaboration of III:25-33. There has been much in the way of tinkering to make the text a coherent whole: the summary at IV:37 does not pretend to serve any other function than this, and much of the first phase feels massaged; only the second phase feels as though it had been internally coherent before it was merged into the present extant text.

My proposals here are, of course, open to objection or revision, but I believe the burden of proof lies upon those who might contend that the Commentator did not intend the *Decisive Treatise* to constitute a unity with a single syllogistic pulse coursing through it. In fact, if we look to the understructure of the text's argumentation, we find that this pulse actually constitutes his thesis, which I believe can be summarized in the following manner:

- Because Religious Law desires to bring about cognizance of God from all of humanity;

- and because the evidence of history indicates that it is a necessary precondition of the human species that there be a plurality of natures with a corresponding plurality of methods by which to bring about that cognizance;²⁷

- therefore, the Law of necessity must encompass within itself these pluralities (III:11 and 15, V:39-41 and 44).

- If the Law encompasses within itself these pluralities;

- but as history has shown, these pluralities frequently deviate immensely and even dangerously from each other;²⁸

- therefore, of necessity the Law must contain a methodology for regulating these pluralities, i.e., so that the maximum number of human beings can achieve cognizance of God (III:15, V:40, VI:52-53 and 57).

- If the Law contains such a methodology;

- and meanwhile the Law has explicitly stated that certain tenets of faith must be taken as first principles in any proper process of cognizance;²⁹

- therefore, these first principles of necessity must be part of the methodology (III:25-26 and 32, V:38-39).

- Yet, although the pluralities of human beings agree upon these tenets of faith as first principles, they do not agree on their interpretation (i.e., everyone agrees to the foundation but not to the superstructure);³⁰

27 This would be an *a posteriori* argument (cf. below, *The centrality of the Qur'ān in Averroës' epistemological sociology* regarding the extent to which the *Decisive Treatise* is, if not a work of philosophy, then a philosophical work).

28 I would distinguish this from the above *a posteriori* argument as an empirical one (again, cf. below, *The centrality of the Qur'ān in Averroës' epistemological sociology* regarding the extent to which the *Decisive Treatise* is a dialectical work).

29 By far a dialectical argument (again, cf. below, *The centrality of the Qur'ān in Averroës' epistemological sociology* regarding the extent to which the *Decisive Treatise* is a dialectical work).

30 Some clarification is necessary to understand in which sense Averroës means "first principles". His description of the tenets of faith as the "roots" (*aṣuwl*) of inquiry (III:25-26, V:44), on one level, are code for first principles as regularly understood by Peripatetics; on another level, it may suggest a metaxological understanding of inquiry (cf. below, *The centrality of God in Averroës' epistemological sociology* regarding this question).

- nevertheless, cognizance of God must also necessarily entail the concordance of humanity;³¹
- therefore, these variant interpretations of necessity must be reconcilable, in the sense that they are either saying the same thing in different ways or speaking at different hermeneutical levels (respective to the plurality of methods that correspond to the plurality of natures within the human species) (III:12-15, V:44-51).³²

- However, although it is true that variant interpretations are either saying the same thing in different ways or speaking at different hermeneutical levels, the condition of humanity poses a problem in this regard, as inevitably disagreement shall *still* arise over whether an interpretation is in conformity with a first principle, either analogically, allegorically, or hermeneutically;
- nevertheless, progress in the cognizance of God and the concord of humanity does seem to be gradually attained over the course of generations;³³
- therefore, interpretation of necessity must be treated as an open-ended endeavour (indeed, history would indicate that this is, in fact, a necessary precondition for it) but it should be regulated according to the dispositions of the people involved (II:6-10, III:16).

- Finally, because the Law has also intended the maximum social happiness for humanity in the form of political stability, as evidenced by its establishment of the imamate/caliphate;
- and because the most harmonious social order is one in which interpretation is regulated according to the dispositions of the people involved;
- therefore, the wise and truly devout leader is he who brings about the rule of such regulation, allowing only certain interpretations to be revealed to certain people (III:35-36, VI:55-58, VII:59-60).

31 In my view, an *a priori* argument (cf. below, *The centrality of the Qur'ān in Averroës' epistemological sociology* regarding the extent to which the *Decisive Treatise* is, if not a work of philosophy, then a philosophical work).

32 I leave it to the reader to decide the necessity of the Commentator's conclusion here.

33 Again an *a posteriori* argument.

This much would have been immediately apparent to most of Averroës' audience. That is because to the untrained eye, the *Decisive Treatise* appears to be first and foremost a theological-legal document, i.e., a formal adjudication or statement of juristic opinion (*fatwā*). However, this is a kind of feint by the Commentator: there is actually philosophical content within the work, but one must learn how to read the *Decisive Treatise* in order to see it. Once one is able to see it, though, they shall find an implicit and radical element to his thesis, which can be rendered in the following manner:

- Although it is true that variant interpretations are either saying the same thing in different ways or speaking at different hermeneutical levels, the condition of humanity poses a problem in this regard, as inevitably disagreement shall *still* arise over whether an interpretation is in conformity with a first principle, either analogically, allegorically, or hermeneutically;
- nevertheless, progress in the cognizance of God and the concord of humanity does seem to be gradually attained over the course of generations;
- therefore, interpretation of necessity must be treated as an open-ended endeavour (indeed, history would indicate that this is, in fact, a necessary precondition for it) *but it should be regulated by those with the most penetrating hermeneutical insights, as they have the necessary knowledge to both determine ultimate Truth when conflicts between interpretations occur* (III:12, 14, 16, 23).³⁴
- Because humanity's plurality of natures are measured by the *per se* versus *per accidens* of their cognizance of God, these natures, as well as their corresponding

³⁴ Another way to construe this might be “but each should be regulated according to their degree of insight”. This rendition would not preclude the real argument that ultimate Truth, i.e., the reality of things as opposed to their mere external *per accidens* description, is only possessed and regulatable by the philosophers. A more nuanced description might therefore read: “each class must regulate themselves internally, but only the philosophers have the capacity to regulate *between* the classes, as well” (cf. below, *The centrality of God in Averroës' epistemological sociology* and “*The Shari'a specific to the philosophers*” regarding the policing powers of the philosophers).

methods, although they may lead to the same ultimate end result, are nevertheless hierarchical;³⁵

- because philosophers deal directly with the reality of things rather than metaphorical representations or consensus-derived positions, they have the firmest cognizance of God, i.e., the most penetrating hermeneutical insights in the form of *per se* knowledge;
- therefore, philosophers have the necessary knowledge to regulate interpretation, up to and including determining ultimate Truth when disagreements arise (III:12, 14, 16, and 23).

- Because the Law has also intended the maximum social happiness for humanity in the form of political stability, as evidenced by its establishment of the imamate/caliphate;
- and because the most harmonious social order is one in which philosophers have supreme legislative power (and history demonstrates how deviation from this has resulted in frequent heresies and civil strife);
- therefore, the wise and truly devout leader is he who brings about the rule of the philosophers (III:35-36, VI:55-58, VII:59-60).

Immediately, one wonders (perhaps alongside Renan) how Averroës could be so confident, if not foolish, as to believe that his sovereign would ever adopt such a policy. I shall come to this question at the conclusion of this study. Let us now proceed onto our main task.

THE CENTRALITY OF SCRIPTURE IN AVERROËS' EPISTEMOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY

The *Decisive Treatise* quietly indicates to its audience how it should be read – or rather, who should read it in which manner. As one moves forward in the text, it becomes clear that the book is no mere legal exposition, but rather a systematic and philosophical³⁶ elaboration on methodology *posing* as a theological-juristic work (or as we shall see, in Averroës'

35 Is this and the next premise *a priori* or *a posteriori*? The Commentator appears to base this claim, if tacitly, upon Aristotle and al-Farabi, rather than his own independent abstract reason (cf. below, *The centrality of God in Averroës' epistemological sociology* regarding the pyramidal nature of society). It would be an interesting question to explore in another paper.

36 That is to say, not a work of philosophy, purely speaking, but certainly with philosophical content.

categorization, a dialectical work). The text posits a tripartite division of society that is determined by a likewise tripartite division of epistemological dispositions corresponding to Aristotle's three methods for bringing about assent in a listener. When we apply this system to the *Decisive Treatise*, we find that one's epistemological disposition determines how one should interpret the text, for it becomes clear that it has been written in a way so as to be communicable to each of the three classes, indicating one message to two of the classes and another, subtler one to the third.

Averroës describes his agenda in the *Decisive Treatise* in a seemingly straightforward fashion: “Now, the goal of this statement is for us to investigate, from the perspective of Law-based³⁷ reflection [*an-naẓar*], whether reflection upon philosophy and the sciences of logic is permitted, prohibited, or commanded – and this as a recommendation or as an obligation – by the Law”³⁸ (I:1). He then launches a syllogism that frames the first phase of the book (II:2):

- “If philosophy is nothing more than reflection upon existing things and consideration of them insofar as they are an indication of the Artisan”;
- and “if the Law has recommended and urged consideration of existing things”;
- therefore, the word “philosophy” (*falsafa*) “indicates” something “either obligatory or recommended by the Law.”

He immediately refines the major premise to read, “consideration of existing things by means of the intellect and for pursuing cognizance of them by means of it” (II:2). “Consideration” (*al-i'tibār*) undergoes a rapid un-packing in II:3, first defined as “nothing more than inferring and drawing out the unknown from the known,” which in turn becomes “intellectual syllogistic reasoning” (*al-qiyās al-'aqlī*), of which “demonstration” (*burhān*) is “the most complete kind”. Meanwhile, “existing things” become “artifacts” due to the fact that “existing things indicate the

37 Butterworth translates “*sharī'a*”/“*shar*” and its adjectival form “*shar'ī*” when used by Averroës in its specifically religious connotation as “Law” and “Law-based”, respectively (Butterworth, *Decisive Treatise*: p. 1, n. 1). For the adjectival form, Taylor is clearer: “...the sort found in religious law” (Taylor, Richard C., “Ibn Rushd/Averroës and Islamic Rationalism,” *Medieval Encounters*, no. 15 (2009): p. 227).

Artisan only through cognizance of the art in them, and the more complete cognizance of the art in them is, the more complete is cognizance of the Artisan” (II:2).³⁹ It should be noted that there is some important overlap between the terms *falsafa* and *ḥikma*, both of which the Commentator uses in the *Decisive Treatise* and frequently interchanges. Oliver Leaman explains:

“Peripatetic philosophy in the Islamic world came to have considerable importance for a fairly limited period, from the third to sixth centuries AH (ninth to twelfth centuries AD). Sometimes the distinctness of this form of reasoning from traditional Islamic methodologies was emphasised by the use of the term *falsafa*, an Arabic neologism designed to represent the Greek *philosophia*. Often, however, the familiar Arabic term *ḥikma* [sic] was used. *Hikma* means 'wisdom', and has a much wider meaning than *falsafa*. A good deal of *kalam* (theology) would be classed as *ḥikma*, as would mysticism or Sufism. Whereas much *falsafa* is defined as the knowledge of existents, wider conceptions of the discipline tend to use the term *ḥikma*. [For example] al-Suhrawardi, the creator of illuminationist philosophy, called it *ḥikmat al-ishraq*, a title which was taken up later by Mulla Sadra, and which is often translated in English as theosophy. This sort of philosophy involves study of reality which transforms the soul and is never really separated from spiritual purity and religious sanctity.”⁴⁰

38 “...*an-naẓar* in philosophy and in the sciences of logic is permitted by religious law, prohibited or commanded, either by way of recommendation or by way of obligation” (ibid.: p.227).

39 The references to the Artisan are key for understanding the role of God in the Commentator's system, which I shall explore below (see: *The centrality of God in Averroës's epistemological sociology*).

40 Leaman adds, “An advantage of seeing Islamic philosophy as broadly *ḥikma* rather than as the more narrow *falsafa* is that it avoids the danger of regarding it as predominantly an unoriginal and transmitted form of thought. This has often been the form of interpretation favoured by Western commentators, who are interested in seeing how originally Greek (and sometimes Indian and Persian) ideas reach the Islamic world and then form part of alternative systems of philosophy. There is no doubt that an important part of Islamic philosophy does follow this path, and the study of it is perhaps more appropriately a part of the history of ideas than of philosophy. Yet it should not be forgotten that by far the larger part of Islamic philosophy does not deal with the concerns of Peripatetic philosophy as such, but is firmly directed to the issues which arise within the context of an Islamic perspective on the nature of reality. Peripatetic philosophy, *falsafa*, may well enter this process, but it is far from the uncritical application of Greek ideas to Islamic issues. Although the central principles of *falsafa* have their origin in Greek philosophy, they were so radically transformed and developed within Islamic philosophy that there is no justification in thinking that the latter is merely a result of the transmission of ideas from outside Islam” (Leaman, Oliver, “Concept of philosophy in Islam,” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1998: <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H006.htm#H006SECT2>).

In my view, the Commentator has thus made a good case for the legality of *ḥikma*, even though he has not used the specific term in this context but rather “*falsafa*”; he still needs to make the case specifically for the latter. His tactic to do so is to argue from the impossibility for any one individual to possess total knowledge of a topic or discipline, resulting in the need for mentors. In the case of demonstration, the best mentors are the “Ancients,” i.e., the Peripatetics (II:4-10); *ipso facto*, their tradition must also be legally sanctioned. However, it should be noted that Averroës is not condoning the wholesale acceptance of this tradition; rather, “we ought perhaps seize their books in our hands and reflect upon what they have said about [intellectual syllogistic reasoning] he says, “and if it is all correct, we will accept it from them; whereas if there is anything not correct in it, we will alert [people] to it” (II:7), the measure for “correctness” here consisting of well-trained independent abstract reason (II:9) and the statements of the Qur’ān (III:13 and 27-36, V:44-49). At any rate, we see that to cinch his overall argument, Averroës summons a bevy of Qur’ānic verses as well as cites historical precedence and draws several analogies, comparing the relationship between the contemporary philosopher and the Peripatetics to that of the jurist and his juristic predecessors (II:4), and likewise the astronomer and the geometer to their respective predecessors, as well (II:8).

These opening shots are a good example of Averroës' approach throughout the *Decisive Treatise*. The impression given is certainly of a book that is thoroughly legalistic in *style*; the trick, however, is to see that it is not always legalistic in *content*. One must essentially learn how to read the *Decisive Treatise*, and the first step in doing so is to consider the distinction between dialectical versus demonstrative syllogisms, namely, that they differ not in their logical structure but in the content and nature of their premises. Robin Smith explains that the conclusions of demonstrative arguments in the Peripatetic tradition must be “true and primary”, whereas in dialectic arguments they need only be “accepted”:

“[D]ialectical premises differ from demonstrative ones in that the former are *questions*, whereas the latter are *assumptions* or *assertions*: ‘the demonstrator does not ask, but takes’, [Aristotle] says. This fits most naturally with a view of dialectic as argument

directed at another person by question and answer and consequently taking as premises that other person's concessions. Anyone arguing in this manner will, in order to be successful, have to ask for premises which the interlocutor is liable to accept, and the best way to be successful at that is to have an inventory of acceptable premises, i.e., premises that are in fact acceptable to people of different types.”⁴¹

In other words, dialectical arguments work upon a foundation of consensus. The consensus can be historical precedence, as in the case of the early Islamic community, which Averroës cites in support of his theory regarding the emergence of factions:

“[A]nyone who distorts these methods by making an interpretation that is not apparent in itself or that is more apparent to everyone than they are – and that is something nonexistent – rejects their wisdom and rejects their intended action for procuring human happiness. That is very apparent from the condition of those in the earliest days [of Islam] and the condition of those who came after them. For those in the earliest days came to have perfect virtue and piety only by practicing these statements, without making interpretations of them; and any one of them who grasped an interpretation did not think fit to declare it. When those who came after them practiced interpretation, their piety decreased, their disagreements became more numerous, their love for one another was removed, and they split up into factions” (VI:56).

The consensus can also be literal and in the present, as in the Islamic juristic conception of agreement between the jurists (*ijmā'*):

“And we firmly affirm that whenever demonstration leads to something differing from the apparent sense of the Law, that apparent sense admits of interpretation according to the rule of interpretation in Arabic. No Muslim doubts this proposition, nor is any faithful person suspicious of it. Its certainty has been greatly increased for anyone who has pursued this idea, tested it, and has as an intention this reconciling of what is

41 Smith, Robin, “Aristotle's Logic,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online ed. (2011):

intellected [i.e., what is gained via abstract independent reason in the form of demonstration] with what is transmitted [i.e., what is gained via historical tradition via the Qur'ān, Ḥādīth and Sunna]. Indeed, we say that whenever the apparent sense of a pronouncement about something in the Law differs from what demonstration leads to, if the Law is considered and all of its parts scrutinized, there will invariably be found in the utterances of the Law something whose apparent sense bears witness, or comes to bearing witness, to that interpretation. Because of this idea, Muslims have formed a consensus that it is not obligatory for all the utterances of the Law to be taken in their apparent sense, nor for all of them to be drawn out from their apparent sense by means of interpretation, though they disagree about which ones are to be interpreted and which not interpreted” (II:14)

Of course, although most Muslims would agree to exegetical rules based upon or consistent with Arabic grammar, this by no means they would then agree that the products of demonstration can be, much less *should* be, reconciled with the statements of tradition. Notwithstanding, this example serves to show how very seriously and even literally the Commentator takes the Aristotelian definition of dialectic, as well as the extent to which he employs it in the *Decisive Treatise*.

However, if we look closer, we find that the dialectical impression of the text is actually belied by three actions on the part of its author. The first is Averroës' decision to analogize. To the untrained eye, his analogies might appear to be simply reinforcing for his dialectical syllogisms, but that's because one has to *hear* them to realize otherwise. In the *Kashf*, Averroës refers to the *Decisive Treatise* as a lecture (*qawl*), indicating that it was probably meant to be read out loud.⁴²

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-logic/>

42 Butterworth elaborates: “This work [...] has been referred to in various ways by the biographers. Most important, though, is that none of them calls it a 'book' (*kitāb*). Nor does Averroës himself ever refer to it by this name. In its sequel [the *Kashf*], he calls it a 'speech' (*qawl*) while designating as a 'book' only the *Kashf* itself. Yet, because he also uses the term 'speech' in the *Decisive Treatise* to identify the *Epistle Dedicatory*, or *Ḍamīma*, doubt remains as to the precise character of this work” (Butterworth, *Decisive Treatise*: p. xix). Ibrahim Najjar renders *qawl* as “treatise” (Najjar, Ibrahim, trans., *Faith and Reason in Islam: Averroës' Exposition of Religious Arguments*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2001: p. 16).

Although the most likely space for an oral reading would have been the private studies or *madrassas* of the Almohad Caliphate's professional cadre, we cannot rule out the possibility that summarizations or excerpts could have filtered down to mosques that served the general public. If so, then analogies like these would have been useful, not simply as illustrative devices, but as *rhetorical* devices, and hence another brand of argumentation. Again, consider the Aristotelian definition of rhetoric:

“Aristotle says that rhetoric, i.e., the study of persuasive speech, is a 'counterpart' (*antistrophos*) of dialectic and that the rhetorical art is a kind of 'outgrowth' (*paraphues ti*) of dialectic and the study of character types. The correspondence with dialectical method is straightforward: rhetorical speeches, like dialectical arguments, seek to persuade others to accept certain conclusions on the basis of premises they already accept. Therefore, the same measures useful in dialectical contexts will, *mutatis mutandis*, be useful here: knowing what premises an audience of a given type is likely to believe, and knowing how to find premises from which the desired conclusion follows.”⁴³

Additionally, rhetoric is a chiefly imagistic and inductive form of argument, as it illustrates connections between particulars of the same genus.⁴⁴

The second action is that Averroës is exploiting some of the flexibility of Arabic vocabulary. Consider his use of *an-naẓar* in his statement of agenda. “Although *an-naẓar* as religious reflection is altogether different from philosophical *naẓar* as the philosophical study of the beings of the world taken up in the Aristotelian theoretical sciences of natural philosophy and metaphysics,” Taylor explains, “Averroës implicitly denies that *naẓar* is equivocal and boldly asserts that the terms are essentially synonymous when used in these differing contexts.”⁴⁵ The same applies for *qiyās*, which can denote either *analogical reasoning*, as in religious

43 Smith, “Aristotle's Logic”: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-logic/>

44 Cf. Rapp, Christof, “Aristotle's Rhetoric,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online ed. (2011): <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-rhetoric/>

45 Taylor., “Islamic Rationalism”: p. 228.

jurisprudence, or *sylogistic argument*, as in philosophical discourse. “In the religious and legal context this is the analogical reasoning brought to bear when principles from the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth are applied to arguably similar cases in religious law in differing circumstances and times,” Taylor writes. “However, in the philosophical context the term *qiyās* refers not to analogical reasoning but rather to rigorous syllogistic argumentation.”⁴⁶ This also sheds light upon his tactic of conditionalizing his premises with phrases such as “nothing more as” and “indicates”.

Yet, before one thinks that the manipulation of such ambiguities is simply in keeping with dialectics (perhaps after the manner of any good lawyer), consider his third action: he slips in paraphrases from the Aristotelian corpus, e.g., “drawing out the unknown from the known” alludes to *Posterior Analytics* I.2. Most notably, during his first discussion about error and exegesis and as part of the build-up for his philosophical case studies, he makes the famous statement, “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 oppose truth; rather, it agrees with and bears witness to it*” (my italics) (III:12).⁴⁷ This strongly echoes *Prior Analytics* I.32, “For everything that is true must in every respect agree with itself”.⁴⁸ The presence of these paraphrases of the Aristotelian corpus are actually code intended to signal interpretations of the text to a specific audience, one very different from either the professional cadre or the general public. Averroës effectively says as much in V:40, when he explains his understanding of Sharī’a, writing, “[W]hat is primarily intended by the Law is taking care of the greater number without neglecting to alert [*tanbī*] the select [*al-khawāṣ*].”

46 Ibid.: p. 228.

47 This is Butterworth’s rendition of “*fa-inna al-ḥaqqā la yuḍāddu al-ḥaqqā bal yūwāfiqū-hu wa-yushhadu la-hu*”.

48 Which, depending on the translation at his disposal at the time, he might have known in Arabic as, “*li-anna-hu yajibu an yakūna al-haqqu shāhidan li-nafsi-hi wa-mutafaqan min kulli jihah*” (“For it is necessary that truth be a witness to itself and be consistent in every way”) (Taylor, Richard C., lecture on Arabic philosophy, presented at Leuven, Hoger Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte, 9 May, 2011, with accompanying PowerPoint slide:

Who is the other audience, this *al-khawāṣ*? They are his fellow Aristotelian philosophers, probably within the ranks of the professional cadre of the Almohad Caliphate or other sectors of literate, educated society. Since the *Decisive Treatise* very openly and stridently affirms that philosophers can and should read scripture differently than other people, its philosophical readers would likewise understand that, given that it is a work *about* scripture, the same principle would by extension apply to the *Decisive Treatise* itself.

Averroës defines faith (*'imān*) as assenting to certain basic or first principles (III:26 and 32, V:38-39), these being the tenets of the Islamic creed, specifically the existence of God, of prophetic missions, and of “happiness” and “misery” in the “hereafter” (III:25-26). Moreover, he posits that humanity has a plurality of dispositions, each with a corresponding method for being brought to assent vis-à-vis these principles (III:11 and 25-26, V:39-50). Specifically, there are three dispositions/methods: the rhetorical for the masses, the dialectical for the professional cadre, and the demonstrative for the philosophers (III:11 and V:44). “While Aristotle was optimistic about the value of syllogism for the formalization of argumentation in philosophy and other fields of intellectual endeavour,” writes Taylor, “Averroës seems to have held with conviction and enthusiasm that the understanding of syllogistic reasoning, and in particular that sort called demonstration, was the primary structure for human understanding of truth.”⁴⁹

It is here that we encounter the first concrete evidence of his religiosity, for Averroës, as Taylor explains, “is not content merely to set forth a 'plurality of rationalities' or methods by which issues raised in Religious Law may be approached. He is interested in pursuing this issue into the discussion of the natures of the rational powers of individuals as they pursue the understanding of the Religious Law.”⁵⁰ With his tripartite division of society established, the Commentator makes the bold claim that that there is one way that the rhetorical and dialectical classes should interpret scripture, and another way that the philosophical class should. His argument, however,

http://web.me.com/mistertea/KUL_Arabic_Islamic_Philosophy/PTT_lectures/Pages/Arabic-Islamic_Philosophy_%289%29.html, slide 32).

49 Taylor, “‘Truth Does Not Contradict Truth’: Averroës and the Unity of Truth,” *Topoi*, is. 19 (2000): p. 6.

50 *Ibid.*: p. 4.

is no *qiyās*-style independently-arrived-upon abstraction; rather, it is derived from the Qur'ānic verse Q. III:7,

“He it is who has sent down to you the Book; in it, there are fixed verses – these being the Mother of the Book – and others that resemble one another. Those with deviousness in their hearts pursue the ones that resemble one another, seeking discord and seeking to interpret them. None knows their interpretation but God and those well-grounded in science. They say: 'We believe it it; everything is from our Lord.' And none heeds those who are mindful.”

He cites this verse no less than four times (III:14, 16 and 30, V:46), the most of any other verses cited in the *Decisive Treatise*, and at all four times it appears at points that are quite fundamental to his system. For example, at III:14 he states,

“The reason an apparent and inner sense are set down in the Law is the difference in people's innate dispositions and the variance in their innate capacities for assent. The reason contradictory apparent senses are set down is to alert 'those well grounded in science' to the interpretation that reconciles them. This idea is pointed to in His statement (may He be exalted), 'He it is who has sent down to you the Book; in it there are fixed verses...' on to His statement, 'and those well grounded in science.'”

– which simultaneously provides a scriptural rationale for the innate plurality of methods and identifies the select as “those well-grounded in science”.⁵¹ Averroës even goes so far as to make this verse an example of the difference in interpretation that is available to philosophers: referring to the long-standing controversy as to where exactly Q. III:7 ends and Q. III:8 begins, the Commentator states that for the first two classes, the ending should be demarcated at “None knows their interpretation but God”, but that for philosophers it should continue to include ‘...and those well-grounded in science’ (III:30 and V:46)!

Despite this potentially massive difference, he insists that any severe variance between the interpretations of the masses and the professional cadre on the one side and the philosophers on the other, so long as both are suitably trained in the methodologies appropriate to their dispositions, is severe only in appearance and not in essence (V:40-45, VI:52-58). Helpfully, he provides several tactics by which serious misunderstandings can be avoided.⁵² Along the way, he elaborates a theory of error and heresy (III:23-26, 27-29 and 31-34, V:41 and 45-47, VI: 52 and 56-58) and piety and sophistry (V:45-51 and 53).⁵³ Trouble, in the form of schism, inquisition and civil war, arises when methodologies and interpretations are misappropriated by the incorrect class or otherwise disseminated to those unprepared or unable to use them correctly (VI:55-58, VII:59) – indeed, he goes so far as to say this is *kufir* and that whoever commits this horrendous act is a *kāfir* (V:47), as well as that perhaps it would be best for books with demonstrative content be censored from the general public, if not also the professional cadre, as a precautionary measure (III:36).

Throughout all of this, the centrality of the Qur'ān is more than apparent. Consider the climax of the *Decisive Treatise*, wherein Averroës summarizes the work with this declaration:

“It is obligatory for whoever wants to remove this heretical innovation [i.e., the distortion of the three methods] from the Law to *apply himself to the precious Book and pick from it indications existing for every single thing we are responsible for believing*. In his reflection he is to strive for their apparent sense as much as he can without interpreting anything, except insofar as the interpretation is apparent in itself – I mean, of an apparentness shared by everyone. For if the statements set down in the Law for teaching the people are examined, it seems that one reaches a point in defending them

51 He makes a yet more powerful link between the two in III:16, but I shall explore this below (see: “*The Shari’a specific to the philosophers*”).

52 These include, “drawing out the figurative significance of an utterance from its true significance without violating the custom of the Arabic language with respect to figurative speech in doing so...” – which calls to mind Taylor’s remarks above. Butterworth notes that a literal translation should read, “drawing out the significance of an utterance out from its true significance to its figurative significance” (Butterworth, *Decisive Treatise*: p. 52, n. 15).

53 Also all important for the question of the Commentator’s religiosity, but I shall explore these below (see: “*The Shari’a specific to the philosophers*” and *Concluding remarks*).

such that only someone who is adept at demonstration pulls out of their apparent sense something that is not apparent in them. *And this particular characteristic is not found in any other statements* [i.e., the inimitability of the Qur'ān]" (my italics) (VI:57).

In my view, this passage is also proof of the seriousness that the Commentator gives to the Qur'ān in his capacity as a *philosopher* and not just in his capacity as a jurist, i.e., a dialectician: the “something that is not apparent” in the literal word of scripture must necessarily be philosophical content, for how else could the philosopher be expected to successfully scrutinize the text?

We should now take a moment to consider the above vis-à-vis Renan's depiction. There is no doubt that an Aristotelian thinker is speaking here, but given the evidence, it would be disingenuous to insist that this voice belongs to someone not equally genuinely Islamic in his worldview. This becomes all the more clear when we consider that the Qur'ān as a totality, rather than its specific precepts, appears to occupy a place in Averroës' epistemological sociology that is essentially a first principle. Now, the role that the concept of first principles plays in the Commentator's system has only been touched upon briefly so far; at this juncture, I should state that I believe the concept's role is actually very significant. There is a puzzle, however, for although in III:26 and 32 and V:38-39 the Commentator establishes the tenets of faith as first principles elemental to all three methods of inquiry, it stands to question whether they are *points of departure* or *points of intersection*. The difference here concerns whether the methods of inquiry have *at their foundation* the same start from which the inquirers then journey, or whether the inquirers have different starts and *arrive at a concordance*, with two classes of people beginning from the Qur'ān and the philosophers from their independent abstract reason and/or the Aristotelian corpus. Answering this question, by the way, would also solve a puzzle from II:7, namely, what exactly is the measure of the Ancients' “correctness”? Here we may safely presume that the Commentator has in mind one's well-trained abstract independent reason and the statements of the Qur'ān (in their initially literal sense); the real problem is: *in which order?*

To both puzzles, I expect that Renan would be tempted to assert that the tenets of faith are points of intersection rather than points of departure. In my view, however, if we look more closely at how the Commentator conceptualizes the tenets of faith *as* first principles, rather than simply their status within the structures of the three methods of inquiry, we find that this might actually be a false dichotomy in Averroës' eyes. However, this shall only become evident once we establish the centrality of God in his sociological epistemology, so let us now continue.

THE CENTRALITY OF GOD IN AVERROËS' EPISTEMOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY

Having established that the *Decisive Treatise* should be read differently according to its audience, the question now becomes: what conclusions would either be drawing? The answer revolves around the issue of interpreting and developing the Sharī'a for society as a whole, or in other words, legislative/statutory authority. It is essentially an issue of whose *fatwās* matter most, the jurists and theologians of the Almohad professional cadre (i.e., the dialecticians) or the philosophers, and for Averroës, it is the latter. This becomes clear when we investigate his epistemological sociology more closely: while at first glance Averroës would seem to portray the three classes of humanity as equals, in fact he is taking Aristotle's distinction between the *per accidens* status of rhetoric and dialectic versus the *per se* status of demonstrations and applying it to society. In terms of the question of the Commentator's religiosity, the crux of this *per se* versus *per accidens* knowledge is not of “existing things” on their own, but rather of the divinity toward which they point: philosophers are superior to the other classes of humanity due to their cognizance of God. In order to see this, while an analytical approach alone sufficed to illuminate the role of the Qur'ān in Averroës' epistemological sociology, we must now take on more of an intertextual approach.

In the Commentator's view, there is actually “but one truth and that the primary way that truth is to be attained is through philosophical demonstration,” explains Taylor.⁵⁴ The paraphrase of *Prior Analytics* I.32 is the key alert here, signalling to a philosophical reader – again, in Taylor's words,

⁵⁴ Taylor, “Truth”: p. 10.

“[R]ational criteria and philosophical study can be asserted to grasp but one world, one reality, one truth and to be of valuable use to the Religious Law for that very reason. And far from being non-intersecting methodologies, the understanding of the Religious Law as providing truths about the world and the Divinity benefits from the critical methodology of philosophy. The interpretation of the Religious Law and the enactment of its consequent practical dictates in religious and moral action indicate that right and truly understood Religious Law must not conflict with, but rather must be able to coincide with, the philosophically established principles of right moral action. There can be no 'Double Truth' in this regard, although there may be truth doubly attained.”⁵⁵

Taylor calls this “the principle of the Unity of Truth” and describes it as “the key to unlocking the meaning of the discussion of the *Faṣl al-Maqāl*”⁵⁶:

“[This principle] makes it clear that there is only one truth and that Religious Law and philosophy in its method of demonstration must be in agreement at the level of the ultimate truth of statements and propositions about reality. Some propositions may be rhetorical with the goal of emotively urging on the less well educated to a life of moral goodness, while others may be dialectical with the purpose of using agreed upon yet perhaps not fully and properly founded principles to argue in a way that convinces auditors to follow a good life. But for the philosopher as practitioner of demonstration... persuasion takes place by way of the necessity in sound argumentation from certain premises to conclusions which are certain and true.”⁵⁷

Thus, variant interpretations must be reconcilable, in the sense that they are either saying the same thing in different ways and/or speaking at different hermeneutical levels respective to the plurality of methods that correspond to the plurality of natures within the human species. As for “emotively urging on”, that serves a pedagogical function, i.e., to raise the consciousness of the

55 Ibid.: p. 11.

56 Ibid.: p. 6.

57 Ibid.: p. 6.

general public and the professional cadre closer to ultimate truth, as the Commentator explains in the *Tahāfut*: “In short, religions are, according to the philosophers, obligatory, since they lead towards wisdom in a way universal to all human beings, for philosophy only leads a certain number of intelligent people to the knowledge of happiness, and they therefore have to learn wisdom, whereas religions seek the instructions of the masses generally.”⁵⁸ As discussed above, the readiest example of rhetoric in the *Decisive Treatise* are Averroës' analogies. Consider V:48-51, wherein he elaborates a lengthy analogy to the physician. He defends the analogy as “not poetical” but rather “certain” (*yaqinī*), i.e., “a sound linking between the one and the other” (V:50), by which he means that it is not merely argumentative garnish, but in fact instructive of an important point. In this case, the lesson concerns the intention of the Prophet to teach humanity the difference between piety and impiety, specifically vis-à-vis the tripartite division of society and the necessity of developing a corresponding social policy:

“[T]he link between the physician and the health of bodies [is the same] as the link between the Lawgiver and the health of souls – I mean, the physician is the one who seeks to preserve the health of bodies when it exists and to bring it back when it has disappeared, while the Lawgiver is the one who aspires to this with respect to the health of souls. This health is what is called 'piety'. [...] Now the Lawgiver seeks this health only through Law-based knowledge and Law-based practice. And this health is the one from which happiness in the hereafter derives and misery in the hereafter from its contrary. From this, it has become evident to you that sound interpretations – not to mention corrupt ones – must not be established in books for the multitude. Sound interpretation is the deposit mankind was charged with holding, and held, whereas all existing things shirked it – I mean the one mentioned in His statement (may He be exalted), 'Indeed, we offered the deposit to the heavens, to the earth, and to the mountains,' [and so on to the end of] the verse [Q. XXXIII:72]” (V:50-51).

58 Van Den Bergh, Simon, trans., Averroës, *Tahāfut at-Tahāfut*, vol 1., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1954: p. 360.

Likewise consider III:23, where he makes the brazen argument that errors should not be punished but instead *rewarded* so long as they were committed in proper obeisance to one's disposition:

“It seems that those who disagree about the interpretation of these recondite questions [i.e., the issues in his philosophical case studies] have either hit the mark and are to be rewarded or have erred and are to be excused. For assent to something due to an indication arising in the soul is compulsory, not voluntary – I mean it is not up to us not to assent or to assent as it is up to us to stand up or to not stand up. Since a condition of responsibility is having choice, the one who assents to error because of vagueness occurring in it is excused if he is an adept of science. Therefore, [the Prophet] said (peace be upon him), 'If the judge hits the mark after exerting himself, he will be rewarded twofold; and if he errs, he will have a single reward.'

“Now what judge is greater than the one who makes judgements about existence, as to whether it is thus or not thus? These judges are the learned ones whom God has selected for interpretation, and this error that is forgiven according to the Law is only the error occasioned by learned men when they reflect upon the recondite things that the Law makes them responsible for reflecting upon.”

The “judges” he is referring to are clearly those who “consider existing things by means of the intellect” (II:2) via the art of demonstration (II:3), i.e., philosophers. Thus, although articulated discursively, there is potent poetical flare here: essentially a vision of the philosopher as a struggling seeker (i.e., *mujtahid*) questing through the twilight of exegesis – a quest that is more worthy than perhaps other, if similar activities, because of its goal, namely, to understand “existing things”.⁵⁹

So far we have seen how the principle of the Unity of Truth applies to non-philosophers; for philosophers, there is a critical practical consequence: the advocacy of their rule over society.

⁵⁹ In fact, to that which the “existing things” point toward, as I shall explain in a few moments.

Simply put, if a person possesses a fact in a *per se* as opposed to *per accidens* fashion, then that person must necessarily stand in a closer position vis-à-vis that fact than someone who apprehends it otherwise. It stands within reason, then, that if a dispute arises concerning that fact, the person who apprehends it in a *per se* fashion is in a better position to determine the truth of the matter. This is precisely Averroës' underlying reasoning in the *Decisive Treatise*, as Taylor again ably explains:

“The philosopher [is] in possession of a truth garnered through demonstration in the full and complete sense of demonstration [and therefore is] in a position to veto or deny certain possible interpretations of a text of the Religious Law. While the philosopher cannot demonstrate the necessity and truth of understanding a text of the Religious Law in a certain way, he can certainly exclude any interpretation which contradicts the conclusion of a proper demonstration, i.e. demonstrated truth.”⁶⁰

It needs to be asked whether this “veto” power extends to only interpretative entanglements and disagreements that arise *between* the three classes, or if the philosophers may also police interpretative activity *within* the other two classes, as well. An explicit answer is not provided by the Commentator in any of his works. Nevertheless, it would be logical that exercising the veto would require intelligence on what the other two classes are believing, and it is of course a slippery slope from passive intelligence reception to active reconnaissance to even more active interference. This seems plausible even if we presume that the philosophers' power is *at minimum* strong enough to protect and maintain their position. Averroës' commentary or epitome of Plato's *Republic* – which could actually be a kind of partial exegesis on his own system⁶¹ – might provide clues,⁶² as he all but instructs the reader therein to substitute

60 Taylor, “Truth”: p. 8.

61 Ralph Lerner strikes a cautious tone concerning the nature of the text: “[R]emarkable are the substantive discrepancies – elaborations where Plato is brief, omissions, changes in details, interpolations drawn from Plato or Farabi [sic] or others. How much weight out to be given to these variations from our text of the *Republic* must remain a matter of controversy, complicated by the fact that not a single Arabic translation of a complete Platonic work is known to have come down to us. In the absence of the text that Averroës [sic] had before him when he sat down to compose this work, we can only hazard some guesses about the significance of the discrepancies. [...] In brief, we cannot know for a certainty whether whatever of Averroës' account strikes us as baffling or simply wrong in

philosophers for the Guardians, writing, “because of what we adjudge the name 'philosopher' [to someone], and that there is no way of saving the cities unless people such as these rule over them.”⁶³ Thus, when he writes, “In general, citizens will have for them [i.e., the Guardians] the status of enemies, and they fear them [respectively] just as they fear the enemies without [i.e., outside the city of the *Republic*],”⁶⁴ one may reason that it is the philosophers who have a somewhat antagonistic relationship to the rest of society; likewise, when he writes, “[Plato] begins, saying: He who governs these cities is obliged in his governance to aim for the greatest good for the city just as he ought to remove the greatest evil from them. Now there is no greater evil in the governance of the city than that governance which converts a single city into many cities than that which joins them together and makes them one,”⁶⁵ there seems to be a regulatory

the light of our present-day understanding of Plato's text does so *because of inadvertence or design*. Averroes' thoughts may not be our thoughts” (my italics) (Lerner, Ralph, trans. Averroës, *Commentary on Plato's Republic (Averroes on Plato's Republic)*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1974: p. xiv). Averroës may be using Plato in some ways as a cipher: although he states that his intention in this text is to explain the “necessary parts” of the political science laid out in the *Republic* (ibid.: p. 145), Lerner finds good reason to believe that there is quite a bit of the Commentator's own thoughts here: “The *falāsifa* [i.e., Arabic-Islamic philosophers] [...] do not as a rule strut forth proclaiming their ingenuity, originality, and superiority over their predecessors. Quite the contrary: a good deal of their ingenuity and originality is devoted to concealing their singularities. The present text by Averroes is a fine case in point, for in truth it is no simple matter to tell in every instance whether Averroes is speaking in his own name” (ibid.: p xv).

62 Considering the complex bibliographical history of this text, I recognize the danger of using it for my own exegesis. Lerner notes, regarding his own English translation of it, “You have here something close to what Abū l-Walīd Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Rushd (known to the Latins as Averroes) [sic] wrote toward the end of the twelfth century in Córdoba. Little more can be asserted with confidence in candor because it may be three centuries since anyone has seen a copy of the Arabic text. What has come down to us is a Hebrew translation of the Arabic, composed by Samuel ben Judah in the early fourteenth century in Provence and preserved in eight manuscripts in varying states of completeness” (ibid.: p. vii) and “Samuel was acutely aware of his shortcomings as a translator of philosophic Arabic; but if his word is to be taken in this matter, he was tireless in his efforts to provide the reader with a translation that was faithful to Averroes and intelligible to one who knew Hebrew but no Arabic. Moreover, he saw what none of has seen – Averroes' Arabic text” (ibid.: p. viii). Lerner follows E.I.J. Rosenthal's lead in treating the text as the “identification of the Ideal State with the Islamic, i.e., *Sharī'a* State, and the conviction of the superiority of the religious law” (quoted in ibid.: p. viii). Indeed, the content of the text as it has come down to us today sounds extremely consistent with the Commentator's views in the *Decisive Treatise*, the *Kashf* and the *Tahāfut*, as Lerner painstakingly compares in his footnotes. Consequently, I have taken the leap of faith to invest some trust in it.

63 Ibid.: p. 78.

64 Ibid.: p. 39.

65 Ibid.: p. 64. The full passage sounds very much like his description of the philosopher's relationship to mainstream society in the *Tahāfut* (cf. below, “*The Sharī'a specific to the philosophers*”).

relationship, as well. It is tempting to draw a modern analogy to the central planning committee of a communist society, which, while staying aloof from the rest of society, evoked the right to monitor the thoughts of the general population and bureaucratic cadre for the greater collective good. However, the reality is that Averroës simply provides us no usable information regarding the full penetrative scope of the philosophers' power.

The philosophers' veto-power is also the second point at which we find evidence for Averroës' religiosity, for its justification is predicated upon not the tripartite division of society as one might expect, but rather upon the existence of a deity around whom the entire universe pivots, including the sublunary world of which human society is but an element or expression. To be able to see this within the *Decisive Treatise*, however, we must do some more piecing together of the larger puzzle of the Commentator's corpus.

As seen above, Averroës distinguishes *falsafa* as a branch or variety of *ḥikma* by dint of its specialization in “the knowledge of existents”; he has also defined “existing things” as “artifacts” due to the fact that “existing things indicate the Artisan only through 'cognizance' of the art in them, and the more complete cognizance of the art in them is, the more complete is cognizance of the Artisan” (II:2-3). Another reference to the “Artisan” is made in II:8, when he again syllogizes,

- if lack of cognizance of artfulness is lack of cognizance of art;
- and if lack of cognizance art is lack of cognizance of the Artisan;
- therefore, lack of cognizance of artfulness is lack of cognizance of the Artisan.

The concept of the Artisan appears in vastly more expanded and refined form in the *Kashf*, wherein it is developed into a teleological argument: “If we suppose that the world is created, it follows [that] it must necessarily have a Maker [*fā'il*] who created it,”⁶⁶ and,

66 Najjar, *Faith and Reason*: p. 19.

“[T]he method which the Precious Book recommends and calls all mankind to follow is found, if the Precious Book is reviewed, to consist of two kinds. The first is the method of providing for man, and creating all existing things for his sake. Let us call it the argument from providence. The second method [refers to] the manifest invention of the substances of the existing beings, such as the invention of life in inanimate matter, as well as sense-perception and intellect. Let us call this the argument from invention.

“[...] With respect to the argument from invention, it includes [the investigation of] the existence of the animal kind as a whole, and that of the plants and the heavens. This method is based on two principles existing potentially in human nature. The first is that all these existing entities are invented ... [and] the second principle is that for everything invented there is an inventor. From these two principles it follows that for every existing entity there is an agent who is an inventor. Evidence for this conclusion is found in the sheer number of invented entities.”⁶⁷

As Taneli Kukkonen notes, the *Kashf* is “a work of rational theology written with the aim of prescribing the way in which the fundamental truths of faith are to be conveyed. The style adopted for the text is preeminently non-technical and the tone carefully measured so as not to clash with the tenets of Sunni orthodoxy.”⁶⁸ From the worldview of the *Decisive Treatise*, then, it is a dialectical work, which signals the Artisan of II:8 as dialectical in character. Yet, underlying the language of the Artisan is a philosophical framework, for on the one hand, Averroës the *philosopher* as opposed to the dialectician does not believe in a *personal* deity, and on the other hand, he is drawing a connection between the content of *falsafa* and the *telos* of its object of inquiry via a very different kind of God. To see these elements, we must cast our nets even further across his system:

Regarding the nature of the divine, one hint occurs at II:4, when the Commentator describes “existing things” as “existing through Him” [*sā'r wājūdātuhu*]; another occurs in the arguments

67 Ibid.: pp. 33-34.

68 Kukkonen, Taneli, “Averroës and the Teleological Argument,” *Religious Studies*, vol. 38, is. 4 (December 2002): p. 406.

he puts forward in the philosophical case studies on divine knowledge of particulars and universals:

“[W]e are of the opinion that Abū Ḥamid [al-Ghazzali] was mistaken about the Peripatetic sages when he accused them of saying that He (Holy and Exalted) does not know particulars at all. Rather, they are of the opinion that He knows them (may He be exalted) by means of a knowledge that is not of the same kind as our knowledge of them. That is because our knowledge of them is an effect of what is known, so that it is generated when the known thing is generated and changes when it changes. And the knowledge God (glorious is He) has of existence is the opposite of this: it is the cause of the thing known, which is the existing thing.

“So, whoever likens the two kinds of knowledge to one another sets down two opposite essences and their particular characteristics as being one, and that is the extreme of ignorance. If the name 'knowledge' is said purely as a name that is generated and of knowledge that is eternal, it is said purely as a name that is shared [i.e., it is a pedagogical tool for the two classes and an alert to the other].

“[...] Moreover, it is not only particulars that [the Peripatetic sages] are of the opinion He does not know in the way we know them, but universals as well. For, the universals known to us are also effects of the nature of the existing thing, whereas, with that knowledge [of His], it is the reverse. Therefore, that knowledge [of His] has been demonstrated to transcend description as 'universal' or 'particular'” (III:17).

We may ask: what kind of God has no knowledge of particulars *or* universals, yet can be said to cause existents via what appears to be some kind empowerment or interfacing (i.e., “a knowledge that is not of the same kind as our knowledge of them”)? The answer begins to emerge when we again consider the *Kashf*, wherein he states that cosmos is “created” in a teleological and transcendent sense: “For God Almighty has brought the existing things into being both by means of causes He subordinated to them from outside (namely, the heavenly

bodies), and causes He implanted in their very natures, which are the souls and natural powers by means of which things are preserved and wisdom fulfilled”⁶⁹ and, “[T]he use of the terms 'creation in time' and 'eternity' is an innovation in religion and a source of great perplexity that corrupts the beliefs of the ordinary people, especially the dialecticians among them.”⁷⁰ , Because cosmology and philosophy are milk sisters in the Peripatetic tradition, it would be illuminating to consider here Averroës' views on the celestial bodies, which Charles Genequand describes and extrapolates in the following manner:

“The way in which Ibn Rushd explains the variety of the motions observed in the heavenly bodies is interesting in that it furnishes a further example of what could be termed his idealism: the unmoved mover is the 'cause of various existents', i.e., of various motions insofar as various aspects of it are 'intellected'. Thus, each intellect of each sphere 'intellects' a specific 'aspect' (*naḥw*) of it and as a result of this intellection, moves in a specific way. There is only one unmoved mover for all spheres, but this unmoved mover is different in the representation (or intellection: *taṣawwur*) of each sphere's intellect. The spheres attain their perfection (*yastakmilu*) by the representation of their cause... There is, then, a double hierarchy among the spheres: the intellect (or first mover) of each star-carrying sphere derives its own motion from the prime mover and imparts in turn specific motions to a certain number of subordinate spheres. Each planet's intellect is in the same situation relative to its subordinate movers as the prime mover is in relation to these intellects. The group of spheres producing the motion of each planet is a kind of reproduction on a smaller scale of the universe with a first mover (the intellect of the sphere which carries the planet) and subordinate powers. Thus, the various motions caused by the various spheres of a given star are only means of producing the motion which this star must possess in order to make its own contribution to the harmony of the universe.

“The same argument is then set forth in terms of formal causes. There is one formal and final cause governing all the intellects of the spheres, which are apparently the forms of

69 Ibid.: p. 88.

the spheres, but not their final causes. The 'common and universal cause' is the common act of all the individual spheres. Ibn Rushd seems thereby to indicate that the prime mover contains in some way all the individual forms of the universe, although he does not say explicitly whether the individual differences between the motions of the various spheres are due to differences between their intellects or to the plan of the prime mover. The very strong emphasis laid on the superiority and dominance of the prime mover would seem to favour the second alternative. In fact, it is neither here nor there: the intellects move their spheres in various ways according to the manner in which they apprehend various aspects of the prime mover; but apparently they have no choice but to apprehend that particular aspect which is suited to them.”⁷¹

70 Ibid.: p. 89.

71 Genequand, Charles, trans., Averroës, *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics: A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book Lam*, Brill, Leiden, 1986: pp. 41-42. Chad Hillier explains it this way: “With the Prime Mover, the celestial bodies and the physical world, Ibn Rushd has a three level cosmological view. He illustrates his cosmological order by using the analogy of the state, where everyone obeys and imitates the king. All smaller social units in the kingdom, like the family, are subordinate to the head, which is ultimately under the authority of the king. There is a hierarchy among the spheres of celestial beings, based on their 'nobility' (*sharaf*) and not, as Avicenna held, on their order in emanation. Of course, the order of nobility parallels emanation's order, for the hierarchical order is that which we see in the universe, the fixed stars, the planets, the moon and the earth. Like a king, the Prime Mover imparts motion only to the First Body (the sphere of the fixed stars), which becomes the intermediary for the other bodies. This leads to the other spheres (i.e. planets) to desire both the Prime Mover and the First Body, which, according to Ibn Rushd, explains how the celestial bodies move from east to west at one time and from west to east at another time. It is the desire of one that moves the planets in one way, and the desire of the other that moves them in the opposite direction. Ultimately, as H. Davidson notes, Ibn Rushd has a cosmos in which the earth is its physical center. Surrounding the earth, at different levels, are the celestial spheres, which contain celestial bodies (e.g. the sun, moon, stars and planets), which all revolve around the earth. The motion of these spheres is attributed to immortal intelligences, governed by a primary immutable and impersonal cause. Each sphere exists in its own right, though somehow the intelligence is caused by the Prime Mover, and it is through their contemplation of the Prime Mover they receive perfection equivalent to the position they hold in the cosmological hierarchy. As such, God no longer is restricted to being a cause of one thing. The active intellect is the last sphere in the hierarchy, but is not the product of another, and like the other intelligences its cognition is fixed on God. This idea has significant influence on Ibn Rushd's doctrine of the human soul and intellect” ([Hillier, H. Chad, “Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\) \(1126-1198\),” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online ed. \(January 5, 2010\): <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ibnrushd/>](http://www.iep.utm.edu/ibnrushd/)).

In other words, God is quite literally the center of the universe's attention.⁷² When we put together all of the above, we can now see that the phrase “Artisan” is actually a codeword (in dialectese, if you will) for an Aristotelian conception of the divine that is essentially metaxological: the Unmoved Mover “creates” the universe, not in the literal sense of a watchmaker constantly greasing and repairing the gears of his watch, but in the metaphorical sense of enabling it to come to be simply as a consequence of its own being.

Regarding the philosopher's connection to this, as it were, non-crafting Craftsman, we can turn principally to three sources: the text on the *Republic*, the *Kashf*, and finally the *Decisive Treatise*. The pertinent element of the first is found in the climax of a long elaboration on the *telos* of humanity (“For every natural being has an end, as has been explained in physics – all the more so Man, who is the most noble of them”⁷³). The Commentator explains,

“[I]n first philosophy ... being is of two kinds: sensible and intelligible. Intelligible being is the principle of sensible existence in that it is its end, form, and efficient cause. Its [i.e., the sensible's] existence in the intelligibles of the theoretical sciences belongs to the class of intelligible ‘existence’. The purpose of Man, inasmuch as he is a natural being, is that he ascend to that existence as it is in his nature to ascend.”⁷⁴

The actual process of this upward-like motion is elaborated in the *Kashf* during the Commentator's explanation of how the argument from invention, alongside the argument from providence, are in his view consistent with the tripartite division of humanity laid out in the *Decisive Treatise*:

“[T]hese two methods correspond exactly to the method use by the select (meaning the learned), and that of the general public. Where the two types of knowledge differ is in the details; the general public are content, as far as knowing providence and invention is

72 Interestingly, it is a universe that is also structured according to a kind of epistemological sociology: man as mirror of nature, microcosm and macrocosm.

73 Lerner, *Averroes on Plato's Republic*: p. 79.

74 *Ibid.*: p. 88.

concerned, with what is known through primary knowledge, which is derived from sense-impressions. *The learned, however, add to what is known of existing things through sense-perception that which is known through demonstration by reference to providence and invention*⁷⁵ (my italics).

Finally, we can learn the mechanism by which this accumulation is achieved from II:2 of the *Decisive Treatise*, when the Commentator writes, “the more complete cognizance of the art in them is, the more complete is cognizance of the Artisan”. The link he is articulating here can be construed syllogistically:

- Since philosophy is cognizance of existing things by means of intellectual syllogistic reasoning;
- and since all existing things are such through God;
- therefore, philosophy is the cognizance of God by means of intellectual syllogistic reasoning.

Thus, the philosopher comes to understand the divine *by way of* his study of the universe. It would not be a stretch to say that according to this view, the philosopher essentially tracks the divine traces left within himself and the cosmos, for the Commentator remarks in the *Kashf*,

“[T]his method [i.e., the argument from invention] is the straight path by which God has called upon men to know His existence and has alerted them to it by what He implanted in their primitive natures of [capacities to] understand meaning The reference to this original primitive nature implanted in the natures of men is contained in the saying of the Almighty: 'And [remember] when your Lord brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam their posterity... (Q. VII:172) That is why it might be required from whoever wants to obey God by believing in Him and listening to what His Messengers

75 Najjar, *Faith and Reason*: p. 37.

have brought forward to adopt this method, so as to become one of the learned scholars who testify to God's lordship...⁷⁶

Thus, when we stitch together these two strands, namely, the metaxological nature of the divine and the philosopher's ascent toward it via the study of existing things, the full tapestry is revealed: we find that Averroës' epistemological sociology is actually predicated upon the existence of God and neither upon itself nor philosophers' knowledge of existents alone.

We should again take a moment to consider the above vis-à-vis Renan's depiction. As before, there is no doubt that an Aristotelian thinker is speaking here; what is less clear is whether that voice is also Islamic. Renan would almost certainly say it is not, and in this instance I concede that an overly teleological and almost mechanistic Unmoved Mover is indeed not the God of Islamic orthodoxy (or for that matter, even most Islamic heterodoxies). Ironically, however, we must commit the heretical act of turning away from the divine in order to see how Averroës' God illuminates other genuinely Islamic elements in his system. They are in three areas: first, in the Commentator's conceptualization of the tenets of faith as first principles; second, the related question of whether scripture or reason should come first in measuring the "correctness" of an Ancient; and third, in his identification of the select as Q. III:7's "those well-grounded in science" in III:14 of the *Decisive Treatise*.

Regarding first principles, having located the divine at the top of Averroës' epistemological sociology, we can also discern that it serves as the system's ground, as well. His description of the tenets of faith as the "roots" (*aṣṣuwl*) of inquiry (III:25-26, V:44) is the key, for it suggests a metaxological understanding of inquiry in which the Unmoved Mover is the enabler of the pursuit of truth. Moreover, there is something of a spiritual dimension to this. Consider: if inquiry is fundamentally driven toward greater cognizance of the Artisan like the celestial bodies in their intellection of the Unmoved Mover, then its activity is really an *inversion* and not an advance. A comparison to the Sufi mystical doctrine of *ẓikr* might be illuminating, for, like its Hebrew cognate *zakhōr*, the term literally means "remembrance": inquiry, whether up to the

76 Ibid.: p. 37.

heights of speculative metaphysics or into the depths of scripture, never discovers, but *recovers*. This is no idle comparison on my part, for as we have seen in the *Kashf*, the Commentator repeatedly speaks of the inquisitive impulse as “implanted” into human nature which, in a sense, insists upon its actualization. Moreover, it is not a logical stretch that actualization conceptually implies some form of recovery of internal resources and proclivities. Were this not enough, Averroës actually envisions a relative open-mindedness toward the Sufi ritualistic practices for the attainment of *zīkr*:

“As regards the Sufis, their methods of investigation are not theoretical, composed of premises and syllogisms. Rather, they claim that the knowledge of God, as well as other entities, is something cast in the soul once it has been cleansed of its worldly appetites and upon focusing its attention on the desired object. [...] However, we hold that, even if we admit the existence of this method, it is not common to all men, qua men. [...] It is true, we do not deny that the mortification of the flesh might be a precondition of sound theoretical investigations, just as health might be, but the suppression of appetites is not what yields knowledge in itself, although it is still a precondition of it, just as health is a precondition of learning but is not what yields it. It is from this perspective that Scripture has called for this method and strongly urged its adoption in its entirety, (meaning in matters of action, not that it is sufficient in itself, as these people have imagined). If it is useful in theoretical matters, it will be in the manner we have just mentioned. And this is obvious to whoever is fair and considers the matter in itself.”⁷⁷

To be sure, there is a lot of ambivalence here, but the Commentator is by no means rejecting Sufi practices; to the contrary, he affords them some validity within his own framework. We can thus interpret him here as recognizing a similarity or proximity to his own views – he is by no means a mystic, but the burden of proof would lie upon those who argue that he has no spiritual impulse whatsoever.

77 Ibid.: p. 32.

Regarding the order in which we should measure an Ancient's "correctness", if my assessment of the metaxological nature of tenets of faith/first principles is correct, then we can see that on this issue it is not so much a matter of which should come first, scripture or reason; rather, scripture and reason are in fact parallel sources that spring from the same soil. Consequently, pitting them against each other would actually be a false dichotomy in Averroës' eyes.

Finally, regarding his identification of the select as Q. III:7's "those well-grounded in science" in III:14 of the *Decisive Treatise*, having deciphered the Unmoved Mover's role in his system, we can now understand that for Averroës the philosophers are those who are the most capable of penetrating the cosmic order, and by extension, drawing the closest to God – indeed, this is the activity of "greater worthiness" hinted at in the analogy of III:23. What this practically entails is an important issue, and it is also the third and final point at which we can discern the Commentator's religiosity. Let us proceed.

"THE SHARĪ'A SPECIFIC TO THE PHILOSOPHERS"

Having established that the epistemological sociology proposed in the *Decisive Treatise* is pyramidal, with the philosophers at the top on account of their *per se* knowledge and hence "closeness" to God, an extremely important *moral* question now arises: are philosophers beholden to the same religious law as everyone else? To this, the Commentator has the remarkable answer of: no and yes. According to him, philosophers have a parallel Sharī'a to that of the rest of society, one which does not trump or otherwise violate the latter, but which is nonetheless unique to them and of "greater worthiness". There are finesses here, however, for the philosophical Sharī'a seems to have its own specialized conception of sin and piety, and meanwhile, it is not entirely clear what role it plays in the philosophers' policing power of themselves. Given the obscurity and controversial nature of this topic as a whole, a much more thoroughly intertextual approach is the best way to make my case. We are, essentially, entering the most subterranean aspect of the *Decisive Treatise*, where analysis alone shall unfortunately avail us little.

In III:16 the Commentator makes what is perhaps his most important use of Q. III:7, writing,

“These [i.e. philosophers] are 'those well-grounded in science' – for we choose to place the stop after His statement (may He be exalted), 'and those well-grounded in science'. Now, if those adept in science did not know the interpretation, *there would be nothing superior in their assent obliging them to a faith in Him not found among those not adept in science*. Yet, God has already described them as those who have faith in Him, and this refers only to *faith coming about from demonstration*. And it comes about only with the science of interpretation.

“Those faithful not adept in science are people whose faith in the [Qur'ān] is not based on demonstration. So, *if this faith by which God has described the learned is particular to them, then it is obligatory that it come about by means of demonstration*. And if it is by means of demonstration, then it comes about only along with the science of interpretation. For God (may He be exalted) has already announced that there is an interpretation of them that is the truth, and demonstration is only of the truth” (my italics).

What exactly is the “faith of the philosophers” or “demonstrative faith” to which he is referring to here? The answer lies in a statement from his *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* that did not survive in the Latin version:

“The Sharī'a specific to the philosophers [*as-sharī'a al-ḥas'ṣṣah bi-l-ḥukamā'*] is the investigation of all beings, since the Creator is not worshipped by a worship more noble than the knowledge of those things that He produced which lead to the knowledge in truth of His essence – may He be exalted! That [investigation philosophers undertake] is the most noble of the works belonging to Him and the most favored of them that we do in God's presence. How great is it that one perform this service which is the most noble

of services and one take it on with this compliant obedience which is the most sublime of obediences!”⁷⁸

This is a remarkable statement that casts a bright light upon his remarks in III:16, for he is proposing that metaphysics is a kind of religious ritual.

When we look more closely at the Averroistic corpus, we see that it is rite that entails some kind of moral code of conduct. Initially, though, that might be hard to discern, for in the text on the *Republic*, just prior to his remarks on First Philosophy that we explored above, the Commentator states that metaphysics in-and-of-itself has no practical value for the conduct of the philosopher:

“We say: That concerning which the theoretical sciences speculate, and particularly physics and metaphysics, *are not practical things*; nor has the will any effect upon their existence. This is self-evident to one who is trained in sciences such as these. This being so, and the subjects of these sciences being such that their being is not up to us, it is clear that they are not disposed toward action [by their] primary disposition and essentially. *Through them a man does not – as a primary intention – serve others.* Rather, their existence in man is with respect to what is preferable, *for it would be absurd if their existence in man were null and in vain*” (my italics).⁷⁹

In fact, this is in keeping with the radically teleological bent of Averroës' whole system: it is not that practical effects are irrelevant; rather, if speculative inquiry's goal was to understand God *only* so as to direct the philosopher's ethical conduct here in the sublunary realm, then it would be “null and vain” (his use of the phrase “what is preferable” is essentially a codeword for the final *telos* of all existents⁸⁰). He clearly states that there is some kind of affinity between the

78 This translation is in Taylor, Richard C., “Averroes on the Shari'ah of the Philosophers,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, is. 12, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (2002): p. 1. I do not know its provenance.

79 Lerner, *Averroes on Plato's Republic*: p. 88.

80 There may be a Hebraicism at work here. The same may be the case for the unusual use of “existence” and “necessity” in the next quote below (in the former' case, I suspect the term in question may be *ha'olam*, literally, “the world”).

“practical arts”, such as ethics or political science, and speculative inquiry, but that it is hierarchical:

“We say: It appears from the case of the practical arts that they were originally established only because of necessity due to ‘the deficiency’ that is incidental to man's existence. His existence would not be possible without them, just as the existence of many of the animals would not be possible but for their peculiarities and natural habits, such as the hexagonal cell of the bee and the weaving of the spider. As for the theoretical part, it appears in physics from its character that its existence in man is not because of necessity but rather for the sake of what is preferable. Whatever exists for the sake of what is preferable is more choiceworthy than whatever exists because of necessity. Hence this part of reason – i.e., the practical – exists necessarily for the sake of the theoretical.”⁸¹

The terminology here might be a bit confusing at first glance, for he does not mean “existence” and “necessity” in the normally philosophical way, but as sublunary life and the pragmatic conditions necessarily arising from it in a manner proper to its cosmological status, respectively. There is another passage of interest a bit later in the text:

“As for the moral virtues, it appears from their case too that they are for the sake of the theoretical intelligibles. [...] The moral virtues are nothing other than that this part of us is aroused toward that which cogitation judges ought to come into being, to the extent that it judges and at the time that it judges. It is evident that this activity belongs to nothing other than the theoretical part of the soul. This being so, it is ‘only’ this part that acquires virtue from the cogitative part. The cogitative part, then, is more truly elevated; it is ‘more’ noble and more choiceworthy.”⁸²

In other words, praxis exists *for* theory, not the other way around. We may employ Taylor to help us understand what precisely why this would be the case for the Commentator:

81 Lerner, *Averroes on Plato's Republic*: pp. 86-87.

“[Averroës] constructed a theory of interpretation which had at its center the absolute primacy of philosophy and its infallible method of demonstration. The highest understanding of God as the creative final cause and the understanding of God's creation can only be had in accord with the assent in which truth is found per se, and that is an understanding only open to the philosopher. It is this understanding, reached through empirical observation of the world and the heavens and arguments concerning motion in physics leading to the assertion of the existence of a single First Mover, that the philosopher can possess and understand. It is the philosopher who studies philosophical psychology and establishes through it that intellectual understanding is an immaterial activity, thereby providing the reasoned grounds – indeed empirical grounds! – for asserting that God's immaterial activity is suitably classified as intellectual understanding or thinking. Thus, science and philosophy in search of the truth have as their end the intellectual apprehension of the principles of the universe leading to the true demonstrative – not dialectical or rhetorical – knowledge of God...

“Metaphysics is the science which carries out this activity of knowing the Creator and of doing so through His creation. Thus, study or investigation (*an-naẓar*) of beings which is itself the most noble of the works to be traced to God and, through those beings, to God as the Creator, constitutes the greatest Sharī'a, that is, the Sharī'a of the philosopher, namely, worship through the study of the metaphysics of beings and of the First Being.”⁸³

By way of additional explanation, we can see a resemblance between the various sciences, practical, moral, and speculative, and the movements of the celestial bodies: in both cases, the drive is always toward the Unmoved Mover via intellection (although in different “mediums”, i.e., the heavens for the celestial bodies, the sublunary realm and the interiority of the human

82 Ibid.: p. 91.

83 Taylor, “Shariah”: p. 11.

being for the sciences). Consequently, any actualization of the lower ranks of sciences is merely a consequence of the actualization of the higher ranks.⁸⁴

Yet, although speculative inquiry is not primarily concerned with the philosopher's conduct, it nevertheless does have a very rigorous effect upon the latter. Also in the text on the *Republic*, Averroës talks about the discipline of the philosopher, writing, “As for the human perfections, nothing [of them] exists by nature save the dispositions alone or the beginnings leading to their [i.e., the perfections] attainment. There is no sure sufficiency in nature that these completions will reach us in their perfection; rather, they reach [us] only through will and skillfulness.”⁸⁵ The question here is whether conduct should be understood as primarily outer or inner. Taylor again provides a good general layout:

“The understanding of the Religious Law itself requires that those who would attain the most complete knowledge of God and His guiding laws be well qualified for the task of employing philosophical study at the theoretical (*an-naẓar*) level at which truth itself about God is the end to be achieved in contrast to the alternative of ignorance and alienation from God. Such a study then is much like an Aristotelian theoretical science in that its end is truth, in contradistinction with practical science which has action as its

84 Having resolved this apparent tension, I do still think there is another one, which is more systematic: it seems to me that such a teleologically-driven understanding of speculative inquiry would require some kind of Platonic-like notion of the mutability of the sublunary realm. If so, how, then, can the Commentator square this hierarchy with his commitment to the eternity of the world? Answering this question is beyond the scope of my current abilities.

85 Lerner, *Averroes on Plato's Republic*: p. 83. I suspect that there is a monopsychist aspect to this, as the passage goes on to say, “This being so, man's perfection and end are to be found in the actions that necessarily result from it [i.e., the soul]” (ibid.: p. 83). Cf. Avempace: “The philosopher must perform numerous [particular] spiritual acts – but not for their own sake – and perform all the intellectual acts for their own sake: the corporeal acts enable him to exist as a human, the [particular] spiritual acts render him more noble, and the intellectual acts render him divine and virtuous. The man of wisdom is therefore necessarily a man who is virtuous and divine. Of every kind of activity, he takes up the best only. He shares with every class of men the best states that characterize them. But he stands alone as the one who performs the most excellent and noblest of actions. When he achieves the final end – that is, when he understands simple essential intellects, which are mentioned in [Aristotle's] *Metaphysics*, *On the Soul*, and *On Sense and the Sensible* – he then becomes one of those intellects. It would be right to call him simply divine. He will be free from the moral sensible qualities, as well as from the high [particular] spiritual qualities: it will be fitting to describe him as a pure divinity” (quoted in

end and productive science which has a product distinct from the agent as its end. And much like the Aristotelian requirements for the person who would attain happiness or fulfilment at the highest level engaged in the contemplative intellectual activity of the most comprehensive and precise sort, here Averroës specifies that natural intelligence and moral virtue as well as religious integrity are necessary elements in the character of those who would be fit to study the books of the ancients for the aid they might give this person's attainment of the theoretical understanding leading 'to the truest knowledge of Him.'⁸⁶

Along these lines, in my view the *Decisive Treatise* seems to posit philosophy and sophistry as the demonstrative versions of the rhetorical-dialectical concepts of piety and impiety, respectively. Consider again the analogy of the physician in V:48-51, wherein Averroës identifies the “health of souls” (*ṣaḥī an-nafūs*) as “piety” (*taq'wā*) and defines the latter as *practical* obedience to the tripartite division of humanity, namely, obeying one's disposition by pursuing the method of assent most appropriate to it and, when necessary, keeping a strict demarcation between the different populations. Both logically and as indicated in V:47 and VI:52-53, piety's opposite, impiety, is the act of violating what is essentially the natural order of society by mingling the methods or disseminating them to the wrong populations, thus leading to factionalism. In particular, the Commentaror identifies the Ash'arī as among the impious:

“They were not with the multitude [i.e., the general public] because their methods were more obscure than the methods shared by the majority. And they were not with the select [i.e., the philosophers] because, if their methods are examined, they are found to fall short of the conditions for demonstration – and that will be grasped after the slightest examination by anyone who is cognizant of the conditions for demonstration. Rather, many of the roots upon which the Asha'rites [sic] base their cognizance are sophistical. For they deny many necessary things, such as the stability of accidents, the

Taylor, Richard C., Averroës, *Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*, Yale University Press, New Haven/London, 2009: p. xxvi).

86 Taylor, “Truth”: p. 4.

influence of some things upon others, the existence of necessary reasons for what is made to occur [i.e., occasionalism], substantial forms, and intermediaries” (VI:53).

Averroës' use of the Greek neologism “sophistical” (*sūfs ṭā'ī*) here is the hint we need to link impiety to sophistry. The image that emerges is that the philosopher is an individual who, by dint of his properly obeying his disposition and thus attaining a *per se* knowledge of affairs, can see clearly the wisdom of the tripartite division of society and obey it accordingly. This is much like Renan's assessment that “que le philosophe seul comprend vraiment la religion,”⁸⁷ but with the practical nuance of *propriety* rather than just the content of the philosopher's knowledge alone.

Moreover, the reasons which the Commentator gives for condemning the Ash'arī indicate that philosophical piety/propriety is as much an inward practice as it is outward: the faulty reasoning of the Ash'arī, which has led them to beliefs that from the perspective of Aristotelianism would be patently absurd, is their inner sin, corresponding to their outer sin of confusing the general public and contributing to factionalism. Thus, although Averroës speaks primarily about the latter, as in V:45, when he explains,

“[I]nterpretation includes two things: the rejection of the apparent sense and the establishing of the interpretation. Thus, if the apparent sense is rejected by someone who is an adept of the apparent sense without the interpretation being established for him, that leads to unbelief if it is about the roots of the Law. So interpretations ought not to be declared to the multitude, nor established in rhetorical or dialectical books – I mean, books in which the statements posited are of these two sorts...”

there is nonetheless two sides to proper interpretation. It might help at this juncture to summarize the Commentator's view on philosophical morality in a syllogistic fashion:

87 Renan, *l'Averroïsme*: p. 128.

- Proper interpretation requires (1) rejection of the apparent sense of a scriptural verse *and* (2) the reasoned establishment of what the interpreter believes to be its inner sense;
- the philosopher does both (1) and (2);
- therefore, the philosopher conducts proper interpretation.

- Moreover, because proper interpretation so defined is true, then improper interpretation is the performance of (1) without (2) or vice versa;
- the sophist does (1) without (2) or vice versa;
- therefore, the sophist conducts improper interpretation.⁸⁸

- Finally, propriety, being as it is the condition of piety, is the quality of conducting a proper interpretation so defined, and likewise, impropriety is the quality of conducting an improper condition so defined;
- the philosopher conducts proper interpretations so defined, whereas the sophist conducts improper interpretations so defined;
- therefore, the philosopher *is* proper, whereas the sophist *is* improper (and hence impious).

All told, we can see precisely how metaphysics can indeed be a religious rite: just as with the ritual daily prayer in Islam, wherein the believer prays as an act of devotion *first*, but in the process of doing so elevates his whole moral being, the practice of metaphysics is likewise about cognizance and drawing closer to the Unmoved Mover *first* – in truth, it is an act of devotion that may even be performed daily like the ritual prayer – and in the process of doing so rectifies the whole ethical and cognitive character of the philosopher.

88 Interestingly, assuming that my syllogistic rendition here is correct, then this implies that there is actually some truth value in the sophist's assertions. The problem lies in their delivery or the purpose to which they are put to the use.

With this established, there are now two issues that should be addressed: how the above might cast more light upon the conduct of philosophers *among each other*, and the relationship between their unique Sharī'a and the general one for the rest of humanity:

Regarding the relations between philosophers, above we attempted to determine the boundaries of the philosophers' policing powers within the total epistemological sociology; what needs to be answered now is how their central planning committee-like arrangement polices itself, or in other words, how would the philosophers anticipate and/or resolve interpretative disagreements between each other? We may presume – again, to draw another analogy to Communism – that just as the Soviet apparatchiks relied upon dialectical materialistic analysis and the Marxist corpus, Averroës' philosophers would rely upon demonstration and the Aristotelian corpus, at least as a way to frame their discussions. Beyond this, we can say nothing more with confidence. In the text on the *Republic*, which would be our best available lead, the Commentator seems particularly fascinated by the issue of copulation between the Guardians,⁸⁹ and he also spends time on their diet, physical regimen, and other physical conditions, as well as their numerical proportion to the rest of society,⁹⁰ but to the best of my knowledge, he says nothing about their conduct with each other. This is a problematic lacuna in the conceptualization of the philosophical Sharī'a, and the only way I can imagine filling it is by recourse to the *Decisive Treatise's* comments on the generational scope of philosophical inquiry:

“[I]t is perhaps obligatory that we start investigating existing things according to the order and manner we have gained from the art of becoming cognizant about demonstrative syllogisms [i.e., by studying the books of the Ancients]. *It is evident, moreover, that this goal is completed for us with respect to existing things only when they are investigated successively by one person after another and when, in doing so, the one coming after makes use of the one having preceded* – along the lines of what occurs in the mathematical sciences. [...] [T]here is not an art among them [i.e., in Islamic communities] that a single person can bring about on his own. *So how can this be done with the art of arts – namely, wisdom?*” (my italics) (II:8)

89 Lerner, *Averroes on Plato's Republic*: pp. 40, 52-57.

We could apply this statement in two equally valid and perhaps mutually reinforcing ways: either (a) at a theoretical level, the philosophers gradually accumulate of *per se* knowledge of the cosmic order and the divine, which also has a positive effect on a practical, i.e., governmental level; and/or (b) at this lower level they simply must hash out the procedures and practices through trial and error, likewise in a manner not too dissimilar from the theoretical arguments they may have about the movement and substance of the celestial spheres or the logical treatises of Aristotle.

Regarding the relationship between the two Sharī'as, the underlying concern here is whether the Commentator is proposing that philosophers owe neither fealty nor respect to the religious law of the other two classes. In the *Tahāfut* he is clear that not only is this *not* the case, but that the opposite is true: the philosopher should not only respect, honor, and even cherish the more general, religious Sharī'a. He writes, "For it belongs to the necessary excellence of a man of learning that he should not despise the doctrines in which he has been brought up, and that he should explain them in the fairest way..."⁹¹ Again, this sounds much like Renan's remark,

"L'homme commence toujours par vivre des croyances générales avant de vivre de sa vie propre, et lors même qu'il est arrivé à une manière plus individuelle de penser, au lieu de mépriser les doctrines dans lesquelles il a été élevé, il doit chercher à les interpréter dans un beau sens. [...] Le sage ne se permet aucune parole contre la religion établie. Il évite toutefois de parler de Dieu à la manière équivoque du vulgaire. L'épicurien, qui cherche à détruire à la fois et la religion et la vertu, mérite la mort."⁹²

However, Renan is missing the fact that Averroës believes this because philosophers can only actualize their faith and accomplish their Sharī'a *via* their fellow believers:

90 Ibid.: pp. 36-37, 41-42, 45-46.

91 Van Den Bergh, *Tahāfut*: p. 360.

92 Renan, *l'Averroïsme*: pp. 128-129.

“[W]e do not find any religion which is not attentive to the needs of the learned, although it is primarily concerned with the things in which the masses participate. *And since the existence of the learned class is only perfected and its full happiness attained by the participation with the class of the masses, the general doctrine is also obligatory for the existence and life of this special class*, both at the time of their youth and growth [...] and when they pass on to attain the excellence which is their distinguishing characteristic” (my italics).⁹³

In the text on the *Republic*, he is even more clear. In the following passage, he rehearses his theory of factionalism from the *Decisive Treatise*, this time emphasizing how unity can only be achieved via the proper alignment of the three classes:

“[T]he equity and justice in the individual soul are identical with the equity and justice in the city. From this it can be seen that the deceit and injustice in the individual soul are identical with the deceit and injustice in the ignorant cities. This is nothing more than when one of these ‘faculties’ that is not fit to rule sets itself up as chief and rules over them, as when the spirited soul or ‘the desiring soul’ rules. The case here is like the case with the body’s health and disease. [...] *[The body/city’s] health consists in its linking up with the cogitative part, and its disease consists in its [i.e., some other part of the soul’s] ruling over [i.e., the cogitative part].* Thus virtue is some kind of health and beauty, and vice is some kind of disease. Just as health is one, so is virtue one. Hence the virtuous city is one” (my italics).⁹⁴

When we consider that the philosopher possesses *per se* knowledge of God via his speculative inquiry in the form of intellectual syllogistic reasoning, then it becomes clear that the “cogitative part” of this rather Hobbesian-like leviathan is the demonstrative class of humanity. Likewise, it is also clear that, as it were, without the body there could be no mind, as there would be no

93 Van Den Bergh, *Tahāfut*: p. 360. This passage seems to me, among other things, also a monopsychist account of social justice (cf. my next citation).

94 Lerner, *Averroes on Plato’s Republic*: p. 56.

interface through which sense impressions could be acquired and cognized. Hence, the other two classes, representing the body, are necessary for the third class' perfection.

There are two other subtleties on this topic. The first is a worry, for one wonders if the policing powers of the philosophers could bring the two Sharī'as into conflict. On paper the tripartite division of society may be harmonious, but in practice it is sure to be discordant, especially when it is first being established. The Commentator does concede in the text on the *Republic* that the “emergence of the virtuous city” will be gradual.⁹⁵ However, as with the important question of how the philosophers might handle their own disagreements, we otherwise do not see any indication about what this long-term process would practically entail. The Averroist is left to devise his own vision here.

The second subtlety is more positive: as I earlier remarked, the pyramidal hierarchy of Averroës' epistemological sociology is essentially the application of Aristotle's distinction between the *per accidens* status of rhetoric and dialectic versus the *per se* status of demonstrations to society. However, the inequality inherent in this system does have a limit: the Commentator also argues that the three classes of humanity are equal insofar as the logical structure of their interpretations are concerned; as he says in the *Kashf*, their knowledges differ only “in the details”.⁹⁶ Moreover, in the *Decisive Treatise*, it is clear that the Muslim Sharī'a is universal: “[W]hen this divine Law of ours called to people by means of these three methods, assent to it was extended to every human being” (III:11).

We should now once more take a moment to consider all of the above vis-à-vis Renan's depiction. I have already addressed two points at which Renan is actually very close to accurate, so what concerns me here is again the question of whether the Aristotelian voice here is also an Islamic one, and I am confident that it is clearly so. In fact, it is tempting to read Averroës to be saying, quite ironically, that rather than being less religious than mainstream believers, on account of their *per se* knowledge of God and the additional burden or responsibility of their unique Sharī'a, philosophers are actually *more* religious. We need not go that far, however. It

95 Ibid.: pp. 101-102.

suffices that he conceptualizes philosophical activity as part and parcel of an intense religiosity. Perhaps the years he dedicated to the elucidation of Aristotle, embodied in his vast output, is testimony to the Commentator's faith.

On another note, were Renan or someone else to question whether the Commentator's use of the term “Sharī'a” is truly religious or just a play on words, the answer here would be similar to how we addressed the issue of measuring the “correctness” of an Ancient, namely, the two Sharī'as are in fact parallel laws that spring from the same soil. Historically-speaking at least, that would certainly be the case in Averroës' eyes, for in another statement in the *Tahāfut* he explains that a philosopher is “under the obligation to choose the best religion of his period, even when they are all equally true for him, and he must believe that the best will be abrogated by the introduction of a still better,”⁹⁷ and for his era, he all but identifies Islam as that better religion: “Therefore the learned who were instructing the people in Alexandria became Muhammedans [sic] when Islam reached them, and the learned in the Roman Empire became Christians when the religion of Jesus was introduced there”.⁹⁸ More generally-speaking, though, when he states that the philosopher should cherish the mainstream Sharī'a, he adds “[the philosopher] should understand that the aim of these doctrines lies in their universal character, not in their particularity...”⁹⁹ In other words, Sharī'a is Sharī'a, with many varieties.

CONCLUSION

To review, what we have seen in the case Averroës makes for his epistemological sociology is not a barrage of abstract *qiyās* with scriptural citations as afterthoughts, as one might expect from a thinker who is being disingenuous about his religiosity, but rather the integration of scriptural citations *into* the syllogistic argumentation. Yet, this is neither a *demonstrative* syllogistic exegesis of scriptural assertions, nor simply behavior consonant with the ostensibly dialectical nature of the *Decisive Treatise*; rather, it is the attribution of philosophical content to

96 Najjar, *Faith and Reason*: p. 37.

97 Van Den Bergh, *Tahāfut*: p. 360.

98 Ibid.: p. 360.

99 Ibid.: p. 360.

scripture itself, and the concomitant placing of scripture at the core of what only appears as dialectical argument but is in fact, if not fully philosophy, certainly philosophical. Similarly, we have seen how this entire argumentation hinges upon a belief in the divine, and how it also entails a multifaceted morality in which philosophical activity in the form of speculative metaphysical inquiry is actually elevated to the rank of religious ritual, entailing a code of conduct with a well-rounded conceptualization of what could be called “sin”. In these aspects, the picture that emerges is a far cry from the purely Aristotelian Averroës of Renan, although it is certainly elitist, as the latter rightly discerned. Renan is also correct that the Commentator is breathtakingly Aristotelian, but I hope that I have sufficiently demonstrated that he is equally Islamic – in sum, that he is an Aristotelian Muslim.

I am now left with the uglier task of evaluating this Aristotelian Islam, both in terms of the personality of the Aristotelian *Muslim*, typified in the Commentator himself, and on that key point which Renan raised, namely, that his logic “mène aux abîmes”.¹⁰⁰ These are fundamentally issues about character – of a society, of a philosopher, and of his system. They are difficult to disentangle while also treating succinctly, so what follows is tentative. Nevertheless, I hope that through these considerations, the reader I might find in Averroës certain lessons, if not also a glimmer of the sublime.

To begin with, one wonders how Averroës can be so confident (and perhaps foolish) as to believe that his sovereign would ever adopt the *Decisive Treatise's* vision of rule by philosophers. Part of the problem in answering this is that we cannot know with confidence the Commentator's precise status within the Almohad Caliphate. “Ibn Rušd [sic] was, no doubt, a member of the caliph’s inner circle,” writes Josep Puig Montada,¹⁰¹ yet “it is obvious [he] was not a member of the [court theologians and jurists] rank of the Almohad hierarchy, but his relationship with them needed clarification.”¹⁰² He enjoyed some kind of special favor with the Almohad Caliphs, particularly with Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf (1135-1184), who was knowledgeable

100 Renan, *l'Averroïsme*: p. 130.

101 Montada, Josep Puig, “Ibn Rušd and the Almohad Context,” *Studies in Jewish History and Culture*, vol. 30 (*Studies in History of Culture and Science: A Tribute to Gad Freudenthal*), Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2011: p. 190.

and respectful of Aristotelian philosophy. According to Madeleine Fletcher, this status may have extended to the point that he may have been given the task of penning the Almohads' official creed.¹⁰³ We need not go this far, however. “The fact that Ibn Rušd was not an official exponent of the Almohad doctrine does not exclude the possibility of his intellectual involvement with it in his writings,” Puig notes.¹⁰⁴ We need only to look at his judicial appointments to Seville and Cordoba, his mandate to write the vast explanations and explorations on the Aristotelian corpus for which he was to become famous, his function as the Caliph's personal physician, and even the fact that he accompanied the Caliph on religious pilgrimages, as evidence of Yūsuf's remarkable affinity for the Commentator. Unfortunately, his stature appears to diminish with the ascent of the Caliph's son, al-Manṣūr (1160-1199), who was a committed Zāhirī. As is well known, Averroës becomes condemned for *kuf*r and is banished to the suburbs of Cordoba (although he is quickly rehabilitated and allowed to pass away in comfort in Marrakesh). Arguments rage over what exactly transpired in the Caliph's court.¹⁰⁵ An innovative interpretation would be that the trial and conviction may have been forced upon al-Manṣūr by the upper ranks of the Caliphate's professional cadre, but that his subsequent exile of Averroës was actually a ploy to save the life of this man whom his father so evidently loved.

More importantly, though, is whether the radicalism of the *Decisive Treatise* played a factor. The answer to that is as yet unknown and probably depends on when the text was actually published. I do not possess the necessary bibliographical and linguistic skills to make a confident pronouncement in this regard. Nevertheless, I would like to offer the following tentative chronological assessment followed by two possible scenarios:

The *Decisive Treatise* must have been written after the *Ḍamīma*, which it mentions, but before the *Kashf*, wherein it is, in turn, mentioned. Yet, as we have already discussed above, the

102 Ibid.: p. 192.

103 Fletcher, Madeleine, trans., “The Doctrine of Divine Unity: The Alhomad Creed,” *Medieval Iberia: readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish sources*, edited by Olivia Remie Constable, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1997: p. 190. See also: Fletcher, Madeleine, “The Almohad Tawhid: Theology Which Relies on Logic,” *Numen*, vol. 38, fasc. 1 (June 1991): pp. 110-127.

104 Puig, “Ibn Rušd and the Almohad Context”: p. 193.

105 For a good summary of the *dramatis personae*, see: Montada, Josep Puig, “Materials on Averroës's Circle,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 51, is. 4 (October 1992): pp. 241-260.

Decisive Treatise might also contain material that ultimately ended up in progressively greater elaborations and refinements in the *Kashf* and the *Tahāfut*.¹⁰⁶ One key to solving this puzzle lies in dating the philosophical case studies, if not also the second phase of the *Decisive Treatise*. Another key may be in dating the *Ḍamīma*. Butterworth finds good reason in the *Ḍamīma*'s style to conclude that the epistle must be addressed to Yūsuf, i.e., before his death in 1184.¹⁰⁷

If the *Decisive Treatise* could be firmly pinned close enough in time to the *Ḍamīma* – and despite the latter's traditional designation as an “appendix” to the *Decisive Treatise*,¹⁰⁸ it is clearly a separate document – then we could say with confidence that Yūsuf is the real intended reader of the *Decisive Treatise*. If so, since Yūsuf would possess both the necessary philosophical knowledge and, perhaps most importantly, a friendly disposition to the Commentator, we could surmise that Averroës might be expecting some receptivity from his sovereign to the proposals coded therein.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the cryptic style of the *Decisive Treatise* could be thus explained as a way to prevent the upper level apparatchiks surrounding the Caliph from discerning the true nature of its message, much like a good poker player hiding his hand but carefully signalling his real intentions to an accomplice on the other side of the table.

The other possibility is that the *Decisive Treatise* was written for al-Manṣūr. Considering the text's double-edged desire to defend the legality of Aristotelian philosophy, *especially* against its maligners and misusers, while simultaneously proposing an entire social policy, the most likely occasion for its publication might have been around the time of-Manṣūr's ascension. One can imagine the Commentator simultaneously fearing for the fate of philosophy under the imminent change-over or freshly-risen regime, yet also smelling a potential opportunity to implement radical social reform. If so, then the intended audience could not be the young Caliph, but rather

106 It does not seem likely that the chronology should be reversed: clearly the *Kashf* comes after the *Decisive Treatise*, and the *Tahāfut* is in the style of his long commentaries (put to polemical use).

107 Butterworth, *Decisive Treatise*: p. xl.

108 Ibid.: pp. xxxix-xl, 51 n. 1.

109 Consider: in the text on the *Republic*, the Commentator states that the terms “philosopher”, “king”, “Lawgiver”, and “Imām” are *synonymous* (although he carefully leaves ambiguous whether the term “prophet” should likewise be embraced) (Lerner, *Averroës on Plato's Republic*: p. 72), and discusses the need for “virtuous kings” to establish the virtuous city (ibid.: pp. 102-103).

hidden philosophical allies within his inner circle or somehow associated with it, although I cannot yet begin to imagine who these individuals might be.

Yet, with both Yūsuf and al-Manṣūr, we can wonder whether Averroës is indeed being foolish: supreme tact would be required for both men, yet he attacks with unrelenting ferocity al-Ghazzali and the Ash'arī – the bedrocks of the Almohad ideology.¹¹⁰ I am personally impressed with his courage in this regard, to the point that the Commentator seems Socratic, but others might see it as misplaced, or worse. However we may judge his strategy's merits or demerits, Averroës is certainly taking big risks in the *Decisive Treatise*. I can envision it two ways: either the Almohad regime brushed off his attacks on al-Ghazzali and the Ash'arī and never caught onto the proposal of rule by philosophers – indeed, perhaps the professional cadre were even content with the less-radical reading of the text, as it could be construed to *favor* their status in the government – and they were simply perturbed by Averroës' general insistence to philosophize; or they were increasingly infuriated by the attack and sniffed out the text's true proposal, and so the *Decisive Treatise* added insult to injury, for now philosophy had become more than just an heretical importation and offense to Islamic decency, but also a threat to the professional cadre's very position in society.

From a systematic point of view, there may have been more direct ways for the Commentator's opponents to attack him. For example, although he is clear in the *Tahāfut* that philosophers can only actualize their faith and accomplish their Sharī'a by being active members of the Islamic community, one would be right to protest that the manner in which Averroës conceptualizes the historical role and value of Islam itself might be, as it were, insufficiently devout. That is because he argues in favor of a concept of religion that is only general and not particular to Islam, and he also fails to provide a sufficient account of Islam's supercessionary claim vis-à-vis other religions – specifically, he does not proclaim its *finality*. In fact, the Commentator very much seems to imply the contrary, namely, that religion as a phenomenon is both larger than any

110 See: Leaman, Olivier and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, part 1 (*Routledge History of World Philosophies*), Routledge, London, 1996: p. 331; Sarioglu, Hüseyin, "Ibn Tūmār," *Medieval Islamic Civilization*, Josef W. Meri, ed., Routledge, London, 2006: p. 375; and Vikør, Knut S., *Between God and the sultan: a history of Islamic law*, C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., India, 2005: p. 117.

of the specific traditions that claim the title, and that the phenomenon shall continue to evolve, perhaps to the point that Islam itself can eventually be superseded.

There is also the very nature of his intellectual project: whether we describe his Aristotelian Islam as the Aristotelianization of Islam, the Islamization of Aristotelianism, their marriage, their integration, or something even more organic – Averroës might prefer to say that they both emerged from the same well-spring, a manifestation of the human species striving to attain its perfection by the intellection of its *telos* in the same manner as the celestial bodies in the starry skies above¹¹¹ – the orthodox might ask: to which are you committing, Averroës, Aristotle or Islam? The *Decisive Treatise* not only fails to dispel this fundamental doubt about his loyalty, but it does the opposite by placing Aristotle and Islam on equal footing methodologically *and* ontologically. We Americans have a saying, *One cannot serve two masters at the same time*, but the Islamic tradition has a much more pointed term: *shirk* – literally, “sharing”, idolatry.

Personally-speaking, I am slightly in agreement to the charge of *shirk*. As a member of a revelation-based religion, although I would strongly sympathize with the notion that reason and scripture ontologically spring from the same soil, I would be inclined to flip their *per se* and *per accidens* statuses, or to propose that scripture has deeper roots in the ultimate. Nevertheless, I again find myself coming to his defense against his interlocutors, for I believe we find in Averroës an excellent lesson that a thinker's religiosity should not be measured by his orthodoxy. This is perhaps the most fundamental error of Renan, to say nothing of the Commentator's enemies and many people today, both secular and religious: the varieties of religious sincerity and expression are vast and defy the easy measure of governmental tastes or popular authority.

That is not to say that his unorthodoxy is not philosophically unassailable. Averroës is vulnerable to the accusation that there is fragmented propositional content in his system. Consider: were it true that the rhetorical statements of the Qur'ān were merely pedagogical devices, it would then be reasonable to wonder: to what exactly are the devout assenting? They assent to **p** only to be told by Averroës that in fact they are really assenting to **p₁**, but then when (and if) they

111 Cf. Lerner, *Averroes on Plato's Republic*: p. 73, n. 61.17.

consciously consent to that, he again informs them that actually it is not really p_1 either, but rather p_2 – if rhetorical devices are supposed to be pedagogical tools, then this is truly a confusing education. Meanwhile, he seems to have lost sight of the fact that the everyday person assents simply to bodily resurrection, *not* to incorporeality (to say nothing of the personal deity of scripture as opposed to the impersonal mechanism of the Unmoved Mover); quite understandably, this person might be bemused, if not enraged to discover that all along it has been really the latter. What of the promise of an afterlife in which all this life's many miseries and injustices are finally redressed, and where lost loved ones are eternally reunited? Is it all to come to nothing?

This leads me to concede to Renan that we find Averroës repeatedly overestimating the convincing power of his arguments and underestimating the emotional aspects to assent. For one, the Commentator has followed his “second teacher” al-Farabi too closely by relegating religion to the status of a political science – indeed, he says so in the *Tahāfut*: “In short, the philosophers believe that religious laws are necessary political arts, the principles of which are taken from natural reason and inspiration, especially in what is common to all religions, although religions differ here more or less.”¹¹² Again, this is not the deal that most people sign up for when they declare their faith in a religion, and they would be resistant to it. Not only this, but I wonder whether Averroës made a critical miscalculation regarding the power of self-interest. I shall use his own logic to explain what I mean: although those who possess the truth *per accidens* may be naturally inclined to consider the opinion of those who possess it *per se* as more accurate, they may nonetheless be in no way inclined to cede authority to them, especially if they stand to lose some perceived status or profit by doing so. Speaking as a journalist, I could recount innumerable occasions in which policy-makers with a *per accidens* understanding of a situation – and very often not even that much of an understanding – overruled, suppressed or otherwise ignored the views of the experts with a *per se* understanding.

Finally, the Commentator's religiosity is impressive in its elegance and coherence, but as his own tripartite division of society can be taken to mean, it is not a religiosity most people can (or

112 Van Den Bergh, *Tahāfut*: p. 360.

should) live by. I have often wondered whether even Averroës himself could live by it. The impression he gives is of an overly cerebral man – until we hear him in the *Kashf* recite Q. LXXXIIX:5, “And [We] made the night as a garment and the day a livelihood,” only to sigh, “This is one of the most beautiful metaphors.”¹¹³ We might therefore do well to re-conceptualize his epistemological sociology less as a rigid hierarchy and more like a ladder that people can ascend and descend, perhaps depending on their age and experience – with the rhetorical equivalent to childhood, the dialectical to young adulthood, and the demonstrative to aged maturity¹¹⁴ – or, perhaps they go up and down multiple times within a space of a lifetime. What truly captures my imagination is wondering whether, had we more textual sources, we could see this in the Commentator's own biography: I can imagine that at the end of his life, after his persecution, exile, and the burning of his books, confronted with his approaching death and the seeming impotency of his intellectual legacy, Averroës may have needed the rhetorical and dialectical aspects of his faith just as much as the demonstrative.

Word Count: 24,437

113 Najjar, *Faith and Reason*: p. 82.

114 Would the ancient thus return to the rhetorical?

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ABSTRACT

Much of the allure of Averroës (1126 - 1198), if not also a root cause of his persistent fame, lies in the puzzle presented by his system of thought, particularly his beliefs with regards to the doctrines of mainstream or orthodox religion. Was he a sincere and devout Muslim, or was he a radical Aristotelian with only a superficial connection to the Islamic tradition, as it were, an arch-rationalist hiding in Muslim clothing? The influential French Orientalist Ernest Renan (1823 - 1892) appears to lean toward the latter in his groundbreaking studies, *Averroès et l'averroïsme* (1852) and “L’islamisme et la science” (1883), which had a profound impact upon academic discourse about Averroës and his intellectual “successors” in Medieval and Renaissance Scholasticism. Unfortunately for Renan and many of those who came after him, a close reading of the Arabic Averroës as opposed to just his Latin “ghost” reveals that he was in fact a serious and committed Muslim. I shall endeavor to provide a more accurate account of his religiosity by demonstrating in a dual analytical and intertextual fashion the following: the centrality of (a) the Qur’ān and (b) God in his epistemological sociology, and (c) his view that there is a “Sharī’a specific to the philosophers”, a Sharī’a that he certainly took to mean religiously, as opposed to a merely metaphorical sense. My case study shall be the *Decisive Treatise*, which K.U. Leuven Visiting Professor Richard C. Taylor has described as the “theoretical foundation” of Averroës’ system, and which was not available to Renan at the time of the latter’s research. Therein Averroës identifies philosophical content in scripture, and in particular, uses the Qur’ānic verse Q. III:7 as the foundation of his argument for a tripartite division of humanity; he likewise hinges the supremacy of the philosophers within this tripartite division upon their *per se* cognizance of God (albeit understood as an Aristotelian Prime or Unmoved Mover); and finally, that his conception of a religious law uniquely suited for philosophers is not at the expense of mainstream Islamic Sharī’a (albeit he does not seem to consider Islam as the intrinsically “best” or “truest” religion as much as the most recent in an ongoing religious evolution). The task at hand is not overthrowing Renan’s depiction but to rectify it according to presently available textual evidence. Moreover, I hope my research here is useful as a lesson against measuring the extent of a thinker’s religiosity by his orthodoxy, which I believe was the mistake committed by Renan.