

THE ROLE OF IMAGES IN AL-FĀRĀBĪ'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

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For the ancient Greek philosophical tradition in general, and especially for Plato and his followers, scientific objects, that is substantial ideas or concepts which one should seek in order to reach true knowledge, are irreversibly distinct from images. These include not only visual images, but also other sorts of representation, such as melodies, poems and theatre. Such a distinction echoes the notion that representations are subject to deviations from their original ectype and, thus, likely to become merely distorted reflexions of the latter with no epistemological value. Ultimately, this deviation from science is intimately related to ethics and contains the perilous possibility of leading human beings to illusions on what concerns virtue and moral corruption and what distinguishes a good action from a bad one. It follows that, according to this current of thought, images should be avoided in the path for true knowledge and a virtuous life.

However, the Arabic reception of Greek philosophy in the 9th and 10th centuries seems to have significantly altered this perspective. With the Arabic translation of Aristotle's *Organon*, his *Poetics* were considered alongside with his logical treatises. This factor had a remarkable impact in the way the *falāsifa* (philosophers) of this period in Baghdad came to approach the arts of representation.

Yet, even more interesting is the way in which Abū Nasr al-Fārābī (852, Fārāb-950/51, Damascus), one of the most prolific figures of the *falsafa* circle in Baghdad during this period (also named "The Second Teacher" by his attentive reader Ibn Sīnā, following the incontestable authority of Aristotle) recognized in them a political significance. "Legitimately regarded as the founder of the tradition of political philosophy in Islam,"¹ namely in what concerns the role of the political community as a means for human beings to achieve perfection, Fārābī embraces the challenge of envisioning the perfect state. In this experiment, one finds the recurrent idea of the relevance and effectiveness of poetic statements and images in a political and religious context.

In this article, it is my aim to explore Fārābī's idea of image in order to determine the role that it plays within his political philosophy and, particularly, within his idea of the virtuous city. To do so, I will focus on his main political writings: *Kitāb al-Millah* (*The Book*

of Religion); *Mabādī Ārā' ahl al-Madīna al-Faḍīla* (Ideas of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City); *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya* (The Political Regime); *Tahṣīl al-Sa'āda* (The Attainment of Happiness); as well as his *Summary of Plato's Laws*. Through these essential readings, I will show how, in his philosophical system, imaginal representations and artistic similitudes provide a remarkable ground for the supreme legislator and religious leader to inculcate in the citizens' souls the virtuous theoretical and practical knowledge that will enable the community (in a comprehensive way, which includes the elite and the multitude) to achieve its ultimate perfection.

As I shall demonstrate, images do not carry the same illusory signification given by Plato in his critical judgement of poetry. On the contrary, for Fārābī, as long as they follow the appropriate rules of the art of *mimēsis*, which he develops in his works dedicated to the poetic arts, such as the *Risāla fī qawānīn ṣinā'ah al-šī'r* (Canons of Poetry) and *Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr* (Great Treatise of Music), they will observe a continuity between the intelligible realities known by science and their correspondent homonyms found in nature. Nonetheless, I will show that their importance does not reside in the ability of producing valuable knowledge, but rather in their psychological effect on the audience and inspiring will and obedience to religious and legislative prescriptions.

Furthermore, I will analyse the techniques and conditions through which these images must be produced in order to contribute to the virtuous harmony of the ideal city without leading to ignorance and illusion. It will also be the occasion to examine Fārābī's definition of the perfect leader and of the perfect philosopher-teacher, who should be able to create and transmit those to the general public.

First, however, I will start by presenting the fundamental signification that Fārābī's attributed to philosophy and knowledge and its relation to happiness, which will be helpful to understand his further views on the government of the virtuous city and the formation of a religious imaginary.

1. THE VIRTUOUS CITY AND THE WAY TO AL-SA'ĀDA (HAPPINESS)

Happiness as a Theoretical Perfection

Fārābī's conception of the state and of political philosophy is very closely related to the nature and place of human beings and of their individual perfection (*kamāl*) set out in his

theological-cosmology. Thus, *al-madīna al-faḍīla*, or the perfect city, is the model institution of governance, not actually existent, but aiming to be “a measure of the world- city,”² in which humans are able to achieve this ultimate end, that is *al-sa’āda* (happiness).

Although it is difficult to give an exact definition of Fārābī’s perception of *al-sa’āda*, it is possible to agree upon his consideration of humans’ rational activity as their highest perfection, as it is stated by most scholars dedicated to this subject³. Indeed, intimately connected to the emerging Neoplatonized Aristotelism of his time, our philosopher emphasises the role of science as the key to perfection⁴ and, therefore, to happiness. This perspective clearly reflects the ancient idea that knowledge of the divine things and leading a contemplative life allows human beings to detach themselves from their material and perishable dimension and to direct their actions towards the development and enrichment of the soul. In the context of Islam, this is crucial, for it guarantees the preservation of the soul in the afterlife. However, there is one particular part of the soul which remains after the corruption of the body: the intellectual faculty (*al-’aql*). This constitutes a central idea which will be discussed, disputed and developed after him across the entire history of Medieval Noetics, for the reason that *al-’aql* possesses the singularity of participating in what he designates as the first intelligibles, or divine essences, lasting eternally without corruption⁵ and closer to the true meaning of being.

In this sense, *al-sa’āda* is depicted as “identical to theoretical perfection”⁶ in Fārābī’s major political writings, such as in *Mabādī’ Ārā’ ahl al-Madīna al-Faḍīla*, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya* and *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, as well as in other minor works, as the *Risāla fī l-tanbīh alā sabīl al-sa’āda*, where he defines it in the following way:

As we can only attain happiness when the beautiful things are in our possession, and as they can only be so through the discipline of philosophy, it follows necessarily that it is through philosophy that we achieve happiness. Concerning the latter, it is through excellent reasoning that we obtain it.⁷

In other words, *al-sa’āda* can only be accessed through reason and the study of the science whose method is the most intellectual of all, that is conception and demonstration⁸. Through these methods, philosophers are, in fact, lead into a deep and comprehensive awa-

renewal of their origins, of the causes that engender all the effects which are manifested in nature, as well as a profound understanding of what is being and its goodness and beauty.

M. Galston claims⁹, in addition, that happiness for Fārābī comprises a “combination of theoretical and practical perfection,” which occurs, for instance, in *Tahṣīl al-sa’āda*. In this text, the Islamic philosopher includes among the various means of achieving it “the deliberative virtues, moral virtues and practical arts, along with the theoretical virtues.”¹⁰ Indeed, they are the fundamental requirements which allow humans to discern good actions from bad ones and to act accordingly in benefit of others, and are portrayed by the author with high consideration as inseparable from reason and playing an essential role in the attainment of human perfection. Yet, it is important to notice that practical perfection still necessarily depends on rationality and practical philosophy, and cannot be attained only through virtuous action.

The Possibility of a Political Happiness

However, if one were to consider this claim in an unconditional sense, one should conclude that only the ones who study and practice this discipline, the philosophers, are able to achieve their ultimate perfection as human beings and survive beyond their temporal existence. Indeed, under the scope of Fārābī’s anthropological views, not everyone is likely to become a philosopher or has the natural capacity to understand it. Although this is not an absolute condition, it remains that the disposition of psychological and intellectual faculties (their *fiṭra*), varies from one human being to another, as one can read on the following passage of his *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya*: “Not every man is created with a natural disposition to receive the first intelligibles, because each man is by nature generated with certain faculties with a more or less great degree of excellence.”¹¹

The nearly exclusive access to philosophical objects attributed to a specific class of citizens, as it is described here, inevitably leads, in Fārābī’s system, to the formation of a selected learned elite. This exceptional minority is essentially distinct from the common people or the multitude, who seem to be fated, by the default of their souls’ faculties or by their occupations, to an imperfect understanding of reality and, consequently, to a limited (or even inexistent) possibility to achieve their perfection as human beings.

Nevertheless, although these conclusions agree with an accurate reading of our philosopher’s anthropological views, to make a deeper sense of the author’s thought, one must

consider them within his philosophical system as a whole. Indeed, as A. Benmakhlouf noted in his introduction to Fārābī's thought, he follows a combined hypothetical and deductive method¹² indicating that a sequence of ideas derives and develops from and within an essential framework of concepts. Hence, one should complement the previous theological-anthropological premises by the following necessity of a political order in Fārābī's thought.

For the philosopher, it is within the structures and dynamics of the community that each human being, in an inclusive perspective which comprises the common people, the elite, and the ways in which they are related, may be guided towards the achievement of their ultimate perfection. Thus, the exact nature of this perfection will be according to their "rank," as presented in the following extract of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'āda*:

For every being is made to achieve the ultimate perfection it is susceptible of achieving according to its specific place in the order of being. Man's specific perfection is called *supreme happiness*, and to each man, according to his rank in the order of humanity, belongs the specific supreme happiness pertaining to his kind of man.¹³

For instance, the philosopher will not attain perfection unless he becomes a teacher and transposes his theoretical and practical knowledge to the benefit of others¹⁴. In their turn, the common people will not achieve their supreme happiness unless they become the receptacles of that knowledge, although this is of a different nature than the science possessed by the philosophers.

Moreover, according to Ibn Bājja, "The Second Teacher" would even have declared in a lost commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* that the only existing happiness is "political happiness" (*al-sa'āda al-madaniyya*).¹⁵ Hence, there is a possibility of achieving supreme happiness, even for those who do not possess the theoretical and practical principles, within and by means of the existing political structures.

The Role of al-Millah (Religion)

Although one cannot assure the validity of Ibn Bājja's reference, as the mentioned commentary is lost, an attentive reflexion upon Fārābī's political writings indicates one evident institution which is specifically designed to contribute to the attainment of perfection

in the perfect state: the virtuous *millah* (religion). The *millah* is in charge of defining and regulating people's opinions and lives in their path towards happiness. As he stipulates at the beginning of *Kitāb al-Millah*: "Religion is opinions and actions, determined and restricted with stipulations and prescribed for a community by their first ruler, who seeks to obtain through their practicing it a specific purpose with respect to them or by means of them."¹⁶

This definition accounts for a conception of religion from the perspective of political philosophy, that is in the quality of a political institution, and not as a result of revelation. It follows that if the government that establishes it is virtuous, the purpose of the first ruler (*ar-ra'īs al-awwal*) here mentioned will be for the political community to obtain *al-sa'āda* by means of religious methods. However, one should acknowledge that these are not limited to practical regulations, prescribing virtuous behaviours and actions, but also include important theoretical content which is meant to define opinions and modes of understanding reality, regarding, for instance, the cosmology of the created world and its generation by God, among other principles,¹⁷ that aim mainly at inspiring the soul.¹⁸

Now, these virtuous opinions and actions are not exclusive to men "in the position to understand the purposes which are only accessible through [philosophy],"¹⁹ but to all the citizens of the perfect city. Religion is originally intended to be transmitted to the common people and, in this sense, it assumes the role of philosophy in the political context. This is essentially allowed by its capacity to "imitate" philosophical objects and methods of research by means of things which are more directly related those people's habits, and, simultaneously, to teach and inculcate them in the citizens' souls, an idea which is repeated and developed almost throughout all political writings by Fārābī.

It is evident that this scheme is problematic, for it considers science in a superior position in relation to religion. However, this statement will not be approached here from a historical or religious perspective, but rather as an intellectual experiment on "the different possibilities of confluence between philosophy and religion," as suggested by J. Langhade in his study of Fārābī philosophical terminology.²⁰ One of them, which will be our main focus in this article, is the way in which religion resembles or imitates philosophy in the path to happiness, for, according to our philosopher:

religion is an imitation of philosophy. [...] In everything of which philosophy gives an account based on intellectual perception or conception, religion gives an account based on imagination. In everything demonstrated by philosophy, religion employs persuasion. Philosophy gives an account of the ultimate principles [...] as they are perceived by the intellect. Religion sets forth their images by means of similitudes [...].²¹

In other words, the relationship between religion and philosophy is that existing between an image and its model, or between a copy and its original. As such, the imitation (*muhāka*) performed by religion primarily aims at making intellectual concepts correspond to mental representations, by imprinting “in the human soul the mental images of beings, their ectype representations (*mitālātu-hā*).”²² Hence, there is for each philosophical content a religious one, which reproduces it in a mimetic way through a physical or sensible correspondent appearance, which is closer to the mental habits of the majority, as, “for instance, some imitate *matter* by *abyss* or *darkness* or *water*, and *nothingness* by *darkness*.”²³

Before developing the role of these representations in the transmission of essential concepts and virtues and, ultimately, the attainment of happiness, in what follows, I will examine the author’s concept of image and the way in which it is *in potentia* to represent things that are not accessible to the senses by analogue symbols in nature.

2. TRANSMITTING VIRTUE THROUGH IMAGES

Imagination and Mental Representations

In order to grasp the concept of image, it is useful to first analyse the faculty which uses it as the object of its activity, in this case the faculty of representation or, simply, imagination (*al-mutakhayyilah*). According to *Al-sayāsāt al-Madaniyya*, it “preserves the imprints of the sensibles when these are no longer present to the sensitive faculty” and, contrarily to the latter, it has the power to “combine some of those imprints with other ones and to fraction some others in a number of combinations.”²⁴ In other words, it performs a double function: on the one hand, it retains imprints, that is images or representations of things which are accessed by the senses and the sensitive faculty in their absence; and, on the other hand, it combines and rearranges them in the soul. These images taken from natural ob-

jects, the first objects of imagination, can be described as forms which are purified from their sensible dimension or dematerialized. It is for this reason that they can be manipulated freely, without having to refer to their previous natural structures. Moreover, as D. Black suggests in her analysis of Fārābī's *Poetics*, imagination could also be qualified as "judgemental, and labelled true or false in respect to the accuracy with which [it represents] an external object,"²⁵ although this does not imply an assent, that is the affirmation or the negation of the object, as it would involve an intellectual performance.

Furthermore, in *Mabādī' Ārā' ahl al-Madīna al-Faḍila*, Fārābī adds a third activity to this faculty, namely "reproductive imitation" (*muḥākāh*, *mimêsis*), and, more specifically, the capacity to imitate the intelligibles²⁶ through sensible objects. Thus, contrarily to Ibn Sīna, who considers another distinct faculty for this purpose,²⁷ he attributes to imagination a power near to conception. This confirms its status as "intermediate between the faculty of sense and the rational faculty,"²⁸ since to imitate the intelligibles consists mainly in the act of "imprinting in the human soul mental images of the essences," which are the highest forms known by means of reason.

Images, Similitudes and Analogies

In sum, images are mental representations reproduced by imagination illustrating the sensibles and, sometimes, the intelligible forms, by means of imitation. Moreover, according to the author, the latter are:

similar to what happens in the case of reflexions, as, for instance, the man, which we may see in person, or in his statue, or in his appearance (*ḥayāla-hu*) <reflected> in water, or in the appearance of his statue <reflected> in water or in any other reflexive surface.²⁹

This example refers immediately to the "shades [...], reflections in water and in all closed-packed, smooth and shiny materials"³⁰ (*eidolon*) belonging to the most obscure segment of knowledge in Plato's analogy of the divided line, as well as to the illusory shadows in the "Allegory of the Cave."³¹ Indeed, as images, the representations produced by the imitative function of imagination are "excluded from existence,"³² and thus, from knowledge and reason.

However, for the Islamic scholar, they remain significant in the sense that they are similar (*šabih*) to or resemble (*tašābaha*) their original, although with different degrees of similitude. More importantly, they share an intelligible signification with their original.³³ Such a view is not surprising considering the fact that Fārābī was familiar both with Plato's other major work, the *Timaeus*, as well as with Aristotle's *Poetics* and, particularly, to an Arabic translation by Abū Bišr Mattā, Fārābī's mentor in Baghdad, which included it as part of the *Organon*'s corpus. This version, which circulated since approximately 932, contributed to a "logical coloration"³⁴ of poetical activities, namely of *mimēsis*. Fārābī may be considered the first philosopher emerging from this context to seriously observe this contiguity between imitation and demonstration.³⁵

To prevent representations from falling into the shade of illusion, the mimetic resemblance must be guided by reason, instead of being simply informed by the senses. According to *Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr*, his major work on music, which is also an imitative art representing emotions and moral virtues through notes and melody, the transmission of similitude must follow two main methods, namely proportion (*ṭarīq al-muqāyasa*) and analogy (*ṭarīq al-muqāyasa*).³⁶ These two techniques of representation are able to transpose intelligible forms by their rational mode of operation through similitudes, assuring an arithmetic relation between the model and its image. According to P. Vallat, analogy, in particular, is responsible for observing a mimetic continuity between the ectype and the image,³⁷ as shown in the following passage of the *Risāla fī qaṭwānīn šinā'ah al-shi'r*, concerning the excellence of this method in creating metaphors in poetry:

[poets] compare A to B, and B to C, because there is a close resemblance between A and B, which is congruent and well-known, then they develop gradually their discourse in way that allows them to bring to the audience's and to the reciters' minds the idea of a similarity between A, B and C, although the latter is initially distant.³⁸

Hence, Fārābī's analogy, also designated as the "poetic syllogism,"³⁹ differs from that of Aristotle's *Poetics*⁴⁰ in the sense that it introduces a common property shared by all three terms of the comparison, which develops gradually from A to C. The continuity between the reality and the image representing it leads the audience to identify the two extreme

terms. In this sense, still based on Vallat's analysis, here, Fārābī is closer to the *Timaeus*, namely in the myth of the formation of the ordered world.⁴¹

Nonetheless, as M. Aouad and G. Schoeler have argued, the poetical syllogism remains an incorrect syllogism,⁴² assuming that, for instance: "*major* – x is beautiful; *minor* – the sun is beautiful; *conclusion* – x is a sun."⁴³ Indeed, our philosopher also recognized this, asserting that, amongst all syllogisms, the poetical syllogism is the only one which is always false.⁴⁴ As such, it does not possess any epistemic value *per se*, but remains a "potential syllogism."⁴⁵

Yet, the relevance of poetic syllogisms and of images in general does not reside, for Fārābī, in their epistemic validity. In fact, they do not intend to produce an assent (the affirmation or negation of the representation). That role is attributed to *Rhetoric*, which causes the audience to believe in the existence of the represented object,⁴⁶ but imagination and imitation simply aim at illustrating ideas. Furthermore, as demonstrated by D. Black, "validity is ultimately not an issue" here, since "the principal function of the imaginative syllogism is to provide an explanatory model illustrating the underlying logical structure of metaphoric discourse [...] [and] it remains only implicit in the actual poetic product."⁴⁷ As I shall demonstrate in what follows, they become relevant from a psychological perspective.

Tahīl: A Glimpse of Wisdom

As previously mentioned, the value of images within Fārābī's philosophical thought, becomes irrelevant when approached from a strictly epistemological point of view. Rather than producing an assent to the illustration in question, it seems to reside in the way through which they affect the soul, bringing something to the audience's mind⁴⁸ which is fundamentally based on an original intelligible form. "One has committed a mistake in stating in respect to the subdivisions of logic books that poetry is pure falsity, because poetry's aim is not that of being false, but that of affecting the soul's imagination and passiveness [...]"⁴⁹ Thus, imaginative evocation, or *tahīl* in the philosopher's own terminology, is significant in the sense that it provides a sign or a preview of true knowledge, suggesting to the mind symbols of what is truly conceived by philosophy.

Firstly, this is particularly convenient, without doubt, in facilitating conception in the process of learning for those who still have not been introduced to philosophy,⁵⁰ as it al-

lows to disrupt the dichotomy existing between the level of scientific knowledge possessed by the teacher and the simpler complexion of the student's mind. One may also view it in an Aristotelian perspective, where "the soul never thinks without an image."⁵¹ Secondly, yet more importantly for our argument, they offer those who, by their natural constitution or their occupations are not able to access knowledge through rational conception, the possibility of having a glimpse of wisdom.⁵² Hence, images, alternatively to intellection, allow their simple souls to grasp:

the intelligibles of utmost perfection, like the First Cause, the immaterial things and the heavens, with the most excellent and most perfect sensibles, like things beautiful to look at; and the defective intelligibles with the most inferior and defective sensibles like things ugly to look at.⁵³

For instance, the image of "angels" constitutes a possible representation of the "celestial spheres" and the demiurgic myth of the formation of the world and the cosmos seems to be, for Fārābī, an adequate imitation of the Agent Intellect's generational action.⁵⁴

Yet, although he seems to support that representation is, in a certain way, an alternative to conception, that is to scientific knowledge,⁵⁵ it is important to notice that it remains implacably inferior to the latter, since, as developed before, philosophy and intellectual reflection are the only real paths to human's theoretical knowledge, which is rationally demonstrated and necessary. Images, by contrast, are multiple and variable, depending on the sensibles chosen by religion to represent reality at a specific place and time. Thus, there may be several religions equally virtuous among themselves,⁵⁶ which use different images to represent the same perfect realities.

Inspiring Will

Additionally, *taḥīl* is even more relevant in the political and religious context from a practical perspective. For instance, in *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, another text which succinctly formulates Fārābī's ideas on political philosophy, he refers to it in respect to its psychological effectiveness "inspiring the audience's soul" and, simultaneously, inducing them to seek or to avoid what is evoked imaginatively⁵⁷ according to the feeling that it suggests. For example, if one feels disgusted when looking at something which resembles something

else which is really disgusting, one would not seek it, but avoid it, and the inverse would happen with a beautiful evocation. In other words, images are not only able to suggest something to the mind, but also to produce emotion and, simultaneously, motivation and will. In this sense, they act as a stimulus to the practical and deliberative mind to act virtuously.

Also important for this purpose is Fārābī's account on Plato's *Laws* in his *Summary*. According to P. Koetchet's introduction, in this text, the title of which seems only to indicate a paraphrase of Plato's work,⁵⁸ the Islamic *faylasūf* gives an entire "new conception of law" and "expands the basis of the existing convictions" of the reader regarding this subject.⁵⁹ For instance, he retains Plato's association between law and poetry⁶⁰ to demonstrate the importance of metaphors, fables and all sorts of marvellous and extraordinary images in the legislator's discourse introducing the law.⁶¹ It is through them, that he is able to suggest to his citizens the benefits of a virtuous rule and, thus, inspire their motivation to observe the law and obey.

Finally, one should recognize that, despite the fact that evocation is a powerful instrument, by itself, it is not sufficient to achieve practical reason, that is to truly know what a virtuous action is and to distinguish it from wrong, which would involve intellectual engagement. Instead, imagination merely is an orientation tool for the citizens of the perfect state, and allows the supreme ruler, who is equally the founder of the community's religion, to create a harmony of behaviours and actions under his government.

3. THE ROLE OF THE SUPREME LEADER

A Philosopher-king

For evocation to be effective, the virtuous legislator, who is in charge of applying it in the perfect state and religion, has responsibility of finding this articulation between the intelligibles and their sensible homonyms. This requires special skills both in "[recognizing] the ground for uniting A to C imaginatively"⁶² in the type of poetic syllogism presented previously, and, more importantly, in adapting the original model to the audience's psychological complexion⁶³, that is to their sensible and mental habits. As stated in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'āda*:

It follows, then, that the idea of *Imam*, Philosopher and Legislator is a single idea. However, the name *philosopher* signifies primarily theoretical virtue. [...] *Legislator* signifies excellence of knowledge concerning the conditions of practical intelligibles, the faculty for finding them, and the faculty of bringing them about in nations and cities.⁶⁴

On the one hand, he must be in perfect possession of rational knowledge, and, thus, have studied and practiced its science, philosophy, which allows him to support his imitative activities on a truthful model and not on a false one. Clearly inspired by Plato's conception of the *philosopher-king* in the *Republic* and by its Neoplatonic variations, he is the one who has achieved the level of the "acquired intellect" (*al-'aql al-mustafād*), in a way that he has a perfect vision of the real order and knows profoundly how to discern good from evil. However, his exceptional deliberation in the choice of images reveals the necessity of a complex and meditated connexion between the real notions and their sensible images, which must not admit any contradiction.

In addition, this task also involves an art of composing, since the representations are not immediate, unlike the physical objects which do not present this ontological separation.⁶⁵ Thus, he must be able to create the analogue correspondences, for instance, between the rhythm or the form of a sensible and its semantic content.⁶⁶ For P. Vallat, this should be the result of a calculation⁶⁷ and of the imitator's capacity to direct his attention simultaneously to the eternal and to the sensible worlds, which enables the analogical intuition to reproduce the former's idea or virtue.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, according to Fārābī, some people, namely the "prophets," seem to be able to receive the intelligibles in their imagination "without the intervention of deliberation."⁶⁹ According to the philosopher, this happens when their faculty of representation is "extremely powerful" and "developed to perfection"⁷⁰ to the extent that they are able to receive the essences immediately in their souls in the form of mental images. In this sense, the images delivered would be perfectly adequate to their ectypes, although these cases are extremely rare. This association between imagination and prophecy is the ultimate key for understanding Fārābī's high perception of images and their moral and political role, as it is through images that prophets receive revelation and are called to spread the word of truth.

On the other hand, these representations must also appeal to the psychological and imaginative constitution of the audience. Thus, their effectiveness resides in the choice of the religious and political leader to evoke images shared by the majority. For instance, as indicated in the *Summary*, he must refer to “fables which the citizens use in their discourse [...], or animals and their dispositions,”⁷¹ in order to enable a wider receptivity among the citizens and, consequently, a more operative suggestion of the virtues transmitted.

This feature accounts for Fārābī’s conception of religion and of law as fundamentally political and human institutions. Hence, the images used by the supreme ruler, although ultimately referring to essential ideas, are bounded to the categories of the particular needs, interests and habits of the citizens. It is only by means of the “conversation” between these two dimensions,⁷² one universal and one particular, that the mind becomes the receptacle of its own perfection. Thus, the legislator and religious leader must be the facilitator of this interaction by appealing to the habitual and imaginative universe of his nation or locality.

Moreover, the supreme leader’s responsibility and power exceed that of the moral guide or pedagogue and embraces challenges which involve an actual religious and political leadership. Therefore, he must employ complementary methods to representation and imaginative evocation: rhetoric and prescription. Indeed, rhetoric is unlike *taḥīl*, a persuasive method and able to cause the adherence of the audience to a certain statement, “[establishing] it in the soul, so that the mind can believe in its ultimate existence.”⁷³ This belief remains, nevertheless, inferior to the result of philosophical demonstration, and, in this sense, it is merely a form of “conviction” (*al-qanā’ah*).⁷⁴ Finally, in the quality of political commander, the *philosopher-king* will also be in charge of prescribing actions through legislation.⁷⁵

Yet, images remain the fundamental condition for these methods to arise and be established in the virtuous city.

CONCLUSION

To conclude our reflexion upon this subject, according to Fārābī, images, understood as mental representations, as well as as poetic similitudes, do not constitute the most excel-

lent method of attaining perfection from an individual perspective. Yet, they embody one of the major conditions for the establishment of the virtuous state as a place where humans achieve their political happiness, since they create the possibility for the community as a whole to engage in a collective awareness of theoretical and practical premises.

Implemented by religion, their role consists, thus, in transposing through sensible homonyms the knowledge conceived and demonstrated by science, namely by means of careful and meditated imitation. The particular relevance of these homonyms lies in their psychological effect, evoking and suggesting to the imaginative mind the essences which are only obtained by reason, in the form of images and sensibles well-known and adapted to the audience's complexion. In addition, this ability to suggest is a powerful tool in creating motivation and will, allowing to accord citizens' behaviours in a regulated harmony. Furthermore, this is guaranteed only by the excellence of the supreme ruler, who is in charge of conducting religion, in reproducing the harmonious structure of the universals into the particular political order.

Overall, images constitute a fundamental element for understanding Fārābī's political philosophy and his concept of religion as a human institution, subject to the variations of its local needs and interests, unlike philosophy which aims at attaining knowledge of the eternal essences.

1. Fauzi M. Najjar, "Fārābī's Political Philosophy and Shī'ism," *Studia Islamica* 14 (1961): 57.

2. Ali Benmakhlouf, "Présentation: Philosophie, religion, poésie," in *Philosopher à Bagdad au Xe siècle*, ed. Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 25. See also Leo Strauss, *Le Platon de Fārābī*, trans. fr. Olivier Sedeyn (Paris: Allia, 2002), 81.

3. Miriam Galston, "The Theoretical and Practical Dimensions of Happiness as Portrayed in the Political Treatises of al-Fārābī," in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. C. Butterworth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 97-98.

4. Abū Nasr al-Fārābī, *Mabādī' Ārā' ahl al-Madīna al-Faḍila (Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Perfect City)*, trans. R. Walzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 15-16.

5. *Ibid.*, 204-206.

6. Galston, *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, 101.

7. Fārābī, "Risāla fī l-Tanbīh 'alā Sabīl al-Sa'āda (Le rappel de la voie à suivre pour parvenir au Bonheur)," trans. fr. Dominique Mallet, *Bulletin des Etudes Orientales* 39/40 (1987-1988): 135-136.

8. Conception and demonstration are the philosophical methods by excellence, as claimed, for instance, in Fārābī, *Tahṣīl al-Sa'āda (The Attainment of Happiness)*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 44.

9. Galston, *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, 103.

10. *Ibid.*, 103. See also, Fārābī, *Tahṣīl al-Sa'āda*, 13.

11. Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya (The Political Regime)*, trans. fr. P. Vallat (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2012), 139-140.

12. Benmakhlouf, "Présentation," 24.

13. Fārābī, *Tahṣīl al-Sa'āda*, 37.

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14. Ibid., 43.
 15. Galston, *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, 100; see original reference: *Rasā'il Falsafiyah li-Abī Bakr Ibn Bajjāh, Nuṣuṣ Falsafiyah ghair Manshūrah*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn al-'Alawī (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1983), 197.
 16. Fārābī, "Kitāb al-Millah (Book of Religion)," trans. fr. S. Diebler, in *Philosopher à Bagdad au Xe siècle*, ed. Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 43.
 17. Ibid., 45.
 18. Benmakhlouf, "Présentation," 27.
 19. Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Millah*, 55.
 20. Jacques Langhade, *Du Coran à la philosophie. La langue arabe et la formation du langage philosophique de Farabi* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1994), 284.
 21. Fārābī, *Tahṣil al-Sa'ada*, 44.
 22. Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya*, 175.
 23. Fārābī, *Tahṣil al-Sa'ada*, 45.
 24. Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya*, 11.
 25. Deborah Black, *Logic and Aristotle's "Rhetoric" and "Poetics" in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 197-198.
 26. Fārābī, *Mabādī' Ārā' ahl al-Madīna al-Faḍila*, 211.
 27. Ibn Sina distinguishes between the "retentive" or "formative" faculty, responsible for retaining the images from the sensible faculty, and the "cogitative" faculty, which is in charge of combining those images, in *Kitāb al-naḥs al-Ṣifā*, I, 5, explained by Meryem Sebt in *Avicenne, L'âme humaine* (Paris: PUF, 2000), 62-66.
 28. Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya*, 175.
 29. Ibid., 175-176.
 30. Plato, *Republic*, VI, 510a, trans. G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve (New York: Hackett, 1992), 183.
 31. Ibid., VII 514a-515e, 187.
 32. Fārābī, *Commentary on the "De Interpretatione"*, trans. F. W. Zimmermann (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), ref. by S. Kemal in *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 95.
 33. Fārābī, "Kitāb al-ḥurūf (Book of Letters)," trans. Muhammad Ali Khalidi, in *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8.
 34. Kemal, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna*, 2.
 35. Ibid., 2.
 36. Fārābī, "Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr (Great Book of Music)," quoted in Phillipe Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie: Des prémisses de la connaissances à la philosophie politique* (Paris: VRIN, 2004), 352-353.
 37. Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 317.
 38. Fārābī, "Risāla fī qawānīn ṣinā'ah al-ṣī'r (Epistle on the Canons of Poetry)," trans. fr. S. Diebler, in *Philosopher à Bagdad au Xe siècle*, ed. Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 128.
 39. Ibid., 121.
 40. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1457b.7, trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 102.
 41. Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 347.
 42. M. Aouad and G. Shoeler, "Le syllogisme poétique selon al- Fārābī: un syllogisme incorrect de la deuxième figure," *Arabic sciences and philosophy* 12 (2002): 185-196.
 43. Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 318.
 44. Fārābī, "Risāla fī qawānīn ṣinā'ah al-ṣī'r," 121.
 45. Ibid., 121.
 46. Fārābī, "Kitāb al-jadal," 100.11-12, quoted in Black, *Logic and Aristotle's "Rhetoric" and "Poetics" in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 177.
 47. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's "Rhetoric" and "Poetics" in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*, 225.
 48. Kemal, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna*, 107.
 49. Fārābī, "al-Mantiqiyāt li-l-Fārābī (Discours d' Fārābī sur la proportion et l'agencement)," trans. fr. S. Diebler, in *Philosopher à Bagdad au Xe siècle*, ed. Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 110.
 50. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's "Rhetoric" and "Poetics" in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*, 189.
 51. Aristotle, "De Anima," 3.7.431a 16-17, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
 52. Najjar, "Fārābī's Political Philosophy and Shi'ism," 72.
 53. Fārābī, *Mabādī' Ārā' ahl al-Madīna al-Faḍila*, 219.
 54. Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 309.

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55. Fārābī, *Mabādī' Ārā' ahl al-Madīna al-Faḍīla*, 219.
56. Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya*, 179-181.
57. Fārābī, "Fuṣūl al-madānī (Selected Aphorisms)," trans. C. Butterworth, in *Alfarabi, The Political Writings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 36.
58. The fact that al-Fārābī had access to a translation of Plato's *Laws* is actually controversial. According to Joshua Parens, *Metaphysics as Rhetoric: Alfarabi's Summary of Plato's Laws* (Albany: State of University of New York Press, 1995), xxvii-xxxi, the Islamic philosopher had access to the entire text; whereas Dimitri Gutas argues, in his review to Parens' book — *International Journal of the Classical Traditions* 3/4 (1998): 405-412 — that the historical transmission of the text in the Arabic world is problematic.
59. Pauline Koetschet, "Présentation: Comment lire le *Compendium?*," in *Philosopher à Bagdad au Xe siècle*, ed. Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 132.
60. *Ibid.*, 134.
61. Fārābī, *Summary of Plato's "Laws,"* 84, trans. fr. Pauline Koetschet, in *Philosopher à Bagdad au Xe siècle*, ed. Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 177-178.
62. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's "Rhetoric" and "Poetics" in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*, 215.
63. Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 329.
64. Fārābī, *Tahṣīl al-Sa'āda*, 46.
65. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's "Rhetoric" and "Poetics" in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*, 22.
66. Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 328.
67. *Ibid.*, 328-329.
68. Plato, *Timaeus*, 28a-b, trans. Robin Waterfield, ed. Andrew Gregory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 61.
69. Fārābī, *Mabādī' Ārā' ahl al-Madīna al-Faḍīla*, 211.
70. *Ibid.*, 213.
71. Fārābī, *Summary*, 177.
72. Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 340.
73. Fārābī, "*Kitāb al-jadal (Book of Dialectics)*," 100.11-12, quoted in Black, *Logic and Aristotle's "Rhetoric" and "Poetics" in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 177.
74. Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Khaṭābah (The Book of Rhetoric)*, 249a, trans. L. E. Ezzaher (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015) 17.
75. Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Millah*, 43.