1

Philosopher, King, Prophet

1

Medieval Muslim thinkers based their political discussions on Plato's *Republic* and *Laws,* not on Aristotle's *Politics.* They did so despite being acquainted with most of Aristotle's extant writings, except for the *Politics,* and being markedly influenced by the Aristotelian tradition.[1] The bias might have been the result of pure chance—the manuscript of the *Politics* simply did not reach them. Perhaps, as R. Walzer supposes, late Hellenistic philosophy simply preferred Plato's *Republic* to Aristotle's *Politics* as a basic textbook on politics. The fact is that we do not have even one commentary on Aristotle's *Politics* dating from that time.[2] Muslim thinkers inherited the same manuscripts to which late Hellenistic philosophy inclined and adapted them to their own philosophical and theological world view. They also continued the accepted practice in late Hellenistic philosophy of seeking to unify Plato's different texts and, what is relevant for us, his political writings, especially *The Republic* and the *Laws,* and to blur the differences among them. The Neoplatonic philosophers like Plotinus and Proclus, who held that the philosopher must shun human society and strive for divine perfection, leaned toward the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus.* Muslim philosophy, by contrast (with the exception of Ibn Bajja), emphasized the social obligation of the philosopher and favored *The Republic* and the *Laws,* read through Neoplatonic modifications and the influence of Aristotle's *Nicomachaean Ethics.* These two Platonic dialogues became the foundation of Muslim political thought. E. I. J. Rosenthal justly titled the second part of his magnum opus on Muslim political thought, which treats political philosophy, "The Platonic Legacy."[3]

Whatever the reason for the Muslims' bias toward Plato's *Republic* over Aristotle's *Politics, The Republic* undoubtedly suited their theological and

philosophical world view better. In qualifications and definition of functions, the Platonic philosopher king nicely paralleled the lawgiver-prophet of the Muslim tradition. As Ibn Rushd remarks in his commentary on Plato's *Republic,* translated into Hebrew by Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles: "Consequently, these terms, that is, Philosopher, King and Lawgiver, are as it were synonymous; so also is 'Priest.'"[4] The superimposing of the Platonic philosopher king on the lawgiver-prophet of the Muslim tradition is clearly reflected in the medieval discussion on the virtues of the ideal ruler.

This identification was facilitated by the Farabian-Platonic world view, which established an exact parallel between philosophy and politics, with philosophy dealing with right beliefs and politics with right actions. Each of these two spheres reflects and is conditioned on the other. Without the attainment of perfection in one, perfection in the other is not possible. When philosophy is political, then, the philosopher may, indeed must be, the statesman. al-Farabi (following Aristotle) defines political wisdom (as Falaquera translates it in his *Beginning of Wisdom [Reshit Hokhmah]*) "the perfect kingly art," the most noble philosophical domain. Whoever attains knowledge of this sort, must apply it in right actions. Thus, if the sciences of religious law and of theology (*fiqh, kalam,* translated by Falaquera in the same place as "the art of jurisprudence" and "the art of dialectical theology") are made ancillary to the science of politics, the philosopher, who is also king, may at the same time also be lawgiver and prophet, and perhaps even priest.[5]

2

Medieval Jewish thought, like Muslim thought, followed Plato's *Republic.* Christian thinking, in contrast, founded its political philosophy on Aristotle's *Politics* from the time the work was translated into Latin in the thirteenth century. Even R. Klibansky, who emphasized the continuity of the Platonic tradition in medieval Christian culture, stressed that this influence was exerted through such dialogues as the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides.* There is no vestige of *The Republic* in medieval Christian sources in the West. Thus, Ernest Barker, who completely ignored the Muslim and Jewish traditions and dealt with the Christian tradition alone, stated bluntly, "Compared with the *Politics, The Republic* has no history. For a thousand years it simply disappears." Jewish thought, however, was hardly aware of the *Politics.*[6] The first direct quotation from the work is found in *Sefer ha-Ikkarim (The Book of Principles),* written by Joseph Albo toward the end of the Middle Ages, and this reference was mediated by the influence of Latin-Christian culture.[7] All other areas of Jewish philosophy, however, were based squarely on Aristotle.

Beyond the casual fate of manuscripts, did the theological differences between Judaism and Islam on the one hand and Christianity on the other dictate which text they chose to adopt? This study argues that the differences in the textual traditions do reflect qualitative theological differences. Albertus Magnus, for example, commissioned the translation of the *Politics* into Latin in the thirteenth century, clearly because he felt the relevance of the work to the political context of Christian theology. In all three religious cultures, the theology preceded the appearance of a particular work and its concomitant influence. The text, whether it simply chanced to find its way into the scholars' hands or was deliberately selected, was singled out for the purposes of commentary and the ongoing development of historic theological tenets.

Common to the three cultures was an underlying political philosophy that dealt with the principles and essence of every human society. This philosophy was based on writings from the world of classical pagan culture. The differences among these cultures lay in political theology, which assigned a particular political significance to the revelation of each faith. In their political theology there is a good measure of proximity between Judaism and Islam; Christianity, is qualitatively different.

Judaism and Islam were both fashioned in the desert, where law was absent. It was vital to present these revelations as law, an exclusive, divine law: there was no other. Christianity, on the other hand, developed within an existing civilization. It did not manifest itself as law, but as *religio*. It recognized the legitimacy of other laws and conceded the sphere of the law to the temporal authority. Christianity focused on beliefs and opinions. Thus, there is no distinction between law and faith in Judaism and Islam, but such a distinction is vital to Christianity.

Christianity conceived revelation as a source of religious dogma. Following the theory of the two swords, which sharply separated temporal from spiritual authority and was influenced by Roman law, medieval Christianity inclined, as did Aristotle in the *Politics,* to see the political sphere as separate and independent, concerned with human laws and temporal rule. This sphere was largely isolated from divine law and affairs of spiritual authority, which were deemed nonpolitical or supra-political.

By contrast, Judaism and Islam, as Strauss has pointed out, laid distinct stress on the political quality of the revelation as divine law. The founding prophet was also a lawgiver and political leader. Therefore, Judaism did not develop a systematic division between the powers, such as grew up in Christianity. In this context, the Platonic teaching, which so emphasized the spiritual dimensions of politics, and hence identified the philosopher as the perfect political leader, was extremely relevant. The prophet-lawgiver of the Jewish and Muslim traditions could easily—in theory, at least—be identified with the Platonic philosopher king. Christianity, however, generally identified, and differentiated,

its founder as one who wholly detached himself from the political life to enter the pure, spiritual sphere. Thus, Moses and Muhammad may be depicted in the form of the Platonic philosopher king, an idea that sheds light on the nature of their activity. For the image of Jesus, the philosopher king was much less relevant. Medieval Christian thought, following Augustine's *Civitas Dei,* generally did not consider the possibility of actualizing the ideal community here and now: It was a matter for the hereafter. In this world, Christian thought sought no more than seemed attainable. In this sense the *Politics,* which set only temporal political goals, suited it better. Judaism and Islam, however, did pursue the ideal community in this world. For both, the *civitas temporalis,* too, could and must become—indeed—a perfect community. The Jewish state that would arise after the coming of the Messiah, like the ideal Platonic state, was expected to be such a state. Thus, Plato's dialogue had much appeal for Jewish thinkers as a basic political text.

In this respect, I cannot agree with R. Lerner and M. Mahdi's assertion that "Jewish political philosophy was, by and large, divided into Judaeo-Arabic and Judaeo-Latin branches." Our sources show us only one branch: Platonic with Islamic influences, which subsequently was somewhat touched by the Aristotelian-Latin philosophy. Jewish political philosophy continued to follow Plato's *Republic,* not Aristotle's *Politics,* despite the *Politics'* influence upon Christian political philosophy. Al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd, not Saint Thomas Aquinas, dominated Jewish political philosophy until the beginning of modern times.[8]

For all the differences in political theology among them, the three medieval religious traditions held the same broad philosophical position, influenced by the same classical writings, chiefly those of the other Aristotle, he of the *Nicomachaean Ethics* and the *Metaphysics*. All concurred that the supreme purpose of human existence was not in the area of practical intelligence, but in the sphere of theoretical intelligence—recognizing and loving the intelligible.

3

Jewish thought in the Middle Ages absorbed the Platonic political tradition through the agency of two Muslim sources, Al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd, who concerned themselves with the ideal state and employed abstract terms suitable for any existing society. Since the two philosophers deliberately eschewed narrowly Islamic terms, it was easy to apply their theories in the realm of Jewish thought. The philosopher king was supposed to hand down a law based on philosophical principles, but phrased in figurative language suited to the understanding of the common folk. In the Muslim context, this role is

assigned to Muhammad, who received the Qur'an. In the Jewish context, it belongs to Moses, who gave the Torah.[9]

The first influences of the Platonic theory of the philosopher king in Judaism mediated through Islam may be found in Saadya Gaon and Judah Halevi. Maimonides certainly acquired his knowledge of the doctrine through Al-Farabi, but qualified the philosopher-king theory for halakhic and theological reasons. Many Jewish thinkers—among them Samuel Ibn Tibbon, translator and first commentator of the *Guide to the Perplexed,* Joseph Ibn Caspi, Efodi, and Joseph Shemtov Ibn Shem Tov—tended toward the governance of the solitary, along the lines of Ibn Bajja, and found little of interest in the philosopher-king theory. It fully penetrated Jewish thought only in the generation after Maimonides, beginning with Isaac Ibn Latif and Shemtov Ibn Falaquera in the first half of the thirteenth century. It was reflected chiefly in the philosophical current that followed Al-Farabi, Maimonides, and Ibn Rushd in emphasizing the political responsibility of the philosopher

The first stage of the transmission of this tradition into Jewish thought saw an almost literal translation of Al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd. Ibn Latif was the first to summarize several chapters of Al-Farabi's *The Virtuous State (Al-Madina al-Fadila),* which he did in his essay, *Gate of the Heavens (Sha'ar ha-Shamayim).* Falaquera presented an exposition of the philosopher-king's virtues in two works. In his encyclopedia of the sciences, *The Beginning of Wisdom (Reshit Hokhmah),* his statements are based on Al-Farabi's *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle,* while in the *Book of Degrees (Sefer ha-Ma'alot),* the subject is discussed as presented in Al-Farabi's *The Virtuous State.*[10] In the fourteenth century, Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles translated into Hebrew Ibn Rushd's commentary on Plato's *Republic.* This translation acquires prime importance, since the Arabic original is lost. The Hebrew translation is our sole evidence for the existence of Ibn Rushd's commentary.[11]

Thus, the first detailed entry of the tradition into Jewish thought contains hardly any comment on the applicability of the subject to the problematics and sources of Jewish thought and no significant changes in the enumeration of the ideal ruler's qualities. On this foundation, at the second stage, we find the list of virtues applied to the Jewish political tradition in various ways. Some philosophers base themselves on Al-Farabi's version (whether using Ibn Latif's and Falaquera's translations or otherwise), while others rely on the translation of Ibn Rushd's commentary on *The Republic* by Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles.

The discourse on the virtues of the ideal ruler is adapted to the requirements of Jewish thought in two ways. The first way is by adding virtues to those indicated by Al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd and introducing modifications and additions to the familiar virtues that are meant to suit a philosopher King of Israel. For example, Isaac Polkar adds a thirteenth virtue to the twelve listed

in Al-Farabi's text in order to match the traditional concept of the thirteen divine attributes that the perfect man is supposed to imitate. Yohanan Alemanno augments the qualities defined in Ibn Rushd's version with the four special virtues halakhically expected of the King of Israel.

The second way of adapting to Jewish thought is by applying in detail the virtues taken from one of the sources to the historical paradigm of the Jewish ruler. Usually these virtues are found in Moses; sometimes in Abraham, King Solomon, or others. Such accounts seek to prove that these leaders express the highest realization of the virtues of the ideal ruler in human history. A purely apologetic aspect is revealed here that accompanies Jewish thought from the Hellenistic period to the Enlightenment: an attempt to prove, in the circumstances of the diaspora, the cultural and even political primacy of Judaism. Polkar, for example, shows how every virtue listed by Al-Farabi is found in Moses. Alemanno seeks to prove that with one exception all the leaders of Jewry, even Moses, failed to attain the perfection of the philosopher king; the sole exception, surprisingly, is Abraham, whom Alemanno presents as the ideal philosopher-prophet-king.

In the third stage of the unfolding discussion, the philosopher-king's virtues are applied liberally to Hebrew sources to meet the developing needs of Jewish thought, without undue adherence to the classical models of Al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd. Cases of this kind appear only toward the end of the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance. The more time that passes, the wider the distance grows from the classical exemplars. Isaac Abravanel applies the concept to Moses, David, and Solomon; Alemanno also applies it to Solomon. In Joseph Albo's comparative analysis of the kingly attributes of Saul and David, the discourse is far removed from the classical model.

Simone Luzzatto and Benedict Spinoza reject the philosopher-king theory and bring its history in Jewish thought to an end. The rejection results from Machiavellian influence, direct and indirect. Machiavelli, who dislodged the Platonic political tradition as he did the medieval world view as a whole, presented the Hebrew patriarchs, as well as the leaders of Greece and Rome, in a new light: not as ideal founders and perfect leaders, but as flesh and blood rulers.

Yet long after Luzzatto and Spinoza laid the philosopher king to rest, Moses Mendelssohn still voiced an echo of nostalgia for the ideal of sole rulership by a prophet-statesman—even as he acquiesced to existing circumstances and fervently supported the division between religion and state. Nevertheless, he derives quite modern conclusions from the new situation. At this point our discussion ends.

Plato, then, founded the ideal of the philosopher king. Al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd used it as their foundation to construct the second story, involving Muslim theological philosophy. Jewish thinkers added the third story, applying the two foregoing levels to the needs of Jewish thought.

The first modern historian of ideas to consider this subject was L. Dukes, the mid-nineteenth-century scholar of Jewish *Wissenschaft*. He noted that the twelve virtues of the philosopher king listed in Falaquera's *Book of Degrees* seem to follow Al-Farabi's *The Virtuous State*. Leo Strauss traced the unfolding of this tradition, and he made the Plato-Al-Farabi-Falaquera connection.[12] Strauss, however, did not know of the earlier rendering by Ibn Latif, the parallel version of Ibn Rushd, or the ongoing development of the theme in Jewish thought of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. The purpose of the present study is to continue, and perhaps complete, what was begun by Dukes and Strauss. As always, according to the old saying that has a long history of its own in medieval and Renaissance Jewish thought, we stand on the shoulders of the scholars who preceded us and, therefore, we can see further.[13]

4

In Jewish tradition monarchy is usually identified as a halakhic norm; however, the biblical sources provide no unequivocal statement on the matter. The form of government established by Moses on the advice of Jethro (Exod. 18; Deut. 1) was not essentially monarchical. The regime was deemed by medieval and Renaissance commentators—some favorably, some negatively—to be an amalgam of the Aristotelian Polybian type: a combination of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, with a strong theocratic component.[14]

Nowhere in the Torah is kingship set forth as an imperative. Monarchy is presented in Deuteronomy 17 as a hypothetical possibility, not an obligation: "And thou shalt say, I will set a king over me" (v. 14). Indeed monarchy is portrayed as undesirable in principle. The wish to set up a king is depicted as a human urge, not the expression of the divine will. It reflects a desire to be "like all the nations that are round about me" (v. 14), a desire consistently portrayed in a negative light. Although the Torah permits the elevation of a king over Israel, such rule is subjected to strict limitations. The monarchy is made constitutional, and subordinate to the Torah, which is binding upon the king. The role of the king is defined as obedience to the laws of the Torah and concern for the public good, terms that greatly limit the king's status and powers. The biblical text is replete with strictures imposed on the king (negatives like "not" and "be not" appear ten times in the six verses devoted to the subject). Clearly great fears were associated with kingship.

A similar approach informs the account of the people's request to Samuel to place a king over them (1 Sam. 8). The request is described twice as the people's wish to be "like all the nations" (1 Sam. 6 and 20). Furthermore, it is portrayed as an open revolt against the rule of Heaven, a continuation of the

sinful and idolatrous practices of the Children of Israel since the exodus. Monarchy is defined forcefully by Samuel as despotism

The entire history of relations between kings and prophets, from Saul and Samuel to the destruction of the First Temple, is marked by persistent struggles and the leveling of sharp criticism by the prophets against the institution of the monarchy. The biblical authors showed a marked suspicion of kings and derived no comfort from their schemes. Scripture fluctuates continually between the ideal desire of the direct kingdom of heaven, as evinced in Gideon's refusal to rule over Israel: "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you" (Judg. 8:22–23)—and fears that the absence of strong, centralized, temporal rule may lead to anarchy, as expressed in the last verse of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25).

The Sages tended to favor the monarchy, for the independence of Jewry in its own land was traditionally linked with the House of David. The era of David and Solomon was the lost golden age of the ancient Hebrew state, which would revive with the coming of the annointed son of David. The messianic concept was invested in the idea of monarchical rule. The Sages, too, however, vacillated throughout the period from the Tanaim to the Amoraim and the later Midrash over the halakhic qualifications for kingship. Among the Tanaim, R. Judah in particular held that the Torah commanded the appointment of a king. But R. Nehora'i, for example, asserted that the call for a king was "a disgrace to Israel."[15] Despite all the disputes, the Mishnah, ultimately assumes that there is a king in Israel.

Although the Sages adopted monarchy as a halakhic norm, it was presented, as in Deuteronomy 17, as a constitutional authority. The halakhic norm presumed a division of political, legal, and ceremonial powers, thus restricting the monarchy and making it dependent on other sources of authority, as expressed in the principle of the Three Crowns *(ketarim):* Torah, Priesthood, and Kingship. Possession of the three crowns by one man according to certain sources was forbidden even to Moses; how much more so to ordinary kings.[16] In all events, the crown of kingship is explicitly subordinated to the crown of Torah.[17]

Acceptance of limited monarchy did not end the debate. Medieval Jewish thought—halakhic, philosophical, and exegetical—continued to be exercised by the problem of kingship. When Maimonides determined that monarchy was a halakhic obligation (*Hilkhot Melakhim*1.1: "Three commandments—to be carried out on entering the Land of Israel—were enjoined upon Israel: [one of these was] to appoint a king, as it is said, 'Thou shalt in anywise set him king over thee'"), he was taking a stand on an issue still fiercely in dispute. The question of monarchy had been a major bone of contention between the Geonim of Babylonia and the Exilarchs. The

Geonim—Saadya, Samuel ben Hofni, and Samuel ben Ali—all took exception to the claim that it was a halakhic imperative to establish a monarchy. Maimonides, in viewing this as a halakhic obligation, sided with the Exilarchs, the successors of the monarchy, in their historic debate with the Geonim of Babylonia. The argument against monarchy, that it was not a halakhic requirement at all, was advanced firmly by Saadya and, later, Abraham Ibn Ezra. More moderate critics conceded that there was a halakhic norm, but that it was limited to times of emergency and did not apply in normal circumstances.[18] All agreed that even in an emergency the monarchy was clearly limited and subject to the spiritual authority.

Maimonides' decisive stance was accepted by most of the medieval sages who treated the subject—Moses of Coucy, Menahem Hameiri, Nissim Gerondi among others. Many, though, harbored reservations: The critics included Bahya ben Asher; Nahmanides, whose stance was markedly ambivalent; Joseph Ibn Caspi; and, of course, Isaac Abravanel, who was outspoken in his halakhical and philosophical rejection of a monarchical regime.[19]

The ambivalence and skepticism regarding the institution of monarchy in medieval Jewish thought are all the more striking since medieval political thought, in general, and Islamic and Christian thought in particular, viewed monarchy as the optimal regime. In Muslim and Christian realms, monarchy was the accepted form of government. Despite the disastrous experiences of Nahmanides and Abravanel, it was frequently the monarchy that protected the Jews from the rage of the mobs in Christian Europe. The intellectual fashions and historical reality that led Islam and Christianity to favor the institution of monarchy influenced medieval Jewish thinkers profoundly. However, utopian desires for the direct kingdom of heaven and the well-founded Biblical suspicion of despotism left many in strong opposition to a monarchical regime and many others ambivalent toward it. The theory of the philosopher king was not only monarchist but absolutist in essence. Jewish thinkers who were influenced by this theory were forced to reconcile it with their halakhic position.

The core of Platonic political theory that influenced Jewish thinkers was monarchical. As the soul rules the body and the rational faculty rules the soul, so government should be in the hands of one who has attained perfection of the rational soul, the philosopher king. Medieval thought translated this principle into theological language appealing to the unity of God, His uniqueness, and His absolute rule over creation. Bahya Ibn Pakuda, for example, ensconces this principle at the heart of his claims regarding the unity of God in the first part of his *Duties of the Heart:* "Among the signs of God's governance of his creation we see that rule can neither succeed nor be constant unless it lies in the hands of one who alone holds sway in word and deed, like a king in his kingdom, like the soul in the body. Aristotle said in

his discussions of unity that a plurality of rulers is not good—the real head is but one. The scriptures also say (Prov. 28:2): "For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof.'"[20]

In medieval Jewish thought, we find many images of this sort in the theory of God and the theory of the soul. Thinkers like Abravanel, who rejected a monarchical regime in principle, also made much use of these images but refused to infer from the principle of divine rule the necessity for monarchical rule in human society. For them, the theological principle did not extend to government by a single human ruler; it actually called for the extension of the direct rule of God to the social order. Thinkers like Saadya who in principle affirmed a monarchical regime, albeit not necessarily for the people of Israel, or who affirmed it for the people of Israel, too, as did Maimonides, fully exploited Plato. The Platonic analogy ranged from the single rule in the cosmos and in the soul to the single wise rule in the perfect social order—for was it not a commandment for humanity to imitate God?

Support for a monarchical ideal did not necessarily mean complete acceptance of the Platonic theory, which identified the king with the philosopher, and, in the medieval theological context, added to this identity the prophet or even the priest. Maimonides, an avowed monarchist, had serious doubts about the Farabian-Platonic identification of the philosopher king with the prophet. Abravanel, a marked antimonarchist, had no reservations about this identification when he ascribed supreme human and political perfection to Moses and Solomon. The monarchist Maimonides restricted the Platonic theory with many qualifications because he supported the division of powers among the Three Crowns. The anti-monarchist Abravanel applied the theory in its entirety to Moses and Solomon on the assumption that they alone merited all the kingly epithets as a result of the direct and miraculous influence of the divine will. Other thinkers, such as Polkar and Alemanno, regarded monarchy as a halakhic norm; they fully accepted the Platonic theory of the philosopher king as adapted to the requirements of scriptural monotheism by the Muslim philosophers Al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd.

To sum up, despite the parallelism of the Platonic philosopher-king theory and the Jewish tradition of the lawgiver-prophet, the two concepts conflict with each other in two respects. First, the Jewish political tradition posited a division of functions and powers, on the lines of the Three Crowns, at least for the period following the founding of the state by the prophet-lawgiver. This tradition makes for a clear-cut distinction between the prophet-lawgiver and the king. The Platonic stance, by contrast, preferred the combination of powers in a single individual. Second, the Platonic theory was essentially monarchical. By contrast, the halakhic posture viewed the monarchical regime with a large measure of suspicion and therefore, favored a restricted monarchy as distinct from the absolutism of the Platonic theory.

Thus, medieval thought that came into contact with Platonic theory through the agency of Islam had to contend with this serious tension. As in other areas of theology—for example, the problem of creation—medieval Jewish philosophy was hard pressed to deal with the Greek philosophical tradition. The philosophers we shall study coped with the problem in a variety of ways.

2

The Sources

1

The historical starting point for a consideration of the philosopher king is the description of the ideal state in Plato's *Republic*. Following his mordant criticism of Athenian democracy and Sophist political notions, Plato presents an alternative based on his theory of Ideas.

The great debate between Socrates and the Sophists on the definition of justice generates the discussion. To achieve an objective definition, Plato takes the position that the state is the individual "writ large"; he passes from the difficult attempt to define justice on the individual level, the microcosm, to a definition of justice in society at large, the macrocosm. The assumption is that both definitions are based on the same principle ("We think of justice as a quality that may exist in a whole community as well as in an individual"),[1] and it will be easier to define justice first at large, in the macrocosm, and then to apply the principle behind this definition to just actions in each individual. The discourse leads Plato to develop a hypothetical—ahistorical—theory of the essential stages in the development of human society, in logical and psychological terms. Within this he develops a theory of the classes that emerge in the development of human society.

When he arrives at a definition of justice, "that each one should do his own proper work,"[2] Plato can apply it to the three-class structure of the ideal state, based on a precise division of functions and tasks. This structure constitutes a magnified image of the relationships among the three parts of the soul: appetite or desire, spirit, and reason. The common people, whose function is to supply the material needs of the ideal state, represent appetite or desire. The guardians, whose task is to protect this state internally and externally, represent spirit; the philosophers, whose role is to rule this state by virtue of the

perfection of their intellect, represent reason. As reason must rule the inferior parts of the human soul, so they who are gifted with rational perfection must rule organized human society.

The qualities of each of the classes in the ideal state reflect the qualities of the ideal state itself. They are the virtues that make it the ideal state ("obviously, then, it is wise, brave, temperate, and just").[3] Each class possesses its own special abilities and therefore its own special functions. Justice and temperance are virtues possessed by all the classes. Temperance, as applied universally, means the readiness of each member to accept a role and suppress his personal desires—because the role assigned is that for which the person is best suited and because one recognizes the needs of the society as a whole. It is thus obvious why these two virtues are attributed to all three classes. The guardians possess the added virtue of courage, which is necessary in their communal role.

The ruler-philosophers, as the highest class in the ideal state, necessarily possess all the virtues of the two lower classes: justice, temperance, and courage; however, they alone possess the virtue of wisdom. There is then, an exact match between the virtues of the philosopher king and those of the ideal state, the former being a miniature of the perfect virtues of the philosophical state and the latter being a reflection of the perfect virtues of the philosopher king.

Plato sets the description of the perfect virtues of the philosophical soul on three planes. The first relates to potential: the possessor of the philosophical soul is quick to learn and has a good memory. Only such an individual with "constant passion for knowledge," in Plato's phrase, is able to desire certain knowledge and to attain it. Certain knowledge is defined as knowledge of the Ideas ("something of that reality which endures forever and is not always passing into and out of existence").[4] The desire for perfection in knowledge necessarily leads one to perfection in the other virtues: whoever channels all his desires into a single direction will of necessity have a weaker appetite for other things. Such a person will necessarily possess balanced virtues ("temperate and free from the love of money, meanness, pretentiousness, and cowardice").[5] Plato summarizes the virtues of the possessor of the philosophical soul like this: "by nature quick to learn and to remember, magnanimous and gracious, and friend and kinsman of truth, justice, courage, and temperance."[6]

The philosophical soul, then, combines three basic qualities: the potential for attaining the truth, the desire for that attainment, and the perfection of moral as well as intellectual virtues. Since these are the qualities of philosophers, it follows that the philosophers will be best suited for leadership of the ideal state, once they realize their talents ("When time and education have brought such characters as these to maturity, would you entrust the care of your commonwealth to anyone else?").[7] Whoever has attained perfection of

the moral virtues and of the intellect has both the ability and the obligation to govern the community. Thus, the philosopher becomes the ruler.

In the myth of the cave, following the ideal of his master, Socrates, as expressed in the *Apology,* Plato stresses the political commitment of the philosopher. The philosopher does not achieve knowledge of Ideas for the perfection of his own intellect alone, but also, and chiefly, for showing the community the light and bringing it to the highest perfection that it is capable of attaining. Whoever is able to define the just and the good objectively and absolutely must also realize these qualities in the life of action. Whoever has emerged from the cave and looked straight into the sunlight must go back down into the gloom and teach human society, which is imprisoned there by its prejudices.[8]

Society will not be saved unless the philosopher rules over it. With a measure of political realism (or perhaps total detachment from the political reality?), Plato presents an alternative to transforming philosophers into kings; namely, that rulers be turned into philosophers by being properly educated by philosophers. Plato would make such an attempt with the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse, but in vain: "Unless either philosophers become kings in their countries or those who are now called kings and rulers come to be sufficiently inspired with a genuine desire for wisdom; unless, that is to say, political power and philosophy meet together . . . there can be no rest from troubles . . . for states, nor yet, as I believe, for all mankind."[9]

In the *Laws,* Plato briefly returns to the philosopher-king theory, but with a significant change. Discussing the establishment of a new state following the migration of citizens from an existing state, the Athenian stranger contends that the regime of the new state will be the best if it is governed by an absolute ruler. He repeats essentially the same list of virtues developed in *The Republic:* "Give me a state which is governed by a tyrant, and let the tyrant be young and have a good memory; let him be quick at learning, and of a courageous and noble nature; let him have that quality which . . . is the inseparable companion of all the other parts of virtue, if there is to be any good in them."[10]

The one virtue that was most important for the ruler-philosopher in *The Republic,* perfection of intellect, manifested in the desire for truth, is now absent. Plato, now old and the wiser for his bitter experience in Syracuse, retreats from the extreme position he had adopted in *The Republic.* He now advocates the rule of law, arguing that several types of regime may bring about the best government. The new preference for youth perhaps accords with associated virtues—facility in learning, courage, and so forth—but it is certainly not in accord with the requirement of the perfection of the intellect. In *The Republic* the ruler must be a mature man. The process of realizing his potential for attaining the truth is long and drawn out. The absolute ruler of the *Laws,* by contrast, need not be a philosopher at all.[11]

Elsewhere Plato links discussion of the supreme perfection of the philosopher with his theory of *imitatio Dei*. In the *Theaetetus* he notes that the purpose of human existence is "to become like God as far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise."[12] Here it is important to emphasize the limitations of human knowledge. Human perfection does not mean simply perfection of the intellect; rather the latter is a means of attaining perfection in all the virtues. The supreme purpose of the philosopher, then, is not theory, but praxis: "to become righteous and holy and wise."

Many Jewish philosophers in the Middle Ages were influenced by Plato's theory of three classes and its parallels with the order of the soul and the order of the cosmos.[13] For obvious reasons, however, they could not accept community of property; and certainly not community of wives.[14] Nor did they usually connect the class theory with the question of the philosopher king. Jewish medieval thinkers used the treatment of the philosopher king in *The Republic,* not the qualitatively different version of the *Laws*. On the other hand, the emphasis on the divine foundations of government in the latter, was important.[15] It is entirely absent from *The Republic,* in which government is legitimated by the perfection of the human intellect. The medievals also explored the relationship between the virtues of the ideal ruler and the imitation of God, an analogy that reached them from Neoplatonic sources and was assiduously applied to monotheistic thought. The philosopher king became the lawgiver-prophet, who as far as humanly possible imitated the virtues of God and put this mimesis to work in his just rule over the community of men. Thus, the imitation theory came to acquire a strong political force, which was not central in Platonic thought but was characteristic of medieval Jewish and Islamic thought alike. For Plato, the philosopher king might rule in a utopian future. Jewish and Muslim theological thought transferred his reign to the past; a utopian past, at the founding of the nation. For the philosopher king was the prophetic founder of the religion.[16] He would reappear with the coming of the king-messiah.

2

Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, the "second teacher" after Aristotle, as he was called by the medieval philosophers, created the great synthesis between the Greek-Hellenistic philosophical tradition and Islam in all areas of philosophy, not least political thought. Following Plato, Al-Farabi emphasized the importance of politics in the philosopher's quest for knowledge of God, the universe, and man. Philosophy seeks knowledge of the Creator, and in his activity the philosopher must strive to be like the Creator as far as humanly possible. This

expression of the Platonic theory of the imitation of God came to Islamic thought apparently by way of Plotinus. The aim of politics is to allow man to live a proper life in this world, so as to prepare himself for the world to come. Politics here acquires metaphysical, and thus theological, weight.

Accordingly, Al-Farabi's *The Virtuous State (Madina al-Fadila)* deals mostly with metaphysical and philosophical matters; only its last nine chapters treat political issues proper. It is not a specifically political composition like Aristotle's *Politics,* but a study with far-reaching philosophical implications like Plato's *Republic.* Politics does not appear in Al-Farabi except as a means of serving loftier purposes. The full title of the work, *The Book of the Principles of the Beliefs of the Citizens of the Virtuous State,* well illustrates this orientation. The virtuous state exists only to perfect the right beliefs of its citizens. This is also the case with Al-Farabi's political writings; for example, *al-Siyasa al-Madaniya (Civil government)* and *K. Tahsil al-Sa'ada (On Attaining Happiness),* to mention the two most important, are devoted mainly to metaphysical subjects and the theory of the soul, and political inquiry in each rests on metaphysical and psychological considerations.

Al-Farabi's political thought follows Plato, with modifications drawn from the *Nicomachaean Ethics;* there are intermediary influences from Hellenistic thought and adaptations to Islamic theological and historical circumstances. This amalgam is expressed in the various subjects that Al-Farabi considers in the sphere of political thought, as well as in the order of the inquiry: the theory of the political nature of man; the division of labor; class theory; the distinction among different states according to size and nature, based on the psychological analogy between the perfection of the individual and the perfection of the whole. Principally the adaptation is expressed in the theory of regimes, with the ideal state governed by the philosopher king.

Al-Farabi presents several classes of the ignorant state *(al-madina al-jahiliyya),* but adds to the original four types enumerated by Plato in the ninth book of *The Republic* to produce a total of seven kinds of ignorant state. The common denominator is that the seven maintain wrong opinions and strive for specious, material ends, because they are not led by rulers possessing true philosophical knowledge, but by various types of men imitating philosophers or prophets and exploiting their ability to influence the masses in order to acquire hegemony, wealth, and honor. The differences among the various kinds of ignorant state arise from the goals of their rulers. To this Platonic account, Al-Farabi adds the distinctively Islamic overtones of the *jahiliyya,* marking these states as pagan and barbarous.

In contrast, Al-Farabi sets forth the ideal state, in which the philosopher king governs. What makes this state unique is that it sustains right opinions, and thereby pursues the supreme spiritual purpose of human existence. Only the philosopher can know, define, and realize this supreme purpose, and

therefore his rule is a necessary condition for the establishment of this state. This ideal ruler for Al-Farabi unites the Platonic philosopher king and the Islamic prophet-lawgiver.

Both Greek and Islamic thinkers held that an ordered human society could not exist without the rule of law. Only he who is able to establish a society and who understands its inner meaning and ultimate purpose is capable and worthy of ruling. The Greek concept, however, generally posited a human origin for the law. The Islamic posited that the source of a perfect law could only be divine: it came by revelation. Greek law related only to this world; Islamic law also concerned the hereafter. Thus, Platonic philosophy identified the philosopher as a human lawgiver of the perfect law. Al-Farabi identified the prophet as one who received the law by revelation and conveyed it to human society. The prophet, then, must also be simultaneously a philosopher, in order to comprehend the hidden meanings and higher purpose of the revealed law, and a king, in order to establish that law in human society.

In Al-Farabi's system, this combination of philosophical and prophetic qualities in a single man was essential to the ideal state. The virtues of the Platonic philosopher alone were insufficient. Prophetic qualities were irreplaceable. What marks the philosopher is the ability to communicate directly with the active intellect by way of the theoretical soul. What marks the prophet is the ability to maintain this connection through the imaginative soul. Each of these abilities contributes in its special way, and each is vital for the existence of the ideal state. The philosopher, for all the perfection of his intellect, is unable to rule without a developed, imaginative soul that will enable him to transmit philosophical truth to the people in metaphorical language suited to the level of their understanding. The imagination, however, is liable to misread reality without constant supervision by the theoretical soul, otherwise it may go out of control and make wildly erratic associations. Integration in a single man of the qualities of the prophet with those of the philosopher is therefore essential in order for the ideal state to be established and maintained. This superimposing of the perfection of the prophet's imaginative soul upon the perfection of the philosopher's theoretical soul constitutes the high point of Al-Farabi's synthesis of the ideal ruler of the Platonic tradition with the ideal ruler of Islamic theology.

Al-Farabi offers several listings of the virtues of the philosopher king in *al-Madina al-Fadila* and *K. Tahsil al-Sa'ada*. Usually they are twelve in number; in essence, Plato's list in *The Republic* with Islamic adaptations. This list will be a central focus in our examination of how Ibn Latif, Falaquera, and Polkar each adapted these twelve virtues into Hebrew.

As a faithful student of Plato and Aristotle and as a person who experienced the Abbasid caliphate, Al-Farabi knew how rare it would be to find a man who was perfect in all twelve virtues. As a practical matter, Al-Farabi was

willing to be satisfied with finding someone with six virtues. The successor of the founder of the ideal state would not be gifted with prophetic qualities. He will be a philosopher king in a more restricted sense: one who knows the perfect law given by the first prophet-lawgiver and is able to apply it for the betterment of human existence.[17]

Ibn Rushd, who lived in the same generation as Maimonides, is known as the greatest medieval interpreter of Aristotle. In the sphere of political thought, however, he continued Al-Farabi's Platonic path. Ibn Rushd took exception to Ibn Bajja's divergence from the political commitment of the philosopher and idealization of the governance of the solitary. He regarded the *Nicomachaean Ethics* as the theoretical basis of practical wisdom. Since the *Politics* was not available to him, he used *The Republic* as his primer in politics, but he studied Plato not only as a Muslim but also as an interpreter of Aristotle. He found no qualitative difference between Plato and Aristotle, who to Ibn Rushd represented different aspects of the same system. His commentary on *The Republic* expands on the tenets of the *Ethics* and interprets the dialogue in terms of the contemporary political situation of the countries of Islam, particularly in North Africa. At times this original juxtaposition leads him to severe criticism of prevailing Islamic norms; for example, Islamic attitudes toward women, as compared to the egalitarian Platonic stance. The force with which Ibn Rushd applied Platonic concepts to Islamic culture is all the more striking in view of the fact that his commentary on the *Nicomachaean Ethics* is purely theoretical and given no topical application whatever.

Although Ibn Rushd was greatly influenced by Al-Farabi, two essential differences characterize their approaches to Plato. First, Al-Farabi used Platonic concepts to write original works that differed in many respects from the Platonic dialogues. Ibn Rushd wrote only his detailed commentary on *The Republic*. Second, Al-Farabi's interest in politics was theoretical. He concentrated on the virtues of the philosopher, prophet, lawgiver, king, *imam*—on his intellectual perfection and his supreme happiness. Al-Farabi was a metaphysician; he was not himself a statesman. He never openly applied Platonic political ideas to the Islamic states of his time, even by analogy. Ibn Rushd, by contrast, had both a theoretical and a practical interest in politics. The theoretical aspect related to the perfection of the citizens and rulers of the ideal state. The practical aspect related to the relevance of the Platonic ideas to the Islamic society in which he lived.

Scholars are divided over Ibn Rushd's position on the relationship between Plato's ideal state and the perfect Islamic state. Beyond the difficulties found in the analysis of specific texts, this debate brings us back to the distinction between an esoteric and an esoteric reading. Consistent with his views on Al-Farabi, E. I. J. Rosenthal holds that Ibn Rushd, too, was first a Muslim and only secondarily a student of Plato and Aristotle, meaning that

philosophy was no more than the adopted sister of the *Sharia* and must serve its needs. Rosenthal argues that Ibn Rushd never held the double truth theory later attributed to him, but posited one divine truth attained by man through prophetic revelation. In this view, philosophy is for philosophers alone, whereas religion is for all, philosophers and common people alike. Accordingly, it is argued, Ibn Rushd also posited the supremacy of the perfect Islamic state of the first khalifs over the ideal Platonic state. The *Sharia* is not merely the Platonic *nomos* transplanted into Islamic surroundings. Rather, the revealed law, the *Sharia,* necessarily supersedes the Platonic *nomos*. It imparts to man perfect ways of conduct with certainty and immediacy. The human intellectual law, considering its limitations, is capable only of approaching this condition, and that after a long, painstaking process of trial and error. The *nomos* of the Platonic republic constitutes the perfect law only for the "secular" states that have no revealed law.

Ibn Rushd accepted the great synthesis of Al-Farabi between the prophet lawgiver of the Islamic tradition and the Platonic philosopher king, but diverged from "the second teacher" on one central issue. In Al-Farabi's system, the philosopher king must also be a prophet. Ibn Rushd left this question open. The addition of prophecy to the qualities of the philosopher king appears in his work only as a possibility, not a requirement. Rosenthal explains this divergence as arising from Ibn Rushd's conviction that prophecy ended with the death of Muhammad. The Islamic ideal state had existed in the past, and the present Islamic state was as close to it as any imperfect state could be. Why, then, did Ibn Rushd retain the obligation of the philosopher king to be a lawgiver? Was not the perfect revealed law already given? Rosenthal explains this position as a vestige of the emphasis placed by the *falasifa,* following their Greek masters, on the rule of law.[18]

S. Pines, on the other hand, finds this divergence by Ibn Rushd to be radically significant, and he extracts far-reaching conclusions from it. In Pines' opinion, it is superficial to present Ibn Rushd as obliged to choose between opposition to and defense of religion. Ibn Rushd's purpose is not to attack the Muslim creed, but to place it in the position it merits in accordance with philosophical criteria. Therefore, the ideal Platonic state is judged superior to the ideal Muslim state. From the fact that the ideal ruler did not have to be a prophet, it followed that the ideal state did not have to be a Muslim state or any kind of state founded on prophecy. At best, the early Khalifate was an imitation, in the Platonic sense of the term, of the ideal Platonic state. Correspondingly, the Islamic state could in time become an ideal state by Platonic criteria if it came to be governed by a series of philosophical rulers.

Pines concedes that in other compositions, such as *K. Fasl al-Maqal,* Ibn Rushd explicitly assumes the superiority of the revealed law over the philosophical law. He ascribes such remarks, however, to the difference between

esoteric and exoteric texts. Ibn Rushd's true position, Pines believes, is well concealed in his esoteric interpretation of Plato's *Republic*. Here the superiority of the philosophical law over religious law is evident, thus projecting the superiority of the Platonic state over the imamate. Pines reads Ibn Rushd's commentary on *The Republic* in much the same way as he reads Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*.[19] We shall soon see how meaningful this debate is for an understanding of Maimonides' and subsequent Jewish thinking about the philosopher king.