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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Beyond Aristotelianism: al-Fārābī on Revelation,
Humans and Animals in his *On The Perfect State*.**

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

By

Michael Stark

Under the supervision of **Dr Mohamed Serag**

September 2014

The American University in Cairo

Beyond Aristotelianism: al-Fārābī on Revelation, Humans and Animals in his *On The Perfect State*.

A Thesis Submitted by

Michael Stark

To the Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

In modern times, Aristotelian influence on Islamicate philosophical writing is exaggerated. Al-Fārābī did more than just copy Aristotle, he was an original thinker, and he may have sourced aspects of his thought and writing style from the Qur'ān. Consideration of al-Fārābī's biography, works and historical context demonstrates his disinclination to base his writings on those of Aristotle. Al-Fārābī's thoughts in the key area of revelation in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* demonstrate his departure from ancient Greek belief in this area, although his use of individual reasoning also shows clearly his occasional disagreement with Islamic doctrine. Differences and commonalities between animals and humans as written by al-Fārābī can be compared with Aristotle's dissimilar thoughts on these matters, refuting the idea that al-Fārābī was simply an Aristotelian philosopher. Use of the religious term *fiṭra* in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* is a microcosm of its writer's propensity to include the terminology of revealed religion in this book.

Transliterations of Arabic follow the International Journal of Middle East Studies system with the sole exception that the definite article preceding sun letters is transliterated how it is pronounced; Greek transliterations follow the Pennsylvania State University system.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Background

Introduction

How humans are related to animals is an important question which some notable philosophers have attempted to tackle, whether generally or in a specifically political context. Perhaps more important still is the question of how God interacts with and commands humans. Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (c.260-c.340AH)¹ wrote about these themes in his *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila* (variously translated as *On the Perfect State, Principles of the Views of the People of the Perfect State, etc.*, henceforth *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*). Much has been made in books about Islamicate philosophy written in European languages of the dominating influence of ancient knowledge – usually Greek but also Persian, Pharaonic and other sources – on the scholarly culture of mediaeval Islamicate societies.

This study, which focusses specifically on elements of one work of al-Fārābī in particular, does not aim to reject this idea entirely, rather simply to stress in addition to it the importance of other influences, notably in this case the Noble Qur'ān as well as al-Fārābī's original thinking, although the latter may have been unintentional.² Analysis of key sections of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* is the central key to achieving this. Such an analysis gives us the basis to evaluate the ideas, methodology and style of al-Fārābī, backing up any tentative conclusions with specific evidence from primary sources.

We can use a detailed knowledge of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* to demonstrate or suggest that al-Fārābī did not simply copy Aristotle – he had his own unique ideas about animals, humans and God and their natures or Nature, and moreover he used many of the ideas inherent in his Muslim faith.

¹ All dates except the publications of modern books are AH unless otherwise specified.

² For the question of al-Fārābī's thought being unintentional, see the discussion of the transmission of the texts of Aristotle's works on animals, below pp20-22.

Replacing or downplaying the influence of Aristotle in some areas of al-Fārābī's oeuvre has the potential to alter how we understand al-Fārābī, and perhaps how we understand Islamicate philosophy as a whole.

The scope of this thesis is broad, but manageable. A highly detailed commentary on the whole of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* would be impossible given the space available, as well as undesirable firstly because al-Fārābī describes such a wide variety of subjects which are often only tenuously related to one another and secondly because of the sheer length of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*. This ideologically dense book of about 145 pages is the mature work³ of al-Fārābī – he details in it his views on many aspects of philosophy, making it impossible for us to analyse in detail every section of this book, not to mention that some often-discussed topics such as the specific characteristics of flawed states are not particularly relevant to this study. It will be argued that, broadly speaking, al-Fārābī has been misunderstood – Aristotle's influence on him is not as important as is often claimed in secondary sources, and the significance of religion has largely been ignored in these sources. Updating and emending the notion of the centrality of Peripatetic ideas, adding the importance of al-Fārābī's originality and the influence of his faith, would allow us to understand al-Fārābī's work quite differently.⁴

The main reason for selecting animal-human relationships and revelation as areas of focus is that even though these topics are sometimes referred to in passing as being areas of commonality between Aristotle and al-Fārābī,⁵ no critical study has yet examined them in detail. Commentaries on al-Fārābī's works can be prone to taking the Aristotelian paradigm for granted, but here we have

³ See "Al-Fārābī's Biography, Oeuvre and Scholarly Milieu" below.

⁴ Especially the recondite *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma* which discusses gnosis. Understanding this and other works from the point of view of specifically Islamic philosophy, as opposed to Islamicate philosophy dominated by Aristotle's influence, could shed new light on the meanings of al-Fārābī's ideas. *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma* could be recategorised as a sort of Sufi or mystical text.

⁵ Walzer (see below, pp6-7) cites Aristotle's works on animals, notably *On the Generation of Animals*, extensively in his commentary on *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, for example. He claims (1998 pp398ff.) that al-Fārābī bases chapter 12 of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* on Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals*, presupposing that an accurate, comprehensive edition of Aristotle's psychological and biological writings was used by al-Fārābī.

the opportunity to examine critically to what extent al-Fārābī was influenced by Aristotle’s works on animals in an attempt to demonstrate the excessive emphasis placed by modern scholars on his influences from Peripatetic ideas.

In light of the fact that so much contemporary literature on Islamicate philosophy takes the Aristotelian pattern for granted, the focus of this thesis is the primary sources, foremost among them *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*. This study aims to identify what the text itself says, challenging this common idea that Aristotle was the main influence on al-Fārābī and opening up hitherto neglected aspects of his philosophy. Al-Fārābī lived in a polyglot, multicultural and religiously diverse society. While he discussed a considerable variety of issues even in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* itself, some of the most important of these are related to the practical application of rationalism within revealed religion and, by extension, how society ought to interpret and use the rules and guidelines of revealed religion. Updating and emending existing ideas about *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* and al-Fārābī’s oeuvre more generally can shed light on ancient solutions to problems which continue to be relevant in the modern world.

Sources and Methodology

The text of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* which has been used is Richard Walzer’s critical edition, *On the Perfect State*, originally published in 1985 and reprinted in 1998.⁶ This edition of the text has been written using a complete corpus of ten manuscripts which date from 468AH to the thirteenth century of the Hijra.⁷ Walzer has preserved the chapter and paragraph divisions which are present in the earliest extant manuscripts, and I have followed this same system in referencing his edition. With regard to diacritics, these generally follow the text as found in Walzer’s edition except in some

⁶ Walzer, R. (ed.), 1998, *On the Perfect State* (KAZI Publications, Chicago) – first published by Oxford University Press in 1985.

⁷ See Walzer 1998 pp19ff “The evidence for the text” for a detailed description of the editor’s *apparatus criticus*.

quotations where diacritics have been inserted into words whose significations could be ambiguous.

An extensive body of secondary literature on al-Fārābī and his works exists in both Arabic and European languages. Some of these books are useful for this current study, and some are not – most of them are not specific to the interrelation of animals and humans or revelation in al-Fārābī's philosophy, rather the Active Intellect is often the main focus. Walzer often cites Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals* in his commentary on *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, but he seldom goes into detail about how al-Fārābī used it as a source. The best general overview of Farabism is Ian Richard Netton's *Al-Fārābī and his School*, which we will have cause to cite to support some general points.

Richard Walzer, the German-born British expert on ancient and mediaeval philosophy, was perhaps the most notable exponent of the pride of place supposedly given to ancient philosophy by al-Fārābī. Walzer's outstanding work on al-Fārābī in various areas being well-known⁸ and without trying to criticise his approach, we should attempt to update his views and broaden our understanding of al-Fārābī's work by placing greater emphasis on the variety of different origins of the ideas in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* - notably Islamic thought and belief, which Walzer does not consider in detail in his works on al-Fārābī.

Ulrich Rudolph's chapter "Reflections on al-Fārābī's *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*"⁹ is one of the most important secondary sources which inspired this thesis. Rudolph adopts a similar methodology to that used here, namely focussing specifically on the text of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* itself, but he concludes that Islamic beliefs and principles are so centrally important in this book that it ought to be viewed as a sort of Islamic theological work.

⁸ See bibliography. His 1998 critical edition of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* is especially notable, but one should also cite *Greek into Arabic: Essays on Islamic Philosophy*, a collection of essays published in 1962 on many different themes and authors within Islamic philosophy.

⁹ Published in Adamson, P. (ed.), 2008, *In the Age of al-Fārābī: Arabic Philosophy in the Fourth/Tenth Century* (The Warburg Institute).

Christopher Colmo aimed in his book *Breaking with Athens: Alfarabi as Founder* to demonstrate the originality of al-Fārābī, while at the same time remembering that al-Fārābī acknowledged that he benefited from reading the political philosophy of Plato. The premise of this source, that the subject was an original thinker, is supported by good evidence from his books. Joep Lameer's *Al-Fārābī and Aristotelian Syllogistics*, published in 1994, is also a useful source for apprehending recent developments in scholarly understanding of the various technical terms used by al-Fārābī and the relationship between religion, logic and philosophy in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* particularly.

Sources dealing specifically with human-animal relationships in al-Fārābī are somewhat harder to find. Georgios Steiris' pioneering chapter "Isidore of Seville and al-Fārābī on Animals: Ontology and Ethics" (published in *Animal Ethics: Past and Present Perspectives*) approached the question of al-Fārābī's attitude towards the nature of animals and how it differs from that of humans by comparing it with that of St Isidore of Seville and looking for precedents in ancient Hellenistic philosophy. This informative chapter by Steiris demonstrates a firm command of source material, but here we have the luxury of relatively plentiful space in which to conduct detailed analyses of key sections from the primary text of al-Fārābī.

Even though a general awareness of the state of scholarship on al-Fārābī until now is informative for this thesis, and even though too a specific knowledge of certain notably relevant articles is required, we should still look at secondary sources critically. Sometimes the methodology and conclusions of its authors can leave something to be desired – analysis of key sections of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* has to be our main focus. It would be a mistake for various reasons to attempt to attack modern scholars who assert the dominance of Aristotelian ideas in al-Fārābī's thought. Instead we can update what writers such as Walzer have suggested, playing down to some extent Aristotle's importance and stressing the equal role of original thought, however unintentional it might have been, and ideas based on the religion of Islam.

When we are confronted with such a knotty problem as the various influences of al-Fārābī, the first thing to be done is to return to the primary texts, mainly *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, and try to glean what we can from an analysis of these. Only then can we turn to secondary literature. Where biographical details about al-Fārābī are relevant, generally these have been taken from mediaeval biographical dictionaries, as noted below,¹⁰ as well as the Encyclopaedia of Islam.¹¹

Limited use of Aristotle's books is important for demonstrating al-Fārābī's inclination to disagree with him at times. *On the Soul*,¹² *Nicomachean Ethics*¹³ and *Metaphysics* are the most important of Aristotle's books for us, and they were main sources for his writings in the mediaeval Islamic world. Passages from Aristotle are cited according to the systems used in the printed editions of these books and the original text is given in footnotes.

Al-Fārābī's Biography, Oeuvre and Scholarly Milieu

Biography of al-Fārābī

Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Fārābī¹⁴ (c.260-340) was a Muslim philosopher of central Asian origin who spent most of his life in Baghdad and the Levant. He may have travelled to Egypt in 338.¹⁵ Nothing is known for certain about the biography of al-Fārābī beyond the basics – he did not write an autobiography per se, and none of his students wrote his biography either – but we can suggest that *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila* is probably the latest of his extant works on philosophy.¹⁶

¹⁰ p11n25. See also Bibliography.

¹¹ *El* "al Fārābī"; "Falsafa".

¹² *Peri Psychēs* in Greek, or *De Anima* in Latin.

¹³ Or *Ethica Nicomachea* in Latin.

¹⁴ The names of al-Fārābī's grandfather and great-grandfather are not found in the earliest sources. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a calls him Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Awzalagh ibn Ṭarkhān al-Fārābī. Another possibility is Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṭarkhān ibn Awzalagh al-Fārābī at-Turki, as he is called by Ibn Khallikān, however this final *nisba* is not attested elsewhere.

¹⁵ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a p603

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p605; Walzer 1998 p20.

Al-Fārābī wrote extensively on many topics within philosophy, and was also highly knowledgeable about mathematics, musical theory and medicine. He knew at least some Greek, which would have allowed him access to the original texts of Aristotle where they were available,¹⁷ however given the paucity of sources for al-Fārābī's life, we have no information about his efforts at translation, if any.¹⁸

Al-Fārābī studied logic with Yūḥannā ibn Ḥaylān. This was probably in Baghdad, where Yūḥannā died during the Caliphate of al-Muqtadir.¹⁹ Al-Fārābī continued his work in philosophy with Yaḥyā ibn 'Adiyy. The former was in Baghdad until the end of 330. He started to write *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* while still there, and took the work in progress with him to Damascus, where he finished it in 331. He may have added six sections summarising *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* during his possible visit to Egypt in 338. Biographers mostly agree that he died in Damascus around 340.²⁰

Although the question of al-Fārābī's ethnic origin has been debated extensively,²¹ it is not relevant for our purposes here. Whether he was ethnically Persian or Turkish does not change what he wrote or how we ought to interpret it. Indeed, we can suggest that, owing to the lack of reliable information about his life, debating this point is ultimately a fruitless exercise.²² Most details about al-Fārābī's life and death found in one source are directly contradicted by at least one other. Ṣā'id al-Andalusī (d. 462) was the first biographer to dedicate a whole entry to al-Fārābī,²³ summarising some of his books and adding the information that he was associated with the Hamdanid ruler Sayf ad-Dawla.

¹⁷ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a p604

¹⁸ None of the mediaeval biographers give us any information about al-Fārābī's translations of ancient Greek texts, and modern scholars such as Walzer assume that he read such books as translations produced by others.

¹⁹ Al- Mas'ūdī p122

²⁰ Al-Mas'ūdī, writing less than ten years after the fact, states that he died in Rajab 339. Other biographers give a date of either 339 or 340 in Damascus, but ash-Shahrazūrī states that he was mugged and killed on the road to Ascalon without giving a date (*Nuzhat al-arwāḥ* p301).

²¹ Walzer 1998 p2; *Encyclopædia Iranica* "FĀRĀBĪ i. Biography"; etc.

²² *Encyclopædia Iranica* "FĀRĀBĪ i. Biography".

²³ *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* pp53-54

The main reason for stressing Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s account of al-Fārābī’s life and works is that he quotes a rare autobiographical passage in which al-Fārābī gives a tendentious account of the history of philosophy and specifically logic from ancient times until his age.²⁴ While we can certainly call into question some aspects of the historical narrative presented by al-Fārābī, there is no specific reason to doubt the autobiographical information which the biographer quotes. Moreover, the inclusion of this passage in *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’* does seem to demonstrate that Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a had access to primary sources about the life of al-Fārābī, even though some other aspects of his account are more myth than historical fact.

Understanding how biographers, especially Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, Ṣā‘id al-Andalusī, al-Mas‘ūdī, ash-Shahrazūrī and Ibn Khallikān,²⁵ wrote about the life of al-Fārābī provides an essential context for understanding, in turn, his work itself. Of equal importance for this thesis, however, it also demonstrates clearly what his main areas of interest were. It is stated repeatedly and unambiguously in all of these biographies that al-Fārābī was a practising Muslim²⁶ – there is no sense that he apostatised or denied that the Qur’ān is a genuine, authoritative religious text. This supports what we can discover by means of a thorough, careful reading of relevant passages written by al-Fārābī himself.

Al-Fārābī’s works

The Farabian corpus is vast in scope, making it impossible to cover all of al-Fārābī’s work here, however we can briefly describe some of the other important works of al-Fārābī, looking at how *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* fits into his oeuvre. About 150 works of varying length are attributed to al-Fārābī, not all of which are extant.²⁷

²⁴ p604

²⁵ In their books *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*, *Ṭabaqāt al-umam*, *at-Tanbīh wa’l-ashraf*, *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ wa-rawḍat al-afrāḥ fī tārikh al-ḥukamā’* and *Wafayāt al-a’yān wa-‘anbā’ abnā’ az-zamān* respectively.

²⁶ Ṣā‘id al-Andalusī actually introduces al-Fārābī as *faylsūf al-muslimīn* “the philosopher of the Muslims” p53.

²⁷ *Encyclopædia Iranica* “FĀRĀBĪ v. Music”.

No critical study of the surviving manuscripts of these works generally has yet been undertaken – this significant task for the future would have to name repeated listings under different titles and possible misattributions, as well as any double listings of the same books in Arabic and Persian.²⁸

Although Steinscheider was the first to make a critical appraisal of al-Fārābī's biography, he did not research the manuscript history of his works.²⁹ Detailed studies of the transmissions of individual books are also tasks for the future, except in the case of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, the transmission of which was analysed by Muhsin Mahdi in 1990 and Richard Walzer in his critical edition *On the Perfect State*.

Many of al-Fārābī's extant writings deal at least in part with logic and linguistic philosophy. Many of these logical writings are, in turn, commentaries on works of ancient Greek-speaking philosophers such as Aristotle and Porphyry, but al-Fārābī did also write some independent works on logic and the philosophy of language. These include *Kitāb al-ḥurūf* and parts of *Kitāb at-tanbīh 'alā sabīl as-sa'āda*.³⁰ Other works such as *Kitāb al-wāḥid wa'l-waḥda* deal primarily with metaphysics. *As-Sīyāsa al-madanīyya* is called an "emanationist" text by Druart.³¹ Al-Fārābī wrote eight works on music, of which four are extant, the most significant of these being *Kitāb al-mūṣīqā al-kabīr*. Political philosophy is discussed in several of al-Fārābī's works, but it is not the main subject of any of them. *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm* and *Kitāb at-tanbīh 'alā sabīl as-sa'āda* as well as *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* are rather difficult to categorise definitively because they cover a wide variety of different topics, without focussing on any specific one of them.

Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma is perhaps the most recondite of all of al-Fārābī's books, and also perhaps the most controversial of his major works in its attribution, because in modern times it is sometimes claimed

²⁸ For example, the various titles given to *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma*, as noted by Corbin p159.

²⁹ See bibliography.

³⁰ The latter was edited by Ja'far Āl Yāsīn and published by Hekmat Publications (Iran) in 1371AH.

³¹ *Encyclopædia Iranica* "FĀRĀBĪ iii. Metaphysics".

to have been written by Ibn Sīnā.³² This highly enigmatic text deals with conventional philosophy as well as gnosis, and also introduces a new concept in philosophy, being the real difference between existence and essence in created beings. *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma* represents a possible result of this research: if dominating Aristotelian influence on al-Fārābī were to be disproven, it is likely that we would view *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma* quite differently, perhaps more like the mystical works of Ibn Sīnā.³³

We can make mention of some of these books in this study as they are the important works of al-Fārābī, however we should nonetheless focus on *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* because this is the most relevant book for the topics of revelation and animals. Al-Fārābī also wrote numerous smaller treatises and commentaries.³⁴

Context of al-Fārābī's writing

Al-Fārābī lived during the politically fraught but culturally efflorescent times of the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate as an effective government. The intellectual renaissance of the fourth century of the Hijra was partially a product of the political upheavals of the time, because smaller and more numerous government centres meant more sources of patronage for poets, historians, musicians and so on as well as philosophers. People like Ibn Sīnā, al-Mutanabbī and al-Fārābī, leaders of their times in their particular fields of medicine, poetry and philosophy, moved around from court to court as was beneficial for them. The two major societal changes which caused these political developments were the conversion of the majority of the population of the Abbasid Caliphate and its successor states to Islam and the economic decline of Iraq. These factors have been discussed in some detail by modern scholars of Islamic history.³⁵ Worth mentioning is the fact that the social context of Aristotle's writing is rather similar to that of al-Fārābī's – both lived during periods of

³² A critical edition of this book was published in Tehran in 1381AH, edited by Ali Owjabi, who attributes it to al-Fārābī. See also Corbin p159, who blames the misattribution to Ibn Sīnā on an anthology published in Cairo which included part of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma* under the name of Ibn Sīnā.

³³ Such as *al-Ishārāt w'at-tanbīhāt IV*.

³⁴ More detailed information on al-Fārābī's oeuvre can be found in Walzer 1998, Netton and elsewhere. See bibliography.

widespread conflict and political upheaval, with occasional hostility to philosophy being expressed by members of their communities and in societies which had been marked by their large-scale use of slave labour.³⁶ This makes it difficult to explain differences of opinion between the two philosophers by means of comparing the social or political contexts of their works.

From the earliest years of Islam, the Umma or Muslim community faced a considerable variety of theological or political controversies which could divide its members. Numerous issues such as law, rulership, Qur'anic exegesis and so on needed to be considered by the leaders of the community: philosophy was one way of answering some religious and other questions which started to be employed from around the third century of the Hijra.³⁷

Al-Fārābī was one of the earliest of the major philosophers in Islamicate society: the only major figure in Islamicate philosophy before him whose works still survive was al-Kindī (c. 185-252).³⁸ The cosmopolitan and polyglot background of al-Fārābī's life and works is attested by consideration of his contemporaries and fellow scholars in Baghdad who originated from a variety of places, cultures and religious traditions, as well as the various places to which he travelled or may have travelled, coming as he did from central Asia to Baghdad, and then moving to Damascus, Aleppo and possibly Egypt. The widespread practice of philosophy at this time, evidenced by the corpus of al-Fārābī's writings and those of his fellow philosophers such as Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus, Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn 'Adiyy and others, in addition to accounts of patronage from various rulers and courts, point to the existence of a free society in which intellectual inquiry was, with some notable exceptions, generally valued and encouraged.³⁹

³⁵ Notably Kennedy pp198ff.

³⁶ See p49 for discussion of Aristotle and al-Fārābī's attitudes to slavery.

³⁷ Useful studies of the origins of Islamic philosophy include Corbin, Leaman, Adamson/Taylor, Gutas (1998 and 2000) and Walzer 1998 "Introduction".

³⁸ *EI* "al-Kindī".

³⁹ More detailed analyses of the context of al-Fārābī's work include Netton pp1ff., Leaman pp17ff., and the first two chapters of Walzer 1962, amongst others.

The Structure of *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*

Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila is the best-known Arabic source for al-Fārābī's political philosophy, and while it certainly does feature Platonic and Peripatetic ideas, it would be a mistake to ignore the influence of Islamic thought and faith on al-Fārābī and the writer's originality, although the latter may have been unintentional. The main focus of scholarship in modern times on this book has been al-Fārābī's idea of the active intellect and his discussions of flawed states in the final two chapters. While these are certainly key areas in his philosophy, in this particular thesis our aim is to suggest other influences apart from Aristotle and differences between him and al-Fārābī. We can do this most productively by analysing less widely-studied areas, specifically revelation and how the natures of animals and humans are related. Aristotle was not primarily concerned with flawed states, which is also why the characteristics of flawed states according to al-Fārābī or other areas which have been researched extensively by scholars such as Herbert Davidson⁴⁰ are not especially relevant for us here.

A very wide variety of topics is covered by al-Fārābī in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*. These include, in order, God and His Nature as the source of all things, astronomy and celestial entities, matter and form, becoming or the generation of matter and beings, the faculties of the soul, bodies and reproduction, reason, divination, the perfect ruler, the afterlife, philosophy and religion, and then in two final chapters a discussion of states which stray from the correct path for various reasons. We can see from this list how broad the scope of al-Fārābī's writing is, but he still discusses his ideas about these various subjects in some detail. This is why it makes sense to focus on some specific areas so that we can analyse al-Fārābī's ideas in depth. The most relevant chapters for us, then, are 10 to 17 of Walzer's critical edition *On the Perfect State*, although some points from other chapters will also be discussed.

⁴⁰ Davidson, H.A., 1992, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (OUP, New York).

Al-Fārābī's basic method in writing *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* was to move from universal points and remarks towards particular ones: he discusses God and His Nature first, and aspects of political philosophy last. Theoretical philosophy – metaphysics and natural science – takes up most of the first ten chapters, then in chapters 11-14 the writer starts to discuss living creatures. The remaining chapters are a description of an ideal society and ruler, followed by criticism of political and social faults perceived by al-Fārābī. The writer's focus in all of these areas is on the structure or hierarchy of all aspects of creation and its purpose – his point is that justice and order rule nature, and so human beings must also attempt to behave in a just and orderly fashion.

Al-Fārābī's approach is an important consideration. *Al-Madīna al-fāḍila* has hitherto been treated in secondary literature almost exclusively as a doxographical source. Of course, there are in this book many clear passages on such areas as politics or cosmology, but still the question of why al-Fārābī wrote *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* is important for understanding the book itself and how it fits into his oeuvre. Ulrich Rudolph has argued persuasively that it is a philosophic treatment of various topics related to systematic Islamic theology. The question of the writer's approach and rationale will be considered throughout this study of al-Fārābī's differences with Aristotle.

Chapter Two: Peripatetic and Islamicate Philosophy

Peripatetic Philosophy and its Influence

Ancient Greek philosophy began by examining the nature of man. It branched out from this to cover everything in existence in some form or another. Pre-Socratic philosophers were mainly concerned with cosmology and ontology – these earliest Greek philosophers were distinguished from other people who were not philosophers because philosophers rejected mythological explanations of events, preferring to use reason to draw their conclusions.⁴¹ Socrates (c.470-399BC), a somewhat mysterious figure, is credited as one of the founders of philosophy even though he did not himself write books or treatises.⁴² His ideas are known mainly through later writers such as Plato (c.425-348BC), Socrates' student, who founded the Academy in Athens and wrote numerous philosophical dialogues.⁴³ Plato's Theory of Forms is the basis of Platonic philosophy.

Aristotle (384-322BC) was the most famous student of Plato, who disagreed with his teacher in some areas. Born in northern Greece, he joined Plato's academy in his late teens and remained there for almost twenty years. It was after Plato's death that Aristotle started to question some of Plato's ideas – he developed his own school of thought, called Aristotelian or Peripatetic after the colonnades in Athens where Aristotle taught. Aristotelianism was the first comprehensive system to cover all branches of what we might now term philosophy.⁴⁴ Some of the most influential aspects of this system include Virtue Ethics, Aristotle's supposed description of man as a "rational animal" and his discussion of the nature of creatures. Aristotle wrote extensively, but it is thought that only around one third of his original writings is now extant.

⁴¹ Yartz pp1ff.

⁴² Bogomolov pp129ff.; Yartz pp38ff.

⁴³ Bogomolov pp172ff.; Yartz pp57ff.

⁴⁴ Bogomolov pp207ff.; Costelloe and Muirhead vol.1 pp1ff.; Yartz pp146ff.

Aristotle's extant writings on animals consist of four main books specifically about animals, as well as elements of other works. We know that these and other books by the ancient Athenian philosophers were widely studied in the centuries after Aristotle's death:⁴⁵ after Alexander the Great conquered western Asia and Egypt from the Persians in the fourth century BC, the successor states of his empire were ruled by Greeks or Hellenised native people. From about 300BC until the chaos of the Roman-Persian war at the start of the seventh century AD, study of the ancient Greek classics in fields such as poetry, philosophy, history and mathematics flourished in Alexandria in Egypt and Antioch in Syria (modern Turkey), as well as other places including the western areas of the Roman Empire. The most important for our purposes of the late antique philosophers influenced by Aristotle is Plotinus (c.205-270AD). Born in northern Egypt, Plotinus studied philosophy in Alexandria under Ammonius Saccas. Plotinus attempted to simplify Aristotle's philosophy and reconcile it with Plato's mysticism in such areas as Plotinus' idea of the One: the supreme, transcendent entity which is beyond all categories of being.⁴⁶ Some of Plotinus' books were later translated into Arabic and misattributed to Aristotle, notably *Uthūlūjiyā Aristāṭālīs* (*the Theology of Aristotle*) which was erroneously considered to be a translation of a genuine work by Aristotle.⁴⁷

Broadly speaking, before the Islamic conquests of the Levant and Egypt, Hellenised city dwellers and native rural populations such as Syrians, Egyptians and Arabs existed together in these areas in a state of mutual cultural incomprehension.⁴⁸ While it is true that some Arabs of the period of *Jāhiliyya* before Islam did leave their homelands to study philosophy or serve the Roman or Persian governments,⁴⁹ they were the exception – until the Abbasid Caliphate, beginning in 132, there were

⁴⁵ Walzer 1998 pp8ff.

⁴⁶ Bogomolov pp334ff.

⁴⁷ Badawi 1955

⁴⁸ Kennedy pp3ff.

⁴⁹ For example, Zethos, the Platonist philosopher, and Philip the Arab, the Roman Emperor.

no significant Arab or Muslim philosophic movements and no attempts were made by Arabs or Muslims to understand Greek or Graeco-Roman thought in a systematic way.

Muslims Writing Philosophy: Footnotes to Plato and Aristotle?

Initial interest in some areas of ancient Greek thought amongst the early Muslims starting in the second century of the Hijra was essentially rooted in a desire to put it into practice: Muslims wanted to understand ancient works on mathematics, medicine and so on because the knowledge which might be gained from them was regarded as useful by the rulers of the Caliphate.⁵⁰ The Caliph ar-Rashīd founded *bayt al-ḥikma* (the House of Wisdom) in Baghdad in 217, and it was later expanded by al-Ma'mūn in order to give force to this current in society and to give it some sort of structure.⁵¹ *Bayt al-ḥikma* had dedicated teams of translators who, in concert with other translators working independently or for some other patron, produced many translations in a period of about two and a half centuries, roughly 150 to 400. Some were made directly from Greek, but many had Syriac as an intermediary language. While this translation movement was what made philosophy accessible to Muslims – very few of whom knew Greek at that time – we should remember that the standard varied widely, owing partially to the inherent difficulties in translating philosophy and its technical terms and the linguistic differences between Greek, Syriac and Arabic.⁵² It is often uncertain which translations were available to which philosophers when and where.

The beginning of philosophy in the Muslim world was not the translation of Greek texts, however. Muslims started to become interested in what we might now term philosophic concepts and methods because they offered ways of solving some of the problems which arose when trying to understand the Qur'ān. A salient example is *qiyās* (analogy). Early Muslim jurists, before they had access to Aristotelian texts on logic translated into Arabic, used *qiyās* to determine general rules

⁵⁰ Leaman pp5-6

⁵¹ *El "al-Ma'mūn"*

⁵² Leaman p7

from particular Qur'ānic commands or prohibitions. Philosophic methods and concepts were also relevant in the field of theology. Theologians attempting to reconcile God's omnipotence and omniscience with the presence of evil in the world and anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'ān used dialectical reasoning to draw their conclusions.

Islamic philosophers (*falāsifa*) who had studied translated texts of Plato and Aristotle, conversely, criticised dialectical reasoning, which works with premisses that are commonly accepted but not logically demonstrated, and regarded it as inferior to their own demonstrative reasoning, which works with premisses that are proven as certain and which cannot be challenged. Regarding these early developments and conflicts from a modern standpoint, it can be somewhat unclear when Islamic philosophy becomes Islamic theology and vice-versa.

Aristotle in Islamicate Society: Biographies, Texts and Attitudes

Philosophic and other *Ṭabaqāt* books contain biographies of Aristotle: for example, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's '*Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*. The first biographies in this book concern ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and doctors - Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a begins with Asclepius and his followers and later physicians such as Hippocrates, and then moves on to figures more famous for their philosophy, such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a notes some intriguing but probably spurious stories about Aristotle, such as the tale of his acceptance of Plato's philosophy after God revealed Himself to Aristotle in the temple of Minerva/Athena in Athens.⁵³ The detailed biography of Aristotle in '*Uyūn al-Anbā'* contains quotations from many other writers contemporary or roughly contemporary with Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, including al-Fārābī himself. There is a long list of the compositions of Aristotle, which includes *Kitāb fī'r-rūḥ* (*On the Soul*),⁵⁴ *Kitāb fī ittikhādh al-ḥayawān* (*On the Adoption of Animals*), *Kitāb fī ḥarikat*

⁵³ p87

⁵⁴ i.e. *Peri Psychēs/De Anima*

al-ḥayawānāt wa-tashrīḥihā (*On the Movement of Animals and their Feeding*), *Kitāb fī ṭabā'ī' al-ḥayawān* (*On the Natures of Animals*) and several other books on animals.⁵⁵ Other mediaeval biographers who wrote in Arabic about Aristotle, such as Ṣā'id al-Andalusī⁵⁶ or ash-Shahrazūrī,⁵⁷ give similar lists of books.

One can note some important points from this brief analysis of biographies of Aristotle, the most relevant of which for our purposes is that determining the reliability of the mediaeval Arabic versions of Aristotle's works is problematic. This is because, while it is possible that the books on animals which Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a lists were genuinely written by Aristotle, it is more likely that at least some of them are misattributions or double-listings of different translations or editions of the same book under different titles.

We cannot be certain which editions of Aristotle al-Fārābī consulted, and we cannot be sure whether Aristotle's biological works were available to al-Fārābī, either in translation or in the original Greek. Understanding which editions he may have read is important for us in determining how al-Fārābī understood Aristotle, because inevitably the various translated editions of Aristotle's works, mediaeval and modern, differ in some specific details, and moreover translators found different ways of rendering the technical philosophic terms used by Aristotle. This is an important point because the different Arabic words which might be used to translate one Greek word may have slightly different significations and might thus cause the reader to misunderstand or misrepresent what Aristotle originally wrote – hence the caveat when talking about al-Fārābī's originality that it may have been unintentional. He could equally have read versions of Aristotle's books which were expanded by translator-philosophers and used the ideas therein in the mistaken belief that they really were Aristotle's and not those of another interpolator or commentator.

⁵⁵ pp104-105

⁵⁶ *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* "al-'ilm fī-'l-yūnān".

⁵⁷ *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ* pp160-172

It may be that al-Fārābī read *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, a mediaeval Arabic translation from a Syriac edition of Aristotle's works on animals including some of the books listed by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a.⁵⁸ We know, conversely, that al-Fārābī definitely could understand some Greek,⁵⁹ so it is not unreasonable to suggest that he might well have read Aristotle in Greek using help from some of his contemporaries who read this language fluently.⁶⁰ That said, there is no indication that he had any knowledge of Syriac.⁶¹ Bearing in mind these general statements on this matter, we ought to consult the Greek of Aristotle in the main in order best to evaluate what Aristotle himself said rather than how he was interpreted and translated.

Analysis of some of the biographies of Aristotle which circulated in mediaeval Islamic society backs up the general point that there necessarily must be some differences between his thought and those of Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī. While biographers did sometimes insert dubious anecdotes about God revealing Himself to Aristotle, there was no serious attempt to cast Aristotle as a religious scholar or a Muslim before Islam. Al-Fārābī's studies in Peripatetic philosophy and his interest in ancient Greek logic did not interfere with his religious faith or lead biographers to call him an apostate – this means that he did not commit himself totally to Aristotle's teachings, because some of them run counter to Islam. The veracity of this statement can be demonstrated by analysing some key passages from *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*.

The basic question which faces us when looking at *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* and other works is whether al-Fārābī came up with his ideas independently or sourced them from origins other than Aristotle.

⁵⁸ This translation is sometimes attributed to Yūḥannā ibn al-Biṭrīq (Badawi 1978), however it is more likely that it was translated from a Syriac version which is now lost and that the true identity of the translator is unknown to us (*El* "Yaḥyā (or Yūḥannā) b. al-Biṭrīq"). Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a notes (p282) that Yūḥannā, being a "Latin" (*laṭīnī*), was not skilled in either Arabic or Greek. This casts doubt on the attribution of *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* to Yūḥannā ibn al-Biṭrīq. The uncertainty of the source of this book means that it may not have been a fully accurate representation of Aristotle's ideas.

⁵⁹ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a p604

⁶⁰ Such as Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus and Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn 'Adiyy (Shahrazūrī pp298-299; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a pp317-318; *El* "Mattā b. Yūnus", "Yaḥyā b. 'Adī").

⁶¹ Furthermore, the Syriac edition (or editions) of Aristotle's works on animals which might have been used by the writer of *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* is now lost (*El* "Yaḥyā (or Yūḥannā) b. al-Biṭrīq").

This is why understanding what Aristotle wrote, and indeed where he wrote it, is relevant. We will have cause to note that *ho theos*, “God”, or sometimes “god” (i.e. of ancient Greek paganism), as written by Aristotle does not have the same religious significance which a Muslim such as al-Fārābī would apply to it. An important term to be researched is *fiṭra*, variously translated as “primordial nature”, “original human disposition” and in other ways. Similarities between the two writers could be coincidence, or al-Fārābī may have arrived at his ideas independently of Aristotle, and only later realised after reading the latter’s books that they were in agreement in some areas. Moreover, al-Fārābī definitely did disagree with Aristotle in many cases, sometimes because of his own personal analysis, and sometimes, for example in areas such as revelation and Prophethood, because disagreement with ancient Peripatetic philosophy is religiously mandated for Muslims.

This hypothesis can be tested by quoting relevant sections of *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* and attempting to analyse what they can tell us, while also comparing what Aristotle had to say about the matter at hand and looking with care at secondary sources where relevant. The focus is on ideas, however considerations of literary style, structure, methodology and other features of al-Fārābī’s writing are also important for a full examination of the relevant sections of the main primary source.

Chapter Three: Revelation and the Revealer

God in al-Fārābī and His Interactions with Man

One of the most crucial differences between the God of revealed religion in whom al-Fārābī believed and Aristotle's First Cause or Prime Mover is God's involvement in the world and His wish to reveal Himself to humanity. We know from al-Fārābī's biography and milieu that he was a Muslim living in a society where revealed religions were prominent, even though we also know from his biography that he used Aristotle's ideas in some places. For this reason we ought to approach reading al-Fārābī's books from a neutral standpoint, without assuming which of the many influences on the writer dominated. Some modern scholars, such as Richard Walzer in particular, are inclined to take the Aristotelian or Hellenistic paradigm for granted when commenting on *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*. When discussing al-Fārābī's political philosophy, Walzer assumes that there must be a Greek predecessor for this:⁶²

“One obviously wonders who the author of this unusual synthesis of Aristotle and Plato may have been or, if this question cannot be answered, whether at least his place in the history of later Greek philosophy can somehow be circumscribed.”

One perhaps wonders instead why we are looking for this predecessor when there is no evidence that he existed, much less that he influenced al-Fārābī. Walzer later admits that there is an Islamic context for al-Fārābī's political thought,⁶³ but we should remember that this could equally be applied to all of the content of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*.

Sometimes this Islamic context is very obvious, such as when al-Fārābī discusses what happens when all the intellects come together in one person:⁶⁴

⁶² Walzer 1998 p424

⁶³ Ibid. “Again we have to be aware of the Islamic background while trying to understand the meaning of these chapters. Al-Fārābī's political thought is connected with the contemporary debate on the caliphate.”

⁶⁴ V, 15, §10 (p244)

وإذا حصل ذلك في كلا جزئي قوته الناطقة وهما النظرية والعملية ثم في قوته المتخيلة كان هذا الإنسان هو الذي يُوحى إليه، فيكون الله عزّ

وجلّ يُوحى إليه بتوسط العقل الفعّال، فيكون ما يفيض من الله تبارك وتعالى إلى العقل الفعّال يفيضه العقل الفعّال إلى عقله المنفعل بتوسط

العقل المستفاد ثم إلى قوته المتخيلة، فيكون بما يفيض منه إلى عقله المنفعل حكيما فيلسوفا ومتعقلا على التمام⁶⁵ وبما يفيض منه إلى القوة

المتخيلة نبيا ومنذرا بما سيكون ومخبرا بما هو الآن من الجزئيات موجود.

When this occurs in both parts of his rational faculty, namely the theoretical and practical rational faculties, and also in his representative faculty, then it is this man who receives revelation, and God Almighty grants him revelation through the mediation of the active intellect, so that the emanation from God Almighty to the active intellect is passed on to his passive intellect through the mediation of his acquired intellect, and then to the faculty of representation. Thus he is, through the emanation from the active intellect to his passive intellect, a wise man, a philosopher and an accomplished thinker, and through the emanation of the active intellect to his faculty of representation a visionary Prophet who warns of things to come and tells of particular things at present.

The main significance of this passage is that it is the first specific mention of God, that is to say *Allāh*, the god of revealed religion, in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*. The text of this passage clearly demonstrates that al-Fārābī believes in God who reveals Himself to humanity and selects from amongst humans Prophets who preach to the other members of society. This is a key aspect of al-Fārābī's political philosophy, but it is also centrally important for the entire system because we can note from this section that the writer's conception of God is, in this case, very similar to that of conventional Islamic belief at the time while also being quite radically divorced from that of Aristotle and other ancient Greek philosophers. The writer does not give any indication before this section that he will discuss revealed religion – what we might infer from this is that al-Fārābī took for granted the idea that Prophets have the highest level of intellect in his system and receive revelation from God. These ideas run counter to the Aristotelian concept of the Prime Mover or impersonal God.

⁶⁵ Walzer notes pp244-245 that some manuscripts add *bi-'aql fih al-ilāhiyy* ("with an intellect of divine quality"/"by an intellect in which the Divine resides") here and again at the end of this section.

Part of the unfamiliar complexity of this passage, however, lies in exactly how a visionary Prophet gains his revelation from God: he receives revelation as a result of emanation from Him. Emanation also applies to interactions between the intellects and faculties of the soul, so it is clear that al-Fārābī does not use the word and its derived forms as a specific technical term applied only to God, but the fact that it can be applied to God also is significant for understanding what the writer believed about the Nature of God and how he interacts with people.⁶⁶ A possible result of this research could also be adumbrated here: new ideas could be suggested on the topic of the relationship between philosophy and Prophethood. We might re-examine this little-studied passage from a religious point of view, rather than treating it as pure philosophy, if the thesis that al-Fārābī did not make Aristotle his central focus were accepted.

The only other direct mentions of God in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* occur during al-Fārābī's explanation of the different kinds of flawed states:⁶⁷

وأما المدينة الفاسقة فهي التي آراؤها آراء الفاضلة وهي تعلم السعادة والله عزّ وجلّ والثواني والعقل الفعّال وكل شيء سبيله أن يعلمه أهل المدينة الفاضلة ويعتقدونها، ولكن تكون أفعال أهلها أفعال أهل المدن الجاهلية. والمدينة المبدّلة هي التي كانت آراؤها وأفعالها في القدم آراء أهل المدينة الفاضلة وأفعالها، غير أنها تبدّلت فدخلت فيها آراء غير تلك واستحالت أفعالها إلى غير تلك. والمدينة الضالّة هي التي تؤمّ بعد حياتها هذه السعادة⁶⁸ وتعتقد في الله عزّ وجلّ وفي الثواني وفي العقل الفعّال آراء فاسدة لا تصلح عليها ولا إن أخذت على أنها تمثيلات وتخييلات لها. ويكون رئيسها الأول ممن أوهم أنه مُوحىّ إليه من غير أن يكون كذلك، ويكون قد استعمل في ذلك التمويهات والمخادعات والغرور.

The sinful⁶⁹ state is that whose views are the views of the perfect state. It knows happiness, God Almighty, the existents of the second order, the active intellect and everything which is known by the people of the perfect state and in which they believe, however the actions of its people

⁶⁶ The concept of emanation is examined in more detail below pp29-31.

⁶⁷ V, 15, §19 (pp256-258)

⁶⁸ Walzer notes p258 that some manuscripts add *wa-lākin ghayr hādhihi* ("but it is not like this") here.

⁶⁹ Or "profligate"

are the actions of the people of the pagan⁷⁰ states. The changed state is that whose views and actions were, in the past, the views of the perfect state and its actions, but they have been changed: other views have entered it and its actions have been transformed into other actions. The state which strays from the straight path⁷¹ is the state which aims at happiness after this life and holds above God Almighty, the existents of the second order and the active intellect depraved and useless beliefs, even if they were taken as representations and symbols. Its first ruler was a man who pretended to be receiving revelation while he was not, and in order to make this impression he used falsifications, cheating and deceptions.

The most immediately noteworthy aspect of this section is the prominent mentions of God.

Although the context here is political, we can still determine from this part of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* the importance of religious belief in the writer's philosophy: one of the first markers of the perfect state, and one which is partially or formerly shared by the flawed states, is belief in God Almighty.

Al-Fārābī uses religious terminology when he introduces the concept of the pagan state. The word *jāhiliyya* functioning as an adjective denotes something pagan or pertaining to pre-Islamic times.⁷²

Walzer incorrectly translates this word as "ignorant" and talks about "ignorant cities", but for us to adopt this rendering we would have to ignore the penultimate letter, *yā'*, in *jāhiliyya* and read *jāhila* instead.⁷³ That al-Fārābī describes a group of states using the terminology of revealed religion demonstrates the centrality of religious faith in his system, and specifically it demonstrates the importance of revelation – there can be no pagan state which has accepted revelation from God and applied it.

The writer also uses religious terminology to describe the other flawed states, *al-madīna al-fāsiqa* and *al-madīna aḍ-ḍāilla*. These words, commonly translated as "sinful" and "erring" respectively,

⁷⁰ Or "pre-Islamic"

⁷¹ Lit. "the erring state"

⁷² Lane; Wehr *jāhili*; *El* "Badw: III. Pre-Islamic Arabia".

⁷³ It is possible that the latter may exist in some manuscripts but Walzer writes the former in his critical edition of the text and does not give any variants for this word in his footnotes (1998 p257).

are used extensively in the Qur'ān. We can take as an example a prominent verse in which they are used together:⁷⁴

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْي أَن يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ

اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفٰسِقِينَ

God does not disdain to use an example, even of a gnat, or what is above it. Those who believe know that it is the Truth from their Lord, but those who are false say “What did God want with this example?” He leads many astray by it and He guides many by it, but He does not lead anyone astray except those who sin.

Fāsiq clearly has a moral value, and although *ḍalla* and its derived forms did originally have descriptive meanings they took on new religious connotations after their use in the Qur'ān which persisted from mediaeval times until the present day.⁷⁵ This comparison demonstrates that al-Fārābī may have used these terms because of their religious connotations in order to emphasise the importance of religious belief in his philosophic system.⁷⁶ For this reason he did not use more general terms to describe the flawed states: he did not talk about *al-madīna as-sayyi'a* or *al-madīna ash-sharīra*, for example.

We can also find an Islamic influence in al-Fārābī's idea of the changed state. The idea that this state formerly held correct views and later changed them bears a striking resemblance to the concept of *bid'a*, innovation, in Islam. Innovators changed Islamic practices and ideas – in doing so, they removed themselves from true Islam.⁷⁷ Thus we can suggest that al-Fārābī views the principles of the perfect state as being the ideal principles of the Muslim community. Thus also, part of the reason that al-Fārābī uses *Allāh 'izza wa-jall* in a political context is to make a contrast with Aristotle's idea of the Prime Mover.

⁷⁴ Al-Baqara (2): 26

⁷⁵ Lane; Wehr *ḍalla*

⁷⁶ Cf. Walzer 1998 p411

⁷⁷ For the origin of this idea, see Sūrat Saba' (34): 15-16.

Although these are the only instances of the specific word *Allāh* being used in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, we know by comparison with al-Fārābī's other books that he also means God when he talks about the First Cause:⁷⁸

فالأول هو الذي ينبغي أن يُعتقد فيه أنه هو الإله،⁷⁹ وهو السبب القريب لوجود الثواني ولوجود العقل الفعّال.

It is appropriate that the First [Cause] is that which is considered to be God, and it is the immediate reason for the existence of the existents of the second order and for the existence of the active intellect.

This passage demonstrates that al-Fārābī uses *as-sabab al-awwal* (or simply *al-awwal* for short) to mean God. Having understood this, we can look at the first chapters of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* for more information on the Nature of God in al-Fārābī's view.

In chapter 2 of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, al-Fārābī talks about the First Cause as the origin of all being, and he also describes in some detail the Nature of the First Cause:⁸⁰

و[السبب الأول] ليس ينقسم إلى شيئين، يكون بإحدهما تجوهر ذاته وبالأخر حصول شيء آخر عنه، كما أن لنا شيئين، نتجوهر بإحدهما وهو النطق ونكتب بالأخر وهو صناعة الكتابة، بل ذات واحدة وجوهر واحد به يكون تجوهره وبه بعينه يحصل عنه شيء آخر.

ولا أيضا يحتاج في أن يفيض عن وجوده وجود شيء آخر إلى شيء غير ذاته يكون فيه [...] وليس وجوده بما يفيض عنه وجود غيره أكمل من وجوده الذي به تجوهره، ولا وجوده الذي به تجوهره أكمل من الذي يفيض عنه وجود غيره، بل هما جميعا ذات واحدة.

ولا يمكن أيضا أن يكون له عائق من أن يفيض عنه وجود غيره، لا من نفسه ولا من خارج أصلا.

[The First Cause] is not divided into two things, by one of which His essence becomes substance and by the other something else occurs from Him as we have two things: we become substance by one of them, namely articulated speech, and we write by the other, namely the art of writing.

⁷⁸ *Kitāb as-siyāsa al-madaniya* p31 ll.12-13

⁷⁹ The editor Najjār notes that some manuscripts have *annahu al-ilāh ta'ālā* ("that it is God Almighty") instead of *annahu huwa al-ilāh*, and that some simply omit *huwa*.

⁸⁰ I, 2, §1 (pp92-94)

But He is one essence and one substance through which He becomes substance and through which other things occur.

Nor does He need, in order that the existence of something else emanate from His existence, anything except His own essence. [...] His existence is not, by the existence of something else emanating from it, more perfect than His existence by which He becomes substance, nor is His existence by which He becomes substance more perfect than the existence of something else which emanates from it, but they are both one essence.

It is also not possible at all that there might be something to prevent that the existence of something else emanates from Him, not from Himself or from outside Him.

At issue in this passage are several points, the most important of which is the concept of emanation, *fayḍ*. Not only did Aristotle never go into detail about the nature of the Prime Mover, but he also did not use any words related to emanation or similar concepts, although Plotinus did use related Greek words in his writings.⁸¹

Al-Fārābī may have included more details on the Nature of the First Cause than Aristotle did on the Prime Mover as a result of the former's wish to express his ideas more fully and accurately, or indeed to distance himself from Aristotle and strengthen his Muslim credentials. It is indeed possible that these statements about the absolute unity and indivisible nature of the First Cause are connected with contemporary or near-contemporary theological debates about the Oneness of God amongst groups like the Mu'tazila, as argued by Rudolph.⁸²

Fayḍ can be simply a philosophic way of saying *wahy*.⁸³ When we compare section 10 of chapter 15,⁸⁴ we can see that the visionary prophet is so because of an emanation from God, which in theological terms is revelation from God. It is significant, however, that *nuṭq*, articulated speech, is

⁸¹ Walzer 1998 p354

⁸² Adamson (ed). p6; pp11ff.

⁸³ Cf. Walzer 1998 p355

⁸⁴ Analysed above pp24-26

mentioned by al-Fārābī in connection with emanation because we know that God speaks directly to the world and things in the Qur’ān.⁸⁵

بَدِيعَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ وَاِذَا قَضٰى اٰمْرًا فَاِذَا مَا يَقُوْلُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُوْنُ

He is the Originator of the Heavens and the Earth, and if He decrees something He says only “Be!” and so it is.

God’s speaking to things in order to make them may have been what al-Fārābī had in mind when he discussed the indivisibility of the First Cause and how articulated speech is separate from writing for humans. God decreed that people follow His will, which was why He revealed the Qur’ān, itself a form of emanation.

Perhaps the most important passage demonstrating the nature of the perfect state is the beginning of chapter 17 on philosophy and religion. Al-Fārābī describes what should be known by the people of the perfect state:⁸⁶

فَأَمَّا الْأَشْيَاءَ الْمَشْتَرَكَةَ الَّتِي يَنْبَغِي أَنْ يَعْلَمَهَا جَمِيعُ أَهْلِ الْمَدِينَةِ الْفَاضِلَةِ فَهِيَ أَشْيَاءٌ (١) أَوْلَاهَا مَعْرِفَةُ السَّبَبِ الْأَوَّلِ وَجَمِيعُ مَا يُوصَفُ بِهِ، [...]]

(٦) ثُمَّ الرَّئِيسِ الْأَوَّلِ وَكَيْفَ يَكُونُ الْوَحْيُ [...]]

As for the things in common which all the people of the perfect state ought to know, they are: (1) knowledge of the First Cause and all how He is described [...] (6) then the first ruler and how there is revelation [...]

Having established that al-Fārābī viewed God and the First Cause as one and the same, it is significant that he would state that knowledge of the First Cause is the first thing which the people of the perfect state ought to know, and that belief in revelation also makes the list. This is because such statements demonstrate al-Fārābī’s disagreement with Aristotle and agreement with Islamic teaching.

⁸⁵ Al-Baqara (2): 117.

⁸⁶ V, 17, §1 (pp276-278)

Differences from Aristotle's Conception of God

Al-Fārābī's philosophy, both of God specifically and when he describes God using the term the First Cause, means that any human notion of the existence of God cannot progress beyond acceptance of the fact that His existence has nothing whatsoever in common with what we mean when we talk about anything else, except in some crucial areas such a revelation and emanation.⁸⁷ We need to bear this fact in mind when comparing al-Fārābī with Aristotle. The most immediate difference between Aristotle and al-Fārābī is the latter's acceptance of divine revelation. In ancient Athens, without Islam and the Qur'ān or any other form of accepted divine revelation or expression, it would have been impossible for Aristotle to use revelation as a concept and include it in his philosophy. Indeed, the way that Aristotle describes God is very different from how a Muslim such as al-Fārābī would have understood His nature.⁸⁸

We must be careful not to ignore the question whether "soul" can be defined in a single unambiguous formula, as is the case with animal, or whether we must not give a separate formula for each of it, as we do for horse, dog, man, god, in the latter case the universal animal – and so too every other common predicate – being treated either as nothing at all or as a later product.⁸⁹

Describing God as "the universal animal" would have been unacceptable to al-Fārābī. As we will see below,⁹⁰ he held the belief that animals are created by God, and God is the source of creation. It should also be remembered that, as noted above,⁹¹ al-Fārābī emphatically states that the First Cause cannot be divided, rather He is one and indivisible. This means that al-Fārābī rejects the idea that a separate formula could be given for each part of the First Cause, God.

⁸⁷ Cf. Colmo p127, who does not qualify his statement by talking about revelation or emanation. Colmo also asserts ibid. that al-Fārābī criticises Islam, which is not true, although al-Fārābī does disagree with at least one Qur'ānic statement (see below p36).

⁸⁸ *On the Soul* 402b

⁸⁹ εὐλαβητέον δ' ὅπως μὴ λανθάνη πότερον εἰς ὁ λόγος αὐτῆς ἐστὶ, καθάπερ ζῶου, ἢ καθ' ἕκαστον ἕτερος, οἷον ἵππου, κυνός, ἀνθρώπου, θεοῦ, τὸ δὲ ζῶον τὸ καθόλου ἤτοι οὐθέν ἐστὶν ἢ ὕστερον, ὁμοίως δὲ κἂν εἴ τι κοινὸν ἄλλο κατηγοροῖτο.

⁹⁰ Chapter Four: pp40ff.

⁹¹ pp29-31

Aristotle does not himself use the word *ho theos*, God, in his *Metaphysics* until Book 12:⁹²

*If, then, the happiness which God always enjoys is as great as that which we enjoy sometimes, it is wondrous; and if it is greater, this is still more wondrous. Nevertheless it is so. Moreover, life belongs to God. For the operation of the mind is life, and God is that operation; and the essential operation of God is life most good and eternal. We hold, then, that God is a living being, eternal, most good; and therefore life and a continuous eternal existence belong to God; for that is what God is.*⁹³

Even here Aristotle does not make any mention of revelation or Prophets, necessarily because these concepts did not exist at that time, and certainly not in the same way as mediaeval Muslims understood them. It is also worth noting that while al-Fārābī does talk about God having feelings of pleasure,⁹⁴ he does not talk about God having emotions or feelings such as happiness, although he does frequently discuss human happiness in connection with pointing out the flaws of certain states.⁹⁵ Al-Fārābī explicitly states that God's pleasure cannot be compared in any way to human pleasure or happiness.⁹⁶ In *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, there is no sense that God has the emotion of happiness or that any of His wishes can be likened to human wishes or inclinations. Nowhere in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* does al-Fārābī state that God is life. He also does not say that God is continuous eternal existence. While it can be understood from *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* that God is alive and God exists continuously and eternally, the writer does not at any point state that life and God are synonymous.

Walzer notes in his commentary on *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*⁹⁷ that the Arabic word for angel⁹⁸ could be used to render the Greek word *theos*. Even though there are no instances of this occurring in al-

⁹² 1072b, 1125ff.

⁹³ εἰ οὖν οὕτως εὖ ἔχει, ὡς ἡμεῖς ποτέ, ὁ θεὸς αἰεὶ θαυμαστόν: εἰ δὲ μᾶλλον, ἔτι θαυμασιώτερον. ἔχει δὲ ᾧδε. καὶ ζωὴ δὲ γε ὑπάρχει: ἡ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωὴ, ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἡ ἐνέργεια: ἐνέργεια δὲ ἡ καθ' αὐτὴν ἐκείνου ζωὴ ἀρίστη καὶ αἰδίου. φημὲν δὴ τὸν θεὸν εἶναι ζῶν αἰδίου ἀριστον, ὥστε ζωὴ καὶ αἰὼν συνεχῆς καὶ αἰδίου ὑπάρχει τῷ θεῷ: τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός.

⁹⁴ I, 1, §14

⁹⁵ For example, V, 15, §19 (pp256-258), quoted and analysed above pp26-27.

⁹⁶ I, 1, §14

⁹⁷ pp363-364

⁹⁸ *Malak* – Lane;Wehr

Fārābī's writing, if true it would demonstrate a different attitude in mediaeval Arabic philosophical writing from that held by ancient Greek philosophers, because in revealed religion angels are created by the One God, whereas varying accounts exist in ancient Greek paganism for how there might be numerous different gods and how the word *theos* might be applied to several distinct entities. Colmo suggests that sometimes al-Fārābī's views conflict with both Islam and ancient philosophy because al-Fārābī viewed the emanation of the world from God as a necessary occurrence, even though this would mean that God's free will is circumscribed.⁹⁹

Al-Fārābī's Use and Opinion of Independent Reasoning

For al-Fārābī, "philosophic tradition" is an oxymoron, as Colmo notes,¹⁰⁰ quoting and disagreeing with Walzer:¹⁰¹

"But Aristotelian cosmology and biological research (enriched by the results obtained by Hellenistic scientists) were now accepted as almost dogmatic truth. Both late Greek philosophers and their Muslim followers acclaimed almost unanimously and without substantial reservation a very complicated structure laboriously established by Aristotelians and Platonists and others. They no longer fully realised 'the hypothetical character of postulates, to which centuries of unquestioned tradition had given the appearance of self-evidence.'"

In the case of al-Fārābī, this is not true. As we have seen in this chapter, and will continue to examine in the following sections on animals and man and the soul, al-Fārābī clearly replaced some Aristotelian beliefs with Muslim ones. We should also remember, though, that he had his own original beliefs which could be in conformity with neither Islam nor Peripatetic philosophy.

Al-Fārābī's original thought, which may be seen to occur in contrast with Islam to an extent, can be demonstrated effectively by analysis of his statements on happiness and the afterlife. Let us

⁹⁹ pp121-122. Colmo claims that al-Fārābī sourced this idea from *The Theology of Aristotle* without giving a specific citation: I have been unable to find any reference to emanation in Badawī's edition.

¹⁰⁰ pp11ff.

¹⁰¹ Walzer 1998 p435

examine al-Fārābī's own definition of happiness from *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*:¹⁰²

وحصول المعقولات الأول للإنسان هو استكماله الأول، وهذه المعقولات إنما جعلت له ليستعملها في أن يصير إلى استكماله الأخير، وذلك

هو السعادة. وهي أن تصير نفس الإنسان من الكمال في الوجود إلى حيث لا تحتاج في قوامها إلى مادة، وذلك أن تصير في جملة الأشياء

البريئة عن الأجسام وفي جملة الجواهر المفارقة للمواد، وأن تبقى على تلك الحال دائما أبدا [...]]

The first obtaining of the intelligibles for a person is his first perfection, and yet these intelligibles are made for him so that he might use them to reach his ultimate perfection, which is happiness. This means that the person's soul reaches perfection in existence such that it does not need matter for its support, because it becomes one of the incorporeal things and one of the immaterial substances and it remains in this state forever [...]

Al-Fārābī defines *sa'āda* as a human person's ultimate perfection. While we can note that this differs from the common definition of the word,¹⁰³ the striking element of this passage is how the writer then defines perfection in existence. One might think that this is surely unobtainable by humans: if a soul was not already without need for matter, it is difficult to see how it might achieve this state except by dying and moving to the next life.

This challenging passage begs more questions than it answers. It would be tempting to label this a mystical passage and compare it with some passages from *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma*, a mystical work ascribed to al-Fārābī, but any such research is a task for the future.

In the following section from the chapter on reason from *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, al-Fārābī describes the purpose of happiness:¹⁰⁴

والسعادة هي الخير المطلوب لذاته وليست تُطلب أصلا ولا في وقت من الأوقات لينال بما شيء آخر وليس وراءها شيء آخر يمكن أن يناله الإنسان

أعظم منها. والأفعال الإرادية التي تنفع في بلوغ السعادة هي الأفعال الجميلة، والهيئات والملكات التي عنها تصدر هذه الأفعال هي الفضائل، هذه هي

الخيرات لا لأجل ذواتها بل إنما هي خيرات لأجل السعادة.

¹⁰² IV, 13, §5 (pp204-206)

Happiness is the good thing which is sought for its own sake: it is not sought at all at any time whatsoever for obtaining something else through it, and there is not beyond it any other thing which is greater than it for one to obtain. The voluntary actions which benefit in reaching happiness are fine actions, and the dispositions and habits which proceed from these actions are virtues: these are good things not for their own sake but instead they are good things for the sake of happiness.

Happiness exists as a goal above religious obligation or any other purpose. Al-Fārābī does not reject the Islamic teaching that true happiness occurs in the afterlife, but he places happiness for its own sake as a higher goal than anything else in our mortal lives. This means that happiness is a higher purpose than religious observance – and yet some of the flawed states know happiness as well as God.¹⁰⁵ One wonders how this can be so. Regardless of the exact meaning of these difficult passages in chapter 13 and how we wish to fit together the ideas in them, we can certainly say that the depth and manner of explanation of such ideas are original to al-Fārābī, demonstrative of his ability to reason independently and view of the benefit in doing so.

Another notable example of al-Fārābī's original thought is his description of what happens to the inhabitants of the various states after they die. When talking about the afterlife in connection with flawed states, the writer says that the inhabitants of the pagan or pre-Islamic state will suffer total destruction, including destruction of their souls, when they die:¹⁰⁶

فأهل هذه المدن: أما مدن الجاهلية فإن أنفسهم تبقى غير مستكملة ومحتاجة في قوامها إلى مادة ضرورة إذ لم يرتسم فيها رسم حقيقة سوى المعقولات الأول أصلا. [...] هؤلاء هم الهالكون والصائرون إلى العدم على مثال ما يكون عليه البهائم والسباع والأفاعي.

As for the people of these states, the souls of the pagan state remain imperfect and necessarily requiring matter for their preservation as no truth has been impressed upon them at all apart from the first intelligibles. [...] These are the people who perish and become nothing, just like cattle, beasts of prey and snakes.

¹⁰³ Lane; Wehr *sa'āda*

¹⁰⁴ IV, 13, §6 (p206)

¹⁰⁵ V, 15, §19 (pp256-258)

¹⁰⁶ V, 16, §7 (pp270-272)

We will return to the meaning of this passage later in order to consider its statements about animals,¹⁰⁷ but what is to be noted in connection with reasoning is the total destruction of the people of the pagan state once their physical bodies are destroyed. This would appear to be in conflict with Islamic teaching.

The Qurʾān says that evil people will be condemned to Hell, and it also says that those who seek only for the goods of this world will go to Hell after dying.¹⁰⁸ By saying that the inhabitants of flawed states are simply destroyed after death, al-Fārābī simply ignores Islamic doctrine on the matter and replaces it with his own ideas.¹⁰⁹

Brief mention can be made of how al-Ghazālī misunderstood al-Fārābī's belief in the destruction of the souls of the inhabitants of the pagan state after death. Al-Ghazālī grouped philosophers together in various different categories in his book *al-Munqidh min ad-dalāl*, one of which is the naturalists. He claimed that these naturalists denied the eternity of the soul, and that they thus denied the existence of Heaven, Hell, Resurrection and Judgement.¹¹⁰ In the case of al-Fārābī though, this is not entirely true, because al-Fārābī only denied the eternity of the souls of the pagan state's inhabitants, while preserving a belief in revelation along with other ideas which come with it. He did not deny Resurrection or Judgement, he simply suggested his own ideas about the destruction of sinful or corrupt souls. We can thus understand something of the origin of the idea that al-Fārābī was classed as an Aristotelian philosopher by noting al-Ghazālī's failure fully and accurately to understand and represent this significant aspect of al-Fārābī's philosophy.

As an example of al-Fārābī's attitude towards original thought, we can turn to his discussion of how the First Cause can be known by people. After discussing the matters known by the people of the

¹⁰⁷ See below Chapter Four

¹⁰⁸ Al-Isrā' (17):18

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Colmo p107, who says that Islam and Plato agree on the matter while al-Fārābī does not.

¹¹⁰ *Al-Munqidh min ad-dalāl* p347

virtuous state,¹¹¹ the writer talks about how these things can be known:¹¹²

وهذه الأشياء تعرف بأحد وجهين إما أن ترسم في نفوسهم كما هي موجودة وإما أن ترسم فيهم بالمناسبة والتمثيل، وذلك أن يحصل في نفوسهم مثالاتها التي تحاكيها. فحكماء المدينة هم الذين يعرفون هذه ببراهين وببصائر أنفسهم، ومن يلي الحكماء يعرفون هذه على ما هي موجودة ببصائر الحكماء أتباعا لهم وتصديقا لهم وثقة بهم، والباقيون منهم يعرفونها بالمثلثات التي تحاكيها لأنهم لا مئة في أذهانهم لتفهمها على ما هي موجودة إما بالطبع وإما بالعادة. وكلتا هما معرفتان إلا أن التي للحكماء أفضل لا محالة.

These things are known in one of two ways, either by being impressed¹¹³ on their souls as they exist or by being impressed on them through affinity and symbolism. In that case, symbols arise in them which reproduce them. The philosophers of the city are those who know these things through demonstrative proofs and their own insight. Those who follow the philosophers know them as they exist through the insight of the philosophers, following them, believing them and trusting them. Other people know them through symbols which reproduce them because there is no way for their minds to understand them as they exist, neither by nature nor habit. Both of these are kinds of knowledge, although that of the philosophers is definitely better.

The idea that there are two different kinds of knowledge of God and His nature and commandments supports the notion that al-Fārābī valued individual reason: the philosophers use demonstrative proofs and their own insight and, it is implied, religious proofs and revelation, whereas other people who are neither philosophers nor their followers use only religious proofs and revelation. Religion, thus, is an imitative representation of philosophic truth for those unable to understand the latter – without the Qur’ān, philosophers would still be able to arrive at such beliefs as the Oneness of God. As above,¹¹⁴ examination of this passage would become important as a result of the acceptance of the idea that al-Fārābī broke with Aristotle. A fresh analysis of the relationship between religious and philosophic knowledge according to al-Fārābī might be undertaken in the future which could give further support to the theory of the uniqueness of

¹¹¹ See above p31

¹¹² V, 17, §2 (p278)

¹¹³ Or “ordained”

¹¹⁴ pp24ff.

Islamic philosophy.

If we were to accept the assertion that the commonly-assumed Aristotelian context of al-Fārābī's writing ought to be replaced with an Islamic and independent one, "impressed on their souls" is a highly significant statement. It reminds us of the idea of *fiṭra*,¹¹⁵ but also has a mystical implication, because something impressed or ordained upon the soul is not something acquired by logical thought and reasoning. If it were to be accepted that al-Fārābī can be viewed as being outside the Aristotelian tradition in some areas, further research in the future into the presence of mysticism in his work may yield results.

Lameer, referring specifically to the first two lines of the text quoted above, believes that Plato may have inspired al-Fārābī's view,¹¹⁶ and yet this assertion is not supported by analysis of key sections of Plato's work. Let us take as an example the same passage which from *Republic VI* which Lameer quotes:¹¹⁷

"And would you also say," I said, "that differentiating between truth and untruth is like defining the opinable¹¹⁸ against the knowable¹¹⁹ and the likeness¹²⁰ against that of which it is a likeness?"¹²¹

While Plato also distinguishes between two types of realisation – and it is quite possible that later philosophers such as Plotinus who were influenced by both Plato and Aristotle might have accepted this assertion – these two types are different from those suggested by al-Fārābī. Realisation is a suitable term to describe the category including opinion and knowledge, because clearly al-Fārābī regarded philosophic and religious truth as different kinds of knowledge. He specifically stated that

¹¹⁵ See below pp50ff.

¹¹⁶ pp261ff.

¹¹⁷ *Republic* 6.510a

¹¹⁸ *doxaston*

¹¹⁹ *gnōston*

¹²⁰ *homoiōthen*

¹²¹ ἢ καὶ ἐθέλοις ἂν αὐτὸ φάναι, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, διηρῆσθαι ἀληθεία τε καὶ μὴ, ὡς τὸ δοξαστὸν πρὸς τὸ γνωστὸν, οὕτω τὸ ὁμοιωθὲν πρὸς τὸ ὅμοιωθή;

both are kinds of knowledge.¹²² It is more likely that this idea is original than that it is a significantly altered version of Plato's statement above as Lameer claims, because al-Fārābī's thoughts on the matter contradict Plato's.

While we should stop short of calling al-Fārābī a theologian, Rudolph's preliminary study¹²³ of theological themes and influences does offer some compelling arguments. His chapter "Reflections on al-Fārābī's *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*" compares *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* with some theological works of the period. Rudolph's striking conclusion that the structure and overall content of al-Ash'arī's *Kitāb al-Luma'*, al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb at-tawḥīd* and al-Juwaynī's *Kitāb al-Irshād* have close parallels with *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* seems to be persuasive and based on convincing evidence. What this might mean is that al-Fārābī was attempting to reconcile Islamic theology with Islamicate philosophy, and this, in turn, might explain why there are specific references to revealed religion in a book ostensibly about philosophy *qua* philosophy, although significant research would be required before the theological aspects of al-Fārābī's thought could be described in detail.

¹²² *humā ma'rifatān*, lit. "they are two knowledges" (V, 17, §2 (p278, l14))

¹²³ Adamson (ed.) pp1-14

Chapter Four: Man's Nature and that of Animals

Faculties of the Soul and Political Comparisons

Animals and man necessarily have some basic commonalities in most philosophic systems, because both are usually said to have been created by either God or an impersonal first cause. Thus al-Fārābī divides animals into two categories, speaking (or rational) and non-speaking (or non-rational). Al-Fārābī first discusses this distinction in chapter 4, on sublunary existents:¹²⁴

والأجسام الطبيعية من هذه هي الاسطقسات مثل النار والهواء والماء والأرض وما جانسها من البخار واللهيب وغير ذلك، والمعدنية مثل
الحجارة وما جانسها، والنبات، والحيوان غير الناطق، والحيوان الناطق.

The natural sublunary bodies are elements like fire, air, water, earth and what is of their genus, such as steam, flame and other things; minerals like rocks and what is of their genus; plants; animals without speech,¹²⁵ and speaking animals.¹²⁶

Given that man is clearly a sublunary existent, even though he is not mentioned specifically by name here, he must fit into one of these categories. "Speaking animals" would appear to be the closest, and in suggesting that humans fit into this category we discover much about the closeness of humans and animals according to the writer. Humans are described as animals, although modified by an active participle. An important question which is raised by this passage is how one ought to render *nāṭiq*.

In chapter 8 of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, on becoming, the writer discusses how living creatures necessarily occur as a result of the occurrence of prime matter, elements and other things and their mixing together.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ III, 4, §3 (pp106-108)

¹²⁵ Or "animals which are not rational".

¹²⁶ Or "rational animals".

¹²⁷ III, 8, §4 (p140)

فالمعدنّيات تحدث باختلاط أقرب إلى الاسطقسات وأقلّ تركيباً ويكون بعدها من الاسطقسات برّتب أقلّ. يحدث النبات باختلاط أكثر

منها تركيباً وأبعد عن الاسطقسات برّتب أكثر. والحيوان غير الناطق يحدث باختلاط أكثر تركيباً من النبات. والإنسان وحده هو الذي

يحدث عن الاختلاط الأخير.

Minerals occur by a mixture which is nearer to the elements and which is less complex, and their distance from the elements is less in rank. Plants occur by a mixture which is more complex than theirs, and they are removed from the elements by a further stage. Animals without speech¹²⁸ occur by a mixture which is more complex than that of plants. Man alone is that which occurs by the last mixture.

The commonality we can note between animals and humans in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* is that both occur as a necessary result of the various mixtures between prime matter, elements etc. which al-Fārābī discusses.¹²⁹ While it should be noted that al-Fārābī consciously deviated from Aristotle in his descriptions of prime matter¹³⁰ and that al-Fārābī also chose not to differentiate the two Arabic words *mizāj* and *ikhtilāṭ* which are both used interchangeably for “mixture”,¹³¹ the question is how to read *nāṭiq*. One might either take it literally, or assert that *al-ḥayawān an-nāṭiq* seems to refer to Aristotle’s purported description of man as a “rational animal”. It would appear that animals are contrasted with humanity by means of the writer’s clarification that they do not speak, or that they are not rational.

The most important question which is raised by this passage is which sense of the word *nuṭq* (or, here, its derived form *nāṭiq*, the active participle) is intended by al-Fārābī. As noted above,¹³² the basic meaning of *nuṭq* is “(articulated) speech”, hence the basic meaning of *nāṭiq* is “speaker” or “one who employs articulated speech”.¹³³ It seems obvious that animals cannot employ articulated

¹²⁸ Or “animals which are not rational”.

¹²⁹ The celestial bodies are described in III, 7, and then elements and mixtures are described in III, 8, §1-3.

¹³⁰ Cf. Walzer 1998 pp372-373

¹³¹ Cf. Ibid. p379, who states that the Greek words *krāsis* and *mixis* were differentiated by Alexander of Aphrodisias when commenting on Aristotle. Also Lane, Wehr *mizāj; ikhtilāṭ* and Liddell-Scott, Morwood *krāsis; mixis*.

¹³² p29-31

¹³³ Lane, Wehr *nāṭiq*

speech, so one wonders why al-Fārābī might use such a description. The conclusion which might then be drawn is that the meaning of the root can be changed by the writer to suit his purposes. Thus we could render *nāṭiq* in chapter 8, section 4 as “rational”.¹³⁴ Conversely, by comparison with other passages in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*,¹³⁵ we can find support for the idea that al-Fārābī uses *nuṭq* and its derived forms as terms with consistent meanings. This challenges the idea that *al-ḥayawān ghayr an-nāṭiq* is to be understood within the Aristotelian context of man as a rational animal. If the reader were to accept reading *nāṭiq* as “rational”, “possessing logic”, numerous difficult questions are raised about the nature of animals as discussed elsewhere in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, for example the beginning of chapter 10 on the faculties of the soul:¹³⁶

فاذا حدث الإنسان فأول ما يحدث فيه القوة التي بها يتغذى وهي القوة الغذائية. ثم من بعد ذلك القوة التي بها يحسّ الملموس مثل الحرارة والبرودة وسائرهما، والتي بها يحسّ الطعوم، والتي بها يحسّ الروائح، والتي بها يحسّ الأصوات، والتي بها يحسّ الألوان والمبصرات كلها مثل الشعاعات ويحدث مع الحواسّ قوة أخرى بها نزوع إلى ما يحسّه فيشتاقه أو يكرهه.

Once a person exists, the first thing to arise in him is the faculty by which he takes nourishment, namely the nutritive faculty. Then there arises the faculty by which he senses the tangible, such as heat, cold and other tangibles, and the faculty by which he senses tastes, that by which he senses smells, that by which he senses sounds, and that by which he senses colours and all seen things such as rays of light. With the senses another faculty arises, the appetite¹³⁷ for him to yearn for or hate what he perceives.

This initial discussion of faculties is significant for us because it demonstrates some further necessary commonalities between humans and animals. Animals must also have the nutritive faculty, because otherwise they would starve. The intriguing question here is how animals can be said to yearn for or hate things, or indeed to perceive taste, smell or sound in the way that the

¹³⁴ As does Walzer (1998)

¹³⁵ Notably I, 2, §1, quoted above pp29-31, where *nuṭq* occurs in contrast with the art of writing.

¹³⁶ IV, 10, §1 (p165)

¹³⁷ Or “propensity”.

word might commonly be understood.¹³⁸ It also might occur to the reader that, since plants also necessarily take nourishment in order to survive, they also have the nutritive faculty. Surely a creature which is not rational perceives taste and so on in a different way from humans, who are rational. Thus we can call into question the idea that *nāṭiq* is used to mean “rational”.

This passage begs more questions than it answers if we accept *nāṭiq* to be understood as “rational”, because the reader might wonder how to reconcile animals not being rational with the fact that they must also have the nutritive faculty. One also wonders what causes yearning or hatred, that is to say how a person – or an animal – decides what is yearned for and what is hated. A possible answer would be that this is *fiṭra*, primordial human nature.¹³⁹

Reproduction, said to be subordinate to the nutritive faculty, is also a function in common between humans and animals. We read in chapter 12 on the organs of reproduction:¹⁴⁰

والقوة التي بها يكون التوليد منها رئيسة ومنها خادمة. والرئيسة منها في القلب، والخادمة في أعضاء التوليد والقوة التي بها يكون التوليد اثنتان، إحداهما تُعِدُّ المادَّة التي بها يكون الحيوان الذي له تلك القوة، والأخرى تعطي صورة ذلك النوع من الحيوان وتحرك المادَّة إلى أن تحصل لها تلك الصورة.

The faculty by which generation occurs is partly ruling and partly serving. The ruling part is in the heart, and the serving part in the organs of generation. The faculty by which generation occurs is twofold: one prepares the matter by which animals which have that faculty exist, and the other gives the form of that type of animal and moves the matter that it might attain that form.

Here al-Fārābī tells us that at least some animals have the faculty by which generation occurs.

While the writer does concern himself in chapter 12 mainly with human beings and how they reproduce, it follows from this passage that animals and humans have in common subordinate

¹³⁸ Cf. Lane, Wehr *ḥassa* | “to feel”, “to sense”, etc. whereas IV “to perceive”, “to notice”, “to hear” etc.

¹³⁹ See below pp50ff. for the question of *fiṭra* in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*.

¹⁴⁰ IV, 12, §1 (p186)

aspects of at least one of the faculties of the soul, in this case the nutritive faculty, as well as the faculty itself.

Walzer claims that this passage and chapter 12 generally are based on Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals*.¹⁴¹ The problem with this is that he presupposes the existence of a comprehensive edition of all the psychological and biological writings of Aristotle, and that such an edition – if it existed – was available to and used by al-Fārābī. This is not impossible, but it is more likely that al-Fārābī sourced his ideas here about twofold generation from his own perceptions and studies, or indeed from the Qur'ān.¹⁴²

وَمِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَا زَوْجَيْنِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

And of all things We created two of a pair, that you might remember.

The idea that generation is twofold can be seen to stem in part from the Qur'ān. Whether al-Fārābī had this particular verse in mind when writing *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* cannot be known for certain, but the idea that he used verses from the Qur'ān in forming his philosophy would seem to be a more reasonable assumption than that he used a compilation of Aristotle which is not known to have existed, been translated or been accessible to al-Fārābī. Even if it did, we know that the idea of twofold generation does not occur anywhere in *On the Generation of Animals*.¹⁴³ For these reasons, it is more likely that al-Fārābī either came up with the idea of the faculty of generation by twofold by himself or from another source, or understood this Qur'ānic verse as referring specifically to the generation of animals and humans.

¹⁴¹ 1998 p398

¹⁴² Adh-Dhāriyāt (51): 49

¹⁴³ For the original Greek with English translation, see Peck. For the mediaeval Arabic version of questionable accuracy, see Brugman and Drossart.

Al-Fārābī compares the violence of animals with that of flawed human beings in chapter 18, on the views of pagan and erring states. He describes the views of these flawed states as making a comparison with nature in order to justify their actions:¹⁴⁴

فإذا نرى كثيرا من الحيوان يثب على كثير من باقيها فيلتمس إفسادها وإبطالها من غير أن ينتفع بشيء من ذلك نفعا يظهر، كأنه قد طبع على أن لا يكون الموجود في العالم بأسره غيره، أو أن وجود كل ما سواه ضار له على أن يجعل وجود غيره ضارا له وإن لم يكن منه شيء آخر غير أنه موجود فقط. ثم كل واحد منها إن لم يرم ذلك التمس أن يستعبد غيره فيما ينفعه، ويجعل كل نوع من كل نوع بهذه الحال، وفي كثير منها يجعل كل شخص من كل شخص من نوعه بهذه الحال.

We see many animals attacking other animals. They seek to ruin and destroy them without gaining any apparent benefit from it, as if it were designed by nature that nothing else should exist in the world except this animal, or that the existence of other animals should be seen as harmful, its very existence being arranged with this purpose in view, although there is actually no harm in the other animal except its existence alone. Then even if the other animals do not have this intention, it tries regardless to enslave others insofar as it might use them. This is the way in which the relation between the different species is arranged, and in many cases the relation of different individuals of one and the same species is arranged in the same way.

This important passage sees al-Fārābī criticise the citizens of flawed states by comparing them with animals.¹⁴⁵ That such things which are so remarkably similar to human nature occur in the animal kingdom does not mean that humans ought to embrace their base desires to conquer and do violence. To do so would be to abandon the true human quest for perfection, which is happiness according to al-Fārābī. The souls of the inhabitants of the flawed states do not have the rational faculty, or the rational faculty is not effectively used, and so they are destroyed after death. In a sense, flawed humans regress to the point of animals by refusing to accept rationalism.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ VI, 18, §3 (p288)

¹⁴⁵ One might infer that he was thinking specifically of the usurpations and civil wars of the Caliphate of al-Muqtadir and his successors. See Kennedy pp185ff.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Steiris p98

Aristotle on Animals and al-Fārābī's Alterations

One of the more important general differences between Aristotle and al-Fārābī on animals is that the former never used comparisons between human and animal behaviour in order to make points about the afterlife and politics. Al-Fārābī used this kind of analogy in order to demonstrate the serious errors of flawed states, whereas the political context of Aristotle's era may have made this more difficult, or indeed Aristotle may not have wished to equate even flawed humans, who still have moral culpability, with animals. An intertextual study of Aristotle and al-Fārābī demonstrates that the former's influence on the latter is overstated, and indeed that in many key areas of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* there is no sense that al-Fārābī gave any particular attention to Aristotle.

The definition of man as a "rational animal", although often attributed to Aristotle by his commentators and modern scholars, does not occur anywhere in the surviving texts of Aristotle. The usual location given for the phrase is *Metaphysics* 7.1037b, but this passage deals with defining man as a "two-footed animal" rather than a "rational animal".¹⁴⁷ The closest Aristotle came to this phrase was in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1102a when he talks about rational and irrational parts of the soul:

*Now on the subject of psychology some of the teaching current in extraneous discourses is satisfactory, and may be adopted here: namely that the soul consists of two parts, one irrational and the other capable of reason.¹⁴⁸ Whether these two parts are really distinct in the sense that the parts of the body or of any other divisible whole are distinct, or whether though distinguishable in thought as two they are inseparable in reality, like the convex and concave sides of a curve, is a question of no importance for the matter in hand. Of the irrational part of the soul again one division appears to be common to all living things, and of a vegetative nature: I refer to the part that causes nutrition and growth [...]*¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ τὸ ζῶον δίπουν, *to zōon dipoun*.

¹⁴⁸ Lit. "having a plan" or "having a principle".

¹⁴⁹ λέγεται δὲ περὶ αὐτῆς καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐξωτερικοῖς λόγοις ἀρκούντως ἓνια, καὶ χρηστέον αὐτοῖς: οἷον τὸ μὲν ἄλογον αὐτῆς εἶναι, τὸ δὲ λόγον ἔχον. ταῦτα δὲ πότερον διώρισται καθάπερ τὰ τοῦ σώματος μόρια καὶ πᾶν τὸ μεριστόν, ἢ τῷ λόγῳ δύο ἐστὶν ἀχώριστα πεφυκότα καθάπερ ἐν τῇ

We understand that al-Fārābī may have used this passage when formulating his own ideas on the faculties of the soul, as Aristotle also says that it is part of the soul, common to all living things, which causes nutrition. Worth noting, however, is that al-Fārābī called the faculties of the soul five in number: he did not simply split the soul into rational and irrational parts.

Even so, the initial description of the faculties of the soul in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* still seems similar to conventional Peripatetic philosophy,¹⁵⁰ at least with regard to the inference that the nutritive faculty belonging to all living creatures. It is the particular terms which al-Fārābī used within this description, however, which cast doubt upon the idea that he simply copied Aristotle and his commentators. This is because words like *nuṭq* and its derived forms do not necessarily conform to Greek *logos*, which is difficult to pin down to a specific translation. If al-Fārābī really did intend that *al-ḥayawān an-nāṭiq* be understood as “the rational animal”, one wonders why he did not select a word such as *‘aqlāni*, *mantīqī*, *‘āqil* or simply *‘aqlī* instead of *nāṭiq*. We also need to remember that Aristotle himself never defined man as a “rational animal” in his books: the first to use this phrase, although in a slightly different form, was Porphyry who called man a “mortal rational animal”.¹⁵¹

Al-Fārābī may not have wished that *al-ḥayawān an-nāṭiq* be understood as “the rational animal” because of a deliberate decision on his part. Based on the consistent use of *nāṭiq* and other forms based on this root in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, we can suggest that the writer intended us to understand consistently such derived forms according to their common meaning of speech. Al-Fārābī used speech in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* to differentiate between animals and man, and rational thought to differentiate between correct and incorrect human behaviour.¹⁵²

περιφερείᾳ τὸ κυρτὸν καὶ τὸ κοῖλον, οὐθὲν διαφέρει πρὸς τὸ παρόν. τοῦ ἀλόγου δὲ τὸ μὲν ἔοικε κοινῶ καὶ φυτικῶ, λέγω δὲ τὸ αἴτιον τοῦ τρέφεσθαι καὶ αὐξεσθαι [...]

¹⁵⁰ Walzer 1998 pp384-386

¹⁵¹ Johnson p80

¹⁵² VI, 18, §1-5. §3 quoted and analysed above p46.

Brief mention can be made of Aristotle's attitude towards slavery and his defence of it. Aristotle considered slaves to be a separate category from both animals and humans, as he stated in his *Nicomachean Ethics*:¹⁵³

*[...] friendship does not exist towards things without souls, nor is it an even [i.e. proportionate] thing. Nor does it exist towards a horse or an ox, towards a slave or as a slave, for it has nothing in common with these things. A slave is a tool with a soul, just as a tool is a slave without a soul.*¹⁵⁴

Al-Fārābī would have disagreed. He does not say anywhere in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* that slaves are reduced to subhuman status because of their being slaves, nor does he compare slaves with animals. He actually criticises the practice by attacking the citizens of flawed states which compare their actions to those of animals in order to justify violence against others and enslavement of other people.¹⁵⁵ It is instructive to compare Bogomolov's analysis of the social context of ancient philosophy,¹⁵⁶ which may help us to understand the origin of Aristotle's ideas on slavery more fully. That said, al-Fārābī lived in a society which had also been marked by its active use of slave labour.¹⁵⁷ The Zanj rebellion was finally crushed after a long campaign only ten years after al-Fārābī's birth, so it is difficult to believe that he was not aware of the debate about slaves and their status in society when he was in Baghdad – and yet there is no sense in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* that slaves are subhuman, nor is there any attempt at justifying of the practice of keeping slaves. Differing opinions on slavery between Aristotle and al-Fārābī cannot be reduced purely to the differing societal contexts of their work.

¹⁵³ 1161b

¹⁵⁴ [...] φιλία δ' οὐκ ἔστι πρὸς τὰ ἄψυχα οὐδὲ δίκαιον. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ πρὸς ἵππον ἢ βοῦν, οὐδὲ πρὸς δοῦλον ἢ δοῦλος. οὐδὲν γὰρ κοινόν ἐστιν: ὁ γὰρ δοῦλος ἐμψυχον ὄργανον, τὸ δ' ὄργανον ἄψυχος δοῦλος.

¹⁵⁵ See above p46

¹⁵⁶ pp12-13. Despite Bogomolov's Communist beliefs and desire to emphasise what he saw as a class struggle between slave-owners and slaves in ancient Athens, his evaluation of the impact of Aristotle's social and political environment on the philosopher's works remains valid.

¹⁵⁷ Kennedy pp177-179

Fiṭra in the Text and Comparison with the Qur’ān

There are many possible ways of translating the Qur’ānic term *fiṭra*, from the simple including “creation”, “nature”, “disposition” and so on,¹⁵⁸ to the more complex such as “a kind or way of creating or of being created”.¹⁵⁹ “Primordial human nature” is generally a good fit for *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* because it is usually applied to human beings. The first mention of this term occurs towards the start of al-Fārābī’s description of the ideal ruler:¹⁶⁰

[...] لا يمكن أن يكون الإنسان ينال الكمال الذي لأجله جعلت له الفطرة الطبيعية إلا باجتماعات جماعة كثيرة متعاونين يقوم كل واحد لكل واحد

ببعض ما يحتاج إليه [...]

[...] a person cannot attain the perfection for whose sake his natural disposition was made for him unless many co-operating societies come together and each supply the other with what they need [...]

In this case we can see that the word *fiṭra* is applied specifically to human beings. What is significant, though, is that the person’s natural disposition is said to have been made for him: he does not make it for himself. The reader would likely infer that it is God who made *fiṭra* for the person, because God is the First Cause who, ultimately, made everything. Aristotle did not use such a term as *fiṭra* in *On the Soul* or in any of his other works, necessarily because, for him, there was no personal God who might design people’s dispositions. Walzer argues¹⁶¹ that *fiṭra* was selected here because it contrasts with other words which make divine providence clearer – we can call this statement into question because of the Qur’ānic origin of the term, and the way in which al-Fārābī uses it.

¹⁵⁸ Lane, Wehr

¹⁵⁹ *El “fiṭra”*

¹⁶⁰ V, 15, §1 (p229)

¹⁶¹ 1998 p429

Part of the originality of al-Fārābī's writing is manifest in his inclination to modify the scope of usage of the word *fiṭra*. When discussing the perfect state, the writer compares its organs with those of humans who rule and serve:¹⁶²

كذلك المدينة أجزاؤها مختلفة الفطر متفاضلة الهيئات [...]

Thus the state: its parts are of different natures, and their natural dispositions are unequal in excellence [...]

It is important that *fiṭra* is also applied to the institutions of the state, because this helps us understand who created the perfect state: God. God gives *fiṭra* to people and things, and it is a recurring idea in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* that faith in God and knowledge of revelation are required for the perfect state to be so. Al-Fārābī is different from Aristotle in this area because the latter did not claim divine creation and design of the functions of the state.

Let us now turn to the Qur'ān and consider some important verses which include the word *fiṭra* and derived forms from this root. Perhaps the most significant is its occurrence as an active verb, *faṭara*:¹⁶³

إِنِّي وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي فَطَرَ السَّمُوتِ وَالْأَرْضَ خَائِفاً وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

Truly I have set my face towards Him who created the Heavens and the Earth, and I am not among those who associate partners with God.

Thus we can understand that there is a clear Qur'ānic precedent for the word *fiṭra* being used of God's actions in creating things.¹⁶⁴ Al-Fārābī took this term from the Qur'ān and used it as part of his philosophy in order to make his points clearer, which means that such points can be contrasted with Aristotle, who did not write about a concept related to *fiṭra*.

¹⁶² V, 15, §4 (p232)

¹⁶³ Al-An'ām (6): 79

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Griffel pp9-11

One other prominent example of *faṭara* can be cited, this time occurring in the context of exhorting humans to attempt to follow the *fiṭra* by which God created them:¹⁶⁵

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفاً فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

So set your face to the religion, a man of pure faith – the disposition by which God created people. Let there be no change to the creation of God. That is the straight religion, but most people know not.

The idea of many humans not understanding the truth is also common in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, which might lead one to suggest that al-Fārābī found it in the Qurʾān and used it in his philosophy because of its presence in the Book. The significance of this passage is that it refers to the disposition by which God created people. It seems possible that al-Fārābī named one of the functions of this disposition as perfection and that he had this verse in mind when writing about how mankind was made with the inclination to seek perfection in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Ar-Rūm (30): 30

¹⁶⁶ IV, 13, §5, quoted and analysed above pp34-35

Conclusion

Based on the evidence in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, it is difficult to reduce al-Fārābī to a pure Aristotelian who was devoid of religious influence or original ideas. While his philosophy is not completely new, it is in its detail that we find his originality and tendency to view the truth, as he saw it, as being more important in itself than who said it. Challenging the notion that Aristotle's legacy dominated al-Fārābī's work in one particular book could also lead us to analyse his other books afresh, disarmed of the preconceived notion that all he really did was copy and preserve ancient Greek philosophy.

From his highly-developed description of the First Cause to his new ideas about the nature of animals, as well as his emphasis on the importance of faith and revelation in the perfect state, al-Fārābī made his ideas suited to his times and practical in dealing with the political, philosophic and theological questions of the Islamic Golden Age. That said, there are commonalities between the social context of al-Fārābī and that of Aristotle – the difference between them is chiefly the presence of revealed religion. By understanding this point, we can also come to question other long-held views about al-Fārābī's oeuvre. *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikma* has often been dismissed in modern times as either misattributed to al-Fārābī or unimportant because of its being understood in the wrong context. Approaching such works from the point of view of the writer's original thought and Muslim beliefs may yield results as to the possible mystical beliefs of al-Fārābī, and it would certainly allow us to re-open the book on his place in history.

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