Over the decades since the first publication of the *Sourcebook* (1963), various events have brought to light the uneasy relation between religion and politics. Conflicts between Islamic radicals and the West, for example, have made it tempting to divide the world into a secular West and a radicalized Islamic world, despite the fact that neither side is simply secular or religious. In the West we often experience doubts about the progress of secularism, while the Islamic world seeks the benefits of modernization without its attendant ills. In a time in which we alternate between safeguarding secularism and questioning it (especially along its indistinct boundaries), medieval political philosophy offers a striking vantage point from which to view these political challenges, as it stands prior in time to the modern project of secularization and to a large extent outside it. Indeed, the separation of religion from politics, as established in liberal democratic regimes, is a modern solution to a problem that had been recognized and investigated by thinkers in the medieval period. And even though the modern, liberal democratic solution took hold in predominantly Christian countries, in the medieval period the theoretical questions inherent to this problem were investigated by diverse Muslims, Jews, and Christians, many of whom learned from their counterparts in the other religious communities.

For the authors gathered in this volume, there is perhaps a greater uniformity of general intention than at any other period: all of these authors studied the works of classical political philosophy and sought to think through the implications of this political thought for their contemporary situation in a monotheistic religious community. Coming to know political philosophy from the ancients, these authors, for the most part, understood political philosophy as extending well beyond the relatively narrow range of “politics” as it is understood in modern, liberal regimes. Yet monotheism posed for them challenges not addressed by classical political philosophy: for example, monotheism, especially Christianity and Islam, reoriented human strivings toward the next life, and so fueled the conflict between secular and ecclesiastical powers in favor of the latter. More importantly, monotheism led at the end of the medieval period toward a conflict between monotheistic sects—in other words, toward religious intolerance. Medieval political philosophy thus combines the comprehensiveness of ancient political philosophy with deep reflection about the challenges posed by monotheism.

We study these authors with the intention of coming to understand the recovery and reemergence of political philosophy in these three monotheistic religious communities. How is political philosophy affected or reshaped when it is articulated and explored within this new context? Might the practice of political philosophy come to be governed by the laws, counsels, or doctrines of the relevant religion? Or, conversely, how might political philosophy affect or reshape religious doctrines and interpretations of divine laws or counsels? Might the insights of political philosophy govern in some fashion the practice of religion? Without yet attempting to bring precision to these questions, we note that, in studying medieval political philosophy, we inevitably encounter the question concerning the confrontation between reason and faith or, we might say, provisionally, between philosophy and theology. In fact, we are drawn to the study of medieval political philosophy precisely because we expect it to enrich our thoughts on this confrontation.

In this introduction we intend to provide some preliminary guidance in pursuing these questions
when reading these texts, but these questions, articulated in this fashion, lack precision, because their formulation does not apply equally well to authors situated in all three religious communities. For example, if we express this confrontation in the rubric of the opposition of “reason and faith,” we tacitly presume that a life in accord with the precepts of the sacred text is succinctly understood more in terms of what one believes and adheres to privately than how one acts within one’s community. If we express it in the rubric of “reason and revelation,” we may permit ourselves to drop authors summarily into one category or another, as if were not possible for one who adheres vigorously to revelation or divine law to inquire deeply and rationally about matters outside of—or even contrary to—what is affirmed by that revelation or law. If we express this confrontation in the rubric of “philosophy and theology,” we tacitly presume that the discipline or science that stands before or opposed to philosophy but calls upon the sacred text is “theology.” The word theology may be used to refer to a discipline in each of the three religious communities (Latin: theologia; Arabic: kalām), but the disciplines so indicated are not conceived in the same manner. If we have distantly inherited from Christian medieval thought a familiar but imprecise notion of the opposition of philosophy and theology, and if we project this opposition, without further thought, back upon Islamic or Jewish medieval thought, we are likely to fall into a fundamental misunderstanding. The contemporary reader must resist the temptation to interpret medieval Islamic and Jewish political philosophy through the lens of Scholastic thought. As a preliminary, we should therefore first ask: When philosophy is pursued in a community defined by a monotheistic religion, what is the authoritative religious discipline against which it is likely to be measured?

In Islam and Judaism, the most authoritative religious science is jurisprudence (fiqh and talmud), as the divine text is a law, and the principal prophet is a legislator; whereas in Christianity, in which the central figure is not a legislator, the authoritative religious science is not jurisprudence, but theology. The focus of Christianity is the Son’s role as the mediator in a Christian’s journey to the kingdom of God. The closest parallel focus in Islam and Judaism is the prophet: the prophet, of course, should never be confused with God in either of these religions, even if the prophet does serve as more (Islam) or less (Judaism) the exemplary case of imitation of God. Jesus’ earthly role is principally that of a teacher and moral counselor; his teaching, the Gospel, is related to and perhaps elaborates upon a divine law but is not itself given as a law. The closest parallel in Islam and Judaism is once again the prophet but now with the clarification that the prophet plays an even more important role as legislator than as moral exemplar. In the modern world, commentators on Islam often claim that Islam is more like Christianity than Judaism because Muhammad is more a bringer of counsels than a legislator. One thing is certain: none of the medieval political philosophers viewed Islam this way. Divine Law (shari’a) was the central concern of the political philosophers we present in this book.

Thus, to repeat, in Islam and Judaism, the most authoritative religious science is jurisprudence (fiqh and talmud), the discipline in which the divine text is studied as law, whereas in Christianity, the most authoritative religious science is theology. In Islam during the period with which we are concerned, theology (kalām) was a more marginal inquiry than jurisprudence. It was primarily apologetic in character, as will become obvious upon reading our selection from Alfarabi’s Enumeration of the Sciences. In Judaism, jurisprudence (talmud, esp. halakhah) had undergone very extensive development for over a thousand years before theology began to develop as an independent discipline (exemplified by Saadya Gaon), shortly before political philosophy made its first significant appearance in the towering figure of Maimonides. The very fact that Maimonides felt it incumbent upon himself to write a commentary on the Talmud and then to codify it testifies to the centrality of jurisprudence in Judaism.

In Christendom, one could say that theology began in late antiquity, as soon as the fathers of the church began to engage the Stoic and Neoplatonic traditions. Yet at the close of antiquity the word theology was borrowed from pagan philosophers and used by Augustine to refer to the attempts of philosophers to reconcile the absurdities of the pagan religion with philosophy (City of God 6.4–10, 7.5, 23, 27–29). In Augustine’s view, Christianity had no need of this “theology,” since it, no less than natural philosophy, was opposed to the absurdities of pagan religion and, furthermore, it brought to fulfillment what various competing philosophies had sought for in vain. Theology as a systematic discipline, alongside the disciplines of canon law and jurisprudence, developed rapidly in
the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the schools and universities. Teachers compiled passages from scripture, the writings of the church fathers, and church decrees and organized them thematically, often laying out opposing arguments (sic et non) and seeking to bring them into harmony: these compilations resulted in the foundational documents of Scholastic theology and canon law (e.g., Peter Lombard’s Book of Sentences and Gratian’s Decretum). (The discipline of jurisprudence treated Roman civil law in a similar fashion but is otherwise not relevant to the present concern with the authoritative religious science.) In retrospect the labors of earlier authors such as Augustine in clarifying and elaborating Christian doctrine could then be viewed as belonging to this developing discipline of theology. The discipline of canon law exercised a great influence over the administration of the church as a comprehensive, extrapoli-
cultural community, and an indirect influence over nonecclesiastical politics, but as the Gospel is not a law, theologians maintained the superior dignity of their science in articulating sacred doctrine with precision.

Having surveyed the differences between the three religions with respect to the authoritative religious discipline, we are now in a better position to consider what we provisionally referred to as the confrontation between “philosophy and theology.” That jurisprudence was the most authoritative religious science in Judaism and Islam shaped political philosophy therein decisively. Even if the consequences are far reaching, it is not difficult to argue that philosophy works at a higher level of inquiry than jurisprudence. After all, the primary focus of jurisprudence is correct action, while the primary focus of philosophy is the ascent from right opinion to knowledge. It was at least plausible for the Islamic and Jewish medieval political philosophers to argue for the leading role of political philosophy vis-à-vis jurisprudence. Moreover, they could argue for the leading role of philosophy in the ascent from opinion to knowledge without manifestly subverting obedience to the Law or the authority of jurisprudence in determining correct action. The situation is different in the context of Christianity, where philosophy is measured directly against theology, inasmuch as both disciplines concern themselves with right opinion or belief, and knowledge. The overlapping domains of theology and philosophy necessitated that a hierarchical relationship be made explicit, exemplified in Thomas Aquinas’s characterization of philosophy as the handmaiden of theology (Summa Theologicae 1.1.5). While the so-called Latin Averroists were accused of having taught that in some cases philosophy contradicted theology, and that in these cases the theological teaching was false and the philosophical true, in the extant writings of the authors thus accused, where such contradictions do appear, the authors inevitably maintain that the Bible is true and must be believed. Moreover, in the Christian community, as opposed to the other two, there often existed officers in the church hierarchy or religious orders, and committees in the university, that supervised educators and guarded against heresy and heterodoxy. Thus, allowing for exceptions to the rule, we may say as a generality that theology in medieval Christianity enjoyed a higher regard vis-à-vis philosophy than did jurisprudence in Islam and Judaism. One of the puzzles of theology’s predominance over philosophy in Christianity and political philosophy’s relative independence from theology and jurisprudence in Islam and Judaism is the undeniably greater longevity of philosophy in the Christian West than in the Islamic world. Independence for philosophy, it would seem, spells not security but rather precariousness.

Before considering the distinct ways in which particular authors understood the relationship between philosophy and the authoritative religious disciplines, it is necessary to consider one further general difference between the three religious communities with regard to how classical political philosophy was studied. The aforementioned distinction between the religions—as divine Law or as a sacred teaching and moral counsel—unexpectedly corresponds to a difference in the ancient philosopher who served as the primary guide in the recovery of political philosophy: the Muslim and Jewish focus on the prophet as legislator suited the reliance of these authors upon Plato as their primary guide. The philosopher-king in the Republic serves as the model against which the prophet-legislator is measured throughout Islam and Judaism, from Alfarabi to Averroes and Maimonides to Isaac Polgar. To be capable of legislating a divine Law ready to stand the test of time, the prophet-legislator must possess every conceivable theoretical and practical virtue. The philosophical inquiry into the divine Law concerns not only the virtues of the legislator, but also the content that is characteristic of a divine Law, or that reveals a law as divine. Whether the law is of human or divine origin is the starting point of the
conversation in Plato’s Laws, in which the interlocutors discuss at length the content of a law that is said to be divine. In contrast, Aristotle’s Politics would have suited much less well the development of political philosophy in Islam or Judaism, for several reasons. The Politics offers a meager treatment of religion, and it does not discuss the possibility of a divine law, let alone the content of such a law. Furthermore, given that Aristotle, in the Nicomachean Ethics, develops the distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom further than Plato and, in the Politics, cordons off politics from direct or overt dependence upon philosophy (as the Politics—even in commenting on the Republic—refrains from discussing the philosopher-king or metaphysical questions), Aristotle’s ethical and political teaching was ill suited to the development of political philosophy in the context of Islam and Judaism. Aristotle’s Politics proved very well suited, however, to the recovery of political philosophy in the context of (Western) Christianity. Because Jesus acted principally as a teacher and moral counselor, prior to the re-emergence of classical political philosophy in the thirteenth century there already existed in canon law (and in the documents it was built upon) an ill-defined and much disputed, but nevertheless fundamental, distinction between the spheres of politics and religion—that is, between the temporal and the spiritual powers. Therefore, it was not expected that the study of political things as conducted in the Politics should extend to divine law or the characteristics of a prophet. This narrowing of the field of politics, by excluding divine law and neglecting religion, also suited the aforementioned separation of theoretical and practical wisdom in the Ethics. Because practical wisdom is evidently sufficient for governing the polity, the study of politics need not aspire to or rely upon theoretical wisdom, which in Aristotle’s account touches upon the unchanging and divine, nor ought the study of politics aspire to any other virtue commonly thought to be divine.

Was the Islamic focus on Plato the result of a lacuna in the Aristotelian corpus available to Alfarabi, the founder of political philosophy in Islam? Although Alfarabi evinces extensive knowledge of the Nicomachean Ethics, he demonstrates little knowledge of the Politics. At first glance, the matter would seem to be settled in favor of the chance historical fact of limited Muslim access to the Politics. Almost as soon as one settles the matter, however, one begins to wonder whether the Politics was rarely commented upon because medieval political philosophers in Islam had few reasons to be interested in the text. Much of the Aristotelian corpus, of course, was or became available in all three religious communities in the course of the medieval period (e.g., Nicomachean Ethics, Physics, Metaphysics, De Anima, etc.), and several of the earliest (often incomplete) translations into Latin were made from Arabic translations rather than from the Greek: why should the fortune of the Politics in the religious communities have differed so greatly from that of the Ethics? Conversely, it is curious in the Christian tradition that Plato’s Timaeus should be so widely known, that Neoplatonic metaphysics should have such a wide influence and deep hold on Christian theology, that Plato himself be held in such high regard, and yet, overtly political works, such as the Republic and the Laws, in which these metaphysical teachings are discussed, should be unknown. We suspect that some combination of chance events and human deliberation played a role in the development of these two trends in medieval political philosophy, though we can by no means be certain of this.

This difference between Islam and Judaism, on the one hand, and Christianity, on the other, regarding whether the primary guide to ancient political philosophy is Plato or Aristotle, proves highly significant for the generally accepted scope and goals of political philosophy in each tradition. For example, from a reading of the Politics or the Ethics, political philosophy will appear to be a part or a branch of philosophy as a whole, separate from the other parts of philosophy, and especially separate from and possibly subordinate to first philosophy (Ethics 6.7 1141a16–23), whereas this separation and subordination are not at all apparent from a study of the Republic and the Laws. Among the Christian authors, political philosophy may often be limited in scope to political questions narrowly conceived, such as the advantages and disadvantages of the types of regime (especially the mixed regime and the types of kingship) or the relation of civil law to natural law. In this milieu, the relationship between human governance of the city and divine governance of the whole would not belong to political philosophy narrowly understood, and it could belong to philosophy more broadly only on the understanding that the conclusions of philosophy on the governance of the whole conform to the conclusions of theology. By contrast, political philosophy among
the Muslim and Jewish authors is manifestly more comprehensive, as comprehensive as the divine Law that it endeavors to comprehend, considering therefore questions such as what is prophecy, and the divine governance of the whole.

Having considered some general differences between the three religious communities in the authoritative religious disciplines and in the typical study of classical political philosophy, we are in a position to consider briefly and with some precision how representative authors treated the relationship of political philosophy to the authoritative religious disciplines. Our objective here is limited to sketching several salient, fundamental possibilities. For Alfarabi, political philosophy is the comprehensive theoretico-practical inquiry. He attempts to bring the politically relevant religious sciences (dialectical theology and jurisprudence) under the control and guidance of political philosophy. In the Book of Religion, he transforms theology (kalām), which had always been apologetic and dialectical or disputatious (and for this reason kalām is often translated “dialectical theology”), into dialectic (jadal)—that is, a specific form of argumentation subordinate to the putatively demonstrative methods of philosophy. Jurisprudence is from the start a dependent science: it argues by analogy from the previously existing laws set forth by a legislating prophet—without inquiring into whether that prophet is divinely inspired or a philosopher-king. Political philosophy, by contrast, inquires into the diverse natures of legislating prophets and the laws that they give, including the nature and conditions for the possibility of the existence of the philosopher-king. In short, political philosophy plays the leading role among the sciences, a role that befits its comprehensiveness.

Because Alfarabi conceives of political philosophy as comprehensive, he engages in inquiries into political matters both narrowly and very broadly conceived. For example, in his Political Regime he discusses the better and the worse regimes as well as a best political order that arises from this philosophical inquiry, the subject matter of politics in the narrow sense. Yet in the first part of this same work he describes a theological order that befits that best political order in a manner reminiscent of Plato’s Timaeus as an account of the natural order that might make the kallipolis of the Republic possible. (Although the first half of the Political Regime is not included in the Sourcebook due to length constraints, a description of this theological order is found in the Book of Religion.) In this case, political philosophy can hardly be confused with “political science” in the contemporary sense: Alfarabi includes in his political works elements of metaphysics that most modern political scientists would consider wholly out of place. In other words, for Alfarabi the comprehensiveness of political philosophy is never in doubt; and its focus on the theoretico-practical heights of human inquiry is never in doubt.

The only challenge to the comprehensiveness of political philosophy are the doubts Alfarabi himself raises concerning the wisdom political philosophy would seem to need to possess if the rule of the prophet-king-legislator were to be just. He does not, as one might expect, defer to the claims to wisdom of revelation. He plunges ever deeper into debates about the origin of divine Law: whether its origin is imagination, prudence, or revelation. Such inquiries lead him into what an insightful twentieth-century interpreter of Alfarabi and Maimonides called “prophetology.” Such inquiries can lead one deep into theoretical inquiries about the nature and fate of the soul. Again, the very comprehensiveness of political philosophy means that medieval Islamic and Jewish political philosophy can never seem to segregate practical inquiries into best rule from theoretical inquiries into the nature of the beings.

Alfarabi’s stand on the status and scope of political philosophy can be contrasted sharply with the views of Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, philosophy, especially political philosophy, is less noble than sacred doctrine or revealed theology; theology is the most comprehensive science, since it is simultaneously theoretical and practical (Summa Theologiae 1.1.4, 5). In this regard Aquinas adhered to the Aristotelian division of the sciences, in which politics is a practical science, together with ethics and household management (economics), and is therefore segregated from the theoretical sciences of mathematics, physics, and metaphysics (i.e., “first philosophy” or “theology” [Metaphysics 6.1 1026a18–24]). Indeed, it could be argued that Aquinas and some other Christian authors deepen the Aristotelian distinction between theoretical and practical science and separate political science more thoroughly from theology or metaphysics than Aristotle intended (consider Aquinas’s commentary on Aristotle’s assertion that politics is the architectonic or master-craft [Ethics 1.2 1094a29; Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics 1.2]). This ordering of philosophy
as a “handmaiden” to theology does not mean that Aquinas demeans the activity of philosophizing or sets narrow limits upon what reason may discover through philosophical inquiry. Indeed, readers new to Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* are more likely to be surprised by what he maintains philosophy is able to establish than by what lies beyond its scope (e.g., philosophical argumentation establishes that the world is created by God, although not that it is created in time [*Summa Theologiae* 1.46.1, 2]). In his commentaries on Aristotle’s works, selections of which are found here, Aquinas rarely appeals to authorities outside of the text he is explicating, and he never makes his explication contingent upon an article of faith. Aquinas appreciates the capacity of philosophy to bring clarity to political and ethical questions; such reasoning is simply not the highest or most comprehensive kind.

The political philosophy of Aquinas, in its scope and content, is closer to what we might recognize as political science. Whereas for Alfarabi subjects such as the nature and conditions of prophecy and giving divine Law fall within the scope of political philosophy, for Aquinas these subjects, insofar as they bear on sacred doctrine, clearly belong to theology (*De Veritate* q. 12 a. 3, 4, 12). Perhaps this segregation of the practical and theoretical sciences, of political philosophy and metaphysics, ought not to be stated too strongly: outside of the philosophical commentaries, one does find in the works of Aquinas that metaphysical truths have a bearing on politics. For example, in the *Summa Theologiae*, the natural law is the providence of God insofar as it can be discerned by human reason (1–2.91.2), and this providence is in part discernible on the basis of a developed form of classical metaphysics. Within this volume, a similar intersection of metaphysics and political philosophy is discernible in the works of other authors (Roger Bacon, Ptolemy of Lucca, Giles of Rome, Dante Alighieri). One must ask the following questions in order to compare these authors with Alfarabi: Does the metaphysical account belong to political philosophy as part of a comprehensive theorectico-practical inquiry into the best life? Or is the practical philosophical account dependent upon metaphysics as a separate, theoretical, and higher discipline?

If Alfarabi and Aquinas may stand as paradigms for the emergence of political philosophy in their respective religious communities, this is not to say that other thinkers in each of their religious communities necessarily adopted the same views with respect to the relative status and comprehensiveness of political philosophy, theology, and jurisprudence. We will here only briefly discuss two authors who provide a stark contrast to Alfarabi and Aquinas: Alghazali and Marsilius of Padua. Alghazali vigorously attacked the philosophical arguments that brought into question the scriptural teaching on the creation of the world by God. Much more radically than Aquinas, Alghazali subordinates philosophical inquiry to divine Law. He also maintains that political philosophy does not add anything to the political teachings already manifest in divine Law: political philosophy is decidedly not comprehensive. This is not to say, however, that Alghazali regards theology as the highest and a comprehensive science in the place of political philosophy; he is likewise suspicious of theology as having attempted only superficially and inadequately to use the arguments of some philosophers against other philosophers. Despite Alfarabi’s profound influence upon other philosophers in the Islamic world, such as Avicenna and Averroes, as well as beyond it, it was, nevertheless, Alghazali who had the greater influence upon the Muslim world as a whole. In the introduction to the Islamic part of the *Sourcebook* will be found a more detailed picture of the vigorous debates between Islamic authors.

Analogous to the opposition of Alfarabi and Alghazali is the opposition between Aquinas and Marsilius. Seeking to refute arguments advanced in theology and canon law that, in his view, attributed a tyrannical power to the papacy, Marsilius wrote the *Defender of the Peace* with two principal discourses: the first is philosophical; the second could be called theological, as it is often based upon passages from scripture and the works of the church fathers. What results is an unambiguous liberation of political philosophy from theology, without, it seems, bringing about a full subordination of theology in return. On the one hand, the conclusions of the Second Discourse regarding the structure and authority of the church invariably conform to the philosophical arguments of the First Discourse. Moreover, the ultimate authority for determining all doubtful meanings in scripture is said to lie with a general council, which is convoked by a political authority, and whose members, secular as well as ecclesiastical, are appointed by political authorities (*Defender of the Peace* 2.17, 2.20-21); the source of such political authority is, of course,
made fully evident in the First Discourse. On the other hand, Marsilius allows that, by the New Law, priests may pursue a form of perfection exemplified by Christ (2.13), and that all priests have an “essential” authority that is caused by God and is inaccessible to philosophy (2.15). Thus, although many questions that formerly seemed theological are brought under the direction of political philosophy—and in the process, political philosophy is rendered independent of theology—nevertheless, the core teachings of theology evidently retain their independence from political philosophy. In addition, political philosophy, as well as the prudence of the good ruler, appears entirely separate from the theoretical philosophical disciplines, including metaphysics. For Marsilius, political philosophy has an independence and scope entirely unlike what one finds in the writings of Aquinas; nevertheless, it appears to lack the comprehensive character attributed to it by Alfarabi.

In this brief look at four medieval thinkers, in two of the religious communities, we naturally find that in neither religious tradition is philosophy uniformly subordinated to the religious sciences or the religious sciences to philosophy; a diversity of opinion and lively debates may be traced in all three traditions. But we also note that the subordination of philosophy to divine law, or of the religious sciences to philosophy, does not take the same form in the different traditions. Within the limited range offered by these four thinkers, in the Islamic tradition one finds both a more robust claim for the comprehensiveness of political philosophy and a more vigorous and radical criticism of that philosophy, while in neither case is theology strongly defended; in the Christian medieval tradition, by contrast, while authors disagree over the relative merits and scope of philosophy and of theology, philosophical inquiry is not criticized as radically as it is by Alghazali, nor is theology so plainly subordinated to philosophy as one finds in Alfarabi. This limited schema, of course, will have to be modified and elaborated in the light of a study of many more authors. Differences among their works must originate, in part, in the individual genius of those authors but may also be due, in part, to the rather different communal and intellectual environments in which classical political philosophy was discovered, and in which political philosophy was practiced anew.