



AVERROES AND THE OPINIONS COMMON TO ALL
PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS
OR
WHAT NO ONE CAN IGNORE

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[for publication details, see end]

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to Muhsin Mahdi's careful reflections published almost four decades ago on the three treatises presented by Marcus Joseph Müller as *Philosophie und Theologie von Averroes*, we now know that the *Decisive Treatise* is the central work of this collection, while the small treatise known as the *Ḍamīma* or *Appendix* or even as *The Question the Shaikh Abū al-Walīd Mentioned in the Decisive Treatise* deserves to be considered as the *Epistle Dedicatory* to both the *Decisive Treatise* and to its sequel, the *Kashf ʿan Manāhij al-Adilla fī ʿAqā'id al-Milla* (Uncovering the Pathways to the Meanings in the Dogmas of the Religious Community).¹ Much has been written on the *Decisive Treatise* since it was first published by Müller almost a century and a half ago. Moreover, it has been translated twice into German, English, and Italian, three or four times into French, as well as once into Spanish, and Turkish. Even though this work was translated into Hebrew during the Middle Ages, it seems never to have been translated into Latin. My forthcoming translation of the text will bring the number of English translations up to that of the French ones.²

¹ See Muhsin S. Mahdi, "Averroës on Divine Law and Human Wisdom," in *Ancients and Moderns: Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss*, ed. Joseph Cropsey (New York: Basic Books, 1964), pp. 114-131. Müller's edition was published in *Monumenta Saecularia, Königlichen Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, I Classe, vol. 3 (Munich: 1859).

² For the German translations, see Marcus Joseph Müller, *Philosophie und Theologie von Averroes* (Munich: 1875) and Max Horten, *Texte zu dem Streite zwischen Glauben und Wissen im Islam* (Bonn, 1913). Léon Gauthier published three versions of his translation, the first and second of which are quite different: see "Accord de la religion et de la philosophie, traduit et annoté," in *Recueil de mémoires et de textes, publiés en l'honneur du XIVème Congrès des Orientalistes* (Algiers: 1905); *Averroès, Traité décisif (Faḍl al-Maqāl) sur l'accord de la religion et de la philosophie, suivi de l'appendice (Ḍamīma)* (Algiers: Éditions Carbonel, 1942); then in 1948, another edition of the 1942 text was published in Algiers by Carbonel with a few changes and corrections. More recently, Marc Geoffroy

There are still differences of opinions among the various translators and students of the *Decisive Treatise* about the basic structure of the work. Although most everyone agrees that it opens with a brief introduction, opinions diverge after that. Alonso and Hourani divide the rest of the work into three parts or chapters, whereas all the others see it as consisting of two.³

has published yet another French translation; see *Le Livre du Discours Décisif, Introduction par Alain De Libera, Traduction inédite, notes et dossier par Marc Geoffroy* (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1996). In addition to M. Jamil ur-Rehman's *The Philosophy and Theology of Averroes* (Baroda: 1921), there is the well-known English translation of George F. Hourani, *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy, A Translation, with Introduction and Notes, of Ibn Rushd's Kitāb Faṣl al-Maqāl, with its Appendix (Damīma) and an Extract from Kitāb al-Kashf ‘an Manāhij al-Adilla* (London: Luzac, 1976). The work has been translated into Italian by Massimo Campanini under the title *Averroè, Il trattato decisivo, sull'accordo della religione con la filosofia, introduzione, traduzione e note di testo arabo a fronte* (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1994) and by Francesca Lucchetta under the title *Averroè, L'accordo della Legge divina con la filosofia* (Genoa: Marietti, 1994). It has been translated into Spanish by Manuel Alonso under the title *Teología de Averroes* (Madrid-Granada: 1947). For an account of the Hebrew translation, see Norman Golb, "The Hebrew Translation of Averroes' *Faṣl al-Maqāl*," in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 25 (1956), pp. 91-113 and 26 (1957), pp. 41-64. In *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, Hourani indicates that he can find no evidence of the *Decisive Treatise* ever having been translated into Latin and also notes that neither Renan nor Munk was aware of the work at the time they wrote their own studies of Averroes (p. 41 and n. 8).

My translation of the *Decisive Treatise* as well as of the *Epistle Dedicatory* or *The Question Mentioned by the Shaykh Abū al-Walīd* will be published shortly in the Islamic Text Series by Brigham Young University Press under the title: *Averroes, The Book of the Decisive Treatise, Determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom*. The translation is based on Muhsin Mahdi's revised version of Hourani's edition of the Arabic text, *Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Kitāb Faṣl al-Maqāl* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959).

³ In his introduction to Geoffroy's translation, Alain De Libera, presents the work as consisting of three parts without an introduction. These three parts correspond to those into which Hourani divided the text.

Against all sense of the argument, or so it seems to me, Alonso and Hourani start the second part or chapter of their division in the middle of Averroes's exposition of the harmony between demonstration and the Law with respect to defending the beliefs central to the Muslim community as such.⁴ As I see it, a division more in keeping with the structure of the argument would bring those first two parts or chapters under one large heading focused on the perspective to be followed if one is to proceed according to the constraints of reflection based on the Law. Here Averroes, in addition to drawing inferences from the Law to indicate the need for the study of philosophy and logic, defends the teachings of the philosophers from the misguided attacks of Alghazali and other dialectical theologians. This part of the treatise ends with an explicit, formal summary that explains the preceding argument and culminates in an apology by Averroes for

⁴ Even on this point, however, there is a minor difference between them with respect to one or two sentences. Hourani begins what he deems to be Chapter Two of the text at page 7, lines 8-9 of Müller's 1859 edition of the text (*Philosophie und Theologie von Averroes*), while Alonso begins what he terms Part Two of the text with the phrase that follows immediately thereafter, namely, page 7, lines 9-10 of that edition; see Hourani, *Harmony*, p. 50 and Alonso, *Teología*, p. 162. With respect to my forthcoming English translation of the *Decisive Treatise*, Hourani's beginning phrase corresponds to its Section 12: "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." Alonso's, on the other hand, corresponds to the beginning of its Section 13: "Since this is so, if demonstrative reflection leads to any manner of cognizance about any existing thing, that existing thing cannot escape either being passed over in silence in the Law or being made cognizant in it." The term translated as "Law" here is *sharī'a*. Whether *sharī'a* is always to be considered as divine law may be debated, for it is found in this text modified by the adjective *ilāhiyya* - namely, "divine"; see, below, the passage cited at n. 9 - and may also be accorded the adjective *ilāhiyya* as well as the adjective *islāmiyya* (Islamic). Yet because it is surely other than conventional law and must differ from natural or canonical law, both of which can perfectly well be rendered in Arabic, I use capitalization when translating or referring to it in order to indicate its peculiar status. Still, however *sharī'a* is to be understood as law, translating it as "religion" or "theology" will not work.

breaking his own strictures against discussing such questions in a writing intended for the general public, that is, a popular writing.

Although the argument of this first part of the treatise admits a further division into two complementary sub-parts, that distinction need not concern us here.⁵ Of more immediate interest is the second part of the treatise where Averroes examines the intentions of the Law and the Law-giver as well as of the methods used in the Law for speaking to all the people. It continues with Averroes's explanation that ignorance of these methods has caused factions to arise within Islam and his attempt to show how they can be avoided. The treatise concludes with a promise by Averroes to pursue these questions in more detail, a cursory acknowledgment that part of the harm befalling the Law has come from those associated with philosophy, and a final indication - by way of a formal expression of gratitude to his sovereign - of the importance of political life for human beings.

THE TITLE

As it has come down to us, the full title of this work is: *Book of the Decisive Treatise and Determination of the Connection between the Law and Wisdom* (Kitāb Faṣl al-Maqāl wa Taqrīr mā bayn al-Sharī'a wa al-Ḥikma min al-Ittiṣāl). Even though each word of this title merits careful attention - starting with the issue of whether the work is properly a "book" (*kitāb*) or merely a "speech" (*qawl*), as Averroes himself refers to it in the sequel or third part of this trilogy, that is, the *Kashf 'an Manāhij al-*

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- ⁵ Thus, I understand the text to be divided as follows:
- A. Introduction (¶ 1, 1:1-9)
 - B. Part One (¶¶ 2-37, 1:10-18:19)
 1. Philosophy and logic are obligatory (¶¶ 2-10, 1:10-6:14)
 2. Demonstration and the Law accord (¶¶ 11-36, 6:14-18:14)
 3. Summary (¶ 37, 18:14-19)
 - C. Part Two (¶¶ 38-60, 18:19-26:14)
 1. The Law's intent and its methods (¶¶ 38-51, 18:19-23:18)
 2. On factions within Islam (¶¶ 52-58, 23:19-25:19)
 3. Conclusion (¶¶ 59-60, 25:20-26:14).

Here and in the references that follow, section numbers refer to those in my forthcoming English translation of the text while page and line numbers refer to Müller's edition.

*Adilla fī 'Aqā'id al-Milla*⁶ - here we will focus only on three: "decisive" (*faṣl*), "determination" (*taqrīr*), and "connection" (*ittiṣāl*). A deeper appreciation of these three words is essential for expounding the topic that is the subject - and the title - of this essay.

In rendering *faṣl* as "decisive," scholars have seized upon the second meaning of the first form of the verb *faṣala*, *yafṣilu*: to make a decisive judgment in the sense of putting an end to something - to a controversy, a discussion, even a legal dispute. The first meaning of the first form of the verb - that is, to separate - does not seem relevant to the general argument of the work. Indeed, the second meaning with its legal overtones or echoes reminds us of what one of the scribes who copied the manuscript first discerned so clearly. It was surely the scribe, after all, and not Averroes himself who opened the treatise with the phrase: "the jurist, imam, judge, and uniquely learned . . . Ibn Rushd . . . said." Acting as a judge or even as a philosophical jurist of sorts, Averroes sets out here to give a judgment that will put an end to the discussion (*maqāl*) that has been going on far too long about philosophy, the aim or intention of the philosophers, and the purpose or intention of the Law. The intention (*maqṣad*) of the philosophers "in their books," Averroes tells us the first time he uses this term, is "the very intention to which the Law urges us." Thus anyone possessed of certain natural qualities and acquired habits - to be precise,

⁶ In the opening lines of this work, Averroes declares: "Praise be to God, who chooses whomever He wishes for His wisdom, grants them to understand His Law and to follow His tradition, apprizes them so as to make clear to them - with respect to His hidden knowledge, the understanding of His revelation, and the intention of the message of His prophet to His creation - the deviation of those from among the people of His religious community who deviate and the distortion of those in His nation who undermine, and discloses to them that some interpretation is not permitted by God or His prophet; and complete prayers to Him for the one entrusted with His revelation, for the seal of His messengers, and for his kinfolk and his family. Now prior to this we have indeed explained, in a speech we set apart, the congruence of wisdom and Legislating as well as the Law's commanding that." See Müller, 27:5-11. As noted above, the term translated here as "Law" is *sharī'a*. The one translated as "Legislating" is *shar'*. Note also, for what follows with respect to *ittiṣāl* (connection), that the term translated here as "congruence" is *muṭābiqa*.

"innate intelligence" (*dhakā' al-fiṭra*) plus "Law-based justice and moral virtue" (*al-ʿadāla al-sharʿiyya wa al-faḍīla al-khalaqīyya*) - should not be prevented from reflecting on the books of the philosophers, for they lead to what the Law urges, namely, true cognizance of God. The benefit to be obtained from these books attaches to them necessarily, whereas the harm that befalls those who go astray is accidental.⁷ Because Averroes is so firm about the need to permit philosophical reflection and insists upon the way its intention accords with the intention of the Law, we can properly understand this as a work meant to cut off or put an end to the earlier controversy, a work setting forth a decisive judgment on it.

Throughout the first part of this work, Averroes returns to the theme of determination (*taqrīr*) by indicating over and over that a particular point has been determined, that is, settled and is thus worthy of being accepted without question.⁸ He does so invariably as a means of summarizing an argument just advanced and setting it forth now as something no longer to be disputed. The highest point of these different determinations comes just after the argument about the accord between the intention of the philosophers and the intention of the Law and links the whole Muslim community to the goal of gaining cognizance of God, this by Averroes's explanation of the different ways each kind of human being can assent to the intention of the Law:

Since all of this has been determined; and we, the Muslim community, believe that this divine Law of ours is true and is the one alerting to, and calling for, this happiness which is cognizance of God, Mighty and Magnificent, and of His creation; therefore, that is

⁷ See *Decisive Treatise*, ¶ 10, 5:12-6:14. Note the five causes or reasons Averroes enumerates here as leading someone to "go astray in reflection and stumble," namely, "a deficiency in his innate disposition, poor ordering of his reflection, being overwhelmed by his passions, not finding a teacher to guide him to an understanding of what is in them, or . . . a combination of all or more than one of these reasons." These causes or reasons thus indicate that error comes not from reflection itself, and certainly not from the books of the philosophers, but from things having nothing to do with those works per se.

⁸ See *Decisive Treatise* ¶¶ 3 (2:9-12), 5 (3:13-19), 11 (6:15-7:6), and 29 (16:1-4) - each of which begins with a variation of "since it has been determined" or "if it has been determined" - as well as, less directly, 8 (4:8-5:7), 15 (8:15-9:17), and 16 (9:18-10:16).

determined for every Muslim in accordance with the method of assent his temperament and nature require.⁹

In this sense, the determination to which the title alludes is a summarizing, even a recasting, of the arguments set forth very early in the work - arguments calling for amplification and nuance, as well as defense - that occupy Averroes in the fuller exposition. The idea of determining something or noting that it has been determined also evokes an image of judicial procedure and thus reenforces that juridical or even legal aspect of this treatise. At the same time, by the way he notes that something has already been determined or starts from the premise that another consequence follows from the first affirmation having been determined, Averroes indicates how important logic and its rules are to the reflection based on Law that is carried out here.

The task Averroes sets for himself in this treatise is to show why the connection (*iṭṭiṣāl*) between wisdom or philosophy and the Law must be awareness, recognition, or cognizance of God. Such awareness or cognizance is achieved by the one who uses the finest kind of intellectual syllogistic reasoning, that is, demonstration. And the one who uses this kind of reasoning is the philosopher. What leads Averroes to reach a conclusion like this is reflection upon the way the Law commands the pursuit of philosophy and consideration of how best to engage in the philosophic quest for wisdom:

Since the Law has urged cognizance of God, may He be exalted, and of all of the things existing through Him by means of demonstration; and it is preferable or even necessary that anyone who wants to know God, may He be blessed and exalted, and all of the existing things by means of demonstration set out first to know the kinds of demonstrations, their conditions, and in what [way] demonstrative syllogistic reasoning differs from dialectical, rhetorical, and sophistical syllogistic reasoning; and that is not possible unless, prior to that, he sets out to become cognizant of what unqualified syllogistic reasoning is, how many kinds of it there are, and which of them is syllogistic reasoning and which not; and that is not possible either unless, prior to that, he sets out to become cognizant of the parts of which syllogistic reasoning is composed - I mean, the premises and their kinds; therefore, the one who has faith in the Law and follows its command to reflect upon existing things perhaps

⁹ See *Decisive Treatise* ¶ 11, 6:15-18.

comes under the obligation to set out, before reflecting, to become cognizant of these things whose status with respect to reflection is that of tools to work.¹⁰

What is more, such investigation is consonant with the habits and customs of the community that strives to follow the divine guidance accorded it. It is, moreover, perfectly in keeping with what the jurists themselves do - at least when they are thoughtful about how they pursue their art:

For just as the jurist infers from the command to obtain juridical understanding of the statutes the obligation to become cognizant of the kinds of juridical syllogistic reasoning and which of them is syllogistic reasoning and which not, so, too, is it obligatory for the one cognizant [of God] to infer from the command to reflect upon the beings the obligation to become cognizant of intellectual syllogistic reasoning and its kinds. Nay, it is even more fitting that he do so, for if the jurist infers from His statement, may He be exalted, "Consider, you who have sight," the obligation to become cognizant of juridical syllogistic reasoning, then how much more fitting is it that the one cognizant of God infer from that the obligation to become cognizant of intellectual syllogistic reasoning.

Now the connection itself is quite straightforward and is derived from consideration of the factors assisting good governance (*tadbīr* or even *ḥukūma*) as well as of its ends. Differently stated, both the Law and philosophy - whether philosophy be wisdom (*ḥikma*) simply or, more appropriately, the love thereof and the search for it - show how the populace might be regulated so as to live more fully, even more happily. Though not lawgivers in any ordinary sense and certainly usually not entrusted with rule, it is the philosophers alone who understand in what sense the one who brings the Law is a physician capable of curing souls. They understand - at times, or so it seems, even better than the jurists - how this Law-giver seeks to improve the health of the citizens as well as to ward away sicknesses that might befall them or the polity.¹¹

Before turning to the key question, that concerning the

¹⁰ For this and the following quotation, see *Decisive Treatise* ¶ 4. The reference in the second quotation is from Quran 59:2.

¹¹ See *Decisive Treatise*, ¶ 48, 22:8-18.

opinions common to all philosophical investigations, it might not be amiss to consider momentarily the relationship between wisdom (*ḥikma*) and philosophy (*falsafa*). First, despite the fact that they have much in common, almost to the point of appearing to be identical, they are actually quite distinct. They appear to be so much the same because wisdom is what philosophy is intent upon achieving. Wisdom, then, is the culmination of philosophic investigation. But precisely insofar as it represents the end - the completion - of philosophic investigation, wisdom cannot be the same as philosophy. Indeed, philosophy thrives, even stands or falls, on the notion that wisdom has not yet been achieved. Once achieved, once grasped to one's bosom intact, the search - the activity of philosophy - would be at an end. Yet it is precisely the pursuit of wisdom that serves to safeguard what little is known from those who claim to have knowledge but are either deceived or deceiving.

Philosophy resembles wisdom as well in that those adept in philosophy are wise, most of the time at least. Even here, however, the two must be distinguished. The philosophers are wise insofar as they know or are aware of what they ignore. Still, awareness of ignorance is hardly knowledge to be praised. In this sense, wisdom - full understanding of the beings that surround us and eventually of the principle that keeps the whole universe together - greatly surpasses the toilsome task of striving to achieve such understanding. It does so, that is, as long as it can be preserved against false pretenders. To say more would, however, take us away from the immediate subject.

WHAT NO ONE CAN IGNORE

In speaking of the opinions common to all philosophical investigations or of what no one can ignore, I have in mind the matters Averroes identifies when he speaks about the kind of error for which there is no excuse. There is no excuse for error because, as he puts it so adamantly and yet so elliptically, "all the sorts of methods of indications steer to cognizance of" these things.¹² Differently stated, these are things we must be aware of or must recognize because everything that leads to awareness of something or to recognition or cognizance of it points to these things. What, then, might these things be? Averroes offers three, but these - as he readily admits - are merely offered by way of example: "affirmation of [the existence of] God, Blessed and Exalted, of the prophetic missions, and of happiness in the hereafter and misery in the hereafter." Yet it is precisely on these questions that debate and controversy have

¹² See *Decisive Treatise*, ¶ 26, 14:18-19: "allatī tufḍī jamī' aṣnāf ṭuruq al-dalā'il ilā ma'rifatihā."

turned since at least the advent of prophecy.

This astounding claim - one concerning opinions or awareness al-Ghazālī would never have attributed to the philosophers - is presented within the larger context of Averroes's attempt to prove that the conclusions of demonstrative reasoning are in accord with the Law (§§ 11-36, 6:14-18:14). It starts from a determination posited by Averroes to the effect that the divine Law of Islam is true and calls for awareness or cognizance of God. He goes on to explain that such an appeal can be made by the divine Law insofar as each person has a means of assenting thereto in accordance with his or her nature, that is, his or her intellectual capability. One sign or indication of such an appeal being reasonable is the tradition about the prophet of Islam having been sent to "the red and the black," in other words, to all human beings. Another is the Quranic injunction that he use different forms of speech for calling individuals with different levels of understanding to the way of the Lord (Quran 16:125). Indeed, such provision has been made to insure assent that only those who obstinately and unreasonably deny or those deprived by bad habits of understanding or the ways to it can possibly escape assent (§ 11, 6:14-7:6). Note that in both instances, the fault lies with the denier alone. Averroes either fails to think of those who are mentally incompetent by nature or means to intimate that they can somehow be reached by one of the three ways mentioned in the Quranic verse.

Yet what most concerns Averroes (and us) is not the mentally incompetent but the mentally gifted, the philosopher. Thus, on the basis of the principle that truth does not contradict truth, he urges that "demonstrative reflection does not lead to differing with what is set down in the Law" (see § 12, 7:7-9) and then to the need for interpretation when the apparent sense of the Law comes into conflict with the conclusions to which this kind of reflection leads (§ 13, 7:10-18). The propositions are carefully couched in terms likely to appeal to a jurist, and Averroes is quick to point out that jurists themselves frequently engage in interpretation. His point is quite straightforward:

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 intellectuated with what is transmitted. 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 close to bearing witness, to that interpretation.¹³

The need for interpretation is even more pronounced when we reflect upon "utterances of the Law" that need not be taken in their apparent sense at all, utterances that admit of an inner sense. This, too, accords with the principles set forth thus far by Averroes:

The reason an apparent and an 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 in it 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".¹⁴

Though Averroes reaches this part of his argument by appealing to what Muslims have agreed to over time, to a consensus that has existed among them, he is only too aware of the objections that

¹³ See *Decisive Treatise*, ¶ 14, 7:20-8:7.

¹⁴ See *Decisive Treatise*, ¶ 14, 8:11-14. The reference is to Quran 3:7, and the whole verse reads:

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 in it; everything is from our Lord." And none heeds but those who are mindful.

The distinction between the fixed verses (*āyāt muḥkamāt*) and those that resemble one another (*mutashābihāt*) is that the former admit of no interpretation, whereas the latter are somewhat ambiguous or open-ended and do admit of interpretation - the question being, interpretation to what end? Traditionally, there has been some question as to where the clause explaining who "knows their interpretation" ends. Some hold that it ends after "God," so that the remainder of the verse reads: "And those well-grounded in science say: 'We believe in it . . .'" Others, like Averroes, hold that it reads as presented here.

can be made to arguments based on such grounds. Thus he quickly reminds the reader of the limits that must be placed on consensus as concerns theoretical matters. The only reason he brings up the issue of consensus is that it appears as though al-Ghazālī has accused Alfarabi and Avicenna of unbelief for going against consensus with respect to the eternity of the world, God's knowledge of particulars, and resurrection as well as the life to come. The charge is easily refuted, for Averroes can show that al-Ghazālī is both inconsistent in his accusations (§ 16, 9:18-10:6) and that he does not pay sufficient attention to the liberty accorded "those well-grounded in science" in the Quranic verse just cited. Here, Averroes's reasoning seems flawless:

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 along with the science of interpretation. Those faithful not adept in science are people whose faith in them 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. Since that is the case, it is not possible for an exhaustive consensus to be determined with respect to the interpretations by which God particularly characterized the learned. This is self-evident to any one who is fair-minded.¹⁵

In the course of defending Alfarabi and Avicenna against these accusations, Averroes is at some pains to identify them as peripatetics or followers of Aristotle. He seems to do so in order to distinguish them from the dialectical theologians with respect to the question of the pre-existence of the world, that is, whether time in the past is limited or not. Aristotle and his followers discern no limit to past or future time, whereas Plato and his followers - and even the dialectical theologians - deem past time to be limited. Here Averroes can point to a

¹⁵ See *Decisive Treatise*, § 16, 10:6-16.

Quranic verse to support the Aristotelian position.¹⁶

Still, the question of past and future time is a recondite matter concerning which error may easily arise and may thus be excused:

Now what judge is greater than the one who makes judgments 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.¹⁷

Though responsible for reflecting upon these matters, they have no sure way to attain truth and are thus excused for falling into error. But there is no excuse for erring when the subject at hand may be apprehended by anyone, when everything points to what all must be aware of - namely, the existence of the creator, prophets, and happiness and misery beyond the present. These are not recondite matters, but roots or principles of the Law.¹⁸

The context in which Averroes arrives at this conclusion is, however, of major significance. It is one in which he seeks to show why it is permissible, even necessary, to interpret the Law. To make that argument palatable, he must show that the Law is not self-evident and why it cannot be so and he must indicate the limits to claiming that the Law is not self-evident. The discussion itself can arise only from the perspective of the Law, from the perspective Averroes set for himself at the very beginning of the treatise when he acknowledged that his goal was to investigate from the perspective of reflection based upon the Law (*al-gharaḍ fī hādhā al-qawl an nafḥaṣ ‘alā jihat al-naẓar al-shar‘ī*). To be sure, such questions can be raised only within that perspective. But they are questions one must pursue further. However ready one may be to admit a happiness to come, for example, merely admitting it does not explain what it is.

For this reason, surely, Averroes returns to the question of happiness and insists on the need to interpret what the Law has to say about it as well as on the error of al-Ghazālī and others

¹⁶ See *Decisive Treatise*, ¶ 18, 12:9-14 for the discussion of the distinction between Plato and Aristotle and ¶ 21, 13:4-12 for the suggestion that Aristotle's position is buttressed by the Quran, 11:7.

¹⁷ See *Decisive Treatise*, ¶ 23, 14:2-5.

¹⁸ See *Decisive Treatise*, ¶ 26, 14:18-15:8.

who seek to blame the philosophers for investigating happiness.¹⁹ Not the philosophers, but the dialectical theologians and jurists, have harmed religion. The former have sought to understand the roots of the Law, whereas the latter have been too quick to define and delimit matters that require more careful investigation. They fail to recognize the need to allow those firmly grounded in science the freedom to probe for what is not evident. They also seem not to recognize that in pursuing such questions the philosophers have given a clear sign of accepting the opinions common to all, that is, the things that no one can ignore. Precisely because those things are common to all, further investigation of them must be limited to those with uncommon understanding and discussion of that investigation must be similarly restricted. This, too, is a root or principle of the Law.

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¹⁹ See *Decisive Treatise*, ¶¶ 32-34, 16:20-17:14.

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