Averroes once spoke very sharply about al-Ghazzali, even going so far as to accuse him of changing allegiances to suit the occasion or, as we might say, of trying to be all things to all people. However, appropriate the accusation may have been in that controversy, it inevitably comes back to haunt its author whenever the secondary literature about his thought is considered. Indeed, were Averroes to be judged solely on the basis of the secondary literature, he would necessarily be found guilty of having completely succeeded in doing that of which he accused al-Ghazzali. The extent to which the secondary literature accuses Averroes of having tried to be all things to all people is especially evident in the scholarly debates about whether he should be considered more a disciple of Aristotle or of Neo-Platonic thought, as well as in the great controversy about his religious standing—i.e., whether he is to be charged among these faithful to the tenets of Islam or among the infidel.

Behind these controversies lie questions of major significance to students of Islamic philosophy, but heretofore arguments that Averroes was primarily an Aristotelian have been largely limited to the well-known fact that he commented very extensively on most of Aristotle's works and highly praised the Stagirite for his acute perception. Consequently, little attention has been given to the fact that Averroes saw nothing inconsistent in his attempt to complete his statement about politics by writing a commentary on Plato's Republic rather than on Aristotle's Politics.

Precisely, because he considered a kind of harmony to exist between Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and Plato's Republic, a harmony similar to the one existing between Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and his Politics, the claims that Averroes may have been more partial to one of the two Greek philosophers or to a particular second interpretation of them become less important than an investigation of how he thought it possible to harmonize these authors and books. Similarly, now that more is known about the logical writings of Averroes and his concern about speaking in different ways to different people is more thoroughly recognized, the arguments about his standing as a Muslim must give way to deeper questions about his thoughts concerning the relation between religion and politics. In his logical writings Averroes explained that the reason for the distinctions in speech was his awareness of the importance of speech to political community, as well as his awareness that preservation of the political community was an essential requisite for decent human life. Consequently, it is necessary to wonder whether these works heretofore most consulted by scholars to determine his religious orthodoxy (i.e., The Disputation and The Destruction of the Destruction) are representative of his deepest thoughts on religion (or, more precisely, on the relation between reason and revelation) or whether they have a more limited and specifically political goal. By his own admission, these works were addressed to a general audience and used arguments appropriate to such an audience. The question of his religious orthodoxy thus depends on a better appreciation of his understanding of the way in which religion is taught to a people and how it affects political life.

It appears, then, that previous scholarly concerns really require a better understanding of why Averroes thought the political community to be essential to decent human life. They also seem to point to the question of what way he thought it should be ordered to bring about such an end, as well as how he thought the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato were in agreement about these issues. His most explicit political writings (the Commentaries on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and the Commentary on Plato's Republic) not only raise these issues; by their very subject matter they promise to clarify them.

According to Averroes, his Commentaries on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics presents his teaching about the first or theoretical part of politics, and his Commentary on Plato's Republic presents his teaching about the second or practical part. When introducing the reader to the second, and admittedly more public, part of this teaching, Averroes explained the reason why he divided his political teaching into two parts. Although politics is to be classed among the practical sciences because of the nature of its subject matter and basic principles, as well as because of the nature of its end, there is a somewhat theoretical part of politics. That somewhat theoretical part is concerned with the general issues on which individual political actions are based, just as other practical arts have a somewhat theoretical side in addition to their simply practical function. For Averroes, medicine was the best example of this mixture of theory and practice in explicitly practical arts. Once the general view of the subject matter and basic principles of politics was presented, it was possible to understand how politics might be practiced, i.e., what should be done so that the end discovered in the theoretical part of the science could be brought about in fact. What these general remarks mean for an understanding of the political thought of Averroes can best be determined by taking a closer look at his description of that theoretical part of politics.

Although quite faithful to the order of Aristotle's book, Averroes' Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics is much more explicitly political than Aristotle's text. This more explicitly political teaching was presented by subtle changes in the emphasis of Aristotle's argument. For example, when
Aristotle argued that the hierarchy which one can discern in arts, inquiries, practical pursuits, and choices insofar as each aims at some end suggests that all things aim at some end and that the end which would be most able to control other ends would be most desirable. Averroës concurred. Similarly, Averroës agreed with Aristotle’s conditional argument about politics being the art which furnishes the end most desirable for its own sake. The argument for both was that if the political art orders all the activities pursued in a city, and if all activities seek some end, the political art must order all the other activities in such a way as to bring about a greater and more desirable end than any one of them might be able to bring about. However, this very agreement provides the grounds for the beginning of a basic disagreement. Whereas Aristotle subsequently remained silent about the political implications of that conditional argument and concentrated his efforts upon the search for the most desirable end, Averroës refused to allow those political implications to remain silent implicitly. Thus, he insisted throughout his commentary that the major purpose of the speech about ethics was governance of the city in general and, more specifically, the good to be sought in such governance.

In a similar manner, he followed Aristotle’s method in searching for a determination of the most desirable end, or happiness, but was much more explicit than Aristotle when confessing the limits imposed upon this particular quest by the context in which it took place—i.e., a political or practical context. Thus, when Aristotle mentioned the tentativeness of such a study and cautioned the reader against expecting too much in the way of demonstrable answers, Averroës emphasized the limits of the inquiry even more strongly and told the reader where a fuller discussion of the subject could be found. That is, he explained that a fuller discussion of the most desirable end belonged to an inquiry as theoretical as logic or first philosophy, i.e., metaphysics.

Unlike Aristotle, Averroës explicitly stated the reasons why the problems connected with ultimate happiness could not be fully examined in this book on moral habits: this book has a practical goal and therefore contains logical premises which are more general and less demonstrable than those used in explicitly theoretical books; any student of the logical art was expected to recognize the necessary limitations on practical art and thus to understand the limits of this book. In general, then, Averroës seized upon the political character of Aristotle’s ethical teaching and ordered his comments around that political character. At one point, he even went so far as to insist, despite Aristotle’s silence on the matter, that what was under discussion in the treatise was nothing less than the most noble art: that of ruling a city.

Averroës’ loquacity about things concerning which Aristotle was silent must be contrasted with his silence about things concerning which Aristotle was laconic. For instance, despite numerous references by Aristotle to the divine character of happiness, Averroës never seized the opportunity to speak about the happiness peculiar to citizens in a community enlightened by revealed religion, nor did he mention the happiness of the life to come. In fact, when Aristotle spoke about the opinions men held about whether happiness was something which must extend beyond death and treated the subject as something which was a matter of utter speculation, Averroës treated the matter in the very same way. Even more surprising to a reader who might expect Averroës to have been intent on pointing out how Islamic teaching altered Aristotle’s ideas is that Averroës made no attempt to go beyond Aristotle’s thoughts about whether the actions of the living could affect the happiness of the dead. Instead, he commented on Aristotle’s reasons and suggested their correctness solely on the basis of what is known to unassisted human reason. Nowhere in his Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics is there evidence that Averroës believed it necessary to modify Aristotle’s general statements about happiness in the light of anything peculiar to his time or place. In short, Averroës presented his comments as though addressed to a man who wanted to know about the highest, practical questions he might consider when trying to decide how to rule a city.

Differently stated, for Averroës the theoretical part of politics was supposed to teach that political rule should be directed to the happiness of the citizens, and it contained some general indications of what the elements of that happiness might be. That happiness was apparently a happiness of this life alone. More importantly, as presented in the theoretical part of politics, happiness seemed to be a result of training and to be directed to practice. It was no more a happiness of intellectual development than it was the happiness of another life. Thus, even though it was admitted that intellectual happiness or contemplation might be the highest kind of happiness, the book containing the presentation of the theoretical part of politics limited the presentation of happiness to a discussion of the kind of happiness attainable by most people: the discussion of contemplative happiness was explicitly assigned to another book, just as the discussion of how to bring about the kind of happiness attainable by most people was assigned to another book. If anything, Averroës was much more emphatic about excluding a consideration of contemplative happiness from the theoretical statement of politics than he was about excluding a consideration of the happiness permanent to the other life. Whereas his ideas about the latter kind of happiness can be gathered only from whatever significance is attached to his silence about the matter, he explicitly relegated the discussion of contemplative happiness to other kinds of discussion.

Similar instances of unexpected loquacity and silence occur in the discussion devoted to Aristotle’s views about natural law. Although Averroës followed the basic thread of Aristotle’s explanations, even to the extent of agreeing that sacrifices represented conventional aspects of justice, he said nothing to
suggest that natural law might have some affinity to divine law. More importantly, Avemarri's completely overlooked Aristotle's suggestion that the justice of the gods might everywhere be the same even if it does not in itself mean that Avemarri's neglect to neglect all of Aristotle's references to divine matters, but it does suggest that he was more concerned about examining the general significance of Aristotle's ideas than he was about applying these ideas to the generally received opinions of a particular community. As a consequence he did not strive to make an explicit correction of Aristotle's explanations which reflected a priori theories to Greek discussion, though he often corrected those remarks without alluding to Aristotle's error. For example, when Aristotle spoke about justice as something basically human because it implied having too much of a proper amount of just things, whereas the gods could presumably never have too many of just things, Avemarri suggested a different reason for justice being a basically human concept: namely, there is a certain limit to the amount of justice men might achieve since there is a different order of justice typical of divinity which man can never attain. Again, in trying to decide whether a man could treat himself unjustly, Aristotle pointed out that even though suicide was something not expressly permitted by the law, a man who committed suicide would have to be called unjust since whatever the law did not expressly permit, it prohibited. Although Avemarri allowed Aristotle's general argument closely, he simply ignored the involvement reasoning regarding suicide and explained that suicide was unjust because it was prohibited by the law, as a result, he had to put suicide into a category of unjust acts other than the category denoted by Aristotle. 68

To be sure, part of the reason for Avemarri's failure to make explicit his correction of such explanations by Aristotle and for his reluctance to point out the minor differences in interpretation arising from Aristotle's distinctive theologian must derive from Avemarri's concern about his whole philosophical project. In trying to make Greek philosophy better known to fellow Muslims and in his own personal acceptance of Greek philosophy, he always had to be wary of the claim that the waves of the Greeks were so different from those of the Muslims that nothing at all could be learned from them and that no steadfast Muslim should place faith in Greek teachings. Still, such a practical consideration explains at least only a certain tenuousness in Avemarri's style; it does not at all account for any of his attempts to extend Aristotle's remarks. Only Avemarri's conviction that the teaching presented in the \textit{Neminacum Ethics} constituted the theoretical part of the practical art of politics can explain his liberal expansion of Aristotle's remarks.

Throughout the \textit{Neminacum Ethics}, the goal of Aristotle's inquiry was that end at which all arts and sciences, and especially the most authoritative arts and sciences, aim. Because politics appeared to be the most authoritative
the Nicomachean Ethics to the Politics was based on a conditional syllogism. Because it appeared to him to be so obvious that men could be made good only by laws, he was persuaded that in the Politics Aristotle intended to answer the very practical question of which laws would make men good. However, Aristotle's work was not the practical question of a political problem, but the practical application of a theoretical inquiry. To him, the problem of training men in moral virtue was the whole question of the Nicomachean Ethics, even though it had become an explicit problem only towards the end of the book. The Nicomachean Ethics constituted the theoretical part of the political art because the interpretation presented in that book resulted in general ideas about moral virtue and explained how the cultivation of moral virtue was intimately related to the political art. Once these general ideas had been set forth, it was the task of the practical part of the political art to investigate particular instances in which they might be applied.

That Aristotle held this opinion about what Aristotle had done in the Nicomachean Ethics and intended to do in the Politics explains why he was so much more outspoken than Aristotle about the limits of the inquiry and about the necessity of investigating contemplative happiness by other sciences. That is, because he perceived the purpose of the Nicomachean Ethics as distinctly political, he was intent upon removing any considerations which would detract from that political purpose. Nonetheless, that Aristotle assigned contemplative happiness to a different kind of investigation, does not imply that he had no relation to the happiness attained in political life. To the contrary, he argued that the investigation of contemplative happiness was guided by the intellectual virtue of theoretical wisdom rather than by prudence—an opinion virtually without support from Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, but which is grounded on Aristotle's argument that the basic difference between theoretical and practical arts arises differences in the subject matter and the purposes of the investigation rather than from the intellectual virtue directing the inquiry into these different arts. The significance of his argument that philosophical wisdom would guide the investigation into the legislative art is that the very intellectual virtue which was said to lead to contemplative happiness is also supposed to indicate the substance of political happiness. In other words, the difference between the happiness which men could ultimately hope to attain by virtue of conducting a political community and that which a few men could ultimately hope to attain by contemplation need not be construed as a qualitative difference.

Thus, while the presentation of Aristotle's teaching about happiness in the Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics is very secular, it prepares the more particularly Islamic presentation of happiness in the Commentary on Plato's Republic. Indeed, when Aristotle presented what he called the practical part of his political teaching, he did not at all hesitate to remind the reader of the crucial difference separating the author of the commentary and the author of the original text in time and place. Many of the general observations arrived at in the theoretical part of his political teaching were modified in the practical part by conventions of which he was acutely aware. In addition to these explicit references to particular circumstances which indicate how general ideas would be modified in their application, Aristotle's Commentary on Plato's Republic is marked by an emphasis on the educational task of the ruler. That is, Aristotle interpreted Plato as having taught that the best ruler was a man with theoretical knowledge of practical matters who sought to instruct the populace by rhetorical and practical speech. Such an interpretation enabled him to argue that the ruler of an actual political community must be able to speak in different ways to different people and ought to have knowledge of political matters based on something other than practical wisdom.

However, Aristotle's decision to investigate the legislative art was partly due to the defectiveness of much of politics in moral virtue. As Aristotle noted, Plato also saw the need for something more than mere speech if citizens were to be trained in moral virtue. In all respects, then, Aristotle's interpretation of Plato's Republic corresponds to the demands of the practical part of politics. It also seems to be a natural sequel to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. If Aristotle's argument about theoretical wisdom guiding practical wisdom can really be attributed to Aristotle. But since it is generally known that Aristotle did not accept that argument in the Politics, Aristotle's attention to that argument, while concluding the present discussion, poses an important question for all students of Aristotle's political teaching: in what way does it make sense to say that theoretical wisdom can guide practical matters?

NOTES


2. Cf. Averroes, Commentary on Plato's Republic, ed. and trans. E.J. Rosenthal (Cambridge University Press, 1960), LXXvi, First Supplement, Chapter 4, Section 8, according to Rosenthal's (infra, n.), in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, 2.1 and 4.7. The first part of this section is continued in Averroes' book known as Averroes, and the second part in his book known as Plato, and in Plato's book also upon which we need to comment. For Aristotle's Politics has not yet come into our hands.

3. It is also important to consider the relation Averroes preserved between the two works.
before he began to comment on Plato's Republic. Cf. Averroes, in Deiner, Divinae Medicinae \nCommentationes, in Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentationibus, ii. Apud, 1682, \nVol. 3, folio 160 G.H.

Est hic explicitum in hac parte loco scientiae: et est quod habet se in scientia \ncivili habitudine notiunt, quod est santes et angustiae, in civi meditata et illo, quae \nprovidit, est parce quae habet se in scientia habitudine, etc. utius constitutur \naverrois, in sinistro, qui nominatur identico de regulis vita et homini \npervertetur ad mos, cui intueris in hoc modo, siquidem, quae in fato, nisi prius quam tractatur, daret perturbis cur ad nos animum nostrum et nobilis donum, dicam, filium Marzini, regnum omnium sano, et Deus trinitatis et \nimium significatum simplicium.

Cum esset in quodam mulierum, qui habeat bonum, in \ne textum habuerit scientia, quod Deus voluerit. Apud unam extr. \nmulierem. Aristotelis \n\n
Averroes, Commentary in Plato's Republic, I, 8. 1, 10. 11. 17.

Averroes, Commentary in Plato's Republic, I, 8. 1, 7. 7, 30. 10. 9. 11. 11. 3. 4. 1, 3. 4.

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NEW LIGHT ON THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF AVERROES