

Prophetic Parables and Philosophic Falsehoods

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In memoriam

The writings of Aristotle's teacher Plato are in parables and hard to understand. One can dispense with them, for the writings of Aristotle suffice and we need not occupy [our attention] with writings of earlier [philosophers].¹

So writes Maimonides to Ibn Tibbon, the translator of the *Guide of the Perplexed* into Hebrew. Aristotle's works, he says, are 'the roots and foundations of all work on the sciences' and all that preceded him were (as indeed Aristotle himself saw them) conducive to him and superseded by him. Indeed, Plato was read — even when directly and not mediated by commentaries and epitomes — through Aristotle. Alfarabi, conspicuously, writes his *Agreement of Plato and Aristotle*. But even those who recognized the difference between them still understood Plato in essential respects as an Aristotelian. This is nowhere as evident — and as distorting — as in the Aristotelization of Plato's epistemology. But more on this presently.

On the other hand, it is commonplace that Platonic political philosophy, with its clear normative orientation, was much more congenial to religious thought than Aristotle's rather more descriptive and analytical approach. The prophet, Moses or Muhammad,² is he who establishes the political order divinely sanctioned and henceforth entrusted to the religious establishment. And so it is that here, by contrast, Aristotle is unwittingly assimilated to Plato, to the extent that Averroes in his *Commentary on the Republic* can confidently present Plato's political philosophy as doing duty for Aristotle's, which he did not know first-hand.³

In Christianity, this Platonization of political thought is made more difficult by Jesus' dissociation of religion from political power: 'Render unto Caesar the

¹ Letter of Maimonides to Samuel Ibn Tibbon. Cf. S. Pines, 'Introduction to Moses Maimonides', *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Chicago, 1963, lix.

² Certainly for Avicenna; the case of Averroes is disputed. But their normative orientation is clear.

³ Cf. *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's 'Republic'*, I i 8, ed. and tr. E.I.J. Rosenthal, Cambridge, 1956, 112.

things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's'.⁴ In his *Civitas Dei*, Augustine was weaving together two originally separate strands: political order and religious revelation. Even when sacred doctrine is called upon to regulate political order, the very distinction between temporal and religious power emphasizes the original non-political nature of Christian dogma. It was this tradition that Thomas More was upholding, albeit in a somewhat novel way, when he made a firm stand on his distinction between what he owed his king and what he owed his conscience. But in Judaism and in Islam, political order and revelation are related from their very beginnings — rather more theoretically in later Judaism, more effectively in Islam throughout its history. The thirteenth-century controversy between the Augustinian Giles of Rome and the Dominican John of Paris over the secular power of the Church⁵ would have been hardly intelligible in the medieval Muslim world.

Historians of medieval political thought will dismiss as irrelevant the question whether the Plato Arabicus (or, for that matter, the Plato Hebraeus) was indeed the Plato of the dialogues. What matters to them is Plato as he was perceived and transmitted via Aristotelian-neoplatonic filters, the Plato who left his mark on political philosophy. Nevertheless, there is a valid interest, I think, in setting the record straight. Not to taunt Averroes or Maimonides for not having understood Plato correctly and for not having been able to tell him apart from Aristotle. We ourselves are still learning how to do it — and are still failing, often quite miserably. Rather, our purpose is to be able more accurately to gauge the distance that separates their understanding of Plato from our own. And, conversely, we should sharpen our own sensitivity to the Aristotelian features in our Plato, who is so different, yet so hard to distinguish, from the Plato of our medieval inheritance.

Let us start with a minor point. Alfarabi, for example, and, following him, Avicenna, Averroes, Maimonides, each in his own way, draw from Plato support for their art of double writing: exoteric meaning for the masses, esoteric philosophy for the capable. Did not Plato himself endorse it, rather recommend it, in the *Laws* and even earlier in the *Republic*? Philosophical truth is at best inadequate for the morally and intellectually child-like masses who are incapable of understanding it, at worst dangerous to those who would be content with a little learning and draw false conclusions from ill-construed premises. But Plato was

⁴ Matthew 22:21. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II ii, q. 10, art. 10 c: 'Divine law which is the law of grace, does not do away with human law which is the law of natural reason ... In strictly civil matters [it is necessary] to obey the secular rather than the spiritual authority'.

⁵ Cf. Giles of Rome (Aegidius Romanus), *On Ecclesiastical Power (De ecclesiastica potestate)*, tr. J. Sheerin, and John of Paris, *On Kingly and Papal Power (De potestate regia et papali)*, tr. E.L. Fortin, in R. Lerner and M. Mahdi edd., *Medieval Political Philosophy*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1963.

well aware that any serious political-educational view cannot overlook the masses. The salvation of the soul may require nothing less than fully reasoned knowledge, but for political order right opinion based on conviction or coercion must suffice. Moreover, reason, although natural, will not develop unless it is carefully nurtured. And it must develop from, and be fed on, something less than the full truth. But whatever is less than the truth is, to that extent, a lie.

Taking their cue from Plato, the *falāsifa* stressed the necessity of lying to the masses, for their own good. Averroes, for example, writes:

Just as it is only the doctor who administers the drug, so it is the king in the exercise of rulership who employs a lie towards the masses. For lying tales are necessary for the education of the citizens. There is no lawgiver who does not employ fictitious tales, because this is necessary for the masses if they are to attain happiness.⁶

In a simple and straightforward way, all myths are false. But Plato's myths are not all of the same ilk: some, like the myth of Boreas in the *Phaedrus*, can be understood, rightly or wrongly, as allegories; some are pleasant literary or didactic alternatives to rational argument, like Protagoras' myth in the dialogue named after him. Such too is the case of the 'noble falsehoods' (or 'noble lies' as they are commonly but misleadingly referred to) about the three metals, the mating lottery, and so many others.⁷ All these can be translated into non-mythical language without difficulty and with little remainder. But a great many Platonic myths cannot be so easily spirited away. Such are, for example, the story of the ring of Gyges in the second book of the *Republic* or the myth of Er in the tenth.⁸ The first is more like a *Gedankenexperiment* while the second puts a heavy strain on our credulity. Neither can be straightforwardly referred to a non-mythical counterpart. However, their truth or falsehood is not dependent on the literal state-of-affairs they purport to describe but on the moral claim they convey. The story about the ring which would confer invisibility on its wearer is false because — in the use it is put to in the dialogue — it does not recognize any motives for human action other than purely empirical and psychological ones. By contrast, Er's alleged report from the underworld, to which we shall have to return later, stresses the transcendental responsibility of the soul over and above its social and psychological determination.

Yet those who are to be educated through myths, precisely because they need them, are incapable of grasping their epistemic status and will take them, as expected, for the literal truth. They will be reared to believe in them for their practical consequences, but will take in their purported factual content at face value. Macy saw the problem clearly, through medieval eyes: 'The problem in the

⁶ *Commentary on the 'Republic'*, I xii 6 p. 129. Cf. Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness (Tahṣīl al-sa'āda)* IV 59, p. 45 Mahdi, in Lerner and Mahdi (n. 5), 79.

⁷ *Phaedrus* 229c, *Protagoras* 320d ff., *Republic* 414b ff., 460a ff.

⁸ *Republic* 339d ff., 614b ff.

Laws is how those who were educated on noble lies will by their own efforts begin to perceive the horizon which exists outside those lies'.⁹

In the *Decisive Treatise*, Averroes had an answer ready, evidently of Platonic origin: the revealed Law contains 'apparent meanings that contradict each other', and to that extent it seems not to be the full truth (although in that book, written from a religious perspective, Averroes himself refrained from going this far). Those contradictions, one must stress, are apparent only and their purpose is 'to draw attention of those who are *well-grounded in science* [iii,7] to the interpretation that reconciles them'.¹⁰

One might refer Averroes' answer to Plato's three fingers in the *Republic*, or indeed to any of the examples of recollection Plato supplies us with. We are spurred to look for supra-sensible, ideal realities because to the senses the same finger appears large and small, the same sticks and stones appear equal and unequal, the same object appears beautiful and ugly.¹¹ But also the agreement between Averroes and Plato is only apparent, or at least deficient. Averroes calls for an (external) *interpretation* to reconcile the contradiction, which will then disappear. In Plato, however, the contradictions of the senses are not reconciled; rather, they are left standing and the senses are recognized as deficient precisely because they involve contradictions. In fact, a special, weakened Principle of Non-contradiction is hypothesized specifically in order to preserve the unity of such entities as entail contradictions of a certain sort, namely, not at the same time and/or not in the same respect.¹²

Plato's own answer is to be sought in the *Republic*, and even earlier in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. There, *doxa* and *episteme* are described as *continuous*. Knowledge and opinion are not different because of their sources — and I am prepared to claim, not even because of their different objects (although this is how he came to be understood, even to our days) — but because *episteme* is *reasoned* opinion (fettered by the *logos*, Plato said in the *Meno*). There are two elements in Plato's concept of knowledge, both equally essential: (i) knowledge is *adequatio*, i.e., it is the apprehension of what is as it is; (ii) knowledge entails the capability of giving a *logos*. *Adequatio* without *logos* is not sufficient; the philosopher who returns to the cave adequately recognizes the shadows of jus-

⁹ J. Macy, *A Study in Medieval Jewish and Arabic Political Philosophy*, Ph.D. thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1982, 225 n. 26.

¹⁰ Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise, Determining what the Connection is between Religion and Philosophy* (*Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl*), p. 8 Müller, tr. G. F. Hourani, in Lerner and Mahdi (n. 5), 170.

¹¹ *Republic* 523c ff., *Phaedo* 72e ff., *Symposium* 221a.

¹² *Republic* 436b. Cf. my 'Il Parmenide di Platone: Prolegomini ad una re-interpretazione', *Symbolon* I, 1984: *Momenti e Problemi di Storia del Platonismo*, 9-36.

tice for what they are, but he would not be able fully to *know* them because, being what they are, they are not fully susceptible of *logos*.

Plato's philosophical method is not deductive but, as we learn from the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, as well as from later dialogues, hypothetical. The hypothetical method, explicitly derived from the forerunner of the geometrical method of analysis, finds reasons for what we suppose, or believe, to be true. And what we believe to be true, the point where the *Meno* and the other dialogues ultimately take a firm stand, is not so much a positive content as the conviction that there is a real difference between truth and falsehood, that man is not the measure of all things. That this conviction is well grounded, we cannot be certain until we reach the unhypothetical beginning. But the beginning comes at the end of the philosophical process. Unlike Descartes and the medieval philosophers, Plato's philosophy is not a tower built on secure foundations laid down first but a vault held together by its keystone, which comes last. With Plato we never know what the truth is until we reach the unhypothetical beginning (if we ever do).¹³

Compare Plato's concept of knowledge with Alfarabi's and his followers': for the Arab philosopher, knowledge is 'to have the essences, as they really are, imprinted in man's soul'.¹⁴ In Alfarabi's concept, ultimately deriving from Aristotle's definition of truth, the capability of giving a *logos* ceases to be essential to (the definition of) knowledge — at least explicitly. Knowledge is *adequatio intellectus ad re*. There is, no doubt, an important difference between truth as apprehended by imagination and truth as apprehended by the intellect. Only the latter is knowledge properly speaking; knowledge must be of 'the essences, as they really are', i.e. in their intelligibility.

But knowledge in the strict sense, for Alfarabi and Averroes, is deductive knowledge, or demonstration.¹⁵ Demonstrative knowledge advances from premises independently known to be true to conclusions which derive their truth-value from their premises. In demonstrative knowledge, however, as understood since late Antiquity, once the consequence is attained, it is immediately detached from its premises. Aristotle himself may sometimes be understood as sanctioning this step; at least on one possible interpretation, he takes it in his discussion of the practical syllogism, although not in the *Analytics*. But with

¹³ Cf. my 'Hypothetical method and rationality in Plato', *Kant-Studien* 66, 1975, 157-62.

¹⁴ Cf. Alfarabi, *The Letter concerning the Intellect (Risālah fi-l-'aql)* But contrast Algazel's stoicizing definition: 'Knowledge comprises the concept, which is apprehended by definition, and the assertion or judgement, which is apprehended by proof' (*Deliverance from Error (al-Munqidh min al-dalāl)*), tr. W.M. Watt, *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*², edd. A. Hyman and J.J. Walsh, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Co., 1986, 272).

¹⁵ Cf. *Decisive Treatise*, ch. 1, Hyman and Walsh (n. 14), 298.

Plato, so long as one does not arrive at the unhypothetical beginning, no deduction can shed its hypothetical form. In the hypothetical procedure, the premises draw their strength from the conclusions: we (hypothetically) adopt the premises because we believe the conclusion.¹⁶ For Aristotle, however, the first premises are known by intuition and it is the truth of that intuition which validates the conclusions drawn by demonstration. And here the Arab philosophers followed Aristotle.¹⁷ Were it not so, revelation could not give true knowledge. True knowledge is a *vera imago*, and its veracity can be attested in a number of ways, not the least of which is divine provenience (or the Active Intellect, if at all distinct from God). If, and when, a (philosophical) *logos* is sought for, it is *for the sake* of true knowledge. But true knowledge is itself independent of the *logos*.

Thus, medieval knowledge is static: it is the *having* of truth, irrespective of the process by which it is arrived at. Even when it is maintained that truth can be fully attained only by philosophy, as Alfarabi and Avempace thought, its value is still independent of the philosophical process that led to it. Alfarabi's simile is telling:

As every citizen of the city does what is entrusted to him — either by knowing it on his own or by being guided and induced to it by the ruler — he acquires, by these actions, the good states of the soul, just as by continued practice in good writing a man acquires excellence in the art of writing, which is a state of the soul; and the more he continues practicing, the more firm his excellence in writing becomes, the greater the pleasure he takes in the resulting state, and the stronger the delight of his soul in that state.¹⁸

The processes are evaluated by their efficacy in bringing man to the good state of the soul, and it is only the latter which has value in itself.

If Rosenthal is right, 'The Falāsifa in so far as one can treat them as a group took their stand on Islam and its law and attempted a philosophical justification and explanation of their faith'.¹⁹ *Falsafa* is always religious philosophy. Indeed,

¹⁶ See, e.g., *Meno* 81b-d, 86b, and cf. my 'Hypothetical method...' (n. 13).

¹⁷ Cf. S. Pines, Translator's Introduction to Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Chicago, 1963, lxxxiii: 'As al-Fārābī points out in the same treatise [*On the Intellect (Risāla fil-'aql)*], pp. 8-9 Bouyges], the intellect with which Aristotle is concerned in the *Book of Demonstrations* [= *The Posterior Analytics*] is the psychic faculty that enables man to obtain certain knowledge of true general and necessary premises not by means of thought and reasoning but either because of his inborn disposition (i.e., a priori knowledge), or from his youth onwards, or without being aware in what way he acquired this knowledge. These premises constitute the principles of the speculative sciences'.

¹⁸ Alfarabi, *The Political Regime (al-Siyāsāt al-madaniyya)*, p. 51 Najjar, tr. R.M. Najjar, in Lerner and Mahdi (n. 5), 37.

¹⁹ E.I.J. Rosenthal, 'Observations on the philosophical theory of prophecy', *Studia Semitica*, Cambridge, 1971, II, 137.

thus Averroes characterizes it, in the beginning of *The Decisive Treatise*: 'If the activity of philosophy is nothing more than study of existing beings and reflection on them as indications of the Artisan, etc.'²⁰ Averroes is admittedly arguing here for the religious value of philosophy; nevertheless, to that extent, for him as also for other Muslim philosophers, revelation guarantees the conclusion independently of rational deduction. But even if we do not follow Rosenthal, and grant the *falāsifa* more radically heterodox views, knowledge is still valued independently of the way by which it is arrived at, be there one way only or more than one. This is possible only because, once achieved, demonstrative knowledge is cut loose from its origins.

A small misunderstanding will suffice for Latin Christianity to impute to Averroes the doctrine of double truth. Unjust as this accusation may have been, Averroes seems to have recognized two truths, at least insofar as their origins are concerned — but these truths were identical to each other: 'Truth does not oppose truth', says Averroes, 'but accords with it and bears witness to it'.²¹ In fact, it is the same truth arrived at by two different routes. Plato could never have said this, since for Plato truth can never be separated from its *logos*.

This uneasy duality is seldom totally absent from medieval Muslim (and Jewish) thought, always demanding attention. It remains in Avicenna and, at least in some interpretations, also in Averroes. It can be resolved only by essentially equating *shari'a* with philosophy (Avempace may have done it) or by elevating philosophy above revelation (as ultimately did Alfarabi and, possibly, on another interpretation, Averroes), or else by restricting the specificity of revelation to the one content which cannot be derived from reason: the distinction between necessary and contingent being (as I believe Maimonides did).²²

For Plato, the homogeneity of *doxa* and *episteme* makes it possible, even mandatory, to pass from the one to the other. But so long as the chain of *logoi* does not reach the unhypothetical beginning there is no real *episteme*. Plato's divination of the reason is *not* a consequence of emanation: the provenance of the hypotheses to be examined is immaterial. There is a primordial vision of the ideas, but it is not enough. One has to *return* to that vision, not start from it. Truth for Plato is *re-cognition* of what is given to *all* men, although admittedly not all men can recognize it. Therefore, education in Plato is the development of reason as gradual *clarification* of semi-rational emotions and opinions. In Plato

²⁰ *The Decisive Treatise*, p.1 Hourani; Lerner and Mahdi (n. 5), 165.

²¹ Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise*, 7 Müller; Lerner and Mahdi (n. 5), 169. Cf. *Analitica Priora* I 32, 47a8-9; but Aristotle is concerned with the reduction of syllogisms to the first figure, not with two disparate sources of knowledge.

²² Cf. my 'Maimonide et le Dieu des philosophes: Observations sur l'aristotélisation de la morale biblique', *Individu et société: L'influence d'Aristote dans le monde méditerranéen*, ed. T. Zarcone, Istanbul and Paris, 1988, 77-82.

reason finds itself; in medieval philosophy it finds God, even if he be the God of the philosophers.

Faced with the choice between misrule and rule 'from without', Plato was bound to choose the latter:

Not that we agree with the opinion Thrasymachus had of the governed, and suppose that the slave ought to be ruled to his hurt, but we think that it is better for every man to be ruled by divinity and insight (ὑπὸ θεοῦ καὶ φρονίμου). It is best, of course, when he possesses that within him, but if he does not, it had better be put over him from without, and that all men, being guided by the same principle, will be equals and friends as far as may be.²³

For the *falāsifa* too, divine rationality is the best ruler. But also when divine reason is prior, or perhaps even identical to divine will — as, for example, with Averroes and Maimonides — obedience is prized *per se*. Alfarabi's *imam* of the virtuous city and Avempace's solitary man may be exceptions, insofar as their union with the Active Intellect is a necessary outcome of Prophetic parables and their intellectual development.²⁴ But for Averroes in *The Decisive Treatise*, philosophical understanding is itself the fulfillment of the Law, and for Maimonides the distinction between the Necessary Being and contingent beings can be attained only by submission to His will. Hence the importance, minimized but nevertheless essential, of the rule from without. Even when rationally understood and acquiesced in, obedience remains the only way of acknowledging the *will* of God.

While even for the Muslim and Jewish philosophers obedience is the highest achievement (with exceptions such as those just mentioned), for the Greeks it is never valuable in itself. It is always a provisional step (which may never be outgrown), leading to a further goal. It is only to be expected that the Greeks, lacking a concept of will,²⁵ would have the same word for obedience and for persuasion.

True, if one follows the curriculum of the *Republic* (and of the *Laws*) one can see that reason has to be instilled from an early age and, as the early dialogues show us, only those who already have a philosophical predisposition will take Socrates' point. On the other hand, rationality is not granted; it will not appear of itself. It must be gradually developed out of the irrational and the semi-rational elements of the soul. Knowledge can be formed only from opinions, and virtue

²³ *Republic* 590d.

²⁴ Alfarabi (n. 18), p. 48 ff. Najjar, in Lerner and Mahdi (n. 5), 36 ff.; Avempace (Ibn Bājjā), *The Governance of the Solitary* (*Tadbīr al-mutawāḥḥid*), tr. Lawrence Berman, in Lerner and Mahdi (n. 5), 123 ff.

²⁵ Cf. A. Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, Berkeley, 1982; C.H. Kahn, 'Discovering the Will: From Aristotle to Augustine', *The Question of 'Eclecticism'*, J.M. Dillon and A.A. Long ed., Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, 234-59.

as knowledge can come only out of habituation and the unconscious possession of a virtuous character. Plato's educational system is devised to bring up his citizens to rejoice in reason, even in its lowest forms: regular movements, popular virtue, harmony and truthful myths. It is an attempt to instill a commitment to reason whose roots go deep into the unconscious and the irrational, from where reason is eventually to arise. But it will not arise if it is not carefully nurtured. The value of philosophy as a life of reason cannot be proved; any philosophical argument presumes it is acknowledged beforehand.

In the same way, it seems, the Active Intellect will not emanate onto one who is not prepared. This emanation, however, is still an imprinting 'from without'; reason does not 'emerge' as in Plato, from its lower forms, but develops towards its union with Actuality. The Active Intellect was required in the *De anima* by Aristotle's ontological priority of actuality over potentiality. Neoplatonic interpretation would hypostatize it and hand it down to the Middle Ages as an unequivocally separate existent.

But is not the prophetic state — like the Platonic — ultimately derived from and aimed at the supreme Good? What is then the difference?

As one learns from the *Symposium* and the *Republic*, for Plato the social framework is *expressive* of man's transcendent interests. In agreement with the modern communitarians,²⁶ Plato maintained that man's deepest interests are not independent of society. But unlike them, Plato did not consider socially dependent interests as *defined* within the social framework but as an expression of interests which are ultimately transcendent. In the *Republic*, the state is not the consequence of a compromise or a compact, as Glaucon set forth as *advocatus diaboli*; it is an expression (albeit embryonic) of man's interests, which of their own nature transcend the individual. As in the *Symposium*, where transcendence is essential to *eros* in *all* its forms, so in the *Republic* there is a continuity between man's most basic drives and his highest aspirations: laws and social arrangements are only rungs in the scale of the beautiful²⁷ or of the good.

Insofar, then, for Plato the highest good is implied in the original state of man. Man's transcendence is towards his own φύσις. It is *natural*, only nature is lifted by Plato out of the empirical plane and displaced towards the ideas. But nature it is, nonetheless. In this sense Platonic transcendence may be termed 'natural' or 'ontologized' transcendence.

By contrast, in medieval Muslim and Jewish thought the social framework is conducive to the highest good, but not expressive of it. The state is insufficient in itself to care for the transcendent interests of man. These are not implied in man's original state; they are revealed to him, even when they are not opposed to his nature. (Again, Alfarabi may be a special case.) There is an implicit dis-

²⁶ Cf., e.g., M.J. Sandel ed., *Liberalism and Its Critics*, New York, 1984.

²⁷ Cf. *Symposium* 211-212; and my *Plato's Metaphysics of Education*, London, 1988, 146 n. 5.

inction between human and divine law. 'The prophet must be a philosopher, but he must be more than that to fulfill the basic demands of the religious law.' This distinction becomes fully spelled out with Avicenna and Averroes, who deny the emanational character of Muhammad's prophecy. In this they are followed by Maimonides with respect to Moses.²⁸

In Maimonides, as in Averroes, one can distinguish between the *political* value of the law (issuing ultimately from reason) and its strictly *religious* value (issuing from the will of God). Human law cares for the good order of the state, avoiding injustice as best as possible, thus creating the conditions which would facilitate the attainment of political happiness. The divine law is not only concerned with man's needs but aims at giving him insight into the true nature of reality, and especially into the nature of God as far as humanly possible.²⁹

The political content of the law has from the start the guarantee of revelation, although, as with Alfarabi and Maimonides, for example, it is not strictly *dependent* on revelation and may be attained also by philosophy. The philosopher is heir to the prophet in knowledge of God and in the act of legislation that follows upon it. But his knowledge is derivative or partial: unlike the prophet, he has no direct contact with the *will* of God.

In his Commentary on the *Republic*, Averroes curtly dismisses the final myth as not adding anything of importance to the argument of the book. It is not only that he belittles myth in comparison with what he construes as deductive arguments. The moral of the myth of Er the son of Armenios is to him totally unacceptable.

The myth of Er in the tenth book of the *Republic* makes quite clear that life according to unphilosophical virtue is no more than moral luck. The first soul to choose its new life, according to the myth, was of someone 'who had come from heaven and had lived in his former life in a well-ordered city and had participated in virtue by habit and not by philosophy', and that soul chose 'the mightiest of the tyrannies, from folly and greed' (619b8-d1). That man was fortunate enough to have lived in a just city and to have had good habits and right opinions put into him. For his just life he was justly rewarded. He was also fortunate that he had never been faced with a temptation greater than his fortitude. But it could have happened. The unphilosophical just man lives in perpetual moral danger. Education based on opinion, even on right opinion, is incomplete and imperfect. Circumstances will change, virtuous states will degenerate, and people's opinions and characters will change with them. And those who were

²⁸ Rosenthal (n. 19) II, 136. See also Rosenthal, 'Sendungsprophetie und natürliche Prophetie', *Griechische Erde in der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie der Mittelalters*, esp. 5 ff.; 'Maimonides' conception of state and society', *Moses Maimonides*, ed. I. Epstein, London, 1935, 189-206. Cf. J. Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, tr. D.W. Silverman, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964, 174.

²⁹ Rosenthal (n. 19) I, 316, 'Torah and *nómos* in medieval Jewish philosophy'.

model citizens in one state could well end up, in different circumstances, as moral monsters.³⁰

That first soul in the myth of Er is not punished for not having achieved theoretical excellence as such, nor because of what it did or did not, but because of what it *might* have done, owing to its not being able to give a *logos* to its beliefs. This intrinsic inferiority of unreasoned opinion may have been partly recognized by those medieval philosophers who openly or covertly rated philosophical understanding higher than unreasoned obedience to the Law. But even for such philosophers, who rate revelation as epistemically inferior, it is still a guarantee of happiness, even if in an lesser degree. But for Plato *doxa* is always subject to moral luck.

In the *Politicus*, having resigned ourselves to not finding the true King, we are all walking a narrow path on the verge of a moral precipice. Were it not for the laws which have proved over the generations to secure a measure of order and stability within soul and city, we might have behaved differently. Therefore, in the state of the *Politicus* we are all transcendently culpable. For Plato, we can achieve some moral and political order without the ultimate theoretical insight (do we ever attain it?). But this is never enough. Moral frailty is inherent in the state of the *Politicus* and of the *Laws* — even when the state is headed by the true statesman. Being continuous with the highest good, Platonic political order is *not* self-sufficient. There is no independent realm of inter-personal relations which is adequately regulated in its own terms. There is no cleavage between political and moral-theoretical virtue. The theoretical desire is active already in the primordial social setting and the process of education toward the highest virtue is the process of clarification of the individual's desires and emotions.

Not so for the Muslim and Jewish philosophers discussed above. For them, the distance between the unphilosophical believer and the philosopher is measured in theoretical terms alone. But on purely moral-political terms, inasmuch as virtue itself is concerned, and for some also inasmuch as happiness is in question, they are equal,³¹ and their recompense, however understood, is in any case proportional to their virtue.

For Plato too, political success is possible, on the purely empirical level, without theoretical excellence. But it is inherently deficient, regardless of its factual consequences. These are not to be taken as criteria of man's *eudaimonia* any more than his subjective well-being. But the acceptance of the revealed Law guarantees by itself happiness, whether to a degree or equally for all. The lack of *logos* does not imperil the virtue and happiness of the unphilosophical believer; at most it puts them at a lower degree than the philosopher's theoretical excel-

³⁰ Cf. Plato's *Metaphysics of Education*, 110.

³¹ Cf. Rosenthal (n. 19) II, 138: 'Since religion and philosophy teach one and the same truth, prophecy ensures the happiness of all even though the degree of intellectual perception may differ from person to person'.

lence. The moral-political realm is not *constituted* by the *logos*. Moral and political virtues are, in an important sense, instrumental, not only in political terms but also as preparing the ground for theoretical knowledge. On the other hand, being guaranteed by revelation, they are valuable on their own terms. They will facilitate theoretical virtue, they may even be a necessary condition of it. But in themselves they do not always necessarily require it. Insofar as theoretical virtue is demanded by the Law, it does not emerge out of the political order but rather the political order is so contrived as to serve it.

The unphilosophical believer deserves, for some — full happiness, for others — a restricted degree of happiness commensurable with his understanding and insofar as he does the right thing, i.e. conforms to the will of God.³² But for Plato, right behaviour and right opinion do not entail happiness (except political happiness), since they *could* have been otherwise. The Platonic unphilosophical man, were he to choose his own life, might not have done it right; that he lived a virtuous life was not *his* doing.

Plato's epistemological continuum from myths and parables to unreflected opinion to the giving of a *logos* and up to the unhypothetical beginning makes it possible to escape from the falsehoods of the cave towards the true light. But it also denies any independent value to the intermediate steps: until the Good itself is attained all else is opinion. Whatever interim solutions we may devise will be inherently deficient and, as such, always at risk. To the unphilosophical believer submission to the will of God gives complete assurance of at least a modicum of *eudaimonia*, insofar as it instills in the believer good behaviour and true (although unreasoned) opinions. But that Plato could not promise. Reason must develop out of itself. And since there is no external target to be met, since there is no attainment valuable in itself independently of the process leading to it, salvation can never come from without.

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³² Cf., e.g., Alfarabi (n. 18), pp. 51-2 Najjar; Avicenna, *Healing: Metaphysics (al-Shifā': al-Ilāhiyyāt)* X 5, p. 451 Anawati, in Lerner and Mahdi (n. 5), 107.