

Lecture 1: Aristotle and the Qur'an in Andalusian Islamic Thought

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Excerpts from: *The Book of the DECISIVE TREATISE Determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom* (tr. C.E. Butterworth [BYU Press, 2001])

5 . . . [I. Introduction]

(1) . . . [T]he goal of this statement is for us to investigate, from the perspective of Law-based reflection, whether reflection upon philosophy and the sciences of logic is permitted, prohibited, or commanded — and this as a recommendation or as an obligation — by the Law.

10 [II. That philosophy and logic are obligatory]

[A. That philosophy is obligatory]

(2) So we say: If the activity of philosophy is nothing more than reflection upon existing things and consideration of them insofar as they are an indication of the Artisan — I mean insofar as they are artifacts, for existing things indicate the

15 Artisan only through cognizance of the art in them, and the more complete cognizance of the art in them is, the more complete is cognizance of the Artisan — and if the Law has recommended and urged consideration of existing things, then it is evident that what this name indicates is either obligatory or recommended by the Law.

20 That the Law calls for consideration of existing things by means of the intellect and for pursuing cognizance of them by means of it is evident from various verses in the Book of God (may He be blessed and exalted). There is His statement (may He be exalted), “Consider, you who have sight” [59:2]; this is a text for the obligation of using both intellectual and Law-based syllogistic reasoning. And there is His

25 statement (may He be exalted), “Have they not reflected upon the kingdoms of the heavens and the earth and what things God has created?” [7:185]; this is a text urging reflection upon all existing things . . . and so on, in innumerable other verses.

[B. The case for syllogistic reasoning]

(3) Since it has been determined that the Law makes it obligatory to reflect upon

30 existing things by means of the intellect, and to consider them; and consideration is nothing more than inferring and drawing out the unknown from the known; and this is syllogistic reasoning or by means of syllogistic reasoning, therefore, it is obligatory that we go about reflecting upon the existing things by means of intellectual syllogistic reasoning. And it is evident that this manner of reflection the

35 Law calls for and urges is the most complete kind of reflection by means of the

most complete kind of syllogistic reasoning and is the one called “demonstration.”

(4) 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

40 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

45 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 comes under the obligation to set out, before

50 reflecting, to become cognizant of these things whose status with respect to reflection is that of tools to work.

. . . It is not for someone to say, “Now, this kind of reflection about intellectual syllogistic reasoning is a heretical innovation, since it did not exist in the earliest days [of Islam].” For reflection upon juridical syllogistic reasoning and its kinds is

55 also something inferred after the earliest days, yet it is not opined to be a heretical innovation. . . .

. . .

(6) If someone other than us has already investigated that, it is evidently obligatory for us to rely on what the one who has preceded us says about what we are

60 pursuing, regardless of whether that other person shares our religion or not. . . And by “not sharing [in our religion],” I mean those Ancients who reflected upon these things before the religion of Islam.

(7) Since this is the case — and all that is needed with respect to reflection about the matter of intellectual syllogistic reasonings has been investigated by the Ancients in the most complete manner — therefore, we ought perhaps to seize their books in

65 our hands and reflect upon what they have said about that. And if it is all correct, we will accept it from them; whereas, if there is anything not correct in it, we will alert [people] to it.

(8) Since we have finished with this type of reflection and have acquired the tools

70 by which we are able to consider existing things . . . , it is perhaps obligatory that we start investigating existing things according to the order and manner we have

gained from the art of becoming cognizant about demonstrative syllogisms. It is evident, moreover, that this goal is completed for us with respect to existing things only when they are investigated successively by one person after another and when, in doing so, the one coming after makes use of the one having preceded — along the lines of what occurs in the mathematical sciences.

...

(9) Since this is so, if we find that our predecessors in former nations have reflected upon existing things and considered them according to what is required by the conditions of demonstration, it is perhaps obligatory for us to reflect upon what they say about that and upon what they establish in their books. Thus, we will accept, rejoice in, and thank them for whatever agrees with the truth; and we will alert to, warn against, and excuse them for whatever does not agree with the truth.

(10) From this it has become evident that reflection upon the books of the Ancients is obligatory according to the Law, for their aim and intention in their books is the very intention to which the Law urges us. And [it has become evident] that whoever forbids reflection upon them by anyone suited to reflect upon them — namely, anyone who unites two qualities, the first being innate intelligence and the second Law-based justice and moral virtue — surely bars people from the door through which the Law calls them to cognizance of God — namely, the door of reflection leading to true cognizance of Him. That is extreme ignorance and estrangement from God (may He be exalted).

...

III. That demonstration accords with the Law

95 [A. The Law calls to humans by three methods]

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

That is because people's natures vary in excellence with respect to assent. Thus, some assent by means of demonstration; some assent by means of dialectical statements in the same way the one adhering to demonstration assents by means of demonstration, there being nothing greater in their natures; and some assent by means of rhetorical statements, just as the one adhering to demonstration assents by means of demonstrative statements.

That is because, when this divine Law of ours called to people by means of these three methods, assent to it was extended to every human being. . . .

[B. Demonstration does not differ from the Law]

110 (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.

(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 cognizable in it. If it is passed over in silence, there is no contradiction here; it has the status of the statutes passed over in silence that the jurist infers by means of Law-based syllogistic reasoning. If the Law does pronounce about it, the apparent sense of the pronouncement cannot escape either being in agreement with what demonstration leads to, or being different from it. If it is in agreement, there is no argument here. And, if it is different, that is where an interpretation is pursued. The meaning of interpretation is: drawing out the figurative significance of an utterance from its true significance without violating the custom of the Arabic language with respect to figurative speech in doing so . . .

125 (14) Since the jurist does this with respect to many of the Law-based statutes, how much more fitting is it for the one adhering to demonstrative science to do so. The jurist has only a syllogism based on supposition, whereas the one who is cognizant has a syllogism based on certainty. 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. . . .

...

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.

135 The reason contradictory apparent senses are set down in it is to alert "those well grounded in science" to the interpretation that reconciles them. . . .

...

[T]otally forbidding demonstrative books bars from what the Law calls to, because it is a wrong to the best sort of people and to the best sort of existing things. For justice with respect to the best sort of existing things is for them to be cognized to their utmost degree by those prepared to be cognizant of them to their utmost degree, and these are the best sort of people. Indeed, the greater the worth of the existing thing, the greater is the injustice with respect to it — namely, ignorance of it. Therefore, He said (may He be exalted), "Associating [other gods with God] is surely a major wrong" [31:13].