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CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE (2.2)

SOME THOUGHTS ON TRANSCENDENCE AND THE “VETULA”

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1.

In contemporary political, philosophical, scientific, and religious circles, one pervasive paradigm crosses many otherwise uncrossable divides: namely, the notion that rationality and religion occupy mutually exclusive and even antagonistic spheres. This post-Enlightenment paradigm has its roots in an impoverished view of reason as a calculative processing of empirical data, and an equally impoverished view of religion as a subjective and unverifiable experience of the non-empirical. The subliminal influence of this paradigm leaves the philosopher wandering homeless between two incompatible realms, too concerned with the non-empirical for “reason” and too concerned with argumentation for “religion.” The philosopher, then, seems to hold two contradictory and unfortunate posts: the irrational pseudo-scientist and demysticizing mystic.

Mohammad Azadpur’s thought-provoking new book, aptly titled *Reason Unbound*, argues that the Islamic Peripatetics rehabilitate the philosopher by providing a richer conception of reason and its relationship to religion. First, against the inherited Enlightenment view of reason as calculative and religion as emotional/practical, the Islamic Peripatetic paradigm views *both* philosophy and religion as having ascetic and cognitive dimensions. Second, against the strict segregation of reason from religion, the Islamic Peripatetic paradigm insists that philosophy and religion are engaged in the same project: i.e., an ascetic/cognitive quest for the divine. The difference is simply that their practitioners approach the divine by different paths: philosophers follow an intellectual path, whereas believers are led by images, poetry, and metaphors. Third, against the view that reason relies on empirical evidence while religion relies on emotion, the Islamic Peripatetic paradigm holds that both philosophers and believers ultimately derive their knowledge and way of life from the same transcendent Intellect, though in different

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ways. The philosopher knows this transcendent Intellect as the Separate Intellect, the source of emanates intelligibles. The believer knows this transcendent Intellect as God, who emanates images into the prophet's imagination that metaphorically represent these intelligibles in ways that are useful for drawing nonphilosophers to the divine. But in some cases, the philosopher may be able to substitute for this direct prophetic emanation of images, if he has a skill for translating intelligibles he has received into suitable images and poetry. Azadpur argues that this Islamic Peripatetic paradigm resolves the presently troubled relationship of reason and religion, by freeing reason from its bondage to the quantitative and eliminating any grounds for competition with religion.

Reason Unbound is an impressive book for its sheer scope and implications. In a relatively short space, Azadpur is able not only to unfold the Islamic Peripatetic view, but to integrate it into a wide range of philosophical conversations, from the ancient Greeks to the medievals, to Kant and Heidegger and Corbin, from philosophy of religion to cognition theory to ethics to phenomenology. I want to restrict my comments to just one of these areas, which is the one with which I am most familiar: namely, Islamic and Latin medieval philosophy. In the first part of this paper, I will highlight two exciting new paths of inquiry that I believe Azadpur's work opens for understanding Islamic and Latin medieval thinkers. The second part of the paper will discuss some difficulties that arise, in my view, from Azadpur's construal of the underlying cause of the split between reason and religion, and the Islamic Peripatetic solution that he proposes.

2.

In studies of medieval philosophical psychology, Alfarabi and Avicenna are well-known for their sophisticated accounts of how raw sensation is refined to produce an image that is the precondition for intellectual understanding. As Azadpur points out, however, the psychological refining of the image is equally an ethical ascent, whereby the soul increasingly purifies the image of its power to move physical desires in the wrong way. Thus, as Azadpur notes, the Islamic Peripatetic view of imagination stands squarely in the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition of philosophy as a transformative purification of knowledge and appetite. In fact, I am struck by the parallels between Alfarabi's description of the vain and counterfeit philosophers, and Plato's description in the *Seventh Letter* of those who are "not genuine converts to philosophy," who lack the discipline and virtue necessary for philosophy, or who have no "natural aptitude for and affinity with justice."¹ One might also note the similarities between the purification of imagination in Avicenna, and the Plotinian view that in order to reach the intelligible realm, the soul must "cut away [from itself] all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast,

¹ Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 340d-341b and 344a-b; compare to Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, cited in Azadpur, 40. Alfarabi himself cites the *Republic*.

labor to make all one radiance of beauty” until it sees intelligibility shining out from itself.²

This interpretation helps to dispel the common misconception that for medieval Peripatetics (both Islamic and Latin), cognition is a sort of data-processing, the work of an absurdly complicated “Rube Goldberg” psychological machine that repackages raw sense data and hands it off in various forms to various cognitive powers. By recognizing knowledge as a “transformative spiritual exercise,” Azadpur helps us recognize that for an author like Avicenna, the function of this psychological “machinery” is to purify the knower so as to achieve an increasingly intense union with the real. For the Islamic Peripatetics, knowledge acquisition is not *interiorizing of data*, but an *emergence from distortion into reality*, i.e., an increasingly perfect assimilation of the knower (via knowledge and virtue) to the really real. Once the ethical dimension of cognition is illuminated, we can see why medieval Peripatetics insist on defining thought as a union, identity, or communion with pure intelligibles. The philosopher is engaged in a project of “healing” the soul, adjusting his vision, breaking out of the realm of appearances into reality. Understanding and virtue, theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom, are thus simply two aspects of the same transformative project.

In addition to shedding light on Islamic Peripatetic theories of cognition, I think that Azadpur’s insight into the ethical dimension of cognition has the potential to open a new chapter in the study of Latin medieval theories of cognition (whose dependence on Islamic philosophers like Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, is now

² Plotinus, *Ennead* I.6.9 (from *The Essential Plotinus*, trans. Elmer O’Brien [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1964], 42-43): “What, then, is this inner vision? Like anyone just awakened, the soul cannot look at bright objects. It must be persuaded to look first at beautiful habits, then the works of beauty produced not by craftsman’s skill but by the virtue of men known for their goodness, then the souls of those who achieve beautiful deeds. ‘How can one see the beauty of a good soul?’ Withdraw into yourself and look. If you do not as yet see beauty within you, do as does the sculptor of a statue that is to be beautified: he cuts away here, he smooths it there, he makes this line lighter, this other one purer, until he disengages beautiful lineaments in the marble. Do you this, too. Cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labor to make all one radiance of beauty. Never cease ‘working at the statue’ until there shines out upon you from it the divine sheen of virtue, until you see perfect ‘goodness firmly established in a stainless shrine.’ Have you become like this? Do you see yourself, abiding within yourself, in pure solitude? Does nothing now remain to shatter that interior unity, nor anything external cling to your authentic self? Are you entirely that sole true light which is not contained by space, nor confined to any circumscribed form, not diffused as something without term, but ever unmeasurable as something greater than all measure and something more than all quantity? Do you see yourself in this state? Then you have become vision itself. Be of good heart. Remaining here you have ascended aloft. You need a guide no longer. Strain and see. . . . No eye that has not become like unto the sun will ever look upon the sun; nor will any that is not beautiful look upon the beautiful. Let each one therefore become godlike and beautiful who would contemplate the divine and beautiful.” See also Plato, *Symposium* 210a-211d, where Socrates outlines a path of purification whereby human souls are drawn toward Beauty itself by means of increasingly refined images of beautiful things that gradually wean the soul away from its distracting desire for sights and sounds; or; see also the famous *Seventh Letter*. Compare to Avicenna, as discussed in Azadpur, §4.1 and 4.4.

increasingly recognized). What might we learn about Latin Scholastic views on virtue, grace, cognition, and free will, if—adopting Azadpur’s methodology—we approach the Latin texts freed from the Enlightenment-era identification of cognition with ratiocination? Certainly Latin theologies of grace clearly present human transformation as a cognitive-affective process of becoming increasingly “deiform.”³ But what about Latin philosophical psychology? Scholars have noted a few cases in which virtue involves a cognitive dimension and vice versa (such as Aquinas’s claim that virtuous habits provide a connatural knowledge of the corresponding realities,⁴ or his description of virtuous practice as a ordering of the passions and taming of phantasms which prepares for contemplation⁵). But not enough research has been done in order to know whether these themes represent a broader commitment to the spiritually transformative character of knowledge among the Latin medievals. And even if not—for instance, if it turns out that the Latins preferred to speak of spiritual transformation as a kind of knowing, rather than construing knowledge as a kind of spiritual transformation—this raises the question of why. While Azadpur suggests a political reason [“it threatened to undermine the church and its monopoly over spiritual salvation” (107)], I wonder whether a quite different issue might be at stake: i.e., the Latin medieval tendency to insist that an uneducated little old lady (the *vetula*) can be just as virtuous as the philosopher (and I will come back to the *vetula* in a moment). In any case, these sorts of questions are long-overdue for investigation, and they have important implications for medieval perspectives of understanding, free will, and happiness.

A second way in which Azadpur’s study furthers our understanding of medieval philosophy is in his challenge to the standard narrative concerning the Latin faith-and-reason debates toward the end of the 13th century. This standard narrative runs as follows: Since the early days of Christianity, Christian thinkers had struggled with the question of how to integrate philosophy and its teaching into Christian theology and practice.⁶ The most successful answer was given by Thomas Aquinas, who describes

³ See especially Bonaventure’s discussion of wisdom in *Quaestiones disputatae de scientia Christi*, q. 7.

⁴ Caldera 1980; Miller 1959.

⁵ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* IIa-IIae, 182.3: “The active life can be considered in two ways. In one way, with respect to the study and exercise of exterior actions. And thus it is clear that the active life impedes the contemplative, insofar as it is impossible to occupy oneself with exterior actions and give oneself over to divine contemplation. In another way the active life can be considered with respect to its composing and ordering the interior passions of the soul. And with respect to this, the active life assists contemplation, which is impeded by the disordering of the interior passions . . . So the exercise of the active life strengthens the contemplative, because it quiets the interior passions, from which phantasms come forth, by which contemplation is impeded” (my translation).

⁶ In addition to helping us understanding the paradigm of Islamic philosophy as a way of life, Azadpur’s insights, I think, can be extended fruitfully to shed light on the tension among the Christians of late antiquity, between faith (Divine wisdom) and pagan philosophy (human wisdom). Reading back enlightenment models of philosophy into the past, this tension is easily misconstrued as a religious fear of being challenged by rational discourse. But if we keep in mind that ancient philosophy construed itself not merely as a system of rational beliefs but as an ascetic way of life, the initial hesitance of Christians to incorporate philosophy into the life of faith takes on quite a different color.

faith and reason as cooperators in a single quest for truth. Faith builds on the discoveries of reason and grants the human mind access to divine intelligibilities that it could never have attained on its own; conversely, reason helps the believer gain deeper understanding into revealed truths. Faith and reason can never truly conflict because they are given to human beings by one Creator as complementary means of returning to him (the Neoplatonic *reditus*).⁷

But this harmonious relationship was threatened by “Latin Averroists” such as Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia, who held that philosophy is superior to theology, and that theology and philosophy necessarily arrive at conflicting conclusions. The Bishop of Paris, sought to address the perceived threat to faith by issuing the famous Paris Condemnations of 1277, which only served to widen the rift. Subsequently, philosophy became increasingly methodologically reliant on demonstrative proof; theology was afflicted by a growing skepticism in reason’s ability to provide insight into the mysteries of faith.⁸ According to this narrative, then, Aquinas stands as the last champion of a harmonious relationship between faith and reason, before a long, slow period of estrangement leading up to divorce in the Enlightenment.

Azadpur challenges this narrative, however, arguing that Aquinas bears responsibility for the eventual divorce, as the first Latin medieval thinker to deny that human thinking requires the external assistance of a separate Agent Intellect. Aquinas argues that the agent intellect plays an essential role in the act of thinking—namely, it is the mental power that renders objects intelligible—and thus we cannot be the authors of our own thoughts unless each of us has his or her own agent intellect.⁹ Following Henry Corbin, Azadpur argues that Aquinas’s immanentization of the Agent Intellect effectively strips philosophy of its ability to attain the transcendent, leaving religion as the sole access point to the Divine (107).

Now in a moment I will articulate some reasons that I think this critique is misdirected. But nevertheless I believe that Azadpur makes an extremely important point, one often overlooked by readers of Aquinas: in order to overcome the contemporary split between reason and religion, it is not enough simply to posit *a priori* that they must be in agreement. The key to overcoming the split, as Azadpur

⁷ Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* I.3-7 and *Commentary on Boethius’s “De Trinitate”*, qq. 2, aa 1-3.

⁸ Although 14th-century theology is often thought to have retreated into fideism (see Etienne Gilson 1938), Russell Friedman has recently convincingly argued that the shape of 14th-century theology is governed instead by a quest for divine simplicity, which precipitated a turn toward negative theology (Friedman 2010, ch. 4). One could also mention the epistemological skepticism of thinkers like Henry of Ghent as a possible factor.

⁹ See Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* II.76 (cited by Azadpur, 106); *Quaestiones disputatae de anima* 5; *Summa theologiae* Ia.79.3. Aquinas thus rejects Avicenna’s separate Agent Intellect, but as Azadpur and others have noted, this is because he fails to realize that the separate Agent Intellect performs a different role in cognition, for Avicenna (see Azadpur, note 53 to chapter 6). The same applies to Aquinas’s critique of the Averroist doctrine of “one possible intellect for all humans”—Aquinas thinks that this would destroy the possibility of each person having his or her own individual thoughts, but he seems to be unaware that he and Averroes have very different interpretations of what it means to think about an essence; see Deborah Black 1993, 23-59; and Richard Taylor 1999, 147-177.

recognizes, lies more fundamentally in some sort of rehabilitation for both reason and religion, in which reason's transformative access to the transcendent is affirmed, and faith is recognized as an affective and cognition relationship. Defenders of Aquinas thus need to examine instead how Aquinas contributes to this project of rehabilitation.

3.

I now want to turn to two points on which I have reservations concerning Azadpur's characterization of the root of the modern split between reason and religion, and his solution to this split.

First, I am not convinced by Corbin's and Azadpur's argument that the immanentization of mental powers necessarily threatens the integrity of philosophy as a transformative spiritual exercise directed toward "the unforeseen beyond."¹⁰ It seems to me that an immanentist *mechanism* of cognition need not restrict the mind to this-worldly *objects* of thought. For instance, a defender of immanentized mental powers like Aquinas might hold that the mind is naturally ordered toward the divine, possessing an innate ability to attain a cognitive union with God and to illuminate the natures embedded in individuals. In short, the claim that the mind can think on its own using its own native powers without *assistance from the divine* need not entail the claim that the unaided mind cannot *attain God or objects of cognition that transcend the merely empirical*, such as justice or beauty itself.¹¹

In fact, as Azadpur recognizes, Avicenna himself does not outsource any of the activity of human thinking to the separate Agent Intellect [and Azadpur rightly criticizes Aquinas for misinterpreting Avicenna on this point (106 and 152n53)]. For Avicenna just as much as for Aquinas, the act of thinking is the *individual human's own act*, the act of our own immanent mental powers. I wonder, then, if Azadpur's objection is really directed, not at immanentized psychologies, but at *abstractionist* theories of cognition. In other words, perhaps his objection ought to run something like this: If intelligibles are cognized only by abstracting them from extramental sensible objects (rather than by receiving them directly from a separate Agent Intellect), then the human intellect seems to be restricted to this-worldly, empirical objects.¹² Now I think an abstractionist could find ways around this objection—for instance, a) by arguing that we cognize intelligibles like *humanity* or *justice* by abstracting from sensible instances of these kinds, but that we have a different, non-

¹⁰ Corbin 1993, 173-74.

¹¹ Just one example of Aquinas insisting that the goal of human existence transcends the merely human, in *Summa theologiae* Ia-IIae.3.5, ad 3: "[Human beatitude would be an operation of the practical intellect] if man himself were his own ultimate end; then indeed the considering and ordering of his own acts and passions would be his beatitude. But because the ultimate end of man is a good outside himself—namely, God, whom we attain by an operation of the speculative intellect—therefore the beatitude of man consists in the operation of the speculative intellect rather than in an operation of the practical intellect" (my translation).

¹² Given the context of his argument, it is interesting that Azadpur does not hold that intelligibles must be *only* received directly from the Agent Intellect; instead, he agrees with Hasse that for Avicenna, intelligibles are both received via abstraction and by emanation from the Agent Intellect (see 55).

abstractive mode of access to higher, divine realities, and/or b) by arguing that abstracted intelligibles are themselves a participation in the Divine Ideas. But it remains true that it is easier for a theory of cognition by direct reception from a separate intellect to show that all cognition involves some access to a divine reality.

The second point on which I have reservations is Azadpur's argument that the integrity of philosophy and its harmonious relation to religion is best safeguarded by construing reason and religion as the intellectual and the imaginative approaches to a transcendent reality. Now at first glance, this solution appears to place reason and religion on a friendly footing. If the same reality can be reached either intellectually or imaginatively, these approaches need not be in competition, any more than a history of Rome and Virgil's *Aeneid* are in competition.

But it seems to me that this approach has two troubling implications. First, under this model religion can only coexist peacefully with philosophy if it is willing to be constrained by the image-weaving role that philosophy defines for it. In fact the Islamic Peripatetic model sets up a hierarchical relationship in which philosophy defines and restricts religion—precisely the reverse of the situation that Hadot critiques so strongly in the Latin medievals. According to Hadot, in the Latin West, religion constricted philosophy and limited its objects of inquiry, so that philosophy became a mere argumentative technique useful to theologians.¹³ Azadpur explains that the restriction resulted from fear of religious heresy, i.e., the fear that “the philosopher would be carried away . . . to an unforeseen beyond, and certainly beyond established dogma” (107). I think that this interpretation of the Latin medievals neglects an important aspect of their theory,¹⁴ but let us simply accept it as given for the present purposes.

Now if we turn to the Islamic Peripatetic model, we find the same kind of relationship, in which one discipline controls and defines the nature of the other. For the Islamic Peripatetics, it is philosophy that stands outside religion, constricting and defining it. Certainly philosophy does not restrict the *objects* of religion (since they both approach the “holy things”), but it does categorically restrict religion's *mode of access* to those objects, which is no small matter. Under the Islamic Peripatetic model, religion can tell instructive stories that truly imitate reality, but it cannot make truth claims about reality. Religion is thus for adults what classic fairy tales are for children—namely, Tolkien's “true myths,” or the “noble lies” of Plato's *Republic*, meant to initiate the listener into the mysteries of life, death, good, evil, love, and

¹³ “[P]hilosophy's role was henceforth to furnish theology with conceptual—and hence purely theoretical—material” (Hadot 1995, 107-08).

¹⁴ On my view, Aquinas construed the quest for God (perhaps not entirely accidentally) in a way that is very similar to the Islamic Peripatetic quest for the divine, i.e., as a process of purification involving religious and ethical practices in which knowledge and virtue are co-developed, culminating in an intimate union with the divine essence. The difference is that for the medievals, natural reason and virtue cannot get the human soul all the way to the end of this trajectory. To complete the journey Divine intervention is needed in the form of grace, which grants the soul a divinized nature whereby it can then attain perfect union with God. Nothing in this paradigm suggests that reason must be relegated to a mere ratiocinative device (although this sort of thinking was arguably common in 14th-century theology).

suffering. Now certainly Azadpur rightly points out that under this model, prophetic symbolism is not a “ploy to make the meaning inaccessible to the average audience”; instead “the hermeneutics of the inspired symbols brings us to imaginatively entertain what the philosopher’s intellectual hermeneutics aims to behold intellectually” (88-89). But even so, religion is barred from providing access to reality *as it is in itself*—only reality under the guise of images suited to the masses. Only the philosopher, who has *intellectual* access to the “unforeseen beyond,” can recognize the true meaning of those images.

As a result, I do not find Ghazali’s resistance to the Islamic Peripatetic solution at all surprising. According to Azadpur, Ghazali simply failed to notice (or was politically motivated not to notice) that philosophy was a way of life in which the intellect cultivates the imagination for the sake of conjunction with the separate Agent Intellect, entirely compatible with the believer’s path toward “divine things” via Islamic religious practices (93). But I would argue that Ghazali (and later, the anti-Averroist Latin medievals) clearly recognized what religion loses under this model: The philosopher claims for himself a superior mode of access to divine things, and even the ability to judge religion’s success in imaginatively representing the truths that he accesses directly. Religion might well resent being dismissed to the children’s table.

This leads us to the second difficulty with the Islamic Peripatetic model: i.e., its reliance on a certain philosophical elitism.¹⁵ Along their different paths to union with the divine, the philosopher and the uneducated believer both attain perfection, but only the philosopher is perfected at the highest level of his being, i.e., the intellectual. The uneducated believer necessarily falls short of such perfection, remaining within the realm of images and attaining a certain remote conjunction with the Agent Intellect only via the imagination. (And thus it makes sense for Avicenna to describe himself as the most perfect believer—philosophy is the intellectual unveiling of what the believer grasps imaginatively, and the philosopher must engage in religious practices in order to cultivate the practical virtue leading to theoretical virtue.¹⁶) Now I would agree with Azadpur that one could rank a way of life as objectively higher than another way of life due to its mode or objects, without necessarily denigrating those who occupy the lesser state of life. But I am not so sure about the claim that the status of one’s way of life determines one’s degree of union with the divine. If union with the divine is the highest goal and fulfillment of human existence, there is something deeply counterintuitive about the claim that factors largely outside one’s control—education and intellectual ability—are what determine the soul’s closeness to God and even the attainment of immortality (see 101). Certainly the philosopher works hard to cultivate virtue, since that is the only way to gain the immortal “acquired intellect.” But what about the little old lady who is equally assiduous in cultivating virtue? Through no fault of her own, according to the Islamic Peripatetic

¹⁵ The same philosophical elitism appears in Moses Maimonides, as well as in Boethius of Dacia.

¹⁶ See Avicenna’s response to accusations of heresy, cited in Azadpur, 92.

model, she is denied perfect union with God in this life, and loses the opportunity for immortality.

In fact, the problem of the “little old lady” (*vetula*) is, I believe, one of the key motivating factors in the Latin medieval inversion of the Islamic Peripatetic model. For the Latin medievals, faith is superior to reason because faith provides the deforming grace of charity, by which the soul is elevated to a supernatural mode of union with God. In this way, the little old lady and the believing philosopher can be equally perfectly united to God. For instance, Bonaventure (Aquinas’s contemporary) writes, “Whence neither justice nor miracles nor knowing (*scire*) mysteries are advantageous without charity. And all the doctors and Saints judge this to be the case. For behold, a little old woman (*vetula*) who has a small garden has better fruit from possessing charity alone, than a great master who has the biggest garden and knows (*scit*) the mysteries and natures of things.”¹⁷ In short, one might object—and many 13th-century Latin masters would certainly have objected—to the Islamic Peripatetic model on the grounds that it denies to the little old lady any possibility of reaching the highest mode of union with God.¹⁸

¹⁷ Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* 18, no. 26 [Quaracchi 5.418, my translation]. The charism of the Franciscan order seems to have made it particularly resistant to any philosophical elitism. For instance, Johannes Jörgensen’s *Saint Francis of Assisi: A Biography* (Jörgensen 1911, 238) reports a story by an early biographer of Francis about a concern among early Franciscans that their charism of simplicity and poverty might be threatened under the leadership of Bonaventure (one of the great minds of the 13th century, educated at Paris before entering the Franciscans): “But soon Brother Giles awakened from his memories and dreams and saw that the good old times were irrevocably gone, that Francis was dead, and he himself an old man whose ideas did not interest anyone. . . . Then Brother Giles sighed deeply and long: ‘Our ship leaks and must sink; let him flee who can! Paris, Paris, thou ruinest St. Francis’ Order!’ . . . And when Giles in his old age was placed before the General of the Order, St. Bonaventure, the first question he asked this learned man was the following: ‘Father, can we ignorant and unlearned men be saved?’ ‘Certainly,’ answered St. Bonaventure kindly. ‘Can one who is not book-learned love God as much as one who is?’ asked the old Franciscan again. ‘An old woman is in a condition to love God more than a master in theology’ was Bonaventure’s answer. Then Giles stood up, went to the wall of his garden and called out to the wide world, ‘Hear this, all of you, an old woman who never has learned anything and cannot read can love God more than Brother Bonaventure!’”

See also Aquinas, *Symbolum Apostolorum*, prooemium: “No philosopher before the coming of Christ could know (*scire*) as much about God and what is necessary for eternal life, even by striving with all his might, as a little old lady knows (*scit*) after the coming of Christ; and thus Isaiah says (11:9): “The earth is full of the knowledge (*scientia*) of God” (my translation).

The strength of 13th-century opposition to any philosophical elitism is evident in the fact that in the Paris Condemnations of 1277, the first two condemned propositions on the list are “That there is no more excellent state than to study philosophy,” and “That the only wise men in the world are the philosophers.”

¹⁸ One wonders whether this problem is intensified or ameliorated by Alfarabi’s lesson or only intensify the problem by uniting the philosopher and prophet in a single person? As Azadpur explains in ch. 3, for Alfarabi, philosophical excellence and prophetic excellence are necessarily united in a single person, who “holds the most perfect rank of humanity and has reached the highest degree of felicity.” Could this state be reached via religious practices as well (in which case a more egalitarian approach to perfect happiness would be available)? Or is it available only to the philosopher (in which

In opening up these and other topics for discussion, *Reason Unbound* provides a valuable service to a historically to the relationship between philosophy and religion. Rehabilitating philosophy as a way of life, and recovering the relevance of Islamic and medieval thought to contemporary philosophy of religion, *Reason Unbound* offers a much-needed reflection on the richness of reason.

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case the problems mentioned above are only intensified, since then the philosopher not only leads a life superior to that of the believer, but even serves as the conduit for religious revelation)?