Re-Telling the History of Political Thought

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Abstract

This paper explores the construction of the canon of political theory. I argue that the interpretation of the canon that defines ancient pagan Greeks as the founders of western political thought, includes medieval Christian thinkers, and yet defines out Muslim and Jewish philosophers is based upon western ethnocentric secular assumptions about the proper role of reason, experience and revelation in philosophical thinking.

We study the canon of political thought because the thinkers represented therein are thought to offer enduring insights into the problems of human community.[1] An important, albeit controversial, challenge to the canon has been made by those who see in it, not timeless wisdom accessible to all, but the dominance of elite dead white European males.[2] Stuurman observes that in spite of this challenge, the canon remains the standard way to approach the study of political theory. "No serious political theorist or intellectual historian that I know of," he writes, "would subscribe to a wholesale endorsement of the canon; yet nearly all of them admit that they cannot at present conceive of a better way to teach the subject."[3]

One of the reasons the canon comes under attack from multiculturalists is not so much due to what each individual classic text may or may not say about the problems and solutions of political community, but that the whole package is presented as the ultimate and definitive word on notions of the good life. The way the canon is conceived of and presented by scholars

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working in its traditions carries with it an arrogance of exclusion that can be infuriating to those who also find wisdom outside the classic texts of the canon. Thus, one of the real problems of the canon is its lack of awareness that it is just one of many different traditions.[4] This has been brought to the fore with the transition to a multicultural West after World War II, growing numbers of non-western scholars in western academy, and the rise of the "global village."

Due to the importance of creating spaces for non-western voices to be heard in discussions affecting the global political community, my paper aims to make room for other traditions of political thought in the teaching and study of political theory. This need not entail (completely) the undoing of the canon, nor the inserting of non-western thinkers into it.[5] All that is needed is to conceptualize the canon not as "the" history of political thought, but as "a" tradition of political thought that all can learn from, alongside other traditions.

A crucial first step is to make the canon more aware of its own construction, its own "inventedness" as a tradition.[6] An illuminating way to highlight the canon's (Eurocentric) formation is to look at the relationship between western and Islamic political theory. Though many might wonder if there is any substantial connection between western and Islamic political thinking, the traditions of western political thought do have significant and interesting interactions with Islamic intellectual traditions. At a time when some in both the western and Islamic worlds are pointing to an absolute incompatibility, even an impending "clash" between the two civilizations, drawing attention to the intellectual relationships between the two worlds, and the intersections and divergences between the two traditions, is a promising way to contribute toward a lessening of tension.[7]

So I aim to bring attention to the constructed nature of the canon of the history of political thought with an emphasis on the relationship between western and Islamic intellectual traditions. I look first at the presumed origins of the history of political thought in ancient Greece. Next, I discuss the relationship between the canon and western identity. Finally, I consider to what extent the canon's composition is based on a secular understanding of the relationship between reason and revelation.

An Intercultural Philosophical Tradition

The standard survey course/textbook places the origins of western political theory, or political theory simply, in ancient Greece, especially the city of

Athens, with Plato (427-347 BCE) and his student Aristotle (384-22 BCE). After Aristotle, the standard account suggests, there is a kind of stagnation until Machiavelli (1469-1532) comes on the scene in Italy, some 1,800 years later. An expanded version of the history of political thought will trace in more detail the thinkers who lived and wrote in between Aristotle and Machiavelli, the Stoics, the Epicureans, Cicero, Augustine, Aquinas, and so on. But the standard account will typically skip the years between Aristotle and Machiavelli. The assumption is that Machiavelli is the first thinker since Aristotle to break with the "classical" tradition of political theory, and that he marks a transition between the "ancients" and the "moderns." The typical short account of the history of political thought carries with it problematic assumptions.

In the first place, that the transition from Aristotle to Machiavelli in the standard account so easily coincides with a Eurocentric interpretation of the linear progress of history should make us uneasy (with ancient Greece as the cradle of western civilization, going into a kind of remission during the "Dark Ages" and waking up again during the "Renaissance.") The standard story of history in western textbooks treats history as the narrative of a "western mainstream" and "non-western" periphery. "Mainstream" history:

> includes all West-European history since it became civilized, of course; and, before that time, selected periods from areas to the southeast: Greek history 'till the time of the Roman Empire (but not since – the Byzantines do not count as mainstream); and the Near East until the rise of the Greeks, but not since ... The 'mainstream' of history, in the traditional image, runs through northwestern Europe in the Dark Ages of the Merovingians – although everyone knows that the Byzantines and the Muslims (and the Indians and the Chinese) were far more civilized then.[8]

It is, as Hodgson notes, not a good picture of world history, simply one that "allows us to construct a world history in which our own cultural ancestors hold most of the attention."[9] It is also a Eurocentric vision of history that has political overtones and implications.

The canon of the history of political thought suffers from the same presuppositions, notably claiming ancient Greece as its cradle, treating that history as synonymous with "the history of western political thought," and tracing the "progress" of political theory as running from ancient Greece to the Romans to the Latin world thence to Western European thinkers, even though this is not the story of the transmission of the Platonic and Aristotelian corpuses to the West. Nowhere is the Eurocentric vision of the history of the canon more evident than in its claiming Plato and Aristotle,

ancient pagan Greeks, as the "founders" of western political thought. This is made plain by an alternative story of the history of western political thought, which I will shortly recount. Such an alternative history complicates the canon's understanding of itself, especially its exclusive claim to Plato and Aristotle.

The survey course form of this alternative history would be as follows: After the deaths of Plato and Aristotle, their teachings continued to be studied at academies in the Hellenistic world until they were closed down, or transformed, by rulers and thinkers of the Christianised Roman empire. By 200, "there existed among the Greeks of the empire only the Platonic academies at Alexandria and Athens and their lesser reflections at Apamea and Pergamum."[10] The Emperor Justinian closed the Academy at Athens in 529, which left only the school at Alexandria, by then radically Christianized.[11] The philosophers and teachers of Plato and Aristotle fled to the Persian Sassanian empire, where they sought refuge in cities such as Jundishapur (located near Baghdad), already a distinguished international center of learning.[12]

By 651, Muslim Arab armies had conquered Arabia, the Syrian and Egyptian provinces of the Byzantine Empire and all of Persia.[13] Thus the Islamic empire became heir to the cumulative learning of the empires of Hellenic Greece, the Romans, and Persia. Under Caliphs al-Mansur (754-75), Harun al-Rashid (786-809), al-Ma'mun (813-33), and other patrons, Greek astronomical, mathematical, medical, philosophical and other scientific texts were translated into Arabic.[14] By the ninth century most of the Platonic and Aristotelian corpuses, and several important Greek commentaries on them, had been translated into Arabic, including Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.[15] Muslim philosophers were enthusiastic disciples of Plato and Aristotle, although many of them were condemned by Muslim jurists for incorporating aspects of Greek philosophy the jurists held to be contrary to Qur'anic revelation.

The Latin Christian world, which had lost touch with the continuous tradition of Greek philosophy as early as 300,[16] was brought up to date commencing in the mid twelfth century, when the first translations of Arabic philosophy into Latin were made by Dominic Gundisalvi and his Arabic-speaking assistants in Toledo.[17] For the next three hundred years, Islamic (and Jewish) philosophers were among the "most important influences on scholastic philosophers and theologians."[18] Medieval Latin scholars relied on Muslim philosophers, especially Ibn Rushd (1126-98, known in the Latin world as Averroes), for their understanding of Plato and Aristotle.[19]

Latin translations of Averroes' commentaries were often bound together with translations of Aristotle's own works.[20] Aristotle was known simply as "the Philosopher," and Ibn Rushd as "the Commentator."[21] Averroism became a school of thought in the Latin West, which was then declared heretical by the Church.[22] In spite of this, Averroism continued to have an influence on European scholars well into the sixteenth century. John of Jandun's (1285/9-1328) interpretation of Averroes was influential among "scholars in Bologna, Padua, and Erfurt in the late fourteenth century … Krakow in the mid fifteenth … [and] Italy in the sixteenth.[23]

European reliance on the Muslim philosophers waned as the Latin translations "were edited and brought into print in the late fifteenth and early sixteen century."[24] Direct access to the original Greek manuscripts further lessened the reliance on Muslim texts and commentaries.[25] The subsequent modern reaction against scholasticism sidelined Muslim (and Christian) philosophical influence more fully.[26] Subsequently, European political thinkers developed the secular tradition that is at the heart of today's western political philosophy, and is reflected in the names of the modern theorists distinguished by the canon.

According to this alternative history of political thought, ancient Greece cannot be claimed as exclusively western by the western philosophical tradition. Rather, Plato and Aristotle are the ancestors of a philosophical tradition that criss-crosses between several different cultures and religions: pagan ancient Greece, the Christianised Roman empire, the Christian Byzantine empire, the Zoroastrian Persian empire, the Islamic empire, Latin Christendom, secular Europe and later, its colonies, now known as the West. This establishes, as Wilson remarks, a "Euro-Arab" tradition of scholarship.[27] Indeed, Richard Walzer used to advise classical scholars to read the Arabic commentaries to finish their work as scholars of Greek philosophy.[28] The transmission of the Greek texts is a rich story of intercultural communication, whereby different theorists of different religious and cultural backgrounds have shared in the "conversation" about politics and the good life.[29] It is a narrative in which ancient Greece provides common foundations both to aspects of the Islamic civilization and the European, later western, civilization. It is only in this broader sense that Plato and Aristotle can be said to be founders of western political thought.

This story of an intercultural philosophical tradition dating back to Plato and Aristotle is well known to medievalists and Islamic studies scholars (indeed, to Muslims in general, who often take great pride in the importance of medieval Muslim philosophy and its contributions to the West).

The way I have told the history, however, is not well known (if known at all) to students of the standard account of the history of political thought. In addition, the formative role played by Muslim philosophers on the western political tradition as I have recounted it here is contentious: the more common version is that Muslim philosophers simply "absorbed, preserved, and retransmitted Greek thought [...] to Europe during the Middle-Ages, thereby ensuring the continuity of the western philosophical tradition."[30] In other words, all that the Muslim thinkers did was passively preserve what are essentially "western" ideas.

That the passive role of Muslim thinkers as transmitters of western ideas is a commonly accepted notion indicates that my telling of an unconventional history of political thought challenges the very identity of the western intellectual tradition, because the alternative account disputes the notion that Plato and Aristotle are the founders of an exclusively western canon of political theory, and also because it brings into view characters not thought of as westerners. Some readers may agree with my point about the sloppiness of the elision between the phrases "the history of political thought" and "the history of western political thought," and seek to be more precise in the future, but many might object to my implication that there is something wrong with considering ancient Greece as the foundation of western political thought. After all, ancient Greece is part of Europe, hence part of the history of European political thought, and as Europe is part of the West, it is part of the history of western political thought.

But consider the implications of Hodgson's observation that "[c]lassical Greece is called 'western,' though Byzantine Greece is often included in the 'East.'"[31] Indeed, when Greece was part of the Ottoman Empire, Europe thought of it as part of the "East." In 1902, D.C. Hogarth, an English archaeologist, included Greece as part of the "Near East," and during WWII the British Middle East Air Command stretched from Malta to Iran, and Syria to Ethiopia. As late as a 1948, a UN Economic Commission for the Middle East included Greece in its definition of the Middle East.[32]

At what point, then, did Greece become a western country? How is it possible to consider ancient Greece as the foundation of western civilization and political philosophy, when the rest of the time Greece is not considered part of the West? How can the Merovigians and not the Byzantines be seen as the "true" heirs of ancient Greece? Conversely, if the criterion for inclusion in the tradition of western political thought is being from a country that is now seen as part of the West, why exclude Muslim philosophers, like Ibn Rushd (Averroes), from Al-Andalusia (Muslim Spain)? Why

exclude theorists who are part of a continuous chain of the transmission of the teachings of Plato and Aristotle from ancient Greece to modern Europe? It is not, after all, as if the canon as it is currently framed represents the history of a single religious tradition, nor that of a single cultural tradition.

The Canon and Western Identity

The canon represents to many western thinkers an authoritative tradition to be consulted for guidance to the problems of today. To be sure, the whole tradition of western political thought is not a seamless one, rather an assemblage of often conflicting notions of the good life, human nature, the best polity, and so on. But these differences are held together in the tradition by virtue of their "westernness" – their affiliation with conversation about politics (supposedly) taking place within the boundaries of the West.

As such, there is a subtext underlying the canon's construction and what it means for western intellectuals: a conviction that the progress of political thought in the West represents the epitome of thinking about politics and the good life. Western civilization is the story of the triumph of reason over (religious) dogmatism, liberty over bondage, and equality over aristocratic privilege.[33] Western civilization emerges as the pinnacle in a hierarchy of civilizations, graded according to certain ideals of liberty and equality. The canon's role in this broader conception of civilization is "interpreted [in this story] as the theoretical component, the *esprit* of historical progress, and its lessons are 'principles never to be effaced from the minds of mankind to the end of time.' "[34]

Stuurman argues that the canon was invented in the nineteenth century, and points to Robert Blakey's *The History of Political Literature from the Earliest Times* (1855) as the first textbook of the history of political thought of which he is aware.[35] He argues that the outlines provided by Blakey (ancient Greece as the foundation, the medieval period focusing on the Church vs. State contest, the theory of Christian natural law, the right of resistance to unjust rule, and the modern era characterized by the triumph of reason and liberal institutions) have remained relatively unchanged in the twentieth century, in spite of many additions and amendments. Stuurman observes that this nineteenth century vision of the triumph of reason and freedom has its roots in the Enlightenment philosophy of history.[36]

These are significant observations, especially for my article's aim to reassess the canon's reflexivity and usefulness for our contemporary era. For it was in the nineteenth century that the concept of civilizations as bounded

entities based on a particular essence took root. In the Enlightenment era, the *philosophes* had attacked the church for its stifling of scientific thought and progress. (Incidentally, to avoid the censors they substituted Islam for Christianity in their attack on religion.[37]) But they still thought of the "oriental man" in humanist terms, that all "men" shared a certain basic similarity by virtue of being human.[38] This changed with the nineteenth century's triumphalism and imperialism. The oriental man "became something quite separate, sealed off in his own specificity, yet worthy of a kind of grudging admiration. This is the origin of the *homo Islamicus,* a notion widely accepted even today."[39]

The study of the comparative history of religions and of historical and comparative linguistics contributed to these concepts. Civilizations were conceived of as totally separate entities, founded on a religious essence.[40] The boundaries were sealed, not porous, and the civilizations could be ranked according to their embodying high and noble qualities. Not surprisingly, Western Europe was placed at the pinnacle, followed by "eastern" Christianity, Islam, Africa and native peoples of the "New World." The Voltairian anti-clerical tradition claimed ancient Greece, as an early exemplar of reason as the way to truth, as the embodiment of "western" civilization. This was contrasted with a "Semitic spirit of intolerance, scholastic dogmatism, fanatical and blind reliance on faith alone, a debilitating fatalism, and a contempt for the visual arts. Attributed to this spirit were all the misdeeds associated with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam."[41] Many western intellectuals remain committed today, even if at a subconscious level, to this contrast between the western and non-western spirit, and to an essentialist conception of civilizations. This is in spite of the intellectual challenges of Marxism, deconstructionism, postmodernism and poststucturalism.

Understood from a "Westernist" perspective,[42] it is clear that the story of the canon's origins, its exclusive claim to Plato and Aristotle, its way of explaining the transmission of Platonic and Aristotelian thought from ancient Greece to Latin Europe via the inert hands of Muslim and Jewish philosophers, and its conception of Machiavelli as the break between "ancients" and "moderns," is no mere trifle: it is part of the very essence of what it means to be a "Westerner." Stuurman is right when he says, "it is not too much to say that the canonical story of political thought is at the very center of European, and more generally, western identity."[43] This is an invented tradition formulated by western Europeans that speaks to their understanding of the relationship between reason and revelation, Church and State, history and progress, and insiders and outsiders. It prioritizes

those peoples and eras they see as their kin, their intellectual ancestors. As I mentioned at the start of this paper, this is to be expected; every people does this in its formulation of a sacred tradition that is to speak to the needs and concerns of its adherents. In this paper, I am trying to highlight underlying presuppositions of the canon and to raise questions of the canon's continued appropriateness for this new era of interpenetration of cultures, peoples and religions.

A more genuinely self-reflexive history of western political thought would place its origins with those moments, perhaps hard to pin down categorically, when European intellectuals began to think of themselves as "European" (if we continue to accept the equation of "Europe" with "the West.") Thus we might start with medieval Christian theologians, such as Bede (672-735), the pre-eminent Biblical scholar who attempted to place the Saracens into the Christian historical schema.[44] But if the western identity is to be a secular one, a more appropriate place would be the eras of the reaction to the Church and Latin Scholasticism, the end of the idea of a united Christendom and the rise of proto-nationalism – the Renaissance, or the Reformation.[45] The emergence of the Latin Christian identity would be an important precursor to this western sense of self. In this version of the history of western political thought, as Stuurman argues, "the ancients [and, I would add, the Latin scholars] … appear … [as] 'intellectual materials,' rather than as theorists in their own, Greek or Roman, contexts."[46]

The standard way to teach the history of western political theory, usually in the form of a study of the progression of individual great male thinkers, is to treat these men as Westerners who are having a conversation with other Westerners about the nature of politics, the good life, the best polity, the best form of government and so on. The West is conceived, in line with what I have said above about civilizational essences, as an entity that is hermetically sealed from the rest of the (peripheral) non-western world. Other peoples, religions and cultures are marked off as if "the West" existed in a world of its own and had no relationship whatsoever with the non-western world.

The field of political theory, existing as a closed system, does not encourage people to do much more than study a set of (largely given) thinkers for their views about X or Y topic. Comparative political theory is virtually non-existent.[47] Contemporary political theorists, unlike philosophers as far as I am aware, have not explored the relationship between the men who make up the canon and Islamic political philosophy. Non-Westerners simply do not figure in the conversation – either as interlocutors

or as relevant aspects of the world in which the great thinkers were carrying out their conversations. The way the canon is taught disregards the intellectual interaction between "the West" and a host of other religions, cultures and their thinkers – Judaism, Islam, China, India, Africa, native American, and so on; the construction of the canon as an enclosed western system does not take into account its intercultural nature. All of these relationships ought to be studied. In what follows I focus only on Islam and the West.

This treating of the West as sealed off from the rest of the world has not always been characteristic of western intellectualism. In the medieval period, "the existence of Islam was the most far-reaching problem in medieval Christendom … at every level of experience."[48] Whether as foil or as teacher, Muslim philosophy (and Islam in general) was an integral aspect of Latin intellectual and theological thinking and writing. And, unlike today, this was recognized by the thinkers themselves. Roger Bacon (ca. 1214-92) had remarked in his history of philosophy, "thus philosophy was revived chiefly by Aristotle in Greek and then chiefly by Avicenna [Ibn Sina] in Arabic."[49] St Thomas Aquinas, at the same time as he learned from Ibn Sina (Avicenna), directed much of his writing to attacking Averrorism.[50] Indeed, the medieval sense of being part of Latin Christendom, their very identities as Latin European Christians, resulted largely from the challenge of the existence of the Islamic empire.[51]

The situation is similar for the Renaissance, Enlightenment and early modern and modern philosophers. As Walzer remarks, "In the age of Dante people were fully aware of this particular importance [of Islamic philosophy and science in the history of European civilization] of the Muhammadans for their own cultural life."[52] Leibniz (1646-1716) footnotes Ash›arite and Mu›tazilite positions on the divine will and divine justice in his discussion of the discussion of evil in the world.[53] Machiavelli discusses "the Turk" in his *Prince*.[54] Voltaire, Diderot and other *philosophes* attack Islam and praise "Arab" science in their campaign against the Catholic Church.[55]

Other Enlightenment deists praise Islam as the closest religion to natural religion, and many Enlightenment thinkers saw Islam in a civilizing role: "civilization did not come from the monasteries, but rather from the pagan Greeks and Romans and was transmitted to Europe by, of all people, non-Christian Arabs."[56] Rousseau praises the Mohammadan system of religion.[57] Locke, Hegel, Marx and, Mill in line with then dominant Orientalist conceptions of the Middle East, portray the world of Islam as stagnated in despotism, the example of which emphasized the western world's progress and civilization.[58] In sum, medieval, Renaissance, Enlightenment and mod-

ern philosophers treated Muslim thinkers as a part of their conversations (sometimes paradoxically, given that their popular and religious cultural milieu was largely anti-Islamic), and yet this is not part of the contemporary conversation about the thinkers themselves.

In fact in today's western cultural milieu, Islam (usually in the form of "Islamic fundamentalism") still features as an important aspect of political theorizing. Westerners are aware of the world of Islam, and the juxtaposition, even threat, it (apparently) poses to western civilization. Liberal discourse abounds with references to Islam and to the problems apparently thrown up by Islamic civilization: especially questions of tolerance and the presence of Muslim minorities living in the West. Imagine a canon based on twentieth-century texts taught in 300 years that does not breathe a word about these intellectual relationships. With greater or lesser intensity, awareness of Islam has been a significant feature of "western" consciousness since about 1120.[59] Whether as interlocutors or as foil, Islam has played, and continues to play, a crucial role as "Other" in the formation and maintenance of western identities. This insight is vital to understanding the traditional construction of the canon.

The Canon and Western Christianity

I have suggested above, following Stuurman, that the canon was constructed in the nineteenth century, based on an Enlightenment vision of history and a nineteenth-century image of the role of Europe in the march of the progress of civilizations. The canon has been presented so far as the story of the secularization of thought, the triumph of reason over religious dogmatism. The privileging of reason as a way to truth led naturally to claiming ancient Greek thinkers as "western," given their emphasis on reason and logic over theology.

One expects to find, then, that the history of western political thought is composed of thinkers who hold to the same principles – a reliance on reason and a discounting of revelation or theology as guides to truth or sources of wisdom. Indeed, this is sometimes the explanation given for the jump in the short account of the history of political thought from Aristotle to Machiavelli, that Machiavelli marks the break of the sway of Aristotelian and theological thinking over western intellectuals. Thus, it is said, European Christian thinkers are sidelined as well as Muslim thinkers.[60] The history of western political thought is typically understood as the history and celebration of secular thought. On this reading, the exclusion of

Islamic political philosophy is easily explained: the adjective "Islamic" implies that Islamic political thought is tied up with the Islamic religion. Since that religion is based on revelation and not on reason, it is not a relevant aspect of the tradition of western political theory, which emphasizes reason over revelation.

A quick glance at the canon, however, reveals that its composition is not based exclusively on such principles as a thinker's relationship to the reason/revelation conundrum. For based on that assumption, one would expect to find included those "Islamic" philosophers who saw themselves as the heirs to Plato and Aristotle and who also emphasized reason over revelation: al-Kindi, al-Farabi, al Razi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd and so on. In addition, one would also not expect to find that the expanded canon does, in fact, include thinkers who were theologians – Christian theologians who were also philosophers (Aquinas) and Christian theologians who were not (Luther and Calvin). Why exclude Muslim philosophers of reason? Why include Christian theologians, but not Muslim or Jewish theologians?

The answer, of course, is that the canon represents those whom western intellectuals think of as their proper kin or ancestors. This is, as I have said before, normal: all peoples have a tradition of wise men or women whom they deem their proper sources for guidance. Islamic traditions include and exclude thinkers based on certain criteria, such as knowledge of Arabic and Arabic grammar, knowledge of Qur'anic revelation, knowledge of the biography of Prophet Muhammad, purity of personal behavior, and so on.

The canon of western political thought is not different in having culturally specific boundaries demarcating who is "in" and who is "out." But it is different in its lack of acknowledgment, even denial, of such borders, and the assumptions underpinning them. Typically, the ethnocentric boundaries are drawn attention to only by those seeking to challenge or change the canon, and defended, not on the grounds of "these are our culturally specific reasons for inclusion/exclusion," but on the grounds of the canon's "timeless truths:" timeless truths that are apparently neutrally derived, and compiled into a canon in an unbiased manner. Thus the real demarcations of who is in and out of the canon are hidden. So, while many of the important thinkers in the canon are not theologians, indeed are not at all religious, are unorthodox or even anti-religious (Machiavelli, Hobbes, Marx and Nietzsche), or, are pagan, (in the case of the "founders" Plato and Aristotle), Christian beliefs (as distinct from Islamic or Jewish beliefs) have not been

a barrier to including other thinkers – Augustine, Aquinas, Locke, Mill, Rousseau.[61]

The explanation for these inclusions and exclusions will most likely be something that draws attention to the "Westernness" of the thinkers included, and the non-Westerness of those excluded. But what is Westernness? Is it a geographical designation: the canon represents those who have been born in Europe? This seems solid enough, until we try to define Europe. I have already drawn attention to the problems of considering Plato and Aristotle as "Westerners." But does this work for the medieval period and after? Only if that is considered the starting point of western political theory, and even then, as I have said before, there are problems.

What of the medieval Muslim philosophers from Spain (Ibn Rushd, 1126-98) or Turkey (al Farabi, 870-950)? If we do not include these thinkers because Muslim Spain is not seen as part of the proper history of Europe, or that Turkey is not part of Europe, then we are back at the original problem: does one have to be a Christian to be part of European history, and if Turkey is not part of Europe, why is Greece? In addition, "having been born in Europe" as a criterion will exclude other thinkers, like the American Federalists, who are included in an expanded study of the history of western political thought. Perhaps the geographical criterion can be refined by adding, "born in what is now considered part of Europe, or one of its colonies." And then there would be the dilemma of considering just who in the colonies would count. Would a Muslim liberal reformer born and bred in British Egypt be included?

If geography gives unclear boundaries for the canon, is there an alternative? What of an intellectual criterion? I have already mentioned how relationship to the reason/revelation quandary does not work. Is it then, quite simply, one's religious belief: the canon represents Christian thinkers? The answer to that, of course, is immediately no. What of Plato and Aristotle? Also, many of the most important thinkers in the canon were unorthodox in their Christian belief, or even dismissive of it and of religion in general. But Christian belief has not excluded anyone from being included in the canon, thus a refinement is required: the canon represents those who come from a Christian background, irrespective of their own personal beliefs.

This works for everyone, even Marx, who came from a family of Rabbis, since his father had converted to Christianity before he was born. Geography is not completely irrelevant, so we can think of the canon's boundaries as "having been born in Europe, or one of its colonies if one is white and of a Christian background."[62] This still raises problems, for unless

the canon is only thought to be an historical one, ending with Nietzsche, when we reach the twentieth-century, especially the second half, where the "West" is now a multi-cultural endeavor, the situation becomes even more complicated.

Thus "Westerness" means "Christianness" in some form or other.[63] And this observation is especially significant for the relationship of Islamic political philosophers to the canon. While there is some variation in the image of Islam in European thought, ranging from Christian theological rejection and attack, to admiration, and even acceptance by conversion, by and large the dominant or mainstream attitude has been markedly consistent in its negative appraisal of the Islamic religion, peoples and cultures.[64] The overall context for considering Islam by western intellectuals has always been determined by Christian polemic, and by popular culture that was replete with fantastic stories of Prophet Muhammad, his being a liar, his magic, sensuality, violence, and so on. This is the case even today. Dante had placed the Prophet Muhammad on the lowest level of hell, condemned continually to be ripped in half, but he placed Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd in limbo, with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

The transition to the "rationalism" of the Enlightenment, and the replacement of Christian theology by secular thought, did not change the basic structure of European thinking on Islam. The negative medieval Christian polemical image of Islam survived these changes.[65] Orientalism, the secular "scientific" study of the Islamic world, encouraged notions of "oriental despotism, oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality," and so on.[66] Admiration for the scientific and philosophical achievements of the "Arabs" was often achieved by separating them from their Islamic milieu, and thinking of them as not true Muslims.[67]

Therefore, while some medieval theorists embraced Ibn Rushd's thinking, establishing a school of Latin Averroism, others, especially Christian theologians, attacked Ibn Rushd and the Latin school for heresy. Other Christian theologians sought to salvage Aristotle from "the Commentator." Thus Duns Scotus (1266-1308) wrote of "that accursed Averroes" and his "fantastic conception, intelligible neither to himself nor to others [which] assumes the intellective part of man to be a sort of separate substance united to man through the medium of sense images."[68] Or, Du Plessis de Mornay, 1581, who wrote, "Aristotle is not very religious, but his interpreter Averroes is thoroughly impious."[69] Somehow, the pagan Aristotle was preferred over monotheist thinkers. This can only be because of Ibn

Rushd's association with Islam, a religion seen at the time as that of the Antichrist, or as the worst of the numerous Christian heresies.

From the seventeenth century onwards, argues Wilson, European philosophers, for these kinds of political and religious reasons, as well as scholarly ones, were "increasingly concerned with separating original Aristotelian doctrines – the *penimento* – from Arabic overpainting."[70] Averroes' publication record, well represented prior to 1600, dropped sharply after 1600: from 1600 to 1800 only two new editions of Averroes were published.[71] Rodinson places this development of separating out Aristotle from the Islamic overlay much earlier, in the Renaissance:

> The Arabs may have started out on an equal footing with other 'classical' authors, but by the Renaissance, the Greeks were considered the undisputed masters. The earlier translations of classical Greek authors via Arabic were seen as the epitome of the distortion of antiquity by the medieval 'gothic' spirit. With the Renaissance came the novel idea of returning to the original texts. The term 'Arabism' began to assume negative connotations. Disdain for the barbarian age now included all that was Arab."[72]

Some western thinkers, especially those devoted to the study of Arabic and the Islamic world, sought to correct misinformation about Islam, and even to promote a more tolerant understanding of the religion and its peoples.[73] They did not, however, have a persuasive influence on the general character of European thought on Islam, and often had to prove their Christian credentials, and offer an apologetic stance for their interest in Islamic studies. The thinkers typically included in the canon of western political thought do not seem to have distinguished themselves for independent thinking about Islam. So, we find Hobbes reiterating the Christian polemical view of Prophet Muhammad as a false Prophet, who pretended to receive revelation by the whispering of a dove in his ear.[74] And as mentioned above, in light of Orientalism, we find Locke, Hegel, Marx and Mill believing the Islamic world to be despotic, dormant, and not progressive. Machiavelli's more matter-of-fact discussion of "the Turk," and Rousseau's approval of Islam stand out as exceptions.

Thus, the incentive to consider Islamic intellectual traditions in a positive light is wholly missing from the European intellectual scene. The disdain, or hatred, for Islam from Christian polemics and popular culture, heightened by the imperialism and arrogance of the nineteenth century succeeded in excluding from the canon an understanding of its indebtedness to and its interactions with Islamic philosophy. Muslim intellectuals could be

nothing but the enemy or the sleepy alien "Other," they certainly could not be respected interlocutors.

Conclusion

Every nation has a sacred tradition that it turns to for guidance on living the good life. The history of western political thought has become the secular West's sacred tradition. In spite of the feminist and multiculturalist criticisms leveled at it over the last decade, the canon remains intact, and meaningful to western intellectuals. Ball writes in his *Reappraising Political Theory* that the tradition of western political thought "warts and all … is the most valuable source upon which we have to draw [in order to appraise, criticize, and appreciate the arrangements of our society]." "If you ask," he continues, "why draw upon such a flawed source?, I can only answer: because there is no other – and certainly no perfect – alternative."[75] One of the aims of my paper is to highlight that there are alternatives upon which to draw, perspectives derived from other traditions of political theory.

I have also made the argument that alternative traditions, particularly Islamic political philosophy, have had a role to play in the formation of the canon of western political theory itself. It is only because of the traditional negative manner in which Christian and Orientalist thinkers perceived Islam that these intersections have been overlooked and written out. As Hodgson points out, many contemporary secularists have adopted the older Christian polemic view of Islam, even if they do not adhere to the Christian faith itself, and so the interactions between Islamic thought and western political thought continue to be denigrated or denied.[76]

In addition, some modern Muslims' adherence to their own intellectual traditions in preference to those of the West draw the ire of a few western intellectuals who remain committed to a nineteenth century view of the western tradition as the epitome of civilization. Daniel Pipes, seeking to convey his belief that modern Muslim religio-political movements are a threat to the West, writes: "[the Islamic resurgence is] a militant, atavistic force driven by hatred of western political thought, harking back to age-old grievances against Christendom."[77] This quotation is notable for its emphasis on the importance of the canon as a kind of litmus test for approval or disapproval from western intellectuals. Some Muslim intellectuals are able to use statements like Pipes' to prove that the West is against Islam, and that it seeks to impose its own tradition of political theory at the cost of any indigenous traditions.

By drawing attention to the presuppositions underlying the "inventedness" of the tradition of western political thought, my aim has been to refute the implications of Pipes' conclusions. (As well as those of Muslims who concur in Pipe's assumption of the absolute difference between Islam and the West.) The role of Plato and Aristotle and their transmission to the West is important here. By erroneously claiming Plato and Aristotle as the founders of traditional western political philosophy, and by overlooking the intermediate role of Muslim intellectuals, the canon has presented a monocultural story of the history of political thought that wipes out its true intercultural nature. At a time when Westerners and non-Westerners are engaging in dialogue about the nature of the world political community, it is time to be aware of this multicultural heritage. Unless the West seeks to dominate the world, that is only appropriate for the coming multicultural age.

Notes

1. I am indebted to Iman Meyer-Hoffman for her critique of an early version of this paper.
2. Siep Stuurman, "The Canon of the History of Political Thought: Its Critique and a Proposed Alternative," *History and Theory* 39, no. 2 (May 2000): 152. Terence Ball, *Reappraising Political Theory: Revisionist Studies in the History of Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 4-5.
3. Stuurman, "Canon," 148.
4. Ibid., 165.
5. Fleischacker, Samuel. *The Ethics of Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 143-47, passim.
6. Stuurman, "Canon," 165.
7. Charles E. Butterworth, "Introduction," in Charles E. Butterworth, ed. *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 2-3.
8. Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History.* ed. Edmund Burke III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6.
9. Ibid.
10. F.E. Peters, "The Greek and Syriac Background," in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 43.
11. Yegane Shayegan, "The Transmission of Greek Philosophy to the Islamic World," in Nasr and Leaman eds., *Islamic Philosophy,* 94.
12. Syed Nomanul Huq. "The Indian and Persian Background," in Nasr and Leaman eds., *Islamic Philosophy,* 53.

13. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1991), 23.
14. Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy,* 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 4.
15. Ibid., 14. Interestingly, Aristotle's *Politics* was not translated. Muslim philosophers apparently preferred Plato's *Republic*. De Lacy O'Leary, *Arabic Thought and Its Place in History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), 115.
16. Richard Walzer, "Arabic Transmission of Greek Thought to Medieval Europe," *Bulletin of The John Rylands Library,* Manchester, no. 29 (1945-46): 160-83, 166.
17. John Marenbon, "Medieval Christian and Jewish Europe," in Nasr and Leaman eds., *Islamic Philosophy,* 1001.
18. Ibid.
19. Walzer, "Arabic Transmission," 181.
20. Catherine Wilson, "Modern Western Philosophy," in Nasr and Leaman eds., *Islamic Philosophy,* 1014.
21. Marebon, "Medieval," 1004.
22. According to Marebon, this school may have been based on an incorrect reading of Ibn Rushd (1007). Averroes's commentaries were "banned in Paris in 1210 and 1215, later permitted with censorship in 1231, and officially inserted into the curriculum in 1255." Bishop Tempier condemned them again in 1270 and 1277 (Wilson, "Modern Western Philosophy," 1018). Ibn Rushd also drew the ire of orthodox Muslim jurists because of his rejection of the doctrine of corporeal resurrection. See Philip K. Hitti, *Islam: A Way of Life* (South Bend, IN: Regnery/Gateway, 1970), 135-36.
23. Marebon, "Medieval," 1007.
24. Wilson, "Modern Western Philosophy," 1014.
25. Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy,* viii.
26. Wilson, "Modern Western Philosophy," 1015. Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy,* viii.
27. Wilson, "Modern Western Philosophy," 1015.
28. Fadlou Shehadi, "Commentary: The Continuity in Greek-Islamic Philosophy," in Thérèse-Anne Druart, ed. *Arabic Philosophy and the West: Continuity and Interaction* (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1988), 23.
29. Ibid., 21.
30. Wilson, "Modern Western Philosophy," 1013.
31. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History,* 6.
32. Roderic H. Davidson, "Where Is the Middle East?" *Foreign Affairs* 38, no. 4 (Jul. 1960), 666, 667, 669, 673.
33. Stuurman, "Canon," 149.
34. Ibid., 150.
35. Ibid., 149.

36. Ibid., 149-51.
37. Rebecca Joubin, "Islam and Arabs through the Eyes of the Encylopédie: The 'Other' as A Case of French Cultural Self-Criticism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 2 (May 2000): 198.
38. Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam,* trans. Roger Veinus. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987). Published in French as *La Fascination de l'Islam* (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1980), 60.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 61.
41. Ibid., 67.
42. Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 27.
43. Stuurman, "Canon," 147.
44. R.W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 17. "Saracen" was the European term given to the Arabs (and Muslims), the label given to the descendants of Ishmael from Hagar, the wife of Abraham. Medieval scholars apparently spent considered energy trying to sort our why they were called 'Saracens" if they were descended from Hagar, and not Sarah. "Saracen" dropped from common usage in the sixteenth century when the work "Turk" came to mean "Muslim" (Rodinson, *Europe,* 36).
45. Rodinson, *Europe,* 24.
46. Stuurman, "Canon," 164. He rightly adds: "To avoid any misunderstanding: this is not to say that their theoretical arguments are of less importance, but only to contextualize the ways in which they were taken up and refashioned in Medieval Europe."
47. Fred Dallmayr, *Border Crossings: Toward a Comparative Political Theory* (Maryland: Lexington, 1999), 1-2.
48. Southern, *Western Views,* 3.
49. Quoted in Rodinson, *Europe,* 16.
50. Marenbon, "Medieval," 1006. Aquinas adopted Ibn Sina's distinction between essence and existence, though he transformed it according to his own thinking by seeing essence as potency and existence as act (1005.) He attacked the Averrosian "heresy" (the unity of the possible intellect), because it left no room for the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul and divine reward/punishment (1006-07). Marebon suggests this wasn't really Ibn Rushd's view.
51. Rodinson, *Europe,* 7; Edward Said, *Orientalism,* 2d ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994 [1979]), 70-71.
52. Walzer,"Arabic Transmission,"160.
53. Wilson, "Modern Western Philosophy," 1024.
54. Machiavelli discusses "the Turk" in his Prince in several places when he discusses different kinds of rule, and the nature of their stability. In chapter 19 he compares the Mamluk dynasty of Sultan Tuman Bey with the papacy as an

example of elective monarchy (p. 81). See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Also see Rodinson, *Europe,* 139.

55. Joubin, "Islam and Arabs," 198-99.
56. Rodinson, *Europe,* 46-47.
57. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*. Trans. G.D.H. Cole (New York: E P Dutton, 1950), 132.
58. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government,* ed. C.B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 98. For Hegel see Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 27. For Marx and Mill, see Said, *Orientalism*, 153, 14.
59. Southern writes that the first Crusade, launched 1095 AD, while not improving accurate knowledge about Islam in Latin Christendom, did make the religion and its Prophet well known for the first time. Until then not much attention had been paid to the Islamic world, apart from the Spanish Christians, living under Muslim rule. Before 1100 Southern finds only one mention of the Prophet Muhammad outside Spain and southern Italy, but that by 1120 "everyone in the West had some picture of what Islam meant, and who Mahomet [sic] was." Southern, *Western Views,* 28.
60. Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy,* viii.
61. Strauss and Cropsey's *History of Political Philosophy* is an interesting exception to this general rule. Their volume includes one medieval Muslim thinker, al-Farabi, and one medieval Jewish thinker, Maimonides. These writers were seemingly included because they represent attempts in each faith tradition to reconcile philosophy with religion. In spite of their inclusion, the general pattern of my argument is not altered: Strauss and Cropsey include Christian theologians, like Calvin and Luther, who expressly saw themselves as theologians and not philosophers. The question remains, why them, and not Muslim or Jewish theologians with the same views?
62. Feminists would add the criterion that one has had to be male to be included in the canon. This is an important insight, but given the criterion I have described, a religious and ethnic bias would still operate even if women theorists began to be included in the canon. White, Christian, European women would be included over non-white, non-European, non-Christian men or women theorists.
63. Plato and Aristotle are not excluded given the classical and medieval assimilation of their concepts into Christianity.
64. Southern, *Western Views;* Norman Daniel, *Islam and The West: The Making of an Image* (Oxford: One World Publications, 1993); Rodinson, *Europe;* Hourani, *History.*
65. Daniel, *Islam,* chapter 10.
66. Said, *Orientalism,* 4.
67. Joubin, "Islam and Arabs," 199. This separation of admiration for a thinker and dislike for that thinker's religion was also applied to Jewish thinkers. William

of Auvergne admired the Jewish thinker Solomon ibn Gabirol (Avencebrol), but conjectured that, despite his Arab name, he must be Christian (Marenbon, "Medieval," 1004).

68. Quoted in Wilson, "Modern Western Philosophy," 1018.
69. Quoted in Ibid.
70. Ibid., 1013.
71. The English *Averroeana*, 1695. Bayle wrote a long article on Averroes for his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697) but, writes Wilson, he had obviously not read him. In 1707 *Letters from an Arabian Philosopher* was published (Ibid., 1015). "The publication curve for Islamic philosophy picks up again in the mid nineteenth century: the interest at this point is mainly historical and philological rather than philosophical (1025).
72. Rodinson, *Europe,* 31.
73. Hourani, *Knowledge,* 13.
74. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan,* C.B. Macpherson, ed. (Middlesex: Penguin, 1981), 177.
75. Ball, Terence. *Reappraising Political Theory,* 57.
76. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam,* 27.
77. Pipes, Daniel. "Same Difference: The Islamic Threat-Part 1," *National Review*, no. 7, Nov. 1994, 63.