

MIRIAM GALSTON

# Politics and Excellence

*The Political Philosophy of Alfarabi*



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THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY  
OF ALFARABI

*Miriam Galston*

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*To Ralph Lerner*

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*NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION, CITATION,  
AND TRANSLATION*

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ARABIC WORDS have generally been transliterated into English using the system followed by the *International Journal for Middle East Studies*, with slight modifications. Final vowels have been omitted except where sentence structure or clarity seem to require it. Arabic terms with familiar Anglicized forms, such as “imam,” have been cited in the Anglicized form, although I have usually included in the transliteration all consonants contained in the Arabic (e.g., “Ash‘arites” instead of “Asharites”). Most Arabic authors are referred to by their Arabic names. However, I have used “Alfarabi” instead of “Al-Fārābī” and “Averroes” instead of “Ibn Rushd,” since the Anglicized versions are reasonably well known to Western readers.

Most works cited in the text or notes will be found in the Bibliography. I have not, however, included entries for standard editions of Greek and Latin texts, such as the Oxford Classical Texts.

All translations are my own unless the translator’s name is noted in parentheses after the translation.





# Politics and Excellence

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## INTRODUCTION

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THE LAST SEVERAL DECADES have witnessed a revival of interest in the philosophic works of Alfarabi, the tenth-century Muslim philosopher whom the medieval Islamic intellectual community considered the greatest thinker since Aristotle. This interest in Alfarabi is due in large part to the discovery, publication, and translation of many of the philosopher's works previously available only in manuscript or not known to be extant. Although many of the newly available works treat topics in the area of logic and metaphysics, numerous political treatises have also recently been published or translated. These developments create a need for a new assessment of Alfarabi's political philosophy. The purpose of the present study is to contribute to that assessment.

Several problems confront the student who attempts to describe, much less analyze, what may be called Alfarabi's practical philosophy. Foremost among these is the fact that Alfarabi wrote multiple political treatises addressing the same or similar issues, at times in strikingly similar fashion and at times in distinct—and even inconsistent—ways. The existence of these multiple treatments forces the reader to reflect upon the relationship among Alfarabi's political treatises, as one step in formulating interpretive principles for understanding and ultimately ranking or otherwise reconciling the disparate treatments. This task is made difficult by the fact that Alfarabi does not ordinarily preface individual works with a statement clarifying his intended audience or explaining the assumptions underlying the structure or substantive doctrines of each work. The interpretive task is further complicated by the fact that Alfarabi's prose is frequently abstract, the organization of his argument obscure or convoluted, his vocabulary unfamiliar, and his style sometimes elliptical and sometimes repetitive. Thus, it is often difficult to state with confidence the purpose and conclusions of individual treatises—itself a condition for understanding the relationship among the works taken as a group.

Finally, we are at present in possession of only fragmentary evidence as to the dates when the individual treatises were composed.<sup>1</sup> Thus, even if

<sup>1</sup> According to some of the biographers, Alfarabi said he began to write two of his political treatises—*Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*—while he lived in Baghdad and then took them to Syria and Egypt, where he completed or revised them (Ibn Khallikān *Wafayāt* V 155; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah *Uyūn* II 138–139). Ibn al-Nadīm, writing in A.H. 377 (A.D. 986–987), mentions only a work of Alfarabi on the sciences, a commentary on a portion of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and several commentaries on Aristotle's logical

we were to assume that Alfarabi's later works should be taken as a more definitive expression of his mature philosophy than his earlier writings, we would be able to establish only tentative guidelines for resolving the problem of multiple treatments. The chronology of an author's works is, moreover, an uncertain guidepost for ascertaining the author's most authoritative teachings, since discrepancies between earlier and later works may stem from causes other than the evolution of the author's thought. For example, an author may assume that the readers of his later works are familiar with the contents of his earlier works and will thus bring their understanding of the earlier works to bear on their interpretation of the later ones.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as one commentator has observed, since there is

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works (*Fihrist* I 263). Since Ibn al-Nadīm makes no mention of Alfarabi's political treatises, it is possible that he did not know of them. His list does not purport to be exhaustive, however, and he characterizes some of Alfarabi's logical commentaries as "extant and in circulation among the people," possibly suggesting that Alfarabi also left a body of work for private circulation only. See the comment by Al-Bayhaqī, reported by Endress (1977), p. 7, about seeing in the library of Rayy some of the "rarest" books by Alfarabi in Alfarabi's own handwriting or in the handwriting of his student, Yahyā ibn 'Adī.

Commentators have reached different conclusions about the chronology of Alfarabi's writings based upon the scanty historical evidence and on their assessments of such things as the relative maturity or immaturity of individual works. Dunlop believes *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* were written around A.D. 941–943. He thinks *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* was written after *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* and both were probably written after the two treatises composed in 941–943 (Dunlop 1961, pp. 12, 14). E.I.J. Rosenthal believes *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* was written first, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* next, and *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, the most "independent and mature" of the three, last (Rosenthal 1958, pp. 141–142; 1955, p. 159). In contrast, Walzer (1985), p. 1, believes that it is certain that *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is the last of Alfarabi's extant works because it is the most mature. Najjar, who does not attempt an exact dating of all the political treatises, notes that *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* clearly were both written during the last years of Alfarabi's life and are the product of extensive reflection (Najjar 1964, pp. 18–19 [Arabic Introduction]). Madkour argues further that probably all of Alfarabi's philosophic works represent Alfarabi's mature thinking, since they all date from the last third of his life (Madkour 1963, p. 453). According to Mahdi, the trilogy that includes *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* was probably written after Alfarabi wrote all his commentaries, in other words, it was written at the end of his stay in Baghdad or was begun there and then finished in Syria (Mahdi 1961A, p. 26 [Arabic Introduction]). In his edition of Alfarabi's *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, Mahdi cautions against construing Alfarabi's failure to refer in certain works to his political treatises as evidence that the political treatises had not yet been written. Mahdi also suggests that *Kitāb al-Hurūf* was written (or dictated as lecture notes) after all of his works on logic and philosophy were completed (Mahdi 1969B, p. 44 [Arabic Introduction]). In contrast, on the basis of the themes discussed in *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, Zimmermann (1981), p. xxiv, believes that *Kitāb al-Hurūf* may be an early work, although he, too, believes that any attempt to date Alfarabi's writings is necessarily tentative.

<sup>2</sup> See Rosenthal (1955), p. 164 (*Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*'s brief treatment of revelation is probably due to Alfarabi's considering a fuller treatment unnecessary because of the elaborate account of the topic contained in one of his earlier works); Dunlop (1961), p. 13 (the allusive character of certain references to the nonexcellent regimes and the introduction of two new concepts indicate that *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* was written at a late date).

no evidence that Alfarabi wrote any of his philosophic works before he was fifty years old, all of his writings may represent his thinking as a mature philosopher.<sup>3</sup> Thus, establishing a chronology of Alfarabi's works would be less useful for coming to terms with his works' doctrinal differences than would be the case for an author whose literary output spanned his formative as well as his later years.

Largely because of these difficulties, there is a wide range of disagreement in the scholarly literature as to the true nature of Alfarabi's political philosophy. To be sure, there is a general consensus that Alfarabi was the first philosopher in the history of Islam to recover the classical tradition of Greek political philosophy. The disagreement among scholars centers upon Alfarabi's purpose in turning to classical Greek political thought.<sup>4</sup> By way of introduction, it may be helpful to describe briefly some of the issues that are central to the inquiry into Alfarabi's purpose and, thus, at the heart of the scholarly disagreement.

Among the issues raised by virtually every student of Alfarabi is the relationship between religion and philosophy. A cornerstone of Alfarabi's political thought is the doctrine that religion is an imitation of philosophy in the sense that religion presents without proof insights that philosophy demonstrates or that religion presents through the use of images truths that philosophy grasps as they truly are. In other words, religion is an imitation of philosophy because the latter presents a true and reasoned account of the universe, whereas the former presents an account based upon imagination or opinion. Many scholars—such as Leo Strauss, Shlomo Pines, Fauzi Najjar, Majid Fakhry, and Richard Walzer—have concluded from this or related teachings that for Alfarabi philosophy is superior to religion in the objects of its knowledge and the manner in which it attains that knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Muhsin Mahdi goes further, referring to Alfarabi's account of religion as an imitation of philosophy as the "myth" of the origin of religion.<sup>6</sup> Mahdi's comment may imply that Alfarabi did not really view religion as a reflection of philosophy, pale or otherwise, and thus that religion is not necessarily consistent or harmo-

<sup>3</sup> Madkour (1963), p. 453.

<sup>4</sup> Scholars differ as well in their opinions of the degree of originality in Alfarabi's political doctrines. See Walzer (1985), esp. pp. 9–12, 425–429, on the possibility that Alfarabi's political thought owes much to an unknown Platonizing predecessor. Although the issue of Alfarabi's originality is of great historical interest, the present study focuses instead on the significance of the various features of Alfarabi's political philosophy for understanding his political philosophy as a whole, since the question of the meaning of the philosopher's ideas must be raised regardless of whether he was the first to proceed as he did or adopted certain of his predecessors' teachings in formulating his own philosophy.

<sup>5</sup> Strauss (1945), pp. 377–379; Pines (1937), p. 67 and n. 1; Najjar (1958), p. 100; Fakhry (1983), p. 116; see Walzer (1962), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Mahdi (1973), p. 19.

nious with philosophy. In a similar vein, in a recent analysis of certain Islamic terms that appear in Alfarabi's political treatises, Joel Kraemer argues that Alfarabi's purpose in incorporating these terms in his works is not to integrate certain Islamic concepts within a larger philosophic framework, but merely to accommodate them rhetorically, i.e., superficially.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the preceding, some scholars have argued that for Alfarabi religion is not subordinate to philosophy. In particular, E.I.J. Rosenthal has concluded that for Alfarabi one of the tasks of philosophy is to vindicate the absolute truth of religion.<sup>8</sup> In a recent article, Hans Daiber has adopted the more radical thesis that philosophy is in fact dependent on religion and needs religion "to realize itself." Thus, properly understood, religion limits the autonomy of philosophy.<sup>9</sup> Daiber's theory rests, in part, on his elevation of the cognitive status of the insights of religion that are based upon imagination, on the grounds that such insights are not available through philosophy alone.<sup>10</sup>

Daiber's theory of the dependence of philosophy on religion is also based upon his observation that for Alfarabi philosophy finds its completion in action.<sup>11</sup> The question of the relationship between philosophy and action in Alfarabi's thought has long vexed students of medieval philosophy. At one end of the spectrum are those commentators, such as Strauss, who argue that for Alfarabi happiness in the highest case consists in theoretical perfection exclusively and, thus, that philosophy is intrinsically self-sufficient (although philosophers may still engage in practical pursuits for nonphilosophic reasons).<sup>12</sup> At the other end of the spectrum are those for whom Alfarabi portrays philosophy as issuing in action. For example, Pines notes that for Alfarabi philosophers should, qua philoso-

<sup>7</sup> Kraemer (1987).

<sup>8</sup> Rosenthal (1958), p. 123, (1955), p. 165, (1951), p. 193. See O'Leary (1968), pp. 149, 152, 154–155, who argues that for Alfarabi philosophy confirms the teachings of revelation.

<sup>9</sup> Daiber (1986), pp. 140–143.

<sup>10</sup> This aspect of Daiber's theory runs counter to the more usual interpretation of Alfarabi, according to which the ideal state (or city of excellence) presupposes only a philosopher-king, and not a philosopher-king-prophet. See *Madīnah* 250:2–4/60:13–15 and Chapter III, note 19, below. Additionally, his theory that philosophy needs religion because of philosophy's cognitive shortcomings appears to run counter to Alfarabi's view that religion is an imitation of philosophy, since Daiber's theory emphasizes those areas where the prophet's imaginative insights have no rational counterpart.

<sup>11</sup> Daiber bases this aspect of his theory on the belief that a person cannot be virtuous "in a general manner," but only by doing virtuous acts (Daiber 1986, p. 141).

<sup>12</sup> Strauss (1945), esp. pp. 364–366, 370; see Najjar (1958), pp. 96, 99, 101–102. Strauss and Najjar both note that because of philosophy's need to justify itself as the best way of life, it must raise moral and political issues. See Strauss (1945), p. 366; Najjar (1958), p. 102.

phers, participate in political life if circumstances permit.<sup>13</sup> According to Lawrence Berman, the injunction to imitate God implies the duty to found a certain kind of political regime, and not just to aspire to emulate God on an intellectual or moral level.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, E.I.J. Rosenthal views Alfarabi's theory of happiness as necessitating the performance of civic duties.<sup>15</sup>

The preceding views are partially attributable to a further scholarly disagreement about Alfarabi's understanding of the availability of philosophy and happiness for people in general. According to Strauss, who in important respects has shaped the terms of the debate over the meaning of Alfarabi's writings for the last fifty years, Alfarabi teaches that happiness is attained by means of theoretical perfection exclusively and that only a very few extremely gifted people are capable of theoretical perfection in any generation. As a consequence, one of the most fundamental facts of human existence is the distinction between the few and the many. This fact gives rise to several corollaries central to Strauss's interpretation of Alfarabi: the harsh fact that happiness is in principle outside the grasp of virtually all men except for a philosophic élite should be concealed as much as possible from the nonphilosophers; and in writing books, philosophers should strive to obscure their true teachings, some of which are politically dangerous or morally destructive, both to avoid corrupting the nonphilosophers and to avoid making the nonphilosophers hostile to the philosophers' intellectual pursuits. Strauss thus sees the obscurities in Alfarabi's writings as largely intentional and attributable to the philosopher's effort to enlighten the deserving few while persuading everyone else of politically salutary or morally edifying myths.<sup>16</sup> Other commentators, such as Pines, Mahdi, Najjar, and Ibrahim Madkour, appear to share Strauss's view of Alfarabi's method of writing as fundamentally "exoteric," or written on two levels, with the literal text aimed at non-philosophic readers and the inner or hidden meaning intended for the philosophers or potential philosophers.<sup>17</sup>

Of the issues raised by Strauss, the one that has probably received the most attention is Alfarabi's method of writing and the related question of the relationship of his individual works to one another. According to some commentators, the doctrinal differences exhibited by Alfarabi's different writings can probably be explained either by the evolution of Al-

<sup>13</sup> Pines (1963), p. lxxxvi, n. 50. Pines also notes the presence of inconsistent teachings on this issue in Alfarabi's works. See the discussion below in Chapter II, especially Section A.

<sup>14</sup> Berman (1961), esp. pp. 56–58.

<sup>15</sup> Rosenthal (1958), p. 138.

<sup>16</sup> Strauss (1959), esp. pp. 136–139; see Strauss (1952), pp. 22–37.

<sup>17</sup> This also appears to be the view of Miller (1983), pp. 274–275. See the discussion of this issue in Chapter I.



farabi's thought or by the different emphasis of individual works.<sup>18</sup> Some authors have attempted to explain the doctrinal differences among Alfarabi's works by recourse to the audience for which or the context in which particular works were written. For example, E.I.J. Rosenthal is of the opinion that *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* was written for a Muslim readership, whereas *Al-Madīmah al-Fāḍilah* has a wider audience, of Muslims and non-Muslims, in view.<sup>19</sup> For Fakhry, *Al-Madīmah al-Fāḍilah* is Alfarabi's presentation of the Platonic account of certain themes, whereas in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* he gives his own view of these themes.<sup>20</sup> According to Mahdi, Alfarabi's commentaries represent his most philosophic writings, whereas his political treatises are, by comparison, popular.<sup>21</sup> For example, Mahdi indicates that the portions of two of the political works ostensibly devoted to metaphysics in reality represent Alfarabi's "political theology and cosmology."<sup>22</sup> In stark contrast is the interpretation of Fakhry, for whom *Al-Madīmah al-Fāḍilah* is a major metaphysical work.<sup>23</sup> Again, for Mahdi, on its face Alfarabi's *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* represents Alfarabi's introductory account of the sciences, that is, a discussion for "beginners" of the sciences as these are "generally understood" by the nonphilosophers.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, according to Fakhry, *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* is "perhaps the most crucial" of Alfarabi's works on the relationship between philosophy and the other sciences.<sup>25</sup>

In a recent article, Thérèse-Anne Druart has attempted to bring order to the scholarly chaos by distinguishing the works in which Alfarabi presents Aristotle's philosophy, those in which he outlines the basic features of his own philosophy but couches them within an Aristotelian framework (the "programmatically works"), and those in which he develops and elaborates his own philosophy outside an Aristotelian framework.<sup>26</sup> Druart argues that, while recognizing the true nature of Aristotelian philosophy (which he presents for the most part without distortion in his Aristotelian works), Alfarabi found Aristotle's solutions to certain fun-

<sup>18</sup> Dunlop (1961), p. 12; Rosenthal (1958), p. 140.

<sup>19</sup> Rosenthal (1958), p. 133; see p. 140.

<sup>20</sup> Fakhry (1983), p. 124.

<sup>21</sup> Mahdi (1969A), pp. 3–4. Mahdi also suggests that some of the popular and political works are more serious than others. See Strauss (1945), p. 358, who argues that the teaching of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* consists, in part, of its "silent rejection" of certain teachings contained in two other political works of Alfarabi.

<sup>22</sup> Mahdi (1975B), p. 130.

<sup>23</sup> Fakhry (1983), p. 117.

<sup>24</sup> Mahdi (1975B), pp. 113, 130. At the same time, as Mahdi's analysis itself reveals, some of Alfarabi's philosophic ideas can be extracted from a careful reading of *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm*.

<sup>25</sup> Fakhry (1983), p. 112.

<sup>26</sup> Druart (1987). Druart (1987), p. 27, mentions *Kutāb al-Ḥurūf* as a fourth type of work, but this work does not play an important role in her analysis.

damental philosophic questions—especially metaphysical questions—inadequate and preferred to adopt more Neoplatonic positions in his own name. Thus, in direct contrast to Strauss, Mahdi, and Najjar, who see the political treatises as Alfarabi's least philosophic writings, according to Druart *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* provide the most definitive expression of Alfarabi's mature philosophy.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, there is considerable scholarly disagreement as to the exact nature of Alfarabi's understanding of the philosophy of Plato and the philosophy of Aristotle. It is well known that certain Neoplatonic philosophers commonly took the position that the teachings of Plato and Aristotle are fundamentally harmonious. Alfarabi has sometimes been presented as espousing this point of view, primarily on the basis of a specific treatise of his known in English as the *Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Wise Men: Plato, the Divine, and Aristotle*.<sup>28</sup> However, Alfarabi himself announces in the introduction to this treatise that his purpose in demonstrating the ultimate harmony between Plato and Aristotle is in an important respect defensive, namely, to counter the distrust of philosophy voiced by nonphilosophers on the basis of their belief that the two greatest philosophers were unable to reach agreement on fundamental issues. Such people have a tendency to conclude from the lack of consensus among the greatest philosophers that philosophy is not in fact the path to the truth; otherwise, since the truth is itself one, these philosophers would agree.<sup>29</sup> Alfarabi's avowed purpose in the *Harmonization*

<sup>27</sup> Druart (1987), esp. pp. 42–43. Druart bases her thesis in the first instance on indications in the “Aristotelian” works that Alfarabi considered Aristotle's metaphysics insufficient because it fails to address certain issues, such as the need for and nature of a principle of existence or being in addition to a principle of change and a final cause of being. In brief, since Alfarabi elaborates in the “emanationist” works precisely the issues he found unsatisfactory in the Aristotelian works, Druart concludes that the emanationist works represent Alfarabi's attempt to supplement Aristotle's metaphysics. Druart's thesis thus depends on the conclusion that those areas in which Alfarabi “takes liberties” with Aristotle reveal his *theoretical* dissatisfaction with Aristotle's metaphysics. The evidence she presents would seem, however, to be consistent with the view that Alfarabi found Aristotle's philosophy lacking on a *practical* level, i.e., as inadequate to deal with the practical challenge of revealed religion. See Mahdi (1967), p. 236 and n. 9 (for Simplicius, and possibly Alfarabi, depicting Aristotle's god as an efficient cause represented “the minimal modification necessary to render his view acceptable to the followers of the revealed religions”). In other words, if religion is to be viewed as an imitation of philosophy—a doctrine important for political reasons—philosophy must be presented as knowing everything religion claims to know and must minimize the distance between fundamental religious doctrines and their philosophical counterparts. It would be difficult to resolve definitively the uncertainty between these two interpretations of Alfarabi's “correction” of Aristotle's philosophy on the basis of the texts in our possession.

<sup>28</sup> Walzer (1985), pp. 10, 428 (and sources cited); Madkour (1963), pp. 456–457; de Boer (1967), pp. 109–110. See Fakhry (1965), pp. 471–473.

<sup>29</sup> Alfarabi *Jam'* 1:6–2:6. The purpose of the work is also to demonstrate that certain

is, then, to restore philosophy's credibility as the purveyor of truth. Because of this defensive posture, and because the *Harmonization* attributes to Plato and Aristotle certain doctrines that do not appear in any of Alfarabi's other accounts of Plato and Aristotle, some commentators have concluded that the explicit thesis of the *Harmonization* is in large measure rhetorical or that it does not represent Alfarabi's deepest understanding of the character of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophies.<sup>30</sup>

Building in part on earlier studies, the present study attempts to resolve some of the existing uncertainties in the interpretation of Alfarabi by offering a philosophic explanation of certain of the inconsistencies and obscurities in his political writings.<sup>31</sup> The explanation begins with and is grounded in an analysis of the logical structure of Alfarabi's method of writing. Taking as my point of departure his observations about the relationship between dialectic and philosophy in his commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* (*Kitāb al-Jadal*) and elsewhere, I advance the hypothesis that Alfarabi's works proceed on several levels simultaneously because they are dialectically written. Dialectical multilevel writing differs in both structure and purpose from exoteric multilevel writing.<sup>32</sup> As a consequence, the two types of writing give rise to distinctive canons of interpretation and aim at fundamentally divergent effects on their respective audiences. The hallmark of the method of dialectic is the juxtaposition of opposing arguments of roughly equal persuasive power.<sup>33</sup> When dialectic is employed as part of philosophical investigation, the ultimate purpose of bringing together such conflicting arguments is to sharpen the investi-

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doctrines identified with either Plato or Aristotle and on their face antithetical to Islamic beliefs were not really held by the philosopher in question or do not mean what they appear to mean. See Fakhry (1965), pp. 473–477; Mahdi (1986), pp. 105–106.

<sup>30</sup> See Mahdi (1969A), p. 4; Galston (1977), p. 19. Recognizing that Alfarabi's overriding purpose in the *Harmonization* is religious, not philosophic, de Boer (1967), p. 109, believes that this induced Alfarabi himself to overlook the two Greek philosophers' differences. See Fakhry (1965), pp. 471–473, who notes the discrepancy between the accounts of the two Greek philosophers in the *Harmonization* and in other works of Alfarabi and emphasizes the controversy concerning the authoritativeness of Greek philosophy as animating the peculiar thesis of the book.

<sup>31</sup> This study treats systematically only Alfarabi's major political treatises, although I discuss his other treatises and his commentaries when they seem to have a direct bearing on the analysis. This approach is made necessary, in part, by the extent of Alfarabi's writings and by the fact that there is as yet no in-depth analysis in English of Alfarabi's political treatises considered as a group. With Dunlop (1961), p. 7, and Mahdi (1968B), pp. 24–28 (Arabic Introduction), and against Khalifāt (1987), p. 260, I consider Alfarabi's *Kitāb al-Tanbīh 'Alā Sabīl al-Sa'ādah* to be more a logical than an ethical treatise and have not included it in this study. See Druart (1988), pp. 8, 10, on the character of *Kitāb al-Tanbīh*.

<sup>32</sup> For a fuller discussion of dialectical writing, its relation to other forms of multilevel writing, and Alfarabi's use of these methods, see Chapter I.

<sup>33</sup> As a technical matter, dialectic reasons from "generally accepted" premises (Arabic *mashhūrāt*, Greek *endoxa*).

gator's understanding of the nature of the most plausible philosophic alternatives and to increase the investigator's ability to identify and eliminate false premises and reasoning.

A corollary of this interpretation of Alfarabi's method of writing is that there is a need, in the first instance, to take inconsistent teachings within and among Alfarabi's works at face value and examine them as representing distinct but philosophically plausible alternative resolutions of the issues the author is addressing. Only after understanding the various teachings on their own terms should the reader evaluate them in light of various indications that Alfarabi himself provides as to the strengths and weaknesses of the individual arguments, the assumptions presupposed by each of the alternatives and the plausibility of those assumptions, and the doctrinal consequences that follow from accepting any of the alternatives as true. Interpreting Alfarabi's writings as fundamentally dialectical thus leads to the additional corollary that initially his political treatises should be analyzed together as a group, since there is a *prima facie* reason for believing both that Alfarabi's composition of multiple accounts of political themes was deliberate and that he intended each of the political treatises to be read alongside—in effect, serving as a commentary on—the others. The interpretation of Alfarabi's method of writing just sketched thus leads to the conclusion, already alluded to by Mahdi and Najjar, that the philosopher was guided by a master plan or an overriding purpose in the composition of many of his works.<sup>34</sup> The above interpretation also requires the reader to begin by treating Alfarabi's political treatises as fundamentally philosophical, in the important sense of works intended to clarify both the central problems of political philosophy and their most serious potential solutions, and of roughly equal weight as sources for arriving at the basic features of Alfarabi's own political thought.

One of the significant doctrinal consequences of interpreting Alfarabi in this fashion may be summarized in simplified fashion by reference to the prevailing scholarship. Commentators have tended to characterize Alfarabi's political philosophy as primarily Platonic,<sup>35</sup> identifying the over-

<sup>34</sup> See Najjar (1964), pp. 13, 19 (Arabic Introduction); Mahdi (1968A), pp. 12–13 (Arabic Introduction).

<sup>35</sup> Alfarabi's theoretical philosophy is, in contrast, typically viewed as fundamentally Aristotelian or Neoplatonic. See Walzer (1985), p. 10 (“the political section of [Alfarabi's *Perfect State*] . . . is not based on an amalgam of Platonic and Peripatetic tenets . . . but rather—though with some notable exceptions and additions—on an explanation of Plato's *Republic*”), p. 428, (1965), p. 779 (despite Alfarabi's reliance on Aristotle for his theoretical philosophy, “in political science he preferred to follow Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*”); Marmura (1983), p. 94 (Alfarabi's metaphysics, epistemology, and psychology are largely Aristotelian and Neoplatonic, while his theory of the state is Platonic); Fakhry (1983), p. 124 (Alfarabi's “analysis of justice, which was such a cardinal feature of Greek political thought, reflects to some extent the influence of Aristotle's *Ethics*, although here as elsewhere the

all character of Plato's political teachings in large measure with the idealistic political order set forth in the *Republic*, although the influence of Plato's more practically oriented *Laws* is sometimes noted.<sup>36</sup> While some commentators have also noted Aristotelian antecedents to certain features of Alfarabi's political thought,<sup>37</sup> little effort has been made to treat the Aristotelian features of Alfarabi's thought systematically.<sup>38</sup> With the

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predominant political motif is distinctly Platonic"); Kraemer (1986B), p. 6 (the political thought of the Islamic philosophers was fundamentally Platonic); Mahdi (1961), pp. 3–4 (in their commentaries on Aristotle, Avicenna and Averroes were following "the most decisive aspect of Farabi's thought, i.e., his Platonic approach to political philosophy"); Strauss (1936), pp. 4–5 (it is only by beginning with the Platonizing politics of Alfarabi that one can hope to reach a true understanding of Islamic and Jewish philosophy in the Middle Ages), p. 13; Rosenthal (1958), p. 114 ("it is permissible to speak of the predominant influence of Plato in political philosophy, although Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was commented and drawn upon by al-Fārābī" and others); Pines (1963), p. lxxvii (Alfarabi's position, as far as political philosophy is concerned, is largely Platonic).

<sup>36</sup> See Walzer (1985), passim, (1965), p. 779 (quoted in note 35 above); Kraemer (1971), p. 1177; Mahdi (1963), pp. 161, 162; Rosenthal (1958), pp. 116–118; and the articles devoted to Alfarabi's commentary on Plato's *Laws* cited in Chapter IV, note 5, below.

<sup>37</sup> See Dunlop (1961), p. 8 and Notes to the English Translation; Rosenthal (1958), passim, (1955), pp. 159–161; Strauss (1945) (concluding, through an analysis of Alfarabi's *Philosophy of Plato*, that Alfarabi's final position is that happiness consists in theoretical philosophy—a position traditionally identified with Aristotle); Pines (1975), p. 160 (Alfarabi "appears to have aimed at a political doctrine in which conceptions of both Aristotle and Plato as well as certain Islamic notions and terms would be welded together; each of them being assigned an appropriate function in the whole of the system"); Kraemer (1987), p. 312, n. 75, p. 313, nn. 77, 78, p. 319; Daiber (1986). See Kraemer (1971), who notes that Alfarabi's political thought was fundamentally Platonic, whereas his "ethical theory" was influenced decisively by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

<sup>38</sup> Daiber (1986) constitutes the main attempt to analyze an Aristotelian strand of Alfarabi's philosophy systematically. Although his study contains several useful observations about Alfarabi's own theories, in critical places Daiber's attribution of certain teachings to Aristotle is unconvincing. One of the most important of these is his claim that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is the source of Alfarabi's view that rhetoric can be employed by the philosopher-king to "teach" the masses "theoretical things" in the strong sense of imparting to them "knowledge of the beings" (Daiber 1986, p. 138). The passage Daiber cites in this connection (Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1357a1ff.) says that rhetoric has as its subject the objects of *deliberation*, i.e., the practical things, not the theoretical things. Further, at 1355a24–29 Aristotle contrasts rhetoric with instruction (*didaskalia*, Arabic *ta'lim*) and notes that instruction is impossible for the audience that is suited to rhetorical persuasion. Thus, Daiber's conclusion—that philosophy and certainty can be taught to the masses by means of rhetorical proofs—cannot be attributed to Aristotle. Daiber's error appears to stem from his belief that all members of the genus "assent" (*taṣḍīq*) are fungible, or that the feeling of certainty, as contrasted with certainty itself, is the hallmark of philosophic understanding. Second, and equally questionable, is Daiber's main thesis, that Alfarabi's understanding of the status of religion can be traced to Aristotle's theories regarding the relationship between thought and perception. Daiber's claim appears to be that because (1) the universals concerned with practical things discovered by philosophy are said in one of Alfarabi's books to correspond to the concrete particulars of practical things made known in religion and (2)

important exception of Druart's article referred to above, neither has there been an effort to treat systematically the presence in Alfarabi's writings of divergent points of view considered as philosophic alternatives. The present study contributes to filling these gaps by attempting to identify and evaluate the competing doctrinal "systems" that coexist in Alfarabi's political treatises and, where appropriate, to link them to hitherto underemphasized Aristotelian motifs. Thus, in Chapter III, I add to the existing literature on Alfarabi's views on the philosopher-king as a ruler of excellence an analysis of Alfarabi's presentation of a statesman who is not a philosopher but is nonetheless a ruler of excellence. My hope is that this analysis of Alfarabi's presentation of two such divergent accounts of political governance will enable the reader to explore the tension between theory and experience as claimants to rule, as this perennial issue of political philosophy is presented by Alfarabi. To take a somewhat different example, in Chapter II I examine the thesis that for Alfarabi happiness consists in theoretical activity exclusively—a view many interpreters associate with Aristotle and, as described above, have frequently attributed to Alfarabi as well—against the backdrop of the contrary view, also attributed to Alfarabi, that in the best case human perfection requires the philosopher to be actively engaged in politics. In this instance I conclude that Alfarabi ultimately rejects both of these alternatives and presents an understanding of human happiness that includes both practical and theoretical activity as essential components but does not necessarily contemplate active involvement in politics, much less founding an ideal regime or city of excellence. In Chapter IV I argue that although there are some indications in Alfarabi's two treatises often characterized as reworkings of Plato's *Republic* that the regimes described will develop the citizens' intellectual virtues as well as their practical ones, these works nonetheless reveal Alfarabi's retreat from the institutionalized subordination of the development of ordinary citizens to the development of the few most gifted people typically associated with the *Republic*. Similarly, I conclude that Alfarabi was less skeptical of conventional morality than Plato appears to have been and the views he presents somewhat closer to the perspective of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, possibly because he perceived

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being virtuous implies actually engaging in particular virtuous activities, "theory and praxis belong to each other," and the autonomy of philosophy is limited because it depends upon religion (Daiber 1986, pp. 139–143). This doctrine is questionable as applied to Alfarabi. It is even more questionable as applied to Aristotle, for whom ethical truths cannot, in general, be captured in general rules and particular ethical judgments cannot be deduced from theoretical universals. See Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* I. 3 1094b11–25, I. 7 1098a26–b8 (one should not expect the same degree of exactness in the study of political [including ethical] things as one does in mathematics), VI. 7 (distinguishing the subject matter of wisdom [*sophia*] and the subject matter of practical wisdom [*phronēsis*]).

a significant although partial congruence between some Islamic virtues and the morality that facilitates the cultivation of reason.

As this brief sketch reveals, in Chapters II–IV I apply the interpretive hypothesis developed in Chapter I—that the purpose of Alfarabi’s peculiar method of writing is, in effect, to recreate a dialogue between Plato and Aristotle—by working through his various accounts of political topics on the basis of particular *themes* recurring in some or all of his political treatises. As a consequence, in these chapters I bring together Alfarabi’s disparate and sometimes inconsistent teachings to illuminate not only the conflict among them, but the nature of the alternatives themselves. In contrast, in the final chapter I apply the proposed interpretive hypothesis by examining the relationship among the political treatises themselves, primarily in light of their differing treatments of the dependence of political science on theoretical inquiry or on a particular view of the universe. On the basis of the resulting characterizations of the individual treatises, I look anew at the major doctrinal differences noted in Chapters II–IV and attempt to account for certain of these differences in light of the distinctive orientation of each of the political works. Although at the conclusion of this analysis there remain significant unresolved questions as to the meaning and purpose of Alfarabi’s political teachings, I believe that this effort to highlight the dialectical character of Alfarabi’s writings contributes significantly to the recovery of the philosopher’s primary purpose.

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It may prove useful to situate the foregoing introduction within the broad outlines of Alfarabi’s life, times, and works.

Our scanty knowledge of Alfarabi’s life comes primarily from the medieval Arabic biographers who wrote in the tenth through thirteenth centuries.<sup>39</sup> According to these sources, Alfarabi was born around A.D. 870 in Turkestan and was of Turkish descent. He came to Baghdad as a young adult and studied with several of the renowned Christian teachers of the Greek sciences and philosophy who were active at that time. Eventually, Alfarabi himself became one of the foremost teachers of logic and philosophy in tenth-century Baghdad. In the last decade of his life, he went to Syria and Egypt and apparently resided for some time at the court of Sayf al-Dawlah, accepting only a modest stipend and living an austere exist-

<sup>39</sup> The main biographers are Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 990), Ṣā’id al-Andalusī (d. 1070), Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ah (d. 1269 or 1270), Ibn Khallikān (d. 1282), and al-Qifṭī (d. 1248). See the accounts of Alfarabi’s life, based upon these primary sources, in Fakhry (1983), pp. 107–109; Madkour (1963), pp. 450–452; Sherwani (1938), pp. 288–292.

tence.<sup>40</sup> According to one report, he was murdered by highway robbers in the year 950.<sup>41</sup>

Alfarabi lived during the period of Islamic history that has been called the "renaissance of Islam."<sup>42</sup> Despite this characterization, the period witnessed the decline of the 'Abbasid caliphate, its temporary recovery at the end of the ninth century, and the caliphate's ultimate replacement as a political and military power by the rise of local princes and principalities.<sup>43</sup> The military decline and extreme political instability experienced during these years was not, however, mirrored in the cultural life, which continued to develop and, in many respects, to thrive throughout the period.<sup>44</sup>

As has often been noted, Alfarabi was the indirect beneficiary of the vigorous and sustained efforts on the part of the early 'Abbasid caliphs, especially Hārūn al-Rashīd (786–809), al-Ma'mūn (813–833), and Mu'tasim (833–842), to recover the scientific and philosophic accomplishments of the Greeks.<sup>45</sup> These efforts took the form of generous finan-

<sup>40</sup> Alfarabi left Baghdad for Syria in A.H. 330 (A.D. 942). Najjar conjectures that Alfarabi was forced to flee Baghdad and take refuge at the Hamdanid court because of orthodox reaction in Baghdad to his Shi'ite beliefs (Najjar 1961, p. 62). (Najjar himself concludes that Alfarabi was a Shi'ite only in a superficial sense.) According to Madkour (1963), pp. 451–452, Alfarabi was merely attracted by the brilliant cultural and intellectual life at the Hamdanid court.

<sup>41</sup> Although the date of Alfarabi's death is widely reported as A.H. 339 (A.D. 950), the story of the highway robbers does not appear in the earliest biographical sources, and it is challenged as fanciful by Madkour (1963), p. 452. The primary sources also contain differing accounts of Alfarabi's funeral.

<sup>42</sup> The phrase "renaissance of Islam" was popularized by Mez in his book of that name (Mez 1937). See the discussion in Kraemer (1986A), pp. 1–5. Mez appears to have the second half of the ninth and all of the tenth centuries in view. Although Kraemer agrees that the renaissance of Islam spanned the ninth and tenth centuries, in his books on humanism and philosophy in the renaissance of Islam he concentrates on the second half of the tenth century, which he calls the apogee of the renaissance (Kraemer 1986A, pp. 4–5). See Nasr (1978), pp. 14–16, who links the heightened philosophic activity of the tenth and eleventh centuries (the period of the breakdown of the central Islamic political authority) to the Shi'ite tendencies of some of the independent princes, on the grounds that Shi'ite theology was in general more open to the arts and sciences than was Sunnite theology.

<sup>43</sup> On the political and military history of this period, see Brockelmann (1947), pp. 131–163; Canard (1962), pp. 267–274.

<sup>44</sup> The best recent general works treating the cultural life in this period are Kraemer (1986A) and (1986B). Although these works have for their main focus the second half of the tenth century (the period immediately after Alfarabi's death), there is extensive material in both works on the period during which Alfarabi lived. Still useful is the classic *Introduction to the History of Science* by George Sarton. See especially Sarton (1927), chap. 30 (on the second half of the ninth century) and chap. 31 (on the first half of the tenth century). See also Shboul (1979), chaps. 2–3; Arnaldez (1962); Sherwani (1938), pp. 288–292; Levy (1929), chap. 8.

<sup>45</sup> On the cultural and intellectual activities of the early 'Abbasid caliphs, see Khan (1942),



cial support for the acquisition and translation of Greek manuscripts in the areas of logic, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, and philosophy; the establishment of the Bayt al-Ḥikmah ("House of Wisdom"), a library and center for the translation and study of scientific and philosophic works; and the encouragement of individual scholars and translators through court patronage. The translation movement, which made possible the recovery of Greek science and philosophy, was first undertaken by Christian Arabs and others versed in Syriac, who often made their translations into Arabic from Syriac translations of Greek texts. As the translation movement became more sophisticated, Arabic translations were often made directly from Greek into Arabic, and regardless of whether Syriac intermediaries were used, an effort was made to acquire and collate the best manuscripts so as to establish critical editions of the texts to be translated.<sup>46</sup>

As was noted above, Alfarabi spent a large part of his adult life in Baghdad, the main center of intellectual life in the second half of the ninth and in the tenth century. The various groups of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that had developed by the end of the ninth century were represented in Baghdad. Although there were considerable and at times vehement disagreements among these groups concerning fundamental questions, such as whether religious texts should be understood literally or were subject to interpretation and whether reasoning could legitimately be used to extend the body of religious beliefs and practices conveyed to Muslims by the prophet and his successors,<sup>47</sup> the differences among the groups had not yet engendered the degree of partisan strife that was to ensue in succeeding generations.<sup>48</sup> Members of the main groups of Islamic theology (*kalām*) lectured, wrote, and attracted large circles of followers in Baghdad at that time. The Mu'tazilites, a rationalist school of theology influenced by although ultimately hostile to Greek philosophy, had been the official school of theology under several caliphs but lost their privileged position during the reign of the Caliph Al-Mutawakkil (847–861).<sup>49</sup> None of the more traditional theological doctrines succeeded in replacing

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pp. 3–7; Rescher (1964), pp. 22–25; Petraitis (1967), pp. 29–31; Sherwani (1941), pp. 144–148.

<sup>46</sup> On the translation movement, see O'Leary (1968), chap. 4; Rescher (1964), pp. 25–32; Walzer (1962), pp. 6–8, 65–70; Arnaldez (1962), pp. 360–361; Meyerhof (1926).

<sup>47</sup> See Schacht (1964), chap. 10; Coulson (1964), pp. 71–81.

<sup>48</sup> Shboul (1979), p. 35. The main exception was the Hanbalites, who labored zealously to reform and homogenize Islamic doctrine. For a description of some of their more strident activities, which ultimately forced the Caliph Al-Rāḍī to issue a decree condemning them, see Laoust (1965), pp. 118, 153, 155; Levy (1929), pp. 148–150.

<sup>49</sup> In A.D. 833, the Caliph Al-Ma'mūn instituted the *mihnah*, a kind of inquisition, intended to test the allegiance of theologians, jurists, and others to basic Mu'tazilite doctrines. On the Mu'tazilite doctrines and their relationship to philosophic teachings, see O'Leary (1968), chap. 5.

Mu'tazilism as the official theology until the century after Alfarabi's death.<sup>50</sup> Thus, although the tenth century witnessed the increasing influence of certain orthodox theological tendencies,<sup>51</sup> the period is notable for the diversity of theological views that coexisted.<sup>52</sup> The diversity of Baghdad's intellectual life was further enhanced by the study of the Arabic language, a discipline that attained a high level of technical and analytical refinement during this period, as evidenced by the works of the various schools of grammarians and philologists, theologians, jurists, and philosophers.<sup>53</sup> Finally, by the end of the ninth century, Baghdad had become the home of a group of philosophers and students of philosophy who were actively engaged in translating and commenting upon the works of Aristotle and other Greek philosophers.<sup>54</sup> This group, which was primarily made up of members of different Christian sects, saw itself<sup>55</sup> as part of a continuous tradition of philosophy that could be traced back to the fourth century B.C. via the school of Alexandria.

<sup>50</sup> The Ash'arites did not become the dominant theological school until the eleventh century A.D. For a brief description of the theological developments during the ninth and tenth centuries, see Pines (1970), pp. 789–793; Sourdel (1970), pp. 120–125, 126–127; Arnaldez (1962), pp. 361–362.

<sup>51</sup> Although I use the terms "orthodox" and "orthodoxy" for convenience here to refer to the prevailing Sunnite teaching, speaking of orthodoxy during this period is problematic. See note 52 below. For a general survey of the attitude of the Islamic orthodoxy to the cultivation of Greek science and philosophy, starting with the early centuries of Islam, see Goldziher (1981).

<sup>52</sup> Arnaldez (1962), pp. 361–362, observes that hindsight creates a tendency to exaggerate the distinction between orthodoxy and nonorthodoxy during the period in question, whereas in fact Sunnite orthodoxy was still in the process of defining itself, and clearly fundamentalist groups, such as the Hanbalites, were still in the minority. The most intense theological divisions during much of Alfarabi's lifetime appear to have been between the Sunnites and the Shi'ites, including various movements that were offshoots of the Shi'ites. These hostilities—which took on social and political as well as religious dimensions—are described in Lewis (1967), pp. 106–113; Canard (1962), pp. 276–278. See Hourani (1967), pp. 3–4, who notes that a direct conflict between theology and philosophy was avoided until the middle of the eleventh century, because the philosophers avoided explicitly denying certain basic Islamic doctrines and because Ash'arism did not become the dominant theology until that time.

<sup>53</sup> See Shboul (1979), pp. 31–32, and Mahdi (1970) on the study of the Arabic language.

<sup>54</sup> On the history of the philosophical circle that flourished in Baghdad in Alfarabi's time, including its links to the classical Greek philosophers and the Athenian and Alexandrian schools, see Zimmermann (1981), pp. ciii–cxii; Peters (1968B), pp. 160–163; Mahdi (1967), pp. 233–237; Rescher (1963), chap. 2 (translating and analyzing an excerpt from Alfarabi's own account of this history, entitled "On the Rise of Philosophy"); Stern (1960) (translating and discussing the history of Greek philosophy and its transmission to the Arabs as presented by Al-Mas'ūdī, who wrote in the middle of the tenth century); Meyerhof (1937), pp. 18–24, (1933); Périer (1920), pp. 42–65. The classic account of this history is that of Meyerhof (1930).

<sup>55</sup> Zimmermann (1981), pp. ciii–cv, cxi–cxii, argues that the Christian Aristotelians were in fact more innovative than they cared to admit and exaggerated the degree of continuity with their Greek predecessors as part of the attempt to legitimate their activities.

The “golden age” for the philosophers and intellectuals under the early ‘Abbasid caliphs, referred to above, was to some extent interrupted during the reign of the Caliph Al-Mutawakkil, who ruled during the two decades immediately prior to Alfarabi’s birth and who instituted various measures to strengthen the position of Islamic orthodoxy against competing doctrinal movements, especially the Mu’tazilites. Among the casualties of the restoration of orthodoxy under Al-Mutawakkil were the philosopher Al-Kindī, who was beaten at the command of the caliph,<sup>56</sup> and the renowned translator Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq, who was twice imprisoned or placed under house arrest.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, the reforms on behalf of orthodoxy were neither comprehensive nor long-lasting. Al-Mutawakkil’s secretary and the commander of the northern frontier of the empire was a lover of the sciences and supporter of the translation movement,<sup>58</sup> and the caliph himself continued his predecessors’ patronage of the translators and men of science, albeit less vigorously than had some of his predecessors.<sup>59</sup> Subsequent caliphs appointed men of letters and individuals associated with the study of Greek thought to positions of power or maintained them at their courts.<sup>60</sup>

One of the most revealing measures of the intellectual vitality of the period during which Alfarabi flourished was the frequency in Baghdad of public debates between members of opposing schools of thought.<sup>61</sup> Most relevant to the subject of this study was the debate in A.D. 932 between Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus and Abū Sa’id al-Sīrāfī on the relative merits of the sciences of logic and grammar.<sup>62</sup> Abū Bishr, a Christian Aristotelian translator and teacher of logic, defended the position that the science of logic is a necessary tool for enabling people to apprehend the truth. Al-Sīrāfī, a Muslim theologian, jurist, and philologist, argued that truth can be known through ordinary language and reasoning. By all accounts Al-Sīrāfī refuted Abū Bishr decisively, although the reporting of this event

<sup>56</sup> Ivry (1974), pp. 3, 5. According to Ivry, Al-Kindī’s treatment may have been a result of political intrigue or a change of intellectual orientation at the caliph’s court, rather than Al-Kindī’s religious beliefs.

<sup>57</sup> O’Leary (1949), pp. 168–169; Meyerhof (1926), p. 687. Ḥunayn subsequently regained the caliph’s favor, and his fortune and library, which had been confiscated, were restored.

<sup>58</sup> Meyerhof (1926), p. 714.

<sup>59</sup> O’Leary (1949), p. 169; Sarton (1927), pp. 583, 611.

<sup>60</sup> Meyerhof (1926), pp. 713–720; see Goldziher (1981), n. 8; Rosenthal (1943), pp. 18–25.

<sup>61</sup> For example, there were debates between Ibn Surayj (d. 918), a major spokesman for the Shafī’ites in Baghdad, and Muḥammad ibn Dāwūd, a major figure of the more traditional Zahīrite school of jurisprudence (Ibn al-Nadīm *Fihrist* I 213; Schacht 1971, p. 949). These were apparently sponsored by the caliph’s vizir. Kraemer (1984), p. 148, n. 51, also mentions assemblies (*majālis*) of cultivated men that met in the ninth and tenth centuries.

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of the background and significance of this debate, see Mahdi (1970); Zimmermann (1981), pp. cxxii–cxxix; Margoliouth (1905).

may have been less than objective. It appears that the debate was viewed less as a contest between the merits of logic and grammar than as a confrontation between philosophy and tradition, in which the claims of philosophy were shown to be indefensible.<sup>63</sup> Thus, on one level the debate reveals that the philosophers could not take their position in society for granted or conduct themselves in flagrant disregard of popular opinion and generally accepted religious beliefs.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, the atmosphere in Baghdad in these years was generally cosmopolitan—and at times even libertine.<sup>65</sup> Even the fact that the debate between Abū Bishr and Al-Sīrāfī was sponsored by the caliph's vizir makes clear that the authorities were still willing to entertain a diversity of views at a time when the proponents of orthodoxy had become increasingly articulate and powerful. As a consequence, the study of philosophy remained firmly entrenched in Baghdad in the tenth century, during the first half of which Alfarabi studied, taught, and wrote.

Alfarabi's literary output was vast. He wrote extensively on logic, both commentaries on Aristotle's *Organon* (in which Alfarabi included Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*) and independent treatises. He also wrote numerous works of theoretical and practical philosophy, including commentaries on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Physics*, and *Metaphysics*, a commentary on Plato's *Laws*, summaries of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and the political treatises discussed in the present study.<sup>66</sup> Finally, Alfarabi was also famous for his works on music, especially his "Great Book of Music" (*Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr*).<sup>67</sup>

The breadth of the subject matter of Alfarabi's writing raises the issue

<sup>63</sup> Mahdi (1970), pp. 58ff. Noting that the claims of religion were to a large extent identified with the philosophy of Plato, as it was popularly understood, Mahdi observes that on one level the debate can be seen as reflecting the "conflict between popular Platonism and academic Aristotelianism" (Mahdi 1970, pp. 59–61). As a consequence, both sides could represent themselves as champions of reason and the truth.

<sup>64</sup> See Kraemer (1986A), pp. 13–15; Ivry (1990); Najjar (1964), p. 18 (Arabic Introduction). Goldziher (1981) mentions a few instances of restrictions upon or public hostility against philosophers in this period, but he focuses primarily on figures and events after the middle of the tenth century.

<sup>65</sup> See Kraemer (1986A), pp. 15–17; Arnaldez (1962), pp. 362–363; Brockelmann (1947), pp. 145, 148.

<sup>66</sup> For the most comprehensive list of works attributed to Alfarabi, see Steinschneider (1869), pp. 214–220. For Alfarabi's works in print up to 1962, see Rescher (1962). For editions and translations of Alfarabi's works, and the secondary literature published during the 1970s and 1980s, see Butterworth (1988), pp. 61–67, 119–122. For Alfarabi's logical writings in print as of 1972 and a partial survey of related manuscript material, see Galston (1988), nn. 2–8. On the commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, see Chapter II, Section A, below. On Alfarabi's writings on the *Physics* (and a summary of all works of Alfarabi known to have been translated into Latin), see Salman (1939). The commentary on the *Metaphysics* was published by Mahdi as *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* (see *Hurūf* in the Bibliography).

<sup>67</sup> See *Mūsīqā* in the Bibliography. There is also a section on the science of music in Alfarabi's *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* (*Iḥṣā'* 105:9–107:8).

of the relationship of Alfarabi's political philosophy to his philosophy as a whole. This issue, in turn, rests on such broad questions as Alfarabi's understanding of the relationship between theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy, the nature of political science and its relationship to political philosophy and theoretical philosophy, and the relationship between thought and action as elements of human fulfillment—all themes discussed in the chapters that follow. It may, however, be useful to note initially the fact that, to judge by his literary output, the two areas that appear to have occupied Alfarabi most are logic and political philosophy. While a complete account of the relationship between these two aspects of Alfarabi's thought would require a separate monograph, this much can be stated on the basis of the present study. Alfarabi's logical theories, in the last analysis, are informed by and reflect a theory of human nature and human happiness. For Alfarabi, the end of human existence includes, if it is not confined to, the effort to understand being insofar as it is knowable through reason. Understanding, in turn, arises out of and thus presupposes a certain kind of inquiry and personal discovery. As a consequence, both the attainment of happiness and the transmission of philosophy from one generation to the next require a certain way of life in which ignorance, opinion, and complacency give way in stages to curiosity, perplexity, and reflection. As was noted above, seeing philosophy and happiness in this light leads Alfarabi to reject the model of demonstrative argumentation in his own writing and in his theory of education. Moreover, it leads him to view human perfection as encompassing both the pursuit of wisdom and the pursuit of the conditions for the perpetuation of wisdom from one generation to the next. At the cosmic level, this theory is mirrored by Alfarabi's presentation of revelation as instilling the principles but not the content of understanding and, thus, as requiring supplementation through the active practice of rational inquiry.

At the same time, the second conspicuous fact of Alfarabi's political theory is his recognition of the challenge that revealed religion poses to the philosophic way of life. Simply put, revealed religion claims to give a complete and authoritative account of all things—human and divine, natural and metaphysical. In addition to the clash of specific substantive teachings, religion threatens to undermine the pursuit of philosophy as Alfarabi understands it by exalting certainty over investigation, and dogmatic assent over reflective understanding. In the wake of revealed religion, there are no basic truths left to discover, and wisdom becomes a system of rules to be learned and taught.<sup>68</sup> To meet the challenge posed

<sup>68</sup> Of course, religious "sciences" would still be necessary to elaborate or defend the basic teachings, but the Islamic sciences of *fiqh* and *kalām* do not, for Alfarabi, cultivate the philosophic state of mind.

by the claims of revealed religion, Alfarabi resorts to an ingenious application of Aristotle's logical theories according to which religion can be explained as an imitation of philosophy, i.e., as the direct presentation of truths for which philosophy provides the proofs, as the embodiment of the particular instances or applications of general truths discovered by philosophy, or as some combination of the above. On one level the result of this approach is to subordinate religion as a phenomenon and as a set of specific teachings to philosophy as a way of life and as a purveyor of truth. On another level, the claims made by revealed religion become a basic political fact that in significant respects limits the public posture that philosophy and the philosophers can assume. To take one important example, the subtlety of Alfarabi's recreation of the debate between Plato and Aristotle appears to have been, at least in part, a response to the popular expectation, described above, that philosophy should culminate in one truth validated by the agreement of the philosophers. Alfarabi's presentation of the classical Greek philosophic tradition in general and the relationship between theoretical and practical philosophy in particular thus reflects, in addition to having itself helped to shape, the complex history of the relation between religion and philosophy.

## Chapter I

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### ALFARABI'S METHOD OF WRITING

Those who wish to succeed in arriving at answers will find it useful to go over the perplexing points well. For answers successfully arrived at are solutions to the perplexing points that have previously been raised. A person cannot untie a knot if he is not aware of it.

—Aristotle *Metaphysics* III. 1<sup>1</sup>

PHILOSOPHIC DISCOURSE has been the object of philosophic inquiry since the time of Plato. According to Socrates, as presented by Plato in the *Phaedrus*,<sup>2</sup> concern with the relative merits of oral and written communication can be traced back to the ancient Egyptian king Thamus, who expressed the fear that the invention of writing would eventually dull people's memories and breed a class of men laden with information, but lacking genuine wisdom (*Phaedrus* 274–275). Plato's Socrates asserts the superiority of oral instruction to its written counterparts and, as a corollary, advances the view that those who really know will only put pen to paper playfully, to amuse themselves, as others indulge in drinking parties and similar diversions (*Phaedrus* 276). This view did not prevail, nor did the Greek philosophical world arrive at a consensus. Socrates left no writings. And of those philosophers who wrote, some wrote conversations, some wrote treatises, and some wrote commentaries or supercommentaries on the writings of others.

The problem of the method or methods of philosophic communication is regularly addressed by students of medieval philosophy, especially students of medieval Islamic and Jewish philosophy, for a number of reasons. The vocabulary, the style, and very often the themes that preoccupy medieval authors are unfamiliar and thus obscure to modern readers.

<sup>1</sup> Translating *aporia* as “perplexing point,” *aporeō* as “raising the perplexing points,” and *diaporeō* as “going over the perplexing points” in the sense of “examining.” Although this translation is wooden, it reveals the centrality of the concept of *aporia* in the passage. *Euporia* and *euporein* are from the same Greek root, but they have been translated as “reaching answers” instead of, for example, “resolving the perplexing points,” which would reveal the root shared by the two sets of terms. For a discussion of the meanings of these expressions, see Aubenque (1960).

<sup>2</sup> For Alfarabi's understanding of this section of the *Phaedrus*, see *Falsafat Aflāṭun* 16:4–10.

Further, several medieval philosophers themselves advocated or attributed to others a special manner of constructing books that proceed on several levels of argument simultaneously.<sup>3</sup> Others, such as the twelfth-century philosopher Maimonides, laboring under a religious prohibition against communicating certain kinds of wisdom to the community at large, claimed to have composed books in such a way as to conceal from some readers what they revealed to others.<sup>4</sup> Bearing a superficial resemblance to these two types of multilevel writing is a religious doctrine that was current in medieval times, namely, the doctrine that revealed texts consist in large measure of hidden truths expressed in metaphorical language, symbols, and parables.<sup>5</sup> Even the importance of esotericism for Islamic mysticism may have helped sustain interest in this subject among Islamicists well after its urgency was lost for historians of philosophy in general.<sup>6</sup>

Because doctrines of Islamic esotericism are well established and have been widely discussed and because of a tendency on the part of some to equate the various modes of philosophic multilevel writing with their religious counterparts, the nature of philosophic writing is frequently addressed by those who study Islamic philosophy, even though scholars still disagree about the presence or type of multilevel writing in the works of individual Muslim philosophers. Thus, George Hourani argues for "an impressive tradition of secrecy among philosophers preceding Averroes,"<sup>7</sup> while E.I.J. Rosenthal "cannot see any convincing reason [for interpreting Averroes esoterically] any more than in the case of Maimonides."<sup>8</sup> Salomon Munk, Shlomo Pines, and Louis Gardet all accept multilevel writing of some kind as common, if not universal, among Muslim philosophers.<sup>9</sup> According to Leo Strauss certain kinds of textual difficulties and irregularities in the works of great philosophers impose an

<sup>3</sup> See the references in Hourani (1961), p. 106, n. 142, and Section B below.

<sup>4</sup> For an alternative understanding of Maimonides' project, see Section D below.

<sup>5</sup> For the theory of the Qur'an as an exoteric text, see Keddie (1963); Averroes *Faṣl al-Maqāl* 12:11ff.; Hourani (1961), esp. pp. 22–25. For the comparable theory in connection with sacred Jewish texts, see Maimonides *Guide of the Perplexed* 9:6–20:18/2:6–9:25 (Introduction).

<sup>6</sup> For the esotericism of Islamic mystical sects, see Blochet (1902) and Corbin (1960), pp. 28–35. According to Blochet (1902), pp. 490–491, the Muslim philosophers had no tradition of esotericism: once the reader masters the technical vocabulary and ideas, it will become obvious that Islamic philosophy is a continuation of the early Greek and Neoplatonic traditions. According to Corbin (1960), p. 21, the Muslim philosophers were influenced by the esotericism of the mystics.

<sup>7</sup> Hourani (1961), p. 106, n. 142.

<sup>8</sup> Rosenthal (1968), p. 432. Similarly Guttman (1950), p. 206, and (1964), p. 434, n. 125.

<sup>9</sup> Munk (1859), p. 332; Pines (1937), p. 71; Gardet (1951), p. 676.



obligation on the reader to reflect on the possibility of multilevel writing but do not point unequivocally to its presence. However, when in addition persecution by religious or political authorities is known to have been a real danger for those who voiced heterodox views, he believes that there should be a presumption that the author in question had recourse to multilevel writing.<sup>10</sup> Muhsin Mahdi, who prefaces his study of Ibn Khaldūn with a general discussion of the question of philosophic discourse, singles out an author's apparently disinterested discussion of multilevel writing in other authors' works or in Scripture as a signal that the author himself writes in this manner.<sup>11</sup> He attributes multilevel writing to Alfarabi, in particular, both because of Alfarabi's discussions and apparent approval of the esoteric methods of writing of Plato and Aristotle and because exoteric writing is a necessary consequence of the nature of the relationship between the philosopher and the nonphilosophers.<sup>12</sup> Several recent studies of Averroes discuss in some detail the special features of medieval philosophic commentaries, which can be viewed as a distinctive subset of multilevel writing.<sup>13</sup>

Alfarabi's method of writing has received somewhat less attention than that of Averroes or Avicenna. Strauss, who was among the first to analyze in detail Alfarabi's method of writing, takes the position that all of Alfarabi's writings are "exoteric," that is, not to be taken literally, although he singles out *Falsafat Aflāṭun* as the least exoteric of the philosopher's writings.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, Mahdi characterizes Alfarabi's writings generally as exoteric, while observing gradations among the works and even within individual works.<sup>15</sup> Richard Walzer attributes the difficulties in Alfarabi's style of writing to the fact that his treatises summarize the conclusions of his philosophic investigations, but leave to the reader the discovery of their application.<sup>16</sup> While eschewing doctrines of deliberate secrecy and

<sup>10</sup> Strauss (1952), pp. 30–32.

<sup>11</sup> Mahdi (1957), p. 118, n. 1. On this kind of writing in general, see Mahdi (1957), pp. 71–72, 113–125, and (1986), the latter of which is entirely devoted to the theme of Alfarabi's method of writing. The texts upon which the latter article is based are discussed in Section B below.

<sup>12</sup> Mahdi (1961B), p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Butterworth (1977), pp. 7–10, 12–13, 22–28; Lerner (1974), pp. xvff.; Kurland (1958), pp. xv–xvi; Davidson (1969), pp. xiii–xv; Strauss (1945), p. 375. Lerner notes the ways that the commentary form enables the Muslim philosophers to conceal the extent of their disagreement with earlier philosophers (Lerner 1974, p. xv). Both Davidson and Butterworth observe that Averroes' short or small commentaries constitute largely independent reworkings of Aristotle's texts and that the differences are of substance as well as form.

<sup>14</sup> Strauss (1945), p. 375. The exoteric character of Alfarabi's writings, according to Strauss, derives from the doctrine of the *Phaedrus* that written works as such are exoteric.

<sup>15</sup> See note 11 above, Mahdi (1969A), pp. 3–4, 9, and (1975A), p. 50, n. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Walzer (1965), pp. 780–781.

levels of writing,<sup>17</sup> E.I.J. Rosenthal also takes note of the obscurity of Alfarabi's prose and traces the problematic character of his writing to its being "diffuse, repetitive and lacking in clarity and precision."<sup>18</sup>

There is, then, a consensus as to the impenetrability of Alfarabi's works, although scholars disagree about the underlying reason for the difficulty. It is thus necessary to begin a study of Alfarabi's thought with an examination of the problem of his writing. For one's view of the origin of the obscurity of his style will influence the manner in which one reads his works and, as a consequence, the interpretation of his teachings one eventually reaches.

In his "Translator's Introduction" to Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines issues a word of caution against presuming an identity between the doctrines or the methods of Alfarabi and those of Maimonides: "none of Alfarabi's writings is as carefully designed as is the *Guide* to throw the unqualified readers and many qualified ones off the right track."<sup>19</sup> According to Pines, not only the scope of the *Guide of the Perplexed* but "its composition and its purpose are quite different from those of any of al-Fārābī's works."<sup>20</sup> Despite this assurance as to the relative openness of Alfarabi, as compared with Maimonides, the obstacles to grasping his method of writing are still considerable.

Given the currency in the medieval world of assorted theories of multidimensional writing, an analysis of the genus of multilevel writing will serve as a useful starting point for this inquiry. Of course, even when the full range of types of multilevel writing has been clarified, it will be difficult to demonstrate the philosopher's commitment to the genre, much less to any specific type of multilevel writing. For the presence of stylistic devices associated with this type of writing in a particular author's works does not definitively resolve the question of the author's intention in thus composing them. Some of the hallmarks of multilevel writing—such as inconsistencies, contradictions, digressions, and silences where the reader expects a lengthy discussion—can be deliberate or inadvertent; and even when deliberate, they may be the result of a variety of circumstances surrounding a work's construction. For example, Averroes explains the presence of contradictions within a single book of Aristotle in terms of a teacher's need to make use of "imprecise, provisional assumptions" in the early stages of instruction, even when he intends to offer a more thorough and consistent discussion subsequently. "For, it is easier to lead the student from what is commonly accepted to what is true than to have him

<sup>17</sup> Rosenthal (1968), p. 432; contrast Madkour (1963), p. 453.

<sup>18</sup> Rosenthal (1955), p. 158.

<sup>19</sup> Pines (1963), p. 1xxxvi.

<sup>20</sup> Pines (1963), p. 1xxix.

attack the heart of the matter at once."<sup>21</sup> Likewise Alfarabi's discussions of multilevel writing as he understood it to be practiced by some of his predecessors, especially Plato and Aristotle, must be examined, because to some extent they reveal his understanding of the character and purpose of philosophic discourse, the advantages of various modes of communication, and the contexts in which each is most fitting or effective. At the same time, it is not safe to assume Alfarabi adopted for his own use every practice he praises on the part of others, even other philosophers. That assumption would entail further, intuitively questionable assumptions, such as that there is a single proper method of philosophic discourse effective as well as desirable, whatever the epoch or the habits and experiences of an audience. The assumption of a single best mode is belied—at the very least, for Alfarabi—by the fact that Plato and Aristotle chose diametrically opposed styles of writing, each of which earned Alfarabi's praise.<sup>22</sup> Finally, it is even riskier to extrapolate from an author's approval of multilevel writing in the religious sphere to his own procedure. For, on its face, it would seem that a philosopher could have believed that Scripture admits of levels of interpretation, and viewed this as part of Scripture's excellence, without adopting its method himself. This is especially but not exclusively the case if the writer sees the ultimate end of Scripture as *different from the ultimate purpose of a philosopher who writes*.

The present chapter will examine Alfarabi's method of writing by first clarifying the concept of multilevel writing. Since the theories of multilevel writing adopted by Muslim and Jewish philosophers were an outgrowth, if not a continuation, of the Greek philosophical tradition, and since the main varieties of multilevel writing are represented in that tradition, it will be pedagogically useful to elaborate the concept through an analysis of two aspects of that tradition: the idea of exoteric writing as it appears in Aristotle's works and the development of the idea in the classical world in response to Aristotle.<sup>23</sup> A historical analysis is also recommended by the fact that important parts of Alfarabi's philosophy are presented through commentaries on Plato and Aristotle, and Alfarabi's understanding of the two earlier philosophers is premised, in part, on the belief that each practiced a species of multilevel writing. This belief of Alfarabi's has occasioned forceful and, at times, impassioned controversy

<sup>21</sup> Davidson (1969), pp. xx, 51.

<sup>22</sup> See Section B below.

<sup>23</sup> There was also a tradition of secret doctrines associated with Platonic philosophy that Alfarabi knew (see Section B below). For the case against the existence of secret Platonic doctrines, see Boas (1953), pp. 85ff. For the argument that such doctrines did exist, see Strauss (1946), pp. 326–347.

among academics and others.<sup>24</sup> Although the analysis that follows will not definitively resolve the question whether Alfarabi's belief about Plato and Aristotle was justified or whether he projected back onto classical philosophic texts a method of writing and interpretation more suited to the medieval philosophic tradition, the results are very suggestive.

The historical analysis of the concept of exoteric writing as it appears in Aristotle and his successors occupies the first section of this chapter. The second section discusses Alfarabi's understanding of the writing of Plato and Aristotle, concentrating on what he sees as their motive for choosing the methods they employed and the general defense he offers for some of their practices. His analysis of multilevel philosophic writing will then be contrasted with his theory of multilevel religious writing. The final section of the chapter will deal with the different approaches to reading and interpreting medieval philosophical texts suggested by the different kinds of multilevel writing.

#### A. ARISTOTLE'S *Exōterikoi Logoi* AND THE POST-ARISTOTELIAN TRADITIONS

The distinction between exoteric and esoteric works is not made by Aristotle.<sup>25</sup> We can conjecture that the distinction came to be attributed to him because he does speak of *exōterikoi logoi* (literally: exoteric speeches, arguments, or works); because some of his teachings are difficult to reconcile with others of his teachings; and, in the case of particular versions of the exoteric-esoteric tradition, because of mystical theories prevalent in the centuries after Aristotle's death. Several of the references<sup>26</sup> to *exōterikoi logoi* in Aristotle's extant works follow a pattern: Aristotle is about to embark on a discussion that builds on a distinction or classification that will not itself be examined.<sup>27</sup> For example, the definition of virtue presupposes the division of the soul into rational and irrational (*Nicomachean Ethics* I. 13); the distinction between art and practical wisdom presupposes the distinction between making and doing (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI. 4); the nature of the best regime depends on the nature of the best life (*Politics* VII. 1); the number and character of re-

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Burnyeat (1985).

<sup>25</sup> See *Eudemian Ethics* I. viii. 6 1217b22, where Aristotle distinguishes in passing between treatments *en tois exōterikois logos* and those *en tois kata philosophian* (sc. *logois*), i.e., discussions or arguments carried out philosophically. Aristotle never refers to esoteric speeches or arguments.

<sup>26</sup> The list is in Ross (1953), vol. 2, pp. 408–409 (commenting on *Metaphysics* 1076a28).

<sup>27</sup> Note, however, that in some instances Aristotle refines the distinction or classification with which he begins. See, for example, *Nicomachean Ethics* I. 13, esp. 1102a32, 1102b13, 1103a1–3. For the authorities that view *exōterikoi logoi* as referring to a distinction made elsewhere, see Dirlmeier (1969), p. 53.

gimes (*politeiai*) corresponds to the number and character of the possible types of rule (*Politics* III. 4); and the definition of virtue depends on the division of good things into goods of the soul and goods external to the soul (*Eudemian Ethics* II. 1).<sup>28</sup> In each instance Aristotle alludes to the discussion of an issue contained in the *exōterikoi logoi* and either explicitly or implicitly finds the earlier discussion adequate to serve as one of the starting points for the inquiry at hand.

Modern interpreters of the allusions to *exōterikoi logoi* in Aristotle's works can be divided into those who maintain that Aristotle has in mind other works or discussions of his own and those who see some or all of the passages as referring the reader to books or discussions outside the Lyceum.<sup>29</sup> In the latter case, exoteric could mean books or discussions of non-Peripatetic philosophers, conversations among educated but not philosophic men, or anything in between.<sup>30</sup> Among those who connect the *exōterikoi logoi* with Aristotle's own writings, opinion appears to be divided between those who see the reference as specifying books with a distinctive style and character (usually popular or nonscientific) and those for whom exoteric refers in a general way to discussions "elsewhere"—i.e., in other places. For example, Thomas Aquinas explains the *exōterikoi logoi* referred to in *Nicomachean Ethics* I. 13 as the discussion of the rational and irrational aspects of the soul presented in the *De Anima*.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, many modern interpreters view the *exōterikoi logoi* as referring to Aristotle's popular works in general or the lost dialogues in particular.<sup>32</sup> According to Aquinas's interpretation, in contrast, by "exoteric" Aristotle could mean his philosophic writings, and not simply or primarily his popular works.

Those who identify the exoteric discussions with a particular group of

<sup>28</sup> In *Nicomachean Ethics* I. 8, the division of goods is tripartite.

<sup>29</sup> See the discussions of this question in Gauthier & Jolif (1970), vol. 1, pp. 63–67; Dirlmeier (1969); Ross (1953), vol. 2, pp. 409–410; Moraux (1951), p. 167, n. 79; Zeller (1897), vol. 1, pp. 110–123; Grant (1885), vol. 1, pp. 398–409; Grote (1880), pp. 45–53. Simplicius *Physics* 695:28 (commenting on Aristotle *Physics* 217b31) equates the *exōterikoi logoi* with common and generally accepted opinions.

<sup>30</sup> For criticism of this view, see Dirlmeier (1969), pp. 53–55, and Zeller (1897), vol. 1, p. 115, n. 4, p. 121, n. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Aquinas *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* I. L. 19, C. 229. Aquinas says that Aristotle calls the discussion of the soul in the *De Anima* "exoteric" because "he wrote the book as an epistle to persons living at a considerable distance" (Litzinger), as contrasted with the lecture notes used in connection with the oral instruction of students. Aquinas says that alternatively "exoteric" may refer to discussions outside the scope of the inquiry in question.

<sup>32</sup> Bernays (1863), pp. 36–40; Zeller (1897), vol. 1, pp. 115–120; Ostwald (1962), p. 9, n. 17 (on *ta enkykliā*, which Ostwald connects with *exōterikoi logoi*). Cf. Grant (1885), vol. 1, pp. 401–404, and Grote (1880), p. 52, who believe Aristotle's popular writings in general are meant and not just his dialogues.

Aristotle's works that have not survived—either the dialogues well known in antiquity or the dialogues together with other works written early in Aristotle's career—themselves disagree as to the character of the lost works. Beginning from the observation that the teachings of the lost dialogues and early treatises seem, from the fragments in our possession and reports of their contents, to be at odds with the doctrines of the books in our possession, these commentators disagree as to the reason for the discrepancies. At bottom, the dispute is between those who attribute the discrepancies to a difference in style between the exoteric works and the surviving books and those who discern in the discrepancies a difference in substance. Those who attribute the differences to style argue that the exoteric writings represent a watered-down version of the doctrines or arguments contained in the philosophic works. The prose of the exoteric works, according to this view, was more accessible, less technical, and more polished—if not elegant<sup>33</sup>—than the prose in the scientific books we possess, because Aristotle designed them to be read by educated laymen familiar with Platonic philosophy, probably in a popularized version, or by beginners in philosophy.<sup>34</sup> In either case the relation of the exoteric works to the nonexoteric ones can be compared to the relation between elementary and advanced courses of study. Those who attribute the differences to substance, on the other hand, usually associate the exoteric works with the early, Platonic period of Aristotle's thought.<sup>35</sup>

To a large extent the controversy about the meaning of “exoteric” may be due to the vagueness of Aristotle's references to *exōterikoi logoi* noted above. In the most famous of the references, however, the antecedent is perfectly clear. This occurs in the section of the *Physics* where Aristotle is beginning to discuss the nature and attributes of time (*Physics* IV. 10 217b29ff.). “First we would do well [*kalōs echei*] to go over the perplexing points, using the *exōterikoi logoi*.” Aristotle proceeds to the kind of dialectical discussion for which he is famous: reviewing the pros and cons of a variety of ways of approaching certain questions presupposed by a

<sup>33</sup> According to Ross (1949), p. 15, Cicero's description of Aristotle's prose as a “golden stream” refers to the dialogues. Likewise Kerferd (1967), p. 152. Zeller (1897), vol. 1, pp. 106–108, connects Cicero's statement with Aristotle's early works, which were addressed to popular audiences. These may have included the dialogues, but were not limited to them.

<sup>34</sup> According to Stahr (1967), vol. 1, p. 322, Aristotle wanted “to come to an understanding with the public” (emphasis in original) because educated men were followers of Plato, and Aristotle wanted to “break ground for his newer philosophy by enlightening the public on certain practical points.”

<sup>35</sup> See especially Jaeger (1923). Gauthier & Jolif (1970), vol. 1, pp. 64–67, say that the difference between the exoteric and other works was one of both substance and style—style, because the exoteric works were addressed to the public, which, although informed, still required a “vulgarisation”; and substance, because the exoteric works reflect Aristotle's early views.

basic understanding of time, such as whether time is a being and whether time can be divided into parts.

The purpose of such dialectical discussions in Aristotle's works and their role in his philosophy as a whole has long been a subject of controversy. In the nineteenth century, George Grote connected Aristotle's procedure in *Physics* IV. 10 with his remarks about dialectic in the beginning of the *Topics* (I. 2 100b21, 101a25, 34–36, b2) and with the third book of the *Metaphysics* (III. 1 995a28ff.), arguing that “exoteric” in the *Physics* refers to the dialectical introduction to philosophy that Aristotle often extols.<sup>36</sup> Grote concluded that exoteric means extraneous to philosophy understood as “the didactic or demonstrative march” to truth.<sup>37</sup> Although outside philosophy proper and having recourse to popular opinion, such prephilosophic inquiries serve philosophy in that “numerous points are canvassed and few settled; the express purpose being to bring into full daylight the perplexing aspects of each.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, according to Grote, the *exōterikoi logoi* refer not to a substantive doctrine, but to a method—a method based on popular and other opinions, but without itself being popular, because it aims at learning from opinion the defects of opinion.<sup>39</sup> Grote's understanding is especially attractive because it is consistent with the circumstance that most of the passages where Aristotle uses the expression *exōterikoi logoi* refer to questions of definition and classification, i.e., to ideas inherently incapable of demonstration. A few more recent commentators have emphasized Aristotle's dialectical discussions of first principles and basic concepts as an integral part of the *philosophic* attempt to verify primary things, which, by their nature, are not susceptible of demonstrative proof.<sup>40</sup>

Many of the modern interpretations of Aristotle's *exōterikoi logoi* can be traced to ancient sources or have counterparts in those sources. Cicero (first century B.C.) identifies Aristotle's exoteric works with his writings in a popular style, and contrasts them with those that are “more carefully wrought” (Rackham) and in the form of notes or comments.<sup>41</sup> This, Cic-

<sup>36</sup> Grote (1880), pp. 46–48.

<sup>37</sup> Grote (1880), p. 52.

<sup>38</sup> Grote (1880), p. 53.

<sup>39</sup> Grote (1880), pp. 49–53. Similarly Dirlmeier (1969), pp. 52–53.

<sup>40</sup> See Wieland (1975); Weil (1975); and Aubenque (1961) on the centrality of Aristotle's dialectical method for his philosophy as a whole. Barnes (1975), pp. 77–87, argues that demonstration was intended to be a mode of exposition, not a method of investigation. For the traditional view, namely, that Aristotle considered dialectic a precursor of and significantly inferior to the activity of philosophy proper, see Solmsen (1968), p. 55, and Huby (1962), p. 72, n. 1, pp. 76, 79–80.

<sup>41</sup> *Commentarii*, according to Zeller (1897), vol. 1, p. 111, n. 5, refers to the strictly scientific (acroamatic) works, which were “continuous expositions.” See Grote (1880), p. 44, n. a (for Cicero *commentarii* refers to the “general heads—plain, unadorned statements of

ero acknowledges, sometimes gives Aristotle<sup>42</sup> the appearance of inconsistency, which is in fact illusory (*De Finibus* V. v. 12). Since the term "esoteric" is missing from the passage in Cicero, although the term "exoteric" appears and is written in Greek, it seems that "esoteric" was not at that time used to describe either Aristotle's works or the character of his discussions.

The earliest clear evidence of the view that Aristotle's works contain secret doctrines occurs in Plutarch (first and second centuries A.D.).<sup>43</sup> The context is an account of the decision by Philip of Macedonia to entrust Alexander's education to Aristotle. Three sections of the account are relevant to the question at hand: Plutarch's general remarks on the nature of Alexander's education; the text of a letter that Alexander is supposed to have sent Aristotle, rebuking him for committing his philosophy to writing; and a paraphrase of Aristotle's reply (*Alexander* VII. 3–5).<sup>44</sup> The passage describing Alexander's education is as follows: "It would appear, moreover, that Alexander not only received from his master his ethical and political doctrines, but also participated in those secret and more profound teachings [*tōn apporrētōn kai bathuterōn didaskaliōn*] which philosophers designate by the special terms 'acroamatic' and 'epoptic,' and do not impart to many" (Perrin) (*Alexander* VII. 3).

Although the terms "exoteric" and "esoteric" are missing, the implication of the contrast between the ethical and political doctrines, on the one hand, and the acroamatic teachings, on the other, is that certain doc-

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fact or reasoning, which the orator or historian is to employ his genius in setting forth and decorating so that it may be heard or read with pleasure and admiration by a general audience"). The earliest known catalogue of Aristotle's writings, which also dates from approximately this period, groups all the dialogues together, regardless of subject matter, instead of placing each dialogue near the other works devoted to the same questions. Moraux (1951), pp. 169–170, concludes from this that there is a high degree of probability that the tradition of viewing the dialogues as a separate category was well established in the first century B.C., although he notes that the author of the catalogue saw the fundamental division in Aristotle's writings as being between the exoteric and the more philosophic works, not between the dialogues and the more philosophic works. Cicero says that his source is Antiochus (of Ascalon) (*De Finibus* V. iii. 8). Both Moraux and Düring consider Cicero's account of his source plausible, and Moraux defends Antiochus as competent to discourse on Peripatetic philosophy as it was then generally understood. What remains, he warns, is to establish the fidelity of the author of the catalogue to Aristotle. Cicero refers to Aristotle's *exōterikoi logoi* in one other place, his *Epistolae ad Atticum*, where he says that Aristotle began each exoteric work with an introduction (*prohoemium*) (*Epistolae ad Atticum* IV. 16).

<sup>42</sup> And Theophrastus.

<sup>43</sup> For the secret teaching interpretation of Aristotle, see Düring (1957), pp. 432–436; Boas (1953), pp. 79–85; Moraux (1951), pp. 169–170; Zeller (1897), vol. 1, pp. 120–123.

<sup>44</sup> Both letters are summarized and then quoted by Gellius (second century A.D.), who cites Andronicus as his source. These passages are printed in Düring (1957), pp. 431–432. According to Düring the letters are a "more or less verbal quotation" from Andronicus.



trines, especially those of practical philosophy, are imparted to people in general, whereas other philosophic teachings are reserved for the few. In the same period as Plutarch, Gellius explicitly contrasts Aristotle's exoteric and acroamatic works—a distinction repeated by several later writers. As was the case with Plutarch, the use of "exoteric" by Gellius seems to be associated with particular subject matters: the exoteric works are devoted to rhetorical exercises, argumentative ability,<sup>45</sup> and politics; in the acroamatic, "a more profound and recondite [*remotior subtiliorque*] philosophy was discussed, which related to the contemplation of nature and dialectic discussions" (Rolfe) (*Attic Nights* XX. v. 2–3).

On the basis of Plutarch and Gellius we can say that by the second century A.D. the distinction between exoteric and nonexoteric was connected with the division of philosophy into theoretical and practical, with specific logical topics treated in one or the other manner. Practical philosophy and certain areas of logic were considered exoteric, or at least it was thought that the doctrines associated with them should be communicated in a popular way. Theoretical philosophy and other aspects of logic, it was believed, should not be expressed with an eye to the general public. Like Plutarch and Gellius, Cicero linked practical philosophy to the exoteric-nonexoteric distinction, although with a different effect. In *De Finibus* V. v. 12 the study of the highest human good is presented as having been communicated by the Peripatetics in *two* ways, one popular or exoteric and the other "more carefully wrought." The implication is that the other subdivisions of philosophy and logic were always communicated in the latter, less popular fashion. In the case of Plutarch and Gellius, particular subject matters invite distinct modes of exposition. Their view makes sense if practical philosophy is intrinsically less philosophic than theoretical philosophy or if the practical end—action with a view to happiness or living well—dictates that the mode of exposition be popular. The Ciceronian account of the practice of the Peripatetics may suggest that in their view neither of the two aspects of practical philosophy could be simply subordinated to the other, i.e., that theory and practice were both necessary to achieve practical philosophy's larger purpose.

The major difference between Cicero's account and that of the two later authors is that for the later authors the doctrines of the acroamatic works are clearly depicted as secret or hidden. Plutarch's account of the correspondence between Alexander and Aristotle reinforces the view that his reference to acroamatic teachings is to secret doctrines. According to Plutarch, in Alexander's letter to Aristotle, the Greek conqueror reproaches the philosopher for having made his acroamatic teachings (*tous*

<sup>45</sup> Translating *facultas argutarum* as "argumentative ability." Rolfe has "logical subtlety"; Düring (1957), p. 432, has "good literary style."

*akroamatikous tōn logōn*) public, on the ground that once they become common property (*koinoi*), Alexander will no longer be superior to other men. The conqueror adds that as far as he is concerned, superiority means superiority in the highest things (*ta arista*) and not merely superior power. Plutarch depicts the philosopher as replying that Alexander need not worry: "Know that [the *akroamatikoi logoi*] have been both made public and not made public [*kai ekdedomenous kai mē ekdedomenous*], since they are only comprehensible to those who have heard me."<sup>46</sup> There follows the comment that "in truth his treatise on metaphysics is of no use for those who would either teach or learn the science, but is written as a memorandum [*hupodeigma*] for those already trained therein" (Perrin) (*Alexander VII*. 4–5).

The usual interpretation of works "at once made public and not made public" has been that they contain a hidden as well as a literal meaning. George Boas and Ingemar Düring argue against the usual interpretation on the grounds that Plutarch's final comment about Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as a memorandum constitutes an alternative and better explanation.<sup>47</sup> For a memorandum written for initiates, if both technical and elliptical, might appear both to convey and to suppress information. It would provide key words and propositions to people well acquainted with the subject and be meaningless or appear garbled to all others.<sup>48</sup> In either case, Plutarch represents a departure from his predecessors in that "exoteric" no longer refers to a distinct group of writings. Rather, in Plutarch can be seen the first expression of a notion that became axiomatic in medieval times, namely, that one and the same work is both exoteric and esoteric, depending on how it is read and understood.

In a passage in the *Vitarum auctio* of the second-century satirist Lucian, the doctrine of a secret teaching is associated with Aristotle in an unambiguous way. The setting is a parody of a slave market where philosophies are for sale in the form of handsome young men. A Pythagorean, a Cynic, a Heraclitean, a Socratic, and a Stoic have so far commanded good prices. The owner has a Peripatetic brought out. The hawker cries to the buyers gathered round, "Come and buy the one with the most understanding,

<sup>46</sup> On the contrast between *ekdedomenoi* and *mē ekdedomenoi* in Aristotle, see Zeller (1897), vol. 1, p. 108, n. 3 (the contrast is between published or made public and not published or made public, and not merely between already published and not yet published, or between works published by Aristotle and works published by others).

<sup>47</sup> Düring (1957), p. 429; Boas (1953). Boas also argues that the so-called evidence of a secret teaching tradition has been misinterpreted. In contrast, Düring finds that a secret teaching tradition did in fact exist, but argues that the tradition misunderstood Aristotle. Likewise Moraux (1951), pp. 169–170; Zeller (1897), vol. 1, pp. 120–121; and Grant (1885), vol. 1, pp. 399–400, deny the plausibility of the secret teaching doctrine, but not its existence.

<sup>48</sup> See the discussion of Alfarabi's account of philosophic writing in Section B below.

who knows absolutely everything!" A potential buyer inquires, "What's he like?" "Moderate, decent [*epieikēs*], and adaptable to life," comes the reply. "Moreover," boasts the hawker, "he's double." "What do you mean?" asks the perplexed buyer. "He appears to be one thing on the outside and another on the inside. So if you buy him, remember to call the one 'exoteric' and the other 'esoteric'" (*Vitarum auctio* XXVI). This seems to be the earliest use of "esoteric" to designate the nonexoteric Aristotle. Yet because the work is a satire and because throughout Lucian chooses only the most obvious doctrines of each school to ridicule, it would appear that Aristotle was already well known as a purveyor of secret doctrines. Despite Boas's and Düring's arguments against counting the authors mentioned thus far as witnesses for the prevalence of this view, the reference in Lucian suggests that the doctrine of a secret teaching was established by the second century.

Among the late Greek commentators, Themistius, Olympiodorus, Elias, and Simplicius all raise the question of a secret teaching in connection with Aristotle. Of these, Themistius believes that the esoteric level is not only obscure, but deliberately so.<sup>49</sup> According to Olympiodorus and Elias, Alexander of Aphrodisias claimed that the esoteric teaching is not merely different from the exoteric because it is more advanced; rather, the exoteric teaching is simply false and the esoteric teaching is the simple truth.<sup>50</sup> Ammonius mentions this interpretation of the two levels in Aristotle's works without naming Alexander as the source.<sup>51</sup> All three authors make clear their disagreement with Alexander's interpretation of Aristotle and put forth the view that exoteric works differ not in doctrine, but in their simplified exposition and more eloquent style. Düring conjectures that the view these commentators attribute to Alexander stems from a misunderstanding of something Alexander is likely to have said, namely, that the teaching in Aristotle's exoteric works cannot be equated with Aristotle's own views. The hypothetical statement, Düring argues, could have been prompted by Alexander's belief in the elementary-advanced version of the exoteric-esoteric distinction as easily as by the secret teaching version. Because we do not possess the disputed statement of Alexander, because no other passages in Alexander repeat this point of view, and because he holds that the attribution of a secret doctrine to Aristotle is nonsense, Düring concludes that these late Greek testimonials to Alex-

<sup>49</sup> 26 *Oratio* 319D (= 385–386 Dindorf). This passage and its context (319–320) are quoted in Düring (1957), p. 435. The passage is noted by Boas (1953), p. 84, n. 6, as evidence against his thesis.

<sup>50</sup> Olympiodorus *Prolegomena* 7:6–21; Elias *Categories* 114:18–115:13. The passage in Olympiodorus is quoted in Düring (1957), p. 438.

<sup>51</sup> Ammonius *Categories* 4:18–27.

ander's understanding of Aristotle's method of writing should be discounted.<sup>52</sup>

### B. ALFARABI AND PHILOSOPHIC MULTILEVEL WRITING

In Alfarabi's works the division made in antiquity between a philosopher's popular and philosophic treatises is superseded by the theory, foreshadowed in Plutarch of single works admitting of levels of interpretation. There is, however, a unique reference in Alfarabi's corpus to separate works that Aristotle apparently wrote with the sole purpose of popularizing philosophical ideas. The contents of these books Alfarabi labels "exoteric philosophy" (*al-falsafah al-khārijah*) (*Jadal* 37:6–7/203r19–v2). It appears from the passage that Alfarabi does not know these books themselves; he knows of them from references to them in the works of Aristotle or others that he did possess. However, no mention is made of special books devoted to exoteric philosophy in *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*, which presents itself as a description of the totality of Aristotle's philosophy (*Aristūṭālīs* 59:2–3). This omission can be explained by the fact that Alfarabi considered exoteric philosophy to be primarily a species of religion rather than a species of philosophy (see *Sa'ādah* 90:10–21/40:9–19, 94:7–10/44:6–9).<sup>53</sup> Like other kinds of religion, it instills in people beliefs about subjects for which wisdom or science is available. Exoteric philosophy differs from other species of religion in that it provides true opinions, whereas most religions contain a mixture of images and true opinions or even images and generally accepted but false opinions. To achieve their ends, however, both employ persuasive and imaginative methods of instruction (*Sa'ādah* 90:10–14/40:9–13, 90:19–21/40:17–19). Mention of separate books devoted to exoteric philosophy is also missing in the list of Aristotle's works in *Qabl Ta'allum al-Falsafah* (*Ta'allum* 50:16–52:15). This omission cannot be explained in the same way as the omission in *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*, however, since the subject of the passage is Aristotle's books, not the parts of his philosophy, and it appears that Alfarabi intended the list to be exhaustive.

The dominant understanding of multilevel writing for Alfarabi is thus of works at once made public and not made public. Within this genre he

<sup>52</sup> Düring (1957), pp. 435–436.

<sup>53</sup> In *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* the expression for exoteric philosophy is *al-falsafah al-barrāniyyah*, although the Hyderabad edition has *al-falsafah al-b+\*rā'iyyah* (*Sa'ādah* 90:14/40:13). In *Kitāb al-Jadal* 37:5–6/203r19, Alfarabi uses the expression *bi'l-falsafah al-khārijah wa'l-barrāniyyah*. In translating this passage, Mahdi (1986), pp. 112–113, uses the expression "diffused" for *al-khārijah* and "public" for *al-barrāniyyah*. Contrast the use of *al-falsafah al-khārijah* in *Kitāb al-Burhān* 82:4–5/177r10–11 ("philosophy external to what human beings can do," i.e., philosophy not about human things).

distinguishes the method of Plato from the method of Aristotle. He conveys the contrast between them most clearly in the *Jam'*, a work devoted to harmonizing the apparent conflicts between Platonic and Aristotelian teachings.<sup>54</sup> Plato, we are told, eschewed committing what he knew to writing on the ground that the proper place for knowledge is not in books, but in “pure hearts and pleasing minds.” Then, as Plato’s knowledge increased, he became afraid of forgetting some of his discoveries, which would be increasingly difficult to recover as his wisdom grew.<sup>55</sup> So he decided to put what he knew in writing in the form of riddles and enigmas, in order that only worthy people would be able to detect his meaning and only as a result of study and effort (*Jam'* 5:23–6:5). Aristotle, apparently for the same reason as Plato, chose a deceptively straightforward style that served to conceal the subtlety and controversial character of his thought (*Jam'* 6:5–12). After an enumeration of some of the devices Aristotle used to achieve this end, Alfarabi concludes by quoting a letter Aristotle allegedly wrote in response to Plato’s accusation that Aristotle had made the sciences public. “Although I committed these sciences and the wisdoms contained therein to writing, I arranged them in such a way that only people with training will understand them, and I expressed them in such a way that only experts will grasp them” (*Jam'* 7:6–8).<sup>56</sup> Alfarabi’s partial catalogue of Aristotelian devices includes the following:

For example, in many of the syllogisms he advances for natural, divine, and ethical [subjects], his arguments omit the necessary premise. The commentators have pointed out where these occur. Alternatively, he omits [the name of] many of the authorities [to whom he refers]; or he omits one member of a pair, and limits himself to one member; . . . Alternatively, he mentions the two premises of some syllogism and follows them with the conclusion from another, or mentions the two premises of a syllogism and follows them with the conclusion from the necessary concomitants of these premises. . . . Alternatively, he enumerates the individual instances of something obvious at

<sup>54</sup> The full title is *Kitāb al-Jam' Bayn Ra'yay al-Ḥakīmayn Aflātun al-Ilāhī wa-Aristūṭālīs* (“The Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Wise Men: Plato, the Divine, and Aristotle”). On this work in general, see Fakhry (1965). For an extended discussion of the section of this work devoted to the difference between Plato’s and Aristotle’s methods of writing, see Mahdi (1986), pp. 104–109.

<sup>55</sup> Contrast Plato *Seventh Letter* 344e (“It cannot be that [a person] has written to assist his memory; there is no danger of a man forgetting the truth, once his soul has grasped it, since it lies within a very small compass” [Hamilton]). Alfarabi mentions Plato’s *Letters* in his catalogue of Plato’s works in *Falsafat Aflātun*, but he does not refer to this letter by name or describe its contents.

<sup>56</sup> On the practice in late antiquity of making up a correspondence between great men, see Düring (1957), pp. 433–434.

great length to display his unstinting, strenuous effort to be thorough, while he passes over something obscure without discussing it at length or giving it its due. Alternatively, he arranges, orders, and organizes the contents of his scientific books in a way that makes one suppose that this is part of his immutable nature. But if one contemplates his letters, one will find the discussions there constructed and arranged according to different [types of] format and order than are in those [scientific] books. (Jam' 6:10–7:3)

In the introduction to his commentary on Plato's *Laws*, *Talkhīṣ Nawāmīs Aflāṭun*, Alfarabi adds to the above description of Plato's writing the observation that Plato frequently combined unmistakable riddles and enigmas with simple, straightforward declarations, knowing the latter would be buried among and thus not easily distinguishable from the overtly cryptic remarks (*Nawāmīs* 4:10–16).<sup>57</sup> In short, according to Alfarabi Plato's writing is for the most part overtly ambiguous, although at times unexpectedly clear, whereas Aristotle's works display an untroubled surface that masks a complex interior. The works of both, then, conceal as they reveal, but the presence of concealment is revealed by Plato and concealed by Aristotle. As far as Aristotle's surviving works are concerned, therefore, Alfarabi saw as provisional the obvious and often conventional doctrines elaborated and apparently endorsed by the author.

Alfarabi refers to a number of reasons why the two Greek philosophers wrote works to be interpreted in different ways on different levels. His commentary on Plato's *Laws* begins with a reference to the philosopher's concern for physical safety. Alfarabi makes this point by telling the story of a pious ascetic who wanted to escape from a tyrannical ruler seeking to arrest him. The ascetic was able to flee by disguising himself as a drunken vagabond and appearing at the city's gate singing and playing a musical instrument. In response to the gatekeeper's query, he said in a joking manner, "I am so and so, the ascetic." Feeling sure that nothing could be further from the truth, the gatekeeper let him pass (*Nawāmīs* 4:1–9).

Alfarabi introduces his commentary to Plato's *Laws* with this tale, he informs the reader, because the ascetic's behavior provides an analogy for Plato's method of writing. Fearing that science would "fall into the hands of those who do not deserve it and be deformed, or fall into the hands of someone ignorant of its worth or who might use it improperly," Plato decided to write in the indirect manner previously described (*Nawāmīs* 4:10–21). The story of the ascetic is an obvious instance of persecution.

<sup>57</sup> On this passage in Alfarabi's *Nawāmīs*, see Strauss (1959), pp. 134–138, and Mahdi (1986), pp. 109–112. The implication of the account appears to be that philosophic truths can in principle be conveyed by being stated directly. For a different view, see below, this section. See also Mahdi (1986), p. 104.

However, Plato's fears for his writing, as reported by Alfarabi, are not necessarily connected with a concern for his own safety. Without the tale of the ascetic we might interpret Plato's twofold concern as directed toward the integrity of science or philosophy and the well-being of "insufficiently gifted or uneducated" readers who might suffer from an exposure to philosophy. With the tale as an introduction, the implication is that Plato feared that, as a result of their failure to understand philosophy's purpose and worth, readers reared with nonphilosophic beliefs, or the authorities charged with protecting such beliefs, would be likely to persecute philosophers.<sup>58</sup>

Alfarabi elaborates this point in his commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*, where he claims that a philosopher protects himself from the multitude (*al-jamhūr*) by disseminating some of the discoveries of philosophy in popular form, since people tend to despise what they find strange (*Jadal* 37:9–11/203v4–6, 37:18–38:2/203v17–19). At first the impulse to instruct the multitude is presented as part of the philosopher's natural affection for his fellow men; but Alfarabi soon indicates that popular philosophy ("fourth philosophy") is part of a trade of a portion of the good (*al-khayr*) for a portion of the goods (*al-khayrāt*) (*Jadal* 36:16–37:2/203r8–14). Although Alfarabi sees an increase in the philosophers' safety as one consequence of thus educating their fellow men, the philosophers' turn toward popular philosophy cannot simply be reduced to a strategy for ensuring the philosophers' preservation. For elsewhere Alfarabi suggests there is a spontaneous antipathy between philosophers and the adherents of religion, which is likely to be accentuated by the former meddling in the affairs of the latter (*Hurūf* No. 149, 155:1–18), and he warns that a truly virtuous person increases the risk of being harmed by attempting to reform the way of life of those around him (*Siyāsah* 101:14–16). Thus, the reasons Alfarabi advances for the philosophers' commitment to enlightening nonphilosophers are not entirely consistent.

Protecting oneself from possible or actual hostility on the part of those whose opinions or ways of life are threatened by the activity of philosophy is one motivation for constructing the surface of multilevel texts so as to disseminate certain kinds of myths among nonphilosophic readers. Another version of the identification of exoteric teachings with politically salutary myths stresses the moral and, possibly, the intellectual development of nonphilosophic readers. According to this view the conclusions of philosophic inquiry can harm laymen because they may undermine the layman's current beliefs without furnishing a replacement. The immediate effect of publicizing philosophic discoveries can be destructive be-

<sup>58</sup> Strauss (1952), p. 17, calls fear of persecution on the part of the philosophers "the most obvious and crudest reason" why they employ exoteric-esoteric writing.

cause, in the absence of the reasoning on which philosophic insights are based and without the commitment to a life of inquiry, a person could realize the falseness of his existing beliefs, yet fail to appreciate the significance of philosophic truths. To take a nonrandom example, it is far easier to grasp that philosophic doctrines about the soul prove conventional notions about heaven and hell false than to understand how a good life, or virtuous activity, constitutes the soul's reward and their opposites its punishment.

This concern with the well-being of nonphilosophers is to be found in Alfarabi's works as well. According to *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* a person confused after realizing the untenability of his fundamental beliefs may, as a result, seek and discover the truth, succumb to moral hedonism, or retreat into skepticism (*Madīnah* 280:13–284:12/70:16–71:21). Intellectual capacity and character together appear to determine the direction the life of such a person will take. On the basis of this passage, then, it is likely that Alfarabi had the possible intellectual and moral corruption of readers in mind when he offered as one reason for Aristotle's decision to write on several levels "clearing up any doubts that the student's nature is fit for instruction" (*Ta'allum* 54:5–6). Similarly, in the passage in the *Jam'* on the writing of Plato and Aristotle, Plato decides to commit philosophy to writing for his own edification; yet he favors the particular mode he chooses in order to hide his real thoughts from people at large and reveal them to the industrious and deserving (*Jam'* 6:1–5). There is thus a gap between Alfarabi's Plato's avowed purpose and the strategy he eventually adopts. For Plato could have reinforced his flagging memory without laboring to construct such carefully crafted works; he could have jogged his memory by making suitable abbreviated notes, without fear of enlightening anyone else should the notes fall into another's hands. Alfarabi's account of Plato's fears explains the form his writing took once the decision was made to construct works which would benefit a few, while harming no one. It does not explain the decision to enlighten the deserving.

In *Qabl Ta'allum al-Falsafah* Alfarabi gives as one of Aristotle's reasons for writing in a concealed fashion the need to train people's minds for the rigors of inquiry (*li-yarūd al-fikr bi'l-ta'ab fi al-ṭalab*) (*Ta'allum* 54:7). Alfarabi expands on this theme in two places, the *Kitāb al-Jadal* and his summary of Aristotle's philosophy, *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*. According to both works, the logical art that Aristotle had in mind for the mental training of the sort needed by an investigator is dialectic, that is, a method of argument usually but not necessarily employed in debates between two people that reasons deductively and with syllogistic necessity from generally accepted premises or inductively to generally accepted universal



statements (*Jadal* 13:5–8/187v7–11, 14:9–10/188r12–14, 25:13–15/195v7–10, 97:4/241v15–16).<sup>59</sup> The art of dialectic so understood

trains a person and prepares his mind for the certain sciences. It does this by habituating a person to investigation; by making known to him how an investigation takes place and how things should be ordered and statements arranged in an investigation so that he attacks the problem; by enabling his mind to grasp the middle term [of syllogisms] quickly; by making him capable of grasping quickly the syllogisms for any problem posed; by imparting to him the ability to oppose every opinion he hears or hears about and to grasp quickly the points that can be opposed in every statement advanced.<sup>60</sup> Thus, [the art of dialectic] habituates a person not to be persuaded by unexamined opinion, the dictates of the first thoughts that cross one's mind, first impressions, and a quick inspection, without close study and careful examination. (*Jadal* 29:18–30:3/198r17–v6)

So understood, dialectical training is not merely useful for philosophy; without training of this kind and the habit of investigation it creates, human beings cannot attain what is real (*al-ḥaqq*) and philosophy (*Jadal* 31:1–3/199r11–13, see 30:12–13/198v17–18). This is the reason Aristotle begins the treatment of every subject with dialectical arguments and with a dialectical investigation (*Jadal* 31:3–6/199r13–17).<sup>61</sup> And this is why Plato has Socrates advise Parmenides to train himself in dialectic as well as why Socrates proceeds to discourse dialectically with him (*Jadal* 31:6–12/199r17–v6). Training people's minds for inquiry thus means giving them experience in dialectical investigation so that they can then carry out dialectical investigations on their own.

Alfarabi explains at length in *Kitāb al-Jadal* the reason dialectical investigation must precede scientific or demonstrative investigation, that is, the reason dialectical investigation is part of philosophy proper. All objects of investigation, except the subjects of the mathematical sciences,<sup>62</sup> have a tendency to lead those who study them astray, because their material component causes them to exist with a wide range of frequently contradictory attributes (*Jadal* 32:11–34:4/200r9–201r16). One of the tasks of the philosopher is to probe such things characterized by contrar-

<sup>59</sup> For dialectical training by oneself, see *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs* 78:15–79:2.

<sup>60</sup> Reading *fī* with MS Teheran Malik 1583 instead of *wa-fī* with MS Bratislava No. 231, TE 41, and MS Hamidiyyah 812.

<sup>61</sup> Alfarabi here goes further than Aristotle in the claims he makes on behalf of dialectical training. According to *Topics* I. 2 (the chapter on which Alfarabi is commenting in the above quotation), training in dialectic makes it easier (*rhaion*) to grasp truth and falsehood (101a34–36). See note 40 above and note 63 below for dialectic in connection with grasping premises.

<sup>62</sup> And among the mathematical sciences, those that study physical objects have the same tendency (*Jadal* 33:20–21/201r7–8).

ies to the point of distinguishing their essential from their accidental properties. Because it is the character of dialectic to reason to either or both of a pair of contradictories, dialectic can deal with the contrariness inherent in nature in a way that demonstration cannot. With the rules of demonstration a philosopher can evaluate dialectical statements and proofs, thereby eliminating some of them and exposing their falseness. But the demonstrative rules cannot be applied until the contrariety inherent in the objects of investigation is itself exposed (*Jadal* 34:4–17/201r16–v14, see 31:14–32:10/199v12–200r9). Thus, Alfarabi also refers to dialectical investigation as the method of creating doubts (*tariq al-tashkik*) (*Jadal* 31:11/199v5, see 34:4–7/201r16–19, 34:17–19/201v14–16).

In *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs* Alfarabi develops the case for dialectical inquiry as a partner of demonstration in philosophic investigation. The theory of demonstration, as expounded in the *Posterior Analytics*, describes the requirements of scientific reasoning, but it fails to explain how one arrives at a demonstrative syllogism in the first place. Figuring out what demonstration is needed for a specific problem is “extremely difficult,” because it involves hitting upon the appropriate middle term (*Aristūṭālīs* 78:12–15). Dialectic can facilitate this process by making a person adept at constructing dialectical syllogisms, which can then be evaluated in light of the rules governing demonstrations, as set forth in the *Posterior Analytics*. What survives this test, whether propositions or arguments, can be reclassified from dialectical to scientific and incorporated into the certain sciences (*Aristūṭālīs* 78:6–12). In the case of deductive reasoning, then, dialectic’s utility comes from providing an indirect access to demonstrative truths. The dialectician turned investigator will have a large pool of arguments from which to extract demonstrations or which can be transformed into demonstrations through revision and refinement.

Much of the analysis of dialectic’s use for philosophy in *Kitāb al-Jadal* deals with the special problem of verifying self-evident or primary propositions—premises which by their very nature can never be demonstrated or proved syllogistically, but must be grasped through insight (*baṣīrah*) (*Jadal* 30:16–19/199r3–7). Difficulties arise because many, if not most, of the beliefs people hold as a result of childhood rearing appear to be of this sort. In point of fact, what usually happens is that people mistake generalities for universals and partial truths for pure ones (*Jadal* 21:18–22:6/193r11–19). Primary truths must, therefore, be screened to verify their status as primary truths. And dialectic is the only logical method equipped to differentiate truth from falsehood at the level of primary propositions (*Jadal* 30:19–31:3/199r7–13, 34:4–17/201r16–v14). It is thus indispensable for establishing the foundations of all thought as well as the axioms of particular sciences (see *Jadal* 35:14–21/202r17–v7).

The theme, then, of the passage in *Kitāb al-Jadal* just discussed is

mainly the elusiveness of certainty about primary truths rather than the elusiveness of the truths themselves. Primary truths are first grasped as generally accepted opinions or received on the authority of others (*Jadal* 19:6–13/191r17–v7, 28:9–11/197r19–v3, 31:14–16/199v8–10). Alfarabi's references to insight suggest that recognition of these truths occurs a second time through a more rigorous, yet still nondiscursive, process. Their precise origin, he concedes in his commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, is one of the enduring controversies of philosophy and science (*Burhān* 23:1–25:9/138v12–140r4). However, to use primary truths with confidence, we do not need to understand their origin, since we can speak with some clarity about the method of verifying such insights, once grasped. Dialectic, in short, is indispensable because of the critical faculties it develops; and those critical faculties, in turn, are necessary for testing and thereby verifying primary truths not amenable to proof.<sup>63</sup>

To acquire the art of dialectic, one must engage in dialectical question and answer. Only by continued practice can a person acquire the mental agility philosophical investigation requires (*Jadal* 39:11–12/204r12–13). One must practice by staging debates, even with partners who prize victory over learning, since the effect of competitiveness can be improved argumentative skills appropriate for serious inquiry (*Jadal* 39:3–40:8/204r1–v4). It is true that dialectical investigation can be carried out in isolation, but the enterprise is easier when people pool their resources (*Jadal* 45:6–10/207v9–14). Perhaps Alfarabi's final teaching is that expertise in dialectical debate with others is not only the best training for philosophy; properly understood, it exists for the sake of private philosophical inquiry (*Aristūṭālīs* 78:15–79:2). In any event, dialectic so conceived requires two participants with approximately the same talents and experience; through parity, the strengths of each will contribute to the improvement of the other (*Jadal* 40:8–15/204v4–13). When live confrontations are not possible, however, books can supply the requisite training in their stead (*Jadal* 25:13–16/195v7–11).

There are, then, nondefensive, philosophical reasons for choosing to write dialectically.<sup>64</sup> In light of Alfarabi's remarks about the nonphilosophical character of received opinions, however true, and his insistence on

<sup>63</sup> Aristotle seems to agree with Alfarabi about this use of dialectic. Although Aristotle at first says that dialectic is useful (*khērēsimos*) with respect to the premises of philosophy (*Topics* I. 2 101a25–26, 36–37), subsequently he says it is necessary (*anankē*) “to deal with [the ultimate bases of each science] through the generally accepted opinions on each point. This process belongs peculiarly, or most appropriately, to dialectic; for being of the nature of an investigation, it lies along the path to the principles of all methods of inquiry” (Forster) (*Topics* 101b1–4).

<sup>64</sup> For a comparable theory in relation to Maimonides, see Berman (1974), p. 164 and n. 33.

personal insight as a condition of philosophic certainty, an indirect mode of communication is dictated by the philosopher's responsibility to his readers. Were textbooks in geometry to serve as the model for philosophical treatises, they would create belief where they should promote understanding. The problem for a philosopher, given Alfarabi's views on education, is to construct books that provide the reader with practice in the dialectic presupposed by success in philosophical investigation. In the best possible case, a book will be so constructed that it can serve as a partner in inquiry for readers with a wide range of backgrounds or at different stages in their pursuit of specific subjects. Multilevel writing which "conceals as it reveals and reveals as it conceals" performs this service. In the last analysis, it originates less in the desire to exclude than from concern for the intellectual development of those who are inclined toward the truth.

### C. ALFARABI AND RELIGIOUS MULTILEVEL WRITING

It appears that the idea of exoteric doctrines with esoteric meanings first arose in the Islamic world in the religious sphere, both among those engaged in Qur'anic exegesis and among Islamic sects with mystical tendencies. Although the view of the Qur'an as having one meaning when taken literally and other meanings when subjected to interpretation was in no way universal, it was widely endorsed by philosophers and certain schools of theology and jurisprudence. Of course interpretation meant different things to each of these groups; and their efforts to penetrate to the deepest level of understanding were, as a result, made in accordance with different canons of interpretation.

To Alfarabi can be traced one of the major philosophic versions of the view that the Qur'an is an exoteric work, namely, the doctrine that religion is an imitation of philosophy.

Both comprise the same subjects and both give an account of the ultimate principles of the beings. For both supply knowledge about the first principle and cause of the beings, and both give an account of the ultimate end for the sake of which man is made—that is, supreme happiness—and the ultimate end of every one of the other beings. 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. (Mahdi) (*Sa'ādah* 90:15–21/40:13–19)<sup>65</sup>

Religion is an imitation of philosophy, in other words, because both seek to make known the same things and because the account of these things in philosophy is superior to the parallel account in religion. Because

<sup>65</sup> Compare *Kitāb al-Millāh* 46:22–47:17, where religion is subsumed under philosophy.

philosophic insights are often beyond the grasp of the layman, religion conveys those insights using vocabulary and concepts easy to understand or analogies with objects and events taken from ordinary men's everyday experiences. Religious doctrines, then, are imitations of philosophic truths designed to meet the needs while conforming to the intellectual abilities of people in general. Religion is popular in this sense.

The doctrine that religion is an imitation of philosophy entails viewing religious texts as exoteric statements because it assumes that philosophic truths provided the original insights which the prophet or founder of a religion then recast or else that awareness of philosophical truths is the ultimate goal of religious teachings. This raises the thorny problem of the extent to which and the manner in which imitations can be said to promote a grasp of what, in principle, they imitate. The notion of imitation implies a limit on the pool of images available for conveying a particular truth. It precludes the possibility that images—whether religious teachings or the literal meaning of multilevel philosophic texts—are simply arbitrary. There is a range of possibilities along a continuum, some “closer” and some “further” from what is being imitated (*Siyāsah* 85:14–18). The closer the imitation, the greater its resemblance to the original. The reflection of a person in a pool of water is in this sense closer to the living person than is the reflection in water of a statue of the person (*Siyāsah* 85:6–11). At the same time, the notion of imitation entails that no image—whether in poetic or prose form—is true in the strict sense that the original is true. Statements about the first cause of the universe illustrate this limitation of imitations well. We can say that the first cause is one or a unity in order better to understand something of its nature, although the first cause is not one in the same sense as a physical object is one. The attribute “one” in connection with incorporeal entities is an image, a reflection of the truth, without itself being true.

The thesis that imitations can be evaluated on the basis of their ability to lead people to the original ideas which they represent is also open to the objection that in some works Alfarabi presents proximity to truth as the goal of imitation, while elsewhere proximity to truth is only one, and not the decisive, variable determining the suitability of images. According to the passage in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* which advances the thesis that religion is an imitation of philosophy, religion “attempts to bring the similitudes of [the things it imitates] as close as possible to their essences” (Mahdi) (*Sa'ādah* 91:11/41:10–11). The images thus “represent the theoretical things that have been demonstrated in the theoretical sciences” (*Sa'ādah* 94:3–4/44:2–3, *Millah* 47:6–7). In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* Alfarabi lists three classes of praiseworthy imaginative impressions—those that promote the well-being of the rational, the irascible, and the appetitive faculties of the soul (*Fuṣūl* No. 56, 64:5–65:5). According to this classification, then, im-

ages can contribute to the development of men's minds as well as to their character; and they seem to be able to affect the rational faculty directly, not merely as a byproduct of improving men's morals. Finally, Alfarabi's theory of prophecy as some kind of interaction between the agent intellect and imagination may be seen as supporting a close connection between the original theoretical discoveries and the subsequent imaginative recasting of them. Something of this sort would seem dictated by the crucial distinction between a powerful imagination independent of rational control and a powerful imagination under the direction of reason.

The teaching of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, on the other hand, is that the *perfection* of an imaginative representation is distinct from its truth content or proximity to the original (*Siyāsah* 86:11–12).

Now if imitations are made equally well or are equal in having few or hidden controversial points, one can use all or any one of them indifferently. But if some are better than others, one should choose the imitations that have been made most perfectly and that have no controversial points at all or else have few or hidden controversial points. After that, one should choose the imitations closest to the truth [*al-ḥaqīqah*] and discard the rest.

(*Siyāsah* 86:17–87:4)

The implication is that the primary index of excellence in imitations is whether they “work,” i.e., whether they generate an image that grips the audience; and this, in turn, depends largely on how familiar the material used to create the images is to a particular audience (*Siyāsah* 85:17–86:4). When one must choose, therefore, between an image that is truly fitting and one that is effective, the former consideration must bow to the latter.

Examined in light of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, the doctrine that religion is an imitation of philosophy turns out to be more ambiguous than first appeared. Even *Tahṣīl al-Sa‘ādah*, where the doctrine is prominent and the integrity of religious imagery is most clearly proclaimed, offers by way of illustration images that are exceedingly remote from the things they are designed to imitate. Intelligibles are imitated by sensibles, metaphysical principles are represented by political counterparts, the ontological hierarchy among the beings is depicted by means of temporal and spatial sequences, and the classes of supreme happiness are portrayed by means of generally accepted and often illusory goods (*Sa‘ādah* 90:22–91:11/41:1–10). The Farabian dictum, with which the passage ends, that philosophy is prior to religion in time (*Sa‘ādah* 91:13/41:12), is thus meant to suggest philosophy's priority in nature. In short, the gulf separating the corporeal from the incorporeal epitomizes the limits of imaginative fidelity. To say that illusory goods are an image of the true human end, as demonstrated in theoretical science, is tantamount to admitting

the antithetical character of religion and philosophy. Alfarabi comes closest to making this opposition explicit in *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, in a section devoted to the relationship between religion and philosophy. The section is especially important because it occurs in a work that defends the thesis that religion is an imitation of philosophy and describes the events that will occur when the religion in question is actually based on “perfect philosophy” (*Ḥurūf* No. 149, 155:1).<sup>66</sup> According to Alfarabi, were such a religion to be transferred from the nation in which it arose to another nation, without the second nation being informed that its religion is an imitation of philosophy, two situations are likely to occur. The adherents of that religion will be hostile to true philosophy should the latter ever reach their nation, and the followers of true philosophy will be hostile to the adherents of that religion (*Ḥurūf* 155:1–10). If the relationship between that religion and philosophy were then made public (apparently by the founders of the religion in the first nation), the followers of philosophy would cease being hostile to the adherents of religion, whereas the adherents of religion would continue to oppose true philosophy (*Ḥurūf* 155:10–11). The conclusion is inescapable that because of the nature of imitation and imagery, religious doctrines, even in the best case, will be so different from philosophic teachings that they will be perceived by the philosophers themselves as antagonistic. To apply the principles for the construction of images suggested in *Tahṣīl al-Sa‘ādah*, we can conjecture that this genetic tale in *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* was intended to portray the natural opposition between religion and philosophy in graphic terms. If so, the gulf separating philosophic insights and the best imaginative reworking of them necessitates as one of its practical consequences an adversary relationship between religion and philosophy.

Why, then, does Alfarabi assert and develop the view that religion is an imitation of philosophy? The remainder of the passage in *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* just summarized provides one explanation. When philosophy is perceived as an enemy, the adherents of religion are likely to persecute philosophers. When forced to defend themselves, Alfarabi advises, philosophers should avoid attacking religion itself; they should confine their attack to the specific religious doctrine that philosophy is the enemy of religion. The view that religion is an imitation of philosophy, in other words, is designed to counter religious attacks on philosophy and philosophers without undermining religious teachings in general. As far as *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* is concerned, philosophic claims about the affinity between religion and philosophy appear to be practical and defensive in origin.

<sup>66</sup> Alfarabi also stipulates that the religion based on perfect philosophy uses images throughout or for the most part. This religion would not, then, seem to be the equivalent of what is elsewhere called exoteric philosophy.

The relationship between philosophy and religion is somewhat different in the case of one particular species of religion, namely, the one Alfarabi calls exoteric philosophy. As was noted above, exoteric philosophy is the religion of nonphilosophers who adhere to philosophic doctrines as a result of rhetorical persuasion.<sup>67</sup> Those who adhere to exoteric philosophy thus believe true opinions, in contrast to the members of other religions, who believe in images of philosophic teachings or a mixture of opinions and images. Alfarabi's purpose in referring to exoteric philosophy as a religion appears to be his desire to emphasize that from the perspective of philosophy, true opinion is opinion first and foremost and truth only secondarily and accidentally (see *Jadal* 28:14/197v6–7). This position is a consequence of his understanding that truth must be discovered to be possessed, whether through reasoning or personal insight (*baṣ-īrah nafsīh*) (*Jadal* 30:16–17/199r3–4, *Millah* 46:18–19). This is also the teaching of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, where Alfarabi first distinguishes three modes of grasping the core beliefs shared by all members of a political community of excellence: recognizing them as conclusions of demonstrations or through one's own insights, recognizing them as they really are but on the authority of others, and recognizing them by means of similitudes instead of as they really are (*Madīnah* 278:8–14/69:19–70:3). However, in the next paragraph he refers to these three modes as “two forms of knowledge” (*ma'rifatān*)—that of the wise man and that of the believer in similitudes (*Madīnah* 278:14–280:1/70:3–6). True opinions are, then, true, but those who possess such opinions must in the last analysis be considered believers and not wise men.

#### D. CONCLUSION

The idea of multilevel writing itself admits of levels of interpretation, depending on an author's ultimate purpose and the means employed to achieve the author's ends. Religious multilevel writing has as its primary purpose instilling in ordinary readers a set of beliefs that will shape their view of the world and man's place in it. It effects this through a variety of rhetorical and poetical devices, such as relying on analogies, whether appropriate or not; bypassing argument altogether when images are just as effective; and simplifying issues, even at the risk of distortion. The author of religious multilevel writing may intend to manipulate the believers he creates to further his own selfish ends; but he is just as likely to intend his handiwork to improve the way of life of his fellow men. Whatever the ultimate purpose, the hallmark of the surface of this kind of writing is the

<sup>67</sup> Above, p. 35.



creation of a feeling of satisfaction or confidence in people (*sukūn al-nafs*) about their opinions and beliefs.

As Alfarabi depicts them, philosophers who write have several goals. They seek to secure their own place in the community, improve if not reform the way of life there, and, above all, contribute actively to the intellectual development of those who are especially gifted. The first two activities are carried out by persuasive methods, often in much the same way as is done by the practitioners of religious multilevel writing. The last of these three activities, on the other hand, is possible only by means of the method of dialectic. The hallmark of the surface of this aspect of philosophic writing is reasoning on the basis of generally accepted opinions to both of a pair of contradictories. Such reasoning has a twofold effect. As noted above, it provides access to a grasp of the essences of things—in some cases, the only access, given the special obstacles to knowledge posed by the contrariness inherent in nature and the indemonstrableness of primary premises. Further, in consequence of furnishing equally persuasive accounts of opposing points of view, the art of dialectic destroys people's confidence in their own beliefs by heightening their awareness of the plausibility of alternatives. The second effect of philosophic multilevel writing, then, is creating perplexity (*Jadal* 34:14–17/201v10–14, 22:15–16/193v12–14, see 31:11/199v5, 34:5/201r17, 34:19/201v15–16).

To ascertain the character of multilevel texts, it is sometimes necessary to do more than identify the character of isolated arguments. For on occasion the art of dialectic will employ the same devices as are useful to the art of rhetoric, namely, in those cases where specific arguments or modes of argument are at once dialectical and rhetorical. Since the immediate objective of each art is to persuade, their distinctiveness will in those instances derive from the use to which persuasion is put. Religious multilevel writing persuades in order to soothe; dialectical philosophic writing persuades in order to unsettle. Using persuasive arguments, religious multilevel writing tries to present the reader with an apparent demonstration; in contrast, through carefully juxtaposed persuasive arguments, philosophic multilevel writing seeks to guide readers to their own discovery of the appropriate proofs. In short, the ultimate goal of philosophic multilevel writing is to provide those who wish to know with the passion, the tools, and the awareness necessary to engage in the arduous search for truth. For, in the best case, perplexity founded on a growing appreciation of the complexity of the phenomena will give way to insight on the same basis.

These differences in intention and method are responsible for a fundamental difference in the relationship between the surface and deepest meanings in religious multilevel texts and in that aspect of philosophic multilevel texts without a parallel in the religious variety, i.e., the dialectic.

tical inquiry directed toward the reader's intellectual development. To be sure, by virtue of being multilevel texts, the deepest meaning of each is different from its surface meaning, but this surface agreement masks a deeper disagreement. The preoccupation in religious multilevel writing with inculcating salutary opinions in ordinary readers leads the author of such texts to indicate the content—and sometimes even the existence—of the true teaching in ways that pose the least risk of disrupting the surface teaching. The consequences of subordinating the instructional function of such texts to their political purpose can best be seen by contrasting the religious variety of multilevel writing with one of the philosophic modes recognized in antiquity,<sup>68</sup> which intends the surface teaching to be an elementary version of the highly technical, philosophic doctrine beneath. The latter model, for which instruction is the primary and perhaps the sole purpose, implicitly presupposes an affinity between the outermost and innermost levels. Where the exoteric teaching is seen as primarily political, in contrast, the distinction between exoteric and esoteric is easily transformed from the distinction between popular and philosophic into the distinction between spurious and serious. The political, religious, or rhetorical mode, according to which the exoteric teaching is a “noble lie,” need not, yet tends to, go hand in hand with a theory of multilevel writing that stresses the polarity between the literal and hidden meanings.

Alfarabi's dialectical method of multilevel writing cannot be equated with the elementary-advanced philosophic model any more than it can with the religious model. On the basis of what we know from ancient testimony, the exoteric stratum of philosophic multilevel writing in the elementary-advanced mode merely furnished a rough replica of the underlying philosophic teachings. The exoteric layer does not appear to have embodied the impetus for and the means of progressing from the elementary to the advanced levels. As far as we know, in other words, the exoteric level was fundamentally static. The surface of Alfarabi's dialectical writing, on the other hand, is dynamic. It is the surface in Alfarabi's works that leads the reader to what lies beneath.

Another explanation of the differences between religious multilevel writing and Alfarabi's dialectical mode is possible: they may originate less in a disagreement about the ultimate purpose of multilevel writing than in a difference in judgment about the means to realize that end. According to this hypothesis, both modes seek first and foremost to enlighten those capable of attaining truth and only secondarily to promote the moral well-being of other people or to avoid being harmed by them. However, the religious mode presupposes that instruction can be realized successfully through the largely concealed methods associated with religious

<sup>68</sup> See Section A above (the doctrine that exoteric works are elementary or simplified versions of esoteric or technical teachings).

multilevel writing. Hence, the religious approach is able to proceed on the level of rhetorical arguments and still accommodate its ultimate purpose to a large extent. Alfarabi's dialectic, according to this hypothesis, is predicated on the belief that the inherent difficulties of instruction and inquiry force the writer, whatever the writer's fears for the ordinary reader, to labor toward the primary purpose relatively openly—as openly as the requirements of personal discovery permit. Both methods, in short, effect instruction indirectly; the rhetorical mode, however, proceeds indirectly because of the need to conceal, whereas the dialectical mode conceals because of the necessity to proceed indirectly.

Whatever the ultimate reason for the differences between the two modes of multilevel writing—whether a disagreement about ends or about means—a conflict between the two modes remains. An argumentative work dominated by investigative dialectic is at bottom incompatible with a purely persuasive work limited to rhetorical and poetic devices coupled with occasional allusions to true teachings. This conflict is most clearly visible when one addresses the problem of interpreting multilevel texts. There are, to be sure, some procedures common to the interpretation of both modes. First, the overall structure of a book, the order in which its chapters or other divisions are arranged, the juxtaposition of specific passages within a chapter, and even the order in which the premises of an argument are presented should be construed as implicit statements about the subject under discussion. The implicit statements should be identified and compared with the explicit discussion (or discussions) of the same subject. Repetitions should be examined for changes that alter the meaning of the initial formulation in decisive ways. The absence of particular words, assertions, or arguments where a reader versed in the subject would expect them should be taken as indicating an author's reservations about opinions apparently adopted in other treatises or in other parts of the same treatise.<sup>69</sup>

At the same time, belief in the polarity, affinity, or dialectical relationship between the levels of a multilevel work will affect the way a reader applies these general guidelines to specific textual problems. In particular, which of the views one holds will to a large extent determine the weight one assigns to conflicting pieces of evidence, the significance one attaches to omissions, the purpose one attributes to structural features and, hence, the inferences one makes on the basis of them. In other words, the rules of interpretation do not in and of themselves inform the reader when an omission is a "silent rejection" and when it is dictated by the focus of a particular passage or argument and is made good in another place.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Strauss (1946), p. 352.

<sup>70</sup> Strauss (1945), p. 358. See Butterworth (1975), pp. 120–121, (1977), pp. 25–26, for a more developed theory of how to interpret silence.

Some repetitions supersede previous formulations, others clarify, and still others furnish subdivisions subsumed under the initial, more general formulation.

Further, each of the several views of the nature of multilevel writing has distinctive principles of interpretation. For example, the reader who assumes a polarity between the surface and deepest teachings is likely to argue that pronouncements made "most frequently or more conspicuously" do not represent an author's real beliefs, or that "a hint . . . deserves to be taken more seriously than the most emphatic and frequently stated doctrines of [an author's] more exoteric works."<sup>71</sup> The reader who posits a dialectical relationship between levels is likely to be more concerned with the presence and validity of arguments than with frequency of assertions and to evaluate the various doctrines endorsed by an author on the basis of the rational defense provided for each (whether the defense takes the form of an explicit justification for a doctrine or the form of relevant doctrines and arguments advanced elsewhere in the author's works which can be brought to bear on the subject at hand). Again, the belief that one can uncover the deepest teaching of a work merely by discovering which of a pair of contradictory statements should be discarded or the belief that in the last analysis it will be proper to accept one of the author's statements *in toto* and reject the others<sup>72</sup> can be traced to an underlying conviction of a polarity between the levels of meaning. In contrast, the reader who assumes a dialectical method will begin by assigning each explicit doctrine, or each formulation of individual doctrines, approximately the same weight and then play them and their consequences off against one another, without the expectation that any one doctrine or formulation will prove entirely true or false. Again, the reader who believes in a polarity between literal text and inner meaning may well endorse the method of interpretation that has been dubbed "reading between the lines." Although Strauss, who popularized the expression, intended it as a metaphor,<sup>73</sup> the expression is unfortunate because it can lead to neglect of or even contempt for the literal text.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Strauss (1945), p. 375; Najjar (1964), p. 20 (Arabic Introduction). Compare Strauss (1945), p. 392, n. 99, where he infers the importance of certain terms from their frequency in the text.

<sup>72</sup> Berman (1965), p. 410; Strauss (1945), p. 369 (1952), p. 59. This view appears to be implied by Twersky's use of the expression as a "split-level composition" (Twersky 1966, p. 556).

<sup>73</sup> Strauss (1952), p. 24. He also cautions that "only such reading between the lines as starts from an exact consideration of the explicit statements of the author is legitimate." Elsewhere he observes about one of Alfarabi's books that it is "doubtful . . . whether it would be wise of us to attach great importance to its explicit argument" (Strauss 1945, p. 359).

<sup>74</sup> Strauss (1952), p. 52, speaks of the "art of revealing by not revealing, and of not revealing by revealing." Najjar (1964), p. 20 (Arabic Introduction), says that for the most part

The interpretation of Alfarabi's writing as fundamentally dialectical rather than rhetorical, as animated primarily by the desire to enlighten and only secondarily by fear of persecution, and as relying on mutually dependent rather than polar levels of meaning finds an analogue in Maimonides' account in the *Guide of the Perplexed* of the Solomonic as against the Rabbinic approach to interpreting Biblical parables. Biblical parables, like religious texts in general and multilevel philosophic works, admit of literal and hidden meanings. According to the Rabbinic method of interpretation, the act of discerning the real meaning of a text of the Torah is analogous to recovering a pearl dropped in a dark and cluttered room. To find the precious gem, one must light a candle, itself worth nothing. Similarly, the exoteric meaning of a parable is worth nothing; yet it enables a person to grasp the precious inner meaning (*Guide* 6:25–7:15/16:4–17:5). Maimonides follows this description of the interpretive method of the Rabbis with a saying of Solomon: A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver (Proverbs 25:11). According to Maimonides, this dictum refers to parables, and it means that a well-constructed parable has two meanings, which can be compared to a golden apple and the silver filigree casing that surrounds it. Because the holes in the filigree are extremely small, the silver casing obscures the existence of the golden apple inside to distant or inattentive people at the same time that it directs the attention of careful observers to the golden apple's existence (*Guide* 7:15–8:3/17:6–21). Solomon's saying, as interpreted by Maimonides, thus differs from the Rabbis' Midrash in its evaluation of the worth of the exoteric meaning of parables. Although inferior to gold, silver is itself valuable: weighed in its own right—not to mention when compared to a candle of wax—it is worth a great deal.<sup>75</sup> Further, after lighting a candle, one looks away from the flame. Accordingly, the exoteric meaning is presented as ultimately worthless. In contrast, after per-

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“the philosopher means what he does not say and says what he does not mean.” The understanding of Alfarabi as a dialectical writer first and foremost accepts the first half of such statements while rejecting the second half.

<sup>75</sup> Against this interpretation of the passage is the fact that Maimonides cites “promoting the well-being of communities of men” as one instance of the worth of the exoteric meaning of parables. He thus seems to agree with those who deny the philosophic content of exoteric statements. If so, then the formulation of exoteric teachings in terms of silver would not elevate them from the political to the philosophic realm; at best, the Solomonic formulation would differ from the Rabbinic mainly in the dignity it ascribes to what is politically useful. And given the peculiar subject that occasions Maimonides' reflections (speeches susceptible of literal and hidden meanings), the reader would have to consider the possibility that Maimonides' correction of the Rabbis is a criticism of the rhetoric and not the substance of their remarks. If people's awareness of the exoteric-esoteric distinction is potentially disruptive to society, then one should indulge in whatever noble lies are necessary to defend the integrity of exoteric teachings. According to this line of argument, no significance should be attached to the identification of popular teachings with silver instead of wax.

ceiving a glimmer of gold beneath the filigree, one must look through the filigree to see the object beneath. In the latter case, then, the exoteric meaning itself leads the careful observer to the inner meaning and always remains a reflection of that meaning.

The question then becomes, does the thesis that the exoteric meaning of parables—and by implication the surface meaning of philosophic texts written on several levels—consists in politically salutary beliefs or simplified true opinions do justice to the Solomonic correction of the Rabbinic method of interpretation? The silver filigree imagery would seem to indicate some kind of cognitive role for the exoteric meaning, whatever its practical function. Maimonides' exact words are that the exoteric meanings constitute wisdom useful in many respects, *among which (min jumlatihā)* are the well-being of communities of men (*Guide* 7:29–8:1/17:19–20). In other words, in this passage of the *Guide of the Perplexed* Maimonides suggests that political well-being is not the exclusive beneficiary of the effect of exoteric formulations. Further, the hypothesis that the exoteric meaning acts as some kind of cognitive forerunner of ultimate theoretical insights gains in force from the fact that it is compatible with Maimonides' characterization of the exoteric meaning in terms of silver, his depiction of the exoteric meaning as access to the inner meaning, and his portrayal of the exoteric meaning as exhibiting roughly the same form as the inner meaning.

There is little doubt that some of those who write in the religious multilevel mode, whether philosophers or not, intend to “reveal the truth to those able to understand by themselves.”<sup>76</sup> In contrast, those who choose the dialectical mode appear to be less sanguine about the prospects for gifted people if left to their own resources. The possibility should also be considered that the explicit claims about secrecy made by some philosophers who appear to engage in the religious mode of multilevel writing are exaggerated, that is, that these claims are part of the rhetoric of the works. This possibility should be considered, not out of perversity, but as a consequence of taking these works on their own terms. For if all the literal teachings are suspect, then an author's professions on the subject of concealment should be considered provisional as well. One might, then, discern as separate species of philosophic writing in the religious mode the method of Avicenna, who advocates keeping the existence of concealment secret, and the method of Maimonides, whose discourse on the secret character of the *Guide of the Perplexed* still rings loud and clear.

<sup>76</sup> Strauss (1952), p. 94. This phrase is meaningful in the context of the dialectical interpretation of multilevel writing also. In the latter context, however, it refers not to the absence of guidance but to personal discovery—in other words, to the ability to reach certain insights on one's own, as a result of instruction or guidance by others.

The chapters which follow examine three of the most fundamental questions addressed by Alfarabi in his political works: the nature of happiness and perfection, especially the role of theory and action as elements of human excellence in the highest case; the qualifications of rulers of excellence, in particular the contribution of both theoretical and practical wisdom to the formation of practical judgments; and the kind or kinds of political orders that make possible a political community of excellence. Throughout the assumption is that both rhetorical and dialectical modes of exposition are present in Alfarabi's treatises and that the former are subordinated to the latter. As a consequence of this assumption, the initial procedure will be to examine all the Farabian doctrines advanced and developed in connection with the above themes with equal care, including both members of obvious contradictions. This will entail pulling together Alfarabi's various treatments of each theme, so as to demonstrate at the outset the seriousness with which Alfarabi views doctrines that may be dismissed as exoteric by one or another school. The bulk of each chapter will be devoted to analyzing and evaluating the positions thus established. This will be followed by an effort to resolve the contradictions explored or, when appropriate, an indication of conflicts without resolution. The final chapter treats the most intractable problem of Farabian exegesis, that of the character and purpose of his parallel works—one of the most conspicuous examples of repetition and reformulation to be found in medieval literature.

## Chapter II

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### THE PROBLEM OF HAPPINESS

First, we should say that wisdom and practical wisdom are necessarily choiceworthy in themselves, even if neither one of them produces anything, since each is the excellence of a part of the soul.

—Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* VI. 12

PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY<sup>1</sup> has been variously defined as knowledge that culminates in action, the investigation into what is human or subject to volition and art, and reasoning about contingent beings and events. Although Alfarabi refers to these definitions and sometimes presents them in his own name, he prefers to characterize practical philosophy in terms of its most significant theme, a theme implicit in the above definitions.

Practical philosophy is not what investigates everything subject to human control, in whatever manner or condition it occurs. After all, mathematics investigates many things that tend to be the product of voluntary action—for example, the science of music, the sciences of military strategy, and much of the contents of geometry, arithmetic, and the science of optics. Likewise, natural science investigates many things that result from art or volition. Yet not one of these sciences is part of political science. Rather, they are parts of theoretical philosophy, since they do not inquire into these things from the perspective of what is base or noble, nor from the perspective of what makes human beings happy or miserable when they do them. When, however, the objects of inquiry in these arts are taken up from the perspective of the human happiness or misery that results from doing them, they belong to practical philosophy. (Jadal 69:10–18/224r3–12)

Concern with happiness and misery, in other words, constitutes the most revealing measure of practical as against theoretical philosophy. Will and choice are also principles of practical philosophy (*Risālah*

<sup>1</sup> The division of philosophy into theoretical and practical is usually attributed to Aristotle, who divided all “thought” (*dianoia*) into theoretical, practical, and productive (*Metaphysics* VI. 1 1025b26) and distinguished theoretical and practical aspects of reason (*logos*) (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI. 1 1139a5–14). For the history of this interpretation of Aristotle, see Zeller (1897), vol. 1, pp. 180–190. Note the use of the term *hē peri ta anthrōpina philosophia* (*Nicomachean Ethics* X. 9 1181b15).



227:21–22, *Hurūf* 67:17–18). However, they appear to be derivative principles, since “choice” means choosing happiness and the means to it (*Jadal* 70:1–3/224r18–20). The ultimate end of practical philosophy according to Alfarabi is not simply doing what is good, becoming good, or even doing what leads to happiness. The ultimate end is being happy as a result of conducting oneself in this manner (*Jadal* 69:7–9/223v20–224r2).

It is exceedingly difficult to determine with certainty Alfarabi’s philosophic understanding of the nature of happiness. The three alternative understandings of happiness that he appears to have considered seriously are happiness as theoretical activity exclusively, as political activity exclusively, and as a combination of theoretical and political activity in which the theoretical and practical aspects are both part of the essence or defining structure of happiness. Happiness understood as theoretical activity exclusively can be consistent with a view of happiness that admits a plurality of human goals as long as the other goals are seen as desirable for the sake of theoretical activity. Thus, the moral and other practical virtues could be necessary for human happiness thus conceived, but only insofar as they are instrumental and, therefore, subordinate to theoretical excellence. Similarly, the view of happiness as exclusively practical could be consistent with viewing theoretical activity as necessary or desirable because of its utility for promoting practical excellence. The understanding of happiness as comprehending both theoretical and practical activity (hereafter the “comprehensive” understanding of happiness) differs from either of the previous alternatives in that the theoretical and practical components of happiness are both constitutive of happiness, i.e., part of its essential nature. Thus, although theoretical excellence according to this understanding could still be acknowledged as being of a higher order than moral virtue or any other type of practical excellence, practical excellence could not be sacrificed without limit in the name of the higher-ranking good. According to the comprehensive understanding of happiness, in other words, the specific human end would consist in a combination of excellences: to attain happiness<sup>2</sup> one can never lose sight of its dual character.

Happiness understood in terms of theoretical activity has long been identified with the philosophy of Aristotle,<sup>3</sup> although recent scholarship

<sup>2</sup> “Happiness” is the translation of *sa’ādah*, which is the Arabic equivalent of the Greek *eudamonia*. *Sa’ādah* has sometimes been translated as “felicity,” to distinguish it from popular, subjective notions of happiness. “Human flourishing” is the translation that Cooper (1975), p. 89, gives to *eudamonia* in Aristotle’s writings, on the grounds that “happiness” connotes a “subjective and psychological state, and indeed one that is often temporary and recurrent.” I use “happiness” and “flourishing” interchangeably to translate *sa’ādah*.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* X. 7 1177a12–18, 1177b27–28, 1178a6–7; see I. 7

has focused on the presence in Aristotle's ethical writings and in the *De Anima* of conflicting accounts of happiness, one purely contemplative and one comprehending both theoretical and practical activity as constitutive elements.<sup>4</sup> For Plato the highest end of man also appears to consist in the life of inquiry. In the *Republic*, however, Plato's philosopher, unlike that of Aristotle, is presented as actively engaged in founding the best regime. Although this aspect of the *Republic* might appear to reflect a disagreement between Plato and Aristotle as to the importance of political activity for being human, Plato portrays the founding of the best regime as a return to the cave, an undertaking the philosopher embarks upon reluctantly. The philosopher's reluctance may suggest that the philosopher's political activity is extraneous to his perfection or is not instrumental to achieving it, and, possibly, may detract from its attainment or enjoyment. If the philosopher's political activity is so understood, there may be little or no disagreement between Plato and Aristotle as regards this issue, although Plato's image of the philosopher's descent to the cave is too obscure and controversial to admit of a definitive interpretation. Alfarabi's consideration of the two alternatives that elevate practical excellence to an essential role in the attainment of happiness would thus appear, on its face, to constitute a departure from the doctrines traditionally associated with his two Greek predecessors.

As a consequence of the appearance in Alfarabi's writings of the three alternative portraits of happiness enumerated above, commentators have reached conflicting interpretations of his understanding of the end of man. T. J. de Boer, Majid Fakhry, Fauzi Najjar, and Leo Strauss take the view that for Alfarabi man's highest perfection is purely theoretical and that moral considerations are introduced in the name of this higher activity.<sup>5</sup> De Boer explicitly subordinates moral virtues to theoretical activity.<sup>6</sup> Fakhry, on the other hand, speaks of moral, intellectual, and artistic virtues as means to the end of man.<sup>7</sup> He does not, however, appear to mean

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1098a16–18. For a discussion of the controversy over the relationship between this passage and Aristotle's theory of intellect as presented in the *De Anima*, see Gauthier & Jolif (1970), vol. 2, pp. 873–874.

<sup>4</sup> See Roche (1988); Heinaman (1988); Cooper (1975), chaps. 2–3; Ackrill (1974); Nagel (1972); Hardie (1968), chaps. 2, 16, (1965); Gauthier & Jolif (1970), vol. 2, pp. 542–547; and the works cited by these authors. According to some of these authors, the tension between the two portraits of happiness contained in Aristotle's writings is superficial or is ultimately capable of resolution.

<sup>5</sup> De Boer (1967), pp. 120–122, 124–126; Fakhry (1983), p. 123; Najjar (1958), pp. 96, 100–102; Strauss (1945), pp. 366–371, 378–381.

<sup>6</sup> De Boer (1967), pp. 118–119.

<sup>7</sup> Fakhry (1983), pp. 123–124. Fakhry also notes that Alfarabi portrays the union of theoretical and practical philosophy as essential to human happiness according to the philosophy of Aristotle and that this doctrine of Aristotle's was adopted by subsequent Muslim

that all three are constitutive elements of happiness. Rather, since he sees ultimate happiness as attaining, or seeking to attain, a certain type of transcendent existence (which medieval Islamic philosophers often described in terms of human beings or the human soul or mind attaining the immateriality of certain rational forces or transcendent “intellects”),<sup>8</sup> Fakhry sees all the virtues, including the intellectual virtues, as stages in the development of the ultimate human potential.

Other commentators have argued that Alfarabi’s emphasis on the political function of philosophy reflects his belief that the ultimate human good encompasses practical as well as theoretical perfection or even practical perfection first and foremost.<sup>9</sup> Within this group, Lawrence Berman takes the extreme view that for Alfarabi, as for his disciple Maimonides, the obligation to “imitate God” refers specifically to the task of founding an ideal political community, not to contemplation or a combination of contemplation and moral or political activity.<sup>10</sup> Although Fazlur Rahman does not discuss the issue in these terms, support for the comprehensive view of happiness can be deduced from two doctrines that he attributes to Alfarabi: the belief that the prophetic mind is the end of the noetic development<sup>11</sup> and the view that legislation, defined as a “religio-social mission,” is an integral part of the prophet’s office.<sup>12</sup> In his “Translator’s Introduction” to Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, Shlomo Pines seems to concur, maintaining that for Alfarabi “philosophers are qua philosophers called upon, circumstances permitting, to play a central role in politics,” although he also observes that the view sometimes attributed to Alfarabi that the practical life is superior to the theoretical is probably

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thinkers (Fakhry 1983, p. 110). Fakhry does not, however, attribute that doctrine to Alfarabi himself, as contrasted with Alfarabi’s Aristotle.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of happiness so conceived, see Section A below.

<sup>9</sup> Berman (1961), pp. 53–61; Pines (1963), p. 1xxxvi; Walzer (1957B), p. 142. It is difficult to determine E.I.J. Rosenthal’s position: at times he says that, under the influence of Neoplatonism, Alfarabi believed that perfection consists in imitating God, i.e., in improving one’s household or political community in addition to oneself (Rosenthal 1958, pp. 122–123; 1960, pp. 145–146). Similarly, he suggests that by virtue of making revelation supreme over reason, Alfarabi was led to see perfection as culminating in action (Rosenthal 1958, pp. 123–124). However, Rosenthal also says that in his political treatises (presumably *Al-Madīnah al-Fādilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*), Alfarabi identifies happiness with intellectual perfection combined with the moral perfection that precedes it (Rosenthal 1958, p. 123; see 1960, p. 148). By the moral virtue that precedes intellectual perfection, he probably means private, not public, virtue. In the same vein, Rosenthal observes that Alfarabi was not interested in the art of government, was not a critic of contemporary politics, and was not a reformer (Rosenthal 1958, p. 124).

<sup>10</sup> Berman (1961), pp. 53–56 (includes a brief discussion of the post-Aristotelian and early Islamic tradition). For Maimonides as the disciple of Alfarabi, see Berman (1974).

<sup>11</sup> Rahman (1958), p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> Rahman (1958), p. 52.

inaccurate.<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere, however, Pines observes that both the comprehensive and the exclusively theoretical portraits of happiness appear in Alfarabi's writings, the latter on a number of occasions.<sup>14</sup>

In order to evaluate these commentators' conflicting interpretations of Alfarabi's philosophy, two types of evidence need to be considered. First are the passages in which Alfarabi explicitly addresses the nature of happiness and develops either a purely theoretical, a purely practical, or a more broadly based portrait of happiness. These are the texts upon which the commentators cited above primarily rely. It will be useful in addition to examine passages devoted to related issues, in which one of the portraits of happiness is assumed or from which one of them necessarily follows. The purpose of turning to the latter texts is to ascertain whether or not one of the portraits of happiness is more consistent with the overall structure and purpose of Alfarabi's larger philosophy. The former texts, i.e., those discussing the nature of happiness explicitly, are examined in the first section of this chapter. The texts that bear on the problem of happiness indirectly are explored in the remaining sections.

#### A. THE ALTERNATIVE PORTRAITS OF HAPPINESS

Apparently Alfarabi took the position that there is no happiness except political happiness (*al-sa'ādah al-madaniyyah*) in his commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Although the text of Alfarabi's commentary has not survived,<sup>15</sup> we are in possession of reports about some of its contents. According to Ibn Bājjah, Alfarabi claimed in this commentary that there is no afterlife and no existence other than sensible existence, and that the only happiness is political happiness.<sup>16</sup> These statements do not necessarily represent Alfarabi's mature or most philosophic beliefs, however. For Ibn Bājjah alleges that the statements reflect Alfarabi's first reading, and that they are not supported by demonstrations. In commenting on the same passage in Alfarabi's commentary, Ibn Ṭufayl appears to take the statements as indicative of Alfarabi's mature thought<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Pines (1963), p. 1xxxvi, n. 50; see p. 1xxxı and note 54 below.

<sup>14</sup> Pines (1970), pp. 799–800.

<sup>15</sup> Its existence is reported by Alfarabi himself (*Jam'* 17:9) and by some of the ancient biographers. Ibn al-Nadīm says that Alfarabi wrote a commentary on a "portion" of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*Fihrist* I 252).

<sup>16</sup> This passage in Ibn Bājjah is translated and analyzed in Pines (1979). Pines is of the opinion that Alfarabi may have adopted such an "aggressive tone" in advancing a radically un-Islamic doctrine because he was the first philosopher of the Arabs to adopt such a position.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Ṭufayl says that the statements occur in Alfarabi's works that deal with philosophy (*Ḥayy ibn Yağzān* 21:21–22). The contrast being drawn is between his logical works and his philosophical works.

and then vilifies his predecessor for having endorsed these and other doctrines that would undermine the religious belief that God will reward good men and punish wicked ones (*Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān* 21:21–22:3). However, Ibn Ṭufayl mentions only Alfarabi's statements about the afterlife, not his claim about the political character of happiness, even though Ibn Bājjah presents this claim as one of Alfarabi's explicit statements and not as an inference to be drawn from his statements about the afterlife.

No other work of Alfarabi limits happiness to political happiness as the commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* apparently did. In a passage in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* Alfarabi does seem to attribute the happiness of the inhabitants of the city (*ahl al-madīnah*) to their political activities (*al-af'āl al-madaniyyah*) (*Siyāsah* 81:14–16). However, it is clear from the fact that he speaks of "happiness" in the plural (*al-sa'ādāt*) that he is not necessarily focusing on happiness in the highest or best case. Moreover, the passage lacks restrictive language that would preclude activities other than political activities from contributing to the attainment of happiness.

Alfarabi depicts human happiness as identical to theoretical perfection in three of his works. In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, in the course of a discussion of the human end Alfarabi equates happiness with perfection, explained as the soul's becoming so perfect that it no longer needs matter to subsist (*fī qiwāmihā*) (*Madīnah* 204:15–16/46:7–8). Happiness thus consists in a person's becoming and remaining a transcendent entity, i.e., one of the "separate substances," albeit lower than the separate substance referred to as the "agent intellect" (*Madīnah* 204:16–206:3/46:8–10).<sup>18</sup> Virtues and noble actions are good, according to this account, because they contribute to happiness, which is the good sought for its own sake. They are not good in and of themselves (*Madīnah* 206:7–13/46:14–19). Similarly, practical reason is depicted as made to serve theoretical reason, whereas theoretical reason is made, not to serve anything else, but so that through it one can reach happiness (*Madīnah* 208:3–4/47:1–2). This passage in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* thus contains the hallmarks of the portrait of happiness as essentially theoretical: the identification of happiness with the complete overcoming of corporeal existence and the subordination of the moral virtues and practical reason to the ultimate theoretical goal.

The same description of happiness appears in *Risālah fī al-'Aql*, Alfarabi's treatise on the meanings of "intellect" and its characteristic activi-

<sup>18</sup> Or "active intellect" (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*, Greek *nous poiētikos*). The concept of an agent or active intellect is normally traced to Aristotle *De Anima* III 430a10–15, although the expression *nous poiētikos* is at most implied there. For Aristotle and later authors, the concept of the agent intellect is made necessary by the need to explain how human reason is transformed from potentiality to actuality. For a history of the doctrine of the agent intellect in late Greek and in Arabic sources, see Davidson (1972).

ties, in a section devoted to Aristotle's use of the term "intellect" in the *De Anima*. The human intellect is in this treatise said to overcome its corporeality through interaction with the agent intellect, thereby becoming substantial ('*Aql* 26:9–27:7, 31:3–5). In *Risālah fī al-'Aql* this state of immateriality is called "ultimate happiness" and is identified with the afterlife ('*Aql* 31:6–9). The passage in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* just discussed, in contrast, emphasizes the human origin of happiness: it is the result of certain voluntary actions—in particular, specific acts of the body and the mind (*af'āl badaniyyah*, *af'āl fikriyyah*) (*Madīnah* 206:4–6/46:10–13).<sup>19</sup> The agent intellect is responsible for man's first perfection (*istikmāl al-awwal*); subsequently people may make use of this gift to reach their final perfection (*Madīnah* 202:10–204:15/45:11–46:6).

Several passages in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* can also be marshaled in support of the portrait of happiness as essentially theoretical. The function of the agent intellect, according to this work, is to ensure that people reach the ultimate degree of perfection possible, namely, becoming a separate substance. This is the rank of the agent intellect, and its attainment is identified as the attainment of ultimate happiness (*Siyāsah* 32:6–9). When people acquire this rank as a result of actualizing their intellects, their happiness is said to become perfect (*kamalat sa'ādatuh*) (*Siyāsah* 35:10–11). Again, when the potential intelligible becomes actual and the potential intellect becomes actual, one reaches ultimate happiness, which is characterized as the most excellent human perfection available (*afḍal mā yumkin al-insān an yablughah min al-kamāl*) (*Siyāsah* 55:9–10). In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, as in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, the goodness of everything but happiness is relative and is derived from the goodness of the final end (*Siyāsah* 72:15–18).

The exclusively contemplative interpretation of happiness is also referred to in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, where it is attributed to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—probably the unique instance in which Alfarabi attributes to all three Greek philosophers a common belief. In this work as well, "ultimate happiness" is characterized in terms of, and is equated with, final perfection and the absolute good (*Fuṣūl* No. 28, 45:6–11, 46:5–9).

In contrast to the preceding texts, portraits of happiness as composed of a combination of theoretical and practical perfection occur in several of Alfarabi's works. Alfarabi's most famous elaboration of happiness defined in terms of practical as well as theoretical perfection occurs in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the entire work can be seen as a sustained defense of

<sup>19</sup> By itself, the reference to specific acts of body and mind could have the connotation of practical perfection, since the expression *af'āl fikriyyah* suggests deliberation and practical reason. However, taken as a whole, the passage clearly subordinates practical reason to theoretical reason.

<sup>20</sup> For an in-depth analysis of this work, see Mahdi (1975A).

that view. The opening paragraph of the book includes the deliberative virtues, moral virtues, and practical arts along with the theoretical virtues among “the things by means of which nations and citizens of cities attain earthly happiness in this life and supreme happiness in the life beyond” (Mahdi) (*Sa’ādah* 49:4–7/2:2–5). In isolation, this assertion could form part of an argument for either view of happiness, depending on whether the first three attributes play an instrumental or a constitutive role.<sup>21</sup> Although the matter is not free from doubt, the thrust of the book favors the latter interpretation, as the following discussion makes clear.

The first section of *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* develops the doctrine that theoretical perfection entails practical as well as theoretical philosophy. As a consequence, knowledge of such things as the end of human existence and the way political communities should be ordered are said to come within the purview of theoretical perfection (*Sa’ādah* 64:7–9/16:15–17, see 63:4–64:7/15:16–16:15).<sup>22</sup> Theoretical perfection is thus more comprehensive than natural philosophy, or natural philosophy and metaphysics. However, the inclusion of political and moral philosophy within the framework of theoretical perfection does not in and of itself necessarily imply that happiness encompasses both theoretical and practical perfection or both the theoretical and the practical virtues. In the second section of *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* Alfarabi argues that the highest deliberative excellence, the highest moral excellence, and the highest practical art are inseparable from theoretical excellence (*Sa’ādah* 75:3–5/26:17–19). However, the context in which their inseparability is asserted is the necessity of theoretical excellence for the operation of the practical virtues and arts in the most authoritative case (*Sa’ādah* 74:17–20/26:11–13), i.e., when the objective is to provide for the well-being of cities or nations (*Sa’ādah* 71:19–72:3/23:16–19).<sup>23</sup> The argument of the second section of *Tahṣīl al-*

<sup>21</sup> If the lesser virtues are pursued and practiced for the sake of the theoretical virtues, or if the lesser virtues lead to the lower form of happiness and only intellectual virtues lead to the highest form of happiness, the doctrine of happiness as essentially theoretical follows.

<sup>22</sup> Contrast Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* VI. 12 1143b19–20.

<sup>23</sup> This appears to be a departure from the teaching of *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, on which the second part of *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* is largely based. After exploring whether and to what extent people need the virtues of the rational part of the soul in order to act virtuously, Aristotle declares that practical wisdom (or “prudence,” Greek *phronēsis*, Arabic *ta’aqul*) and moral virtue in the full sense (*kuriōs*) are both indispensable and entail one another (VI. 12–13). Wisdom, the virtue of the theoretical part of the rational soul, is said to be necessary simply because it actualizes a part of the soul (VI. 12 1144a1–3). Wisdom affects the operation of practical reason in that it is an end, perhaps the end, that practical reason seeks to secure (VI. 13 1145a8–9). Wisdom does not appear to supply practical wisdom with any additional principles of practical reasoning. Aristotle furnishes a quartet of rational faculties concerned with primary knowledge in the realm of conduct, but wisdom is not among them (VI. 11). The problem in Alfarabi’s Aristotelian source, then, is assessing the relative roles of practical wisdom and moral virtue as suppliers of practical principles. Given the focus of

*Sa'ādah* thus assumes but does not defend or prove the desirability of taking action on the basis of philosophic discoveries. As a consequence, it inquires into the best way to accomplish a goal the worth of which has yet to be explored. In the third section of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* Alfarabi examines the person who already possesses the practical virtues and arts in addition to theoretical excellence and then argues that such a person ought to acquire the ability to make others develop comparable traits (*Sa'ādah* 77:17–78:1/29:7–10). In this section of the book as well, the self-sufficiency of theoretical excellence is not at issue.

It is not until the final section of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* that Alfarabi addresses the question of whether or not it is desirable for an individual who possesses theoretical excellence to pursue the practical virtues and arts in the first place.<sup>24</sup> The section consists in an extended discourse on the distinction between true philosophy and several types of spurious philosophy. The theoretical sciences are said to be defective philosophy (*falsafah nāqīṣah*) when “their possessor does not have the faculty for exploiting them for the benefit of others” (Mahdi) (*Sa'ādah* 89:9–10/39:9–10). The greater a person’s power to make discoveries in the theoretical sciences intelligible and to bring those of them subject to human volition into existence in cities and nations to the extent of the inhabitants’ abilities, the more perfect is that person’s philosophy (*Sa'ādah* 89:10–17/39:11–16). In contrast to the true philosopher

[t]he false<sup>25</sup> philosopher is he who acquires the theoretical sciences without achieving the utmost perfection so as to be able to introduce others to what he knows insofar as their capacity permits. The vain philosopher is he who learns the theoretical sciences, but without going any further and without being habituated to doing the acts considered virtuous by a certain religion or the generally accepted noble acts. Instead he follows his own inclination and appetites in everything, whatever they may happen to be. . . . As for the false philosopher, he is the one who is not yet aware of the purpose for which philosophy is pursued. He acquires the theoretical sciences, or only some portion thereof, and holds the opinion that the purpose of the measure he has acquired consists in certain kinds of happiness that are believed to be so or are considered by the multitude to be good things.

(Mahdi) (*Sa'ādah* 95:16–96:2/45:12–16, 96:10–14/46:6–9)

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the discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Alfarabi’s claim that only the possessor of philosophy can discover the means of realizing the goals uncovered by practical philosophy in concrete situations and the concomitant doctrine of the inseparability of the four kinds of theoretical and practical excellence must be seen as features of the distinctive and hence emphatic teaching of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*.

<sup>24</sup> On the fourth part of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, see Mahdi (1975A), pp. 58–66.

<sup>25</sup> *Al-faylasūf al-bāṭil*, the philosopher in vain. “Something is in vain when it exists but is not accompanied by the end for the sake of which it exists” (Alfarabi *Jadal* 70:11–12/224v11–12).



So conceived, “philosopher,” “supreme ruler,” “king,” “lawgiver,” and “imam” are different expressions for the same idea (*Sa’ādah* 93:18–19/43:18–19). Alfarabi does acknowledge that the expression “philosopher” stands for theoretical excellence first and foremost. Nonetheless he adds that “if it be determined that the theoretical virtue [or excellence] reach its ultimate perfection in every respect, it follows necessarily that he must possess all the other faculties as well” (Mahdi) (*Sa’ādah* 92:12–14/42:12–14).

The teaching of *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah*, then, is not merely that practical rational excellence and moral virtue are constitutive parts of human perfection in the highest case.<sup>26</sup> Alfarabi appears to maintain the more extreme thesis that these things are constitutive parts of philosophy itself. The most authoritative practical excellence for Alfarabi is the one with the broadest scope: the excellence inherent in participation in the life of the community is superior to the excellence called forth in private life, and of the practical virtues associated with communal life, those exercised in the political arena are the most authoritative or complete (*Sa’ādah* 71:1–72:3/22:18–23:19). Since he sees moral and deliberative excellence as two subdivisions of practical excellence, the argument for including practical perfection in human happiness culminates in the doctrine that happiness presupposes the union of philosophy and kingship in a single person.

Several additional passages that contain the comprehensive portrait of happiness deserve notice both in their own right and because they occur in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, and *Fuṣūl Muntaza’ah*, three works previously cited as incorporating a portrait of happiness as essentially theoretical. Toward the end of *Fuṣūl Muntaza’ah* the reader is told that theoretical philosophy is useful because it makes truly virtuous or excellent action (*‘amal*) possible. Virtuous action presupposes real virtue, and real virtue, in turn, presupposes a knowledge of real happiness (*Fuṣūl* No. 94, 95:14–96:8). Real virtue is, of course, a byproduct of habituation (*Fuṣūl* 95:17–96:2); however, habituation to virtue can result from regularly obeying commands of parents or persons in authority as well as from acting in accordance with what one knows to be right. In the former case, one’s actions may be the actions of the real virtues without being really virtuous actions from the perspective of the philosopher, since one who behaves properly in deference to authority behaves well by accident.

In addition to propounding the thesis that virtue, properly understood, is never simply imitative, this aphorism suggests that philosophy natu-

<sup>26</sup> As Strauss (1945), p. 367, notes, the identification of the philosopher with the king does not necessarily mean that philosophy and kingship are the same art.

rally culminates in action.<sup>27</sup> Because of the way the thought is expressed, the aphorism can also be construed a second way, as alluding to the fact that the activity of contemplation itself is first engaged in without a philosophic understanding of the necessity of a contemplative life for the attainment of happiness. In other words, ordinarily a person embarks on a life of inquiry because of a belief in the rightness of that way of life, but the belief has been adopted on the authority of others—typically teachers or peers who are especially trusted. The initial decision to philosophize is thus based on received opinion. Ultimately only philosophic inquiry can validate the life of inquiry. Without an understanding of the nature of the human soul, its function and purpose, and the interaction of its parts, a person cannot know with certainty that the life of inquiry is the only life worth living.

The aphorism in question thus admits of two interpretations. Consistent with the comprehensive portrait of happiness—and more obviously suggested by the language literally construed—the aphorism seems to mean that the moral life as ordinarily understood becomes truly moral when virtue is grounded in knowledge. Alternatively, the aphorism may be interpreted as applying to moral activity in the global sense of the overall character of the way a person lives. Not the moral virtues, but the philosophic or theoretical life as a way of life, would be the end. Further, if moral virtue refers to specific kinds of moral action, as contrasted with the overall character of a person's way of life, the aphorism appears to advance the view that happiness consists essentially in moral action and that theoretical activity is choiceworthy because it serves this goal. This would amount to a portrait of happiness that is essentially practical. However, the aphorism does not point unambiguously in this direction. At one point Alfarabi speaks of a “level of theoretical knowledge through which man attains happiness” (*Fuṣūl* 97:17–18). Yet he also describes the person who has completed theoretical and practical philosophy as finally able to turn to the “practical part” (*al-juz' al-'amalī*) and begin to act as he must in order to attain perfection (*Fuṣūl* 98:7–8). This also implies that contemplation both makes possible and finds completion in action.

In a later aphorism, Alfarabi asks the reader to consider two people,

<sup>27</sup> The suggestion that theoretical understanding is not self-sufficient is made repeatedly in *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*. See especially the concluding paragraph: “And it has become evident that the knowledge that he [Aristotle] investigated at the outset just because he loved to do so, and inspected for the sake of explaining the truth about the above-mentioned pursuits, has turned out to be necessary for realizing the political activity for the sake of which man is made” (Mahdi) (132:11–15). See, however, Mahdi's notes to the Arabic and English editions concerning the textual basis for the reading “political activity.” Contrast *Aristūṭālīs* 125:4–126:5. See generally Galston (1977), pp. 24–31, on the relationship between Aristotle's theoretical and practical purposes in *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*.

one of whom has mastered the contents of all Aristotle's books, theoretical and practical, and usually acts contrary to the prevailing morality, and the second of whom is completely ignorant of the sciences possessed by the first and who always acts in accordance with the conventional view of what is good (*Fuṣūl* No. 98, 100:14–18). The second person, Alfarabi informs the reader, is “closer to being a philosopher than the first” and “better able to possess the sciences the first possesses than is the first able to possess what the second possesses” (Dunlop) (*Fuṣūl* 100:18–20).<sup>28</sup> The contrast Alfarabi draws between the moral novice and the immoral initiate might appear to undermine both the fundamentally theoretical and the fundamentally moral accounts of the philosophic life. However, Alfarabi continues: “Philosophy at first sight and<sup>29</sup> in reality consists in a human being acquiring the theoretical sciences and in all his actions conforming to what is noble [*jamil*] according to common opinion and in reality” (*Fuṣūl* 100:20–23). According to this passage in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, then, philosophy consists in theoretical and moral excellence, with thought and action both integral and constitutive elements of the whole.<sup>30</sup>

The contrast in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* between the two versions of happiness helps to clarify Alfarabi's respect for and apparent endorsement of conventional morality in several of his works. There is, the text implies, a large degree of harmony, if not overlap, between conventional morals and the moral demands recognized as a result of theoretical investigation. In addition, it is possible that the habit of flaunting conventional morality could interfere with a person's ability to adopt the types of restraints dictated by theoretical considerations. A person habituated to the prevailing morals, on the other hand, could experience less difficulty in learning to conform his behavior to the dictates of reason (*Fuṣūl* No. 98, 101:1–7).

<sup>28</sup> The text at *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* 100:18–20 says that all of the actions of the first person are at variance with (*mukhālifah*) what is noble in the unexamined opinion common to all people. The Arabic manuscript reads *muwāfiqah* (“in accordance with”) for *mukhālifah* (“at variance with”) at *Fuṣūl* 100:19, although the correct reading is added above the line. The medieval Hebrew translation has the erroneous reading (*maskimōth*) (see Dunlop 1961, p. 208). On the basis of the erroneous reading, de Boer (1967), p. 122, uses this aphorism to support Alfarabi's belief in the superiority of knowledge over moral action.

<sup>29</sup> Najjar has *fi al-ḥaqīqah*, without listing any variants (*Fuṣūl* 100:20–21). Dunlop (1961), p. 170:2, has *wa-fi al-ḥaqīqah*, without listing any variants. Dunlop's reading is preferable in light of the end of the aphorism.

<sup>30</sup> The same thought is expressed in *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* (95:18–96:2/45:14–16). A little earlier in the same work, Alfarabi distinguishes between the proper posture for a philosopher vis-à-vis the virtuous acts of the religion in which he was reared and the proper posture for him vis-à-vis the generally accepted virtues and the generally accepted noble acts. The philosopher is instructed not to forsake the “generally accepted noble acts”; in contrast, he is advised not to forsake “all or almost all” of the virtuous acts of his religion (*Sa'ādah* 95:11–14/45:7–9). See Chapter IV below.

The comprehensive portrait of happiness also emerges in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, in the course of Alfarabi's discussion of prophecy. The person who has perfected theoretical and practical reason and has, in addition, attained prophecy (here equated with the ability to speak about unseen occurrences in the present and to predict events in the future) is said to possess "the most perfect level of humanity and the highest degree of happiness" (*huwa fī akmal marātib al-insāniyyah wa-fī a'lā darajāt al-sa'ādah*) (*Madīnah* 244:7–16/58:18–59:3). The equation of prophecy with the highest degree of happiness would preclude an exclusively theoretical view of happiness to the extent that the operation of the prophet's practical reason involves the discovery of particular actions that should, for example, be chosen or avoided. Clearly the prophet's knowledge of unseen occurrences and future events, the source of which is the imaginative faculty, necessarily binds him to the material world. Thus, the fact that the prophet's theoretical understanding somehow finds its completion in the operation of practical reason would seem to place the view that connects happiness with prophecy in opposition to the account of happiness as essentially contemplative. In short, the portrait drawn in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* of a self-sufficient, transcendent happiness, beyond which there exists nothing greater to which a person can aspire (*Madīnah* 204:15–206:10/46:7–16), is in this passage contrasted with, if not superseded by, the claims made on behalf of the philosopher-prophet.

*Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* has a comparable passage. It focuses on revelation (*wahy*), which follows from a person's union with the agent intellect and which gives rise to the power "to define things and actions that direct people toward happiness" (*Siyāsah* 79:15–17). The expression "defining and directing actions toward happiness" appears repeatedly in other works of Alfarabi as a description of the legislative product of a prophet's or a supreme ruler's perfection (*Millah* 43:3–4, 44:6–11, *Fuṣūl* 23:3–5, cf. *Madīnah* 246:1/59:4–5). In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, then, revelation appears to issue in action, specifically in the creation of a political organism, whether a regime or its counterpart, a religious community (*millah*).<sup>31</sup> The passage is different from the parallel passage in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, however, in that the rank of the recipient of revelation is expressed not in terms of perfection or happiness, but in terms of the authoritativeness of the recipient's "rule" (*Siyāsah* 80:3–4). Although the people subject to this rule are said to be "virtuous, good, and happy" (*Siyāsah* 80:5), neither the supreme ruler nor the possessor of revelation is assessed in comparable terms. As far as the literal text goes, therefore, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* lacks the conflicting accounts of human happiness present in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*. *Al-Si-*

<sup>31</sup> For *millah* as a substitute for *madīnah*, see Mahdi (1968A), p. 30 (Arabic Introduction).

*yāsah al-Madaniyyah*, in other words, could be seen as equating happiness with some kind of private existence, while revelation arguably enlarges the perfect person's sphere of competence in a way that does not necessarily enhance happiness.

These, then, are the accounts of happiness presented in some detail in Alfarabi's works. To evaluate and begin resolving the discrepancies they contain, it is helpful to consider the various accounts of happiness against the backdrop of related psychological and metaphysical doctrines. Several of these are to be found in the political treatises themselves as well as in Alfarabi's works on logic, psychology, and metaphysics.

## B. THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE SCIENCES AND REASON

Since perfecting the theoretical intellect (*al-'aql al-naẓarī*) or the theoretical rational faculty (*al-quwwah al-nāṭiqah al-naẓariyyah*) is the human end according to the portrait of happiness as essentially theoretical, it is necessary to begin by determining the kind or kinds of knowledge this perfection includes. Traditionally theoretical reason had been associated with theoretical science or theoretical philosophy. Alfarabi reproduces the traditional characterization in two works, where he defines theoretical reason as knowledge of beings that we cannot make or transform, as contrasted with practical reason, which is the source of knowledge of objects and events that owe their existence to human volition (*Fuṣūl* No. 7, 29:8–14, *Siyāsah* 33:4–5). If “theoretical” is understood in this way and happiness is identified with theoretical activity, the end of man would consist in mastering mathematics, physics, and metaphysics. The practical sciences, in contrast, would be pursued for the sake of the theoretical, i.e., to establish the type of society and moral character most conducive to the acquisition or development of the theoretical sciences. Equating the actualization of theoretical reason with the possession of the theoretical sciences goes hand in hand with the characterization of wisdom as the most excellent knowledge of the most excellent being.<sup>32</sup>

Alfarabi qualifies the traditional division of the sciences and reason on a number of occasions. In the passage of *Kitāb al-Jadal* quoted at the beginning of this chapter,<sup>33</sup> Alfarabi rejects the identification of practical philosophy with what is subject to art or volition and proposes instead

<sup>32</sup> In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* Nos. 52–53, human subjects are first excluded from wisdom and subsequently included within its purview. Aristotle considers the latter alternative serious enough to warrant refutation. In fact, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI. 7, which is ostensibly devoted to a discussion of theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), is in reality occupied with the challenge posed by the claim that practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) constitutes the highest form of knowledge and thus is entitled to the name *sophia*.

<sup>33</sup> See also *Burhan* 75:10–11/173v7–8.

that practical philosophy be defined as the inquiry into subjects from the perspective of happiness and misery. In other words, not the subject matter but the purpose of philosophic inquiry would be decisive for characterizing a particular investigation as “theoretical” or “practical.” As a consequence, some so-called theoretical sciences would form part of practical philosophy or political science when they are engaged in with a view to bringing about happiness or avoiding misery (*Jadal* 69:10–18/224r3–12, see *Hurūf* 67:21–68:1). Further, although happiness depends for its existence on volition, at least in part (*Siyāsah* 72:13–73:18, *Madīnah* 206:4–5/46:10–11, *Fuṣūl* No. 74, 80:13–17), only the theoretical rational faculty can attain real knowledge of what happiness is (*Siyāsah* 73:11–12, *Fuṣūl* No. 53, 62:2–5, see *Madīnah* 208:10/47:8). In short, the formulation of the classification of the sciences in *Kitāb al-Jadal* has the effect of undermining the exact correspondence between theoretical knowledge and theoretical reason on the one hand and practical knowledge and practical reason on the other.

Like *Kitāb al-Jadal*, *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* abandons the traditional dichotomy between the theoretical and the practical.<sup>34</sup> Ordinarily the ability to discern the means to bring about a given end is attributed to deliberation (*rawiyyah*), an aspect of practical reason (*Siyāsah* 33:6–7, *Madīnah* 208:11–12/47:9–10, *Fuṣūl* No. 7, 29:15–30:2, No. 39).<sup>35</sup> Yet according to *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah*, both human science (*al-‘ilm al-insānī*), defined as the science of the things useful for the attainment of happiness, and political science, defined as the science of the things useful for the attainment of happiness and made possible by political associations, are properly parts of what Alfarabi calls “theoretical perfection” (*al-kamāl al-naẓarī*) (*Sa’ādah* 63:4–64:9/15:16–16:17). Theoretical perfection thus encompasses knowledge of such things as happiness, the moral virtues, political associations, and other things whose existence depends upon human volition (*Sa’ādah* 64:7–9/16:15–17, 66:18–67:2/19:3–5, 91:14–15/41:12–13). As part of theoretical perfection, these subjects are not known in all their particularity: they are not known with all the accidents and states that necessarily accompany them when they exist at a specific time and in a specific place (*Sa’ādah* 64:11–65:13/16:19–17:16). They are known as intelligible ideas (*ma’qūlāt*), that is, in terms of their essential features or underlying structure independent of the particular attributes they assume when they exist in concrete situations. In other words, the practical sciences partake of the theoretical character of inquiries into nonhuman things as long as they remain on a universal level (see *Millah* 47:2, *Hurūf*

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of this issue, see Mahdi (1969A), pp. xi–xxi.

<sup>35</sup> See Mahdi (1969A), p. 136, n. 26(2), and the English translation of the definition of the reflective faculty (*al-fikrī*). Practical reason is discussed in Section C below and in Chapter III, Section B.

151:18–152:1, 153:2–3, *Iḥṣā'* 127:3–7). This is also the opinion that Alfarabi attributes to Aristotle in *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*. According to Alfarabi's Aristotle, man can have two kinds of perception in connection with those intelligible ideas that have to do with beings capable of being brought into existence: a perception useful for bringing them into existence and "a kind of perception that exceeds the measure required and useful for their existence" (Mahdi) (*Aristūṭālīs* 123:17–21). The former perception is an expression of practical intellect (*al-'aql al-'amaliyyah*),<sup>36</sup> the latter an expression of theoretical intellect (*Aristūṭālīs* 124:1–4). In short, volition and action are relevant principles for differentiating among things to be studied and understood (*Hurūf* 67:16–18). The classes thus created, however, cut across the traditional boundaries of theoretical and practical knowledge. To the extent that theoretical perfection includes both theoretical and practical or political philosophy, the identification of happiness with theoretical activity would have broader connotations than first appeared.<sup>37</sup>

Alfarabi's understanding of the place of metaphysics among the sciences also warrants clarification. Although metaphysical inquiry may

<sup>36</sup> In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 38, 54:10–55:5, the practical intellect is defined as the practical rational faculty that, on the basis of experience and observation, grasps premises about things subject to human control.

<sup>37</sup> Mahdi (1969A), pp. xx–xxi, suggests that Alfarabi's account of theoretical perfection not only encompasses subjects traditionally associated with the practical sciences; it also fails to include the totality of the theoretical sciences or theoretical knowledge. As a consequence, he concludes that "theoretical perfection" in the first part of *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* is really identical to theoretical political science. He appears to mean by this that theoretical perfection, as the term is used in the first part of *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, encompasses only a portion of natural science, i.e., that portion of natural science useful for the inquiries of political science. Mahdi's observations appear to be based on Alfarabi's statement that theoretical perfection comprises "knowledge of the four kinds of things by which the citizens of cities and nations attain supreme happiness," which Mahdi contrasts with "knowledge of all the beings with certainty." However, Alfarabi earlier defines the things by which nations and citizens of cities attain earthly happiness in this life and supreme happiness in the next as encompassing, among other things, the theoretical virtues or excellences (*al-faḍā'il al-nazariyyah*), which, in turn, are defined as the "sciences whose ultimate purpose is only to make the beings and what they contain intelligible with certainty" (*Sa'ādah* 49:4–9/2:2–7). Thus, the "knowledge of the four kinds of things by which the citizens of cities and nations attain supreme happiness" (*Sa'ādah* 64:8–9/16:16–17) would appear to include the theoretical virtues, at least to the extent that they comprehend the study of logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics in addition to the study of human things. This appears to be the reason Mahdi goes on to suggest that theoretical perfection understood as theoretical political science is not truly independent of theoretical perfection understood more broadly, since it necessarily operates on the basis of certain unexamined assumptions about nature, man, and the relations among the beings (Mahdi 1969A, pp. xxi–xxii). Note, however, that according to the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, all these subjects can be viewed as part of practical philosophy if they are studied from the perspective of happiness and misery.

well be the highest of the inquiries subsumed under theoretical perfection, it is not clear that the other inquiries exist for the sake of metaphysics. To be precise, it is political philosophy, itself made up of human science and political science, which is not obviously subordinated to metaphysics. On two occasions when Alfarabi sketches out the entire course of theoretical study, he depicts the study of metaphysics as being interrupted and the study of political philosophy taken up instead. The first time this occurs, the examinations undertaken by political philosophy are in turn interrupted, whereupon the metaphysical inquiry is continued; subsequently political inquiry is resumed (*Fuṣūl* No. 94, 97:6–98:7, *Sa'ādah* 59:18–63:13/12:14–16:5). It is difficult to discern the rationale for proceeding in this fashion.<sup>38</sup> For example, if one posits that the interruptions are intended to reveal a degree of reliance by each discipline on the findings of the other, it is difficult to confirm this hypothesis by isolating specific insights of one stage of either inquiry incorporated into the other inquiry that justify the interruption. Rather, Alfarabi points out (1) that the study of the heavenly bodies and their motions (one of the last stages in the investigations of natural science) suggests the existence of incorporeal principles that make the supralunar sphere intelligible and (2) that the study of the rational animal (another of the last stages in the investigations of natural science) suggests the existence of incorporeal principles that make the sublunar sphere intelligible (*Sa'ādah* 59:18–60:17/12:14–13:10). The latter incorporeal principles are not, however, equated with the former, nor is one kind derived from or presented as dependent upon the other. Instead, the respective relationships between the two kinds of incorporeal principle and the natural realm associated with each are *likened* to one another (*Sa'ādah* 60:14–17/13:7–10). Further, the two types of incorporeal principle have in common the same ultimate cause of being (*Sa'ādah* 62:12–15/15:5–8), although the relationship each has to this prior principle may be unique.

Because the various intellectual principles and human perfections are only identified in a formal way in both *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, the descriptions are extremely abstract and difficult to interpret. In *Kitāb al-Hurūf* Alfarabi assigns metaphysics the task of examining the ultimate foundations of political science and of “the practical art of politics” (*al-madanī min al-ṣanā'i' al-'amaliyyah*) in addition to the foundations of mathematics and natural science. He then calls these metaphysical inquiries the “culmination of theoretical science” (*inda dhālika tata-nāhā al-'ulūm al-naẓariyyah*) (*Hurūf* No. 17, 69:18–21). This is not obviously a statement of the subordination of political inquiry to meta-

<sup>38</sup> On the relationship between metaphysics and political science in this passage, see Mahdi (1969A), pp. xiv–xvi, xx–xxii.



physics. At the end of *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs* Alfarabi attributes to metaphysics a similar task, with the explanation that the metaphysical inquiry is to be carried out for the sake of completing natural philosophy and political and human philosophy (*Aristūṭālīs* 131:22–132:1). Such passages in Alfarabi's works led Fakhry to observe that for Alfarabi metaphysics and politics should probably be seen as "two aspects of the same science, which might be indifferently described as the pursuit of truth insofar as it conduces to happiness, or the pursuit of happiness insofar as it conduces to truth."<sup>39</sup>

The relationship among the sciences is further complicated by indications in Alfarabi's works that theoretical perfection may not be attainable even in the best case. The indications in question frequently occur in passages that discuss the ability of human reason to overcome material existence to the point of becoming completely transcendent or separate from matter, a condition that is typically described in terms of human reason's relationship to the agent intellect. Transcendence of this kind is usually seen as a precondition of man's ability to attain knowledge of the "separate substances," i.e., beings that are not bodies and do not inhere in bodies (and never have). As a consequence, transcendence of this kind would be a condition of attaining complete metaphysical knowledge and, thus, of attaining theoretical perfection. As commentators have noted since the twelfth century, if not earlier, Alfarabi's writings contain conflicting accounts of the limits of human transcendence.

According to one passage in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, when the rational faculty becomes intellect in act (*'aql bi'l-fi'l*), it becomes simultaneously the agent of intellection (*al-'āqil*), the object of intellection (*al-ma'qūl*), and the activity of intellection (*al-'aql*). At that time it achieves the rank (*yaṣīr fī rutbah*) of the agent intellect (*Siyāsah* 35:4–11). However, the same passage concludes with the observation that the rational faculty achieves only "nearness" to the rank (*yaṣīr fī qurb min rutbah*) of the agent intellect (*Siyāsah* 36:1–3, see 55:6–7). When in the same work Alfarabi describes the supreme ruler without qualification (*al-ra'īs al-awwal 'alā al-iṭlāq*), a figure equated in Alfarabi's writings with the highest human type, he attributes that ruler's intellectual prowess to the conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) of his soul with the agent intellect (*Siyāsah* 79:8–11). It is true that *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* initially equates ultimate happiness with achieving the rank of the agent intellect (*Siyāsah* 32:6–7), possibly implying that mere "nearness" to that rank would comprise incomplete or imperfect happiness. Yet Alfarabi also equates the achievement of "nearness" to the rank of the agent intellect with the rational faculty's becoming divine (*ilāhī*) (*Siyāsah* 36:4) and describes the supreme ruler

<sup>39</sup> Fakhry (1983), pp. 116–117.

without qualification as having attained the sciences and cognitions in actuality (*al-'ulūm wa'l-ma'ārif bi'l-fi'l* (*Siyāsah* 79:3–4). Taken together these passages imply that complete transcendence of material existence is in principle possible for certain human beings, namely, those who have attained perfection through the actualization of their rational faculties, although it is less clear that such transcendence constitutes immortality, whether on earth or in the next life.<sup>40</sup>

The teachings of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* are compatible with those of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*. In a discussion of the operation of human reason and its passage from potentiality to actuality, Alfarabi defines happiness as the human soul's not needing matter to subsist (*fī qiwāmiḥā*), at which time the soul would become one of the separate substances (*al-jawāhir al-mufāriqah*). This condition is said to be "beneath" the rank of the agent intellect (*dūna rutbat al-'aql al-fa'āl* (*Madīnah* 204:15–206:3/46:7–10). Although Alfarabi never states whether happiness so conceived is in fact attainable,<sup>41</sup> an affirmative answer may be implied in a subsequent passage describing revelation and the supreme ruler.<sup>42</sup> In any event, consistent with the more restrained formulation in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, the supreme ruler in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is, according to Alfarabi, "as if united" (*ka'l-muttaḥidah*) with the agent intellect (*Madīnah* 244:16/59:3–4).<sup>43</sup> Thus, both *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* appear to agree that theoretical perfection is available to the extent that human reason can attain transcendence from material existence, although the relationship between the transcendence of human reason and the agent intellect is described more cautiously in the former work.

Alfarabi apparently took a different position in his commentary on Ar-

<sup>40</sup> See the discussion of these passages in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, and the parallel passages in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, in Davidson (1972), pp. 142–144, and in Walzer (1985), pp. 409–410, 442–443. According to Davidson, the condition of being conjoined to, although inferior to, the agent intellect constitutes immortality for human beings, and this condition can occur before death. For a discussion of conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) and union (*ittiḥād*), see Altmann (1965), pp. 82–87. Note the ambiguity in Alfarabi's use of the term "supreme ruler without qualification" (*'alā al-iṭlāq*).

<sup>41</sup> The passage says only that the primary intelligibles are supplied in order to be used in achieving ultimate perfection or happiness (*Madīnah* 204:14–15/46:5–7) and then defines happiness as described above.

<sup>42</sup> See especially *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* 248:15–250:4/60:11–15, which states that the natural attributes necessary before revelation is possible are difficult to find in one person, but they do occur, albeit rarely. The passage implies, although it does not state, that the additional acquired attributes (described at length in the immediately preceding passage), all or most of which are presupposed by revelation, could also occur in the rare person blessed with the natural attributes.

<sup>43</sup> Reading *ka'l-muttaḥidah* with Walzer and most manuscripts instead of *kāmilah muttaḥidah* with Dieterici.

istotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. As was noted above, according to the surviving reports of that work, Alfarabi maintained that there is no life after death and no existence other than what is perceived by the senses.<sup>44</sup> This may imply that knowledge of transcendent entities is not available to man<sup>45</sup>—in other words, that metaphysics is inherently incapable of completion and theoretical perfection in principle beyond man's grasp.<sup>46</sup> Alternatively, the reported comments may signify a denial of the existence, and not merely the knowability, of transcendent entities. So understood, Alfarabi could have taken the position in the commentary that there are no beings except material beings and no objects of knowledge except these beings, what inheres in them, and explanatory principles. This understanding would be consistent with the denial of an afterlife, but it also suggests that knowledge of what is, is within our grasp.

Parts of the account of metaphysical investigation in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* point in this direction.<sup>47</sup> In particular, Alfarabi says only that the inquirer will grasp that the highest being<sup>48</sup> is that by which, from which, and for which the rest of the beings exist and that its relationship with the lower beings is completely without defect. In other words, he says that the inquirer will grasp its nature as a cause, as contrasted with its nature simply (see *Sa'ādah* 62:12–18/15:5–10). However, because the objects of this investigation are repeatedly referred to as metaphysical “beings” (*Sa'ādah* 62:4–17/14:17–15:10),<sup>49</sup> and the result is characterized as knowledge of the beings through their ultimate causes (*ma'rifat al-mawjūdāt bi-aqṣā asbabihā*) (*Sa'ādah* 62:21–63:1/15:13), Alfarabi's allusion to a philosophic descent from the peak of metaphysics back through the natural sciences gives the impression that the metaphysical

<sup>44</sup> See Pines (1979), pp. 82–83 (quoting from an unpublished work of Ibn Bājja); Munk (1955), pp. 348–349.

<sup>45</sup> See Pines (1979), pp. 83, 85; cf. Druart (1987), pp. 23–24 (disagreeing with Pines as to Alfarabi's belief in the impossibility of knowledge of the separate substances).

<sup>46</sup> On the basis of Ibn Ṭufayl's report of Alfarabi's commentary and Averroes' comments in his long commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima* (but not the passage from Ibn Bājja analyzed by Pines), Munk interprets Alfarabi as intending to say that the acquisition of the theoretical sciences is possible, whereas man's becoming a separate substance is not possible (Munk 1955, p. 348, n. 4).

<sup>47</sup> See *Sa'ādah* 60:5–61:11/13:1–14:4.

<sup>48</sup> Alfarabi identifies the first principle as the divinity (*al-ilāh*) and the other principles as the divine principles (*al-mabādi' al-ilāhīyyah*) (*Sa'ādah* 63:1–3/15:14–15).

<sup>49</sup> Alfarabi refers to them as “beings” throughout his description of what the inquirer should investigate (*Sa'ādah* 62:4–17/14:17–15:10). Once the inquirer is presented as having understood this phase of the investigation (*Sa'ādah* 62:18/15:10), it is unclear whether Alfarabi continues to refer to the metaphysical things as well as the lower-order beings as “beings.” At the end of the passage, he clearly refers to the former as “principles” (*mabda', mabādi'*) rather than as beings (*Sa'ādah* 63:1–3/15:14–15). According to Pines (1974), p. 76, Alfarabi affirmed the existence of “immaterial substances.”

entities can themselves be cognized to the extent necessary for metaphysical inquiry to be capable of completion. In the final part of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, Alfarabi reinforces the impression that the highest metaphysical inquiry can in principle produce substantive results by attributing to philosophy “an account of the ultimate principles . . . as they are perceived by the intellect,” which is equated with the “essence of the first principle and the essences of the incorporeal principles” (Mahdi) (*Sa'ādah* 90:21–22/40:19–41:1).<sup>50</sup> The parallel passage in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, which appears to be a summary of the account of metaphysical inquiry in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, similarly suggests the knowability of the subject of metaphysics.<sup>51</sup>

*Kitāb al-Hurūf* contains the most unambiguous statement concerning the limits of human knowledge. According to a passage in that work describing the development of the arts and sciences, by Aristotle's time theoretical philosophy and universal practical philosophy<sup>52</sup> had reached perfection, there remained nothing in them left to investigate, and they became an art to be learned and taught (*Hurūf* No. 143, 151:17–152:2). A parallel passage in one of Alfarabi's commentaries on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* repeats much of the account of the arts contained in this passage of *Kitāb al-Hurūf*. However, it omits the assertion about the perfection of philosophy, and it implies that philosophy, or philosophizing, continued to be engaged in as an investigative art after Aristotle's time (*Khaṭābah* 55:9–57:9).<sup>53</sup> Certainly the account of Aristotle's philosophy in Alfarabi's *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs* lends support to the position that for Alfarabi philosophy was still fundamentally the active *pursuit* of truth at the time of his Greek predecessor. Since the account of philosophy in *Kitāb al-*

<sup>50</sup> The context is a comparison between religion and philosophy. It is therefore possible that the claims made on behalf of philosophy are exaggerated in order to portray philosophy as knowing what religion claims to know. On this passage, see Mahdi (1975A), pp. 52–53 (the investigator can only know that the first principle exists and that it must be absolutely perfect), (1969A), pp. xiv–xv (what leads the investigator to need and then abandon metaphysics), (1975B), p. 130 (in Alfarabi's more philosophical works he argues directly or indirectly against the inclusion of the study of the incorporeal beings in metaphysics or against the view of its centrality for metaphysics).

<sup>51</sup> *Fuṣūl* No. 94, 97:7–98:5. In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* 98:1–2, however, the first principle is clearly characterized as a being (*al-mawjūd al-awwal*). The result of the metaphysical inquiry is described with the same phrase as is used in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* (*Fuṣūl* 98:4).

<sup>52</sup> Reading *wa'l-'amaliyyah al-kullīyyah*, suggested by Mahdi, for *wa'l-'āmiyyah al-kullīyyah* in the printed edition.

<sup>53</sup> For example, people continued to use dialectic for training and sophistry for testing (*Khaṭābah* 57:3–4). The picture painted in *Kitāb al-Hurūf* may be prompted by Alfarabi's observation about the potential destructiveness of dialectic and sophistry for the beliefs of ordinary adherents of religion (*Hurūf* No. 151). This suggests that the account of philosophy as complete in *Kitāb al-Hurūf* may have been dictated by another practical consideration, namely, the need to banish these destructive logical arts from the city.

*Hurūf* appears to be strongly influenced by the desire to present philosophy as a worthy competitor of religion with respect to knowledge of metaphysical truths—indeed, the doctrine that religion is an imitation of philosophy requires that philosophy be presented as possessing such knowledge—it is possible that the claim made on behalf of philosophy in that work (and in similarly defensive contexts) should not be accepted at face value.

To sum up, Alfarabi's classifications of the sciences are distinctive in that he calls into question the traditional distinction between theoretical and practical by expanding theoretical perfection to include portions of what is often referred to as the science of ethics and political science. He also qualifies the status of metaphysics as the supreme science by pointing out the ways in which it exists for the sake of the other sciences, by suggesting that there are limits to the ability of human reason to understand the objects of metaphysical inquiry, and by portraying the science of human things as a parallel inquiry with insight into the universe beyond nature. The larger effect of Alfarabi's presentation is to stress the importance of human things or to counter the tendency to glorify nature and what is beyond nature at the expense of what is human.<sup>54</sup> Thus, it appears that on the level of epistemology, Alfarabi is attempting to combat the otherworldly tendencies of certain philosophical doctrines, just as in some of his works he criticizes the otherworldly tendencies of certain theological doctrines (see *Madīnah* 314:12–316:5/80:14–81:2, see 316:6–318:13/81:2–82:1, *Fuṣūl* No. 81).

### C. THE AUTONOMY OF PRACTICAL REASON

Even if theoretical perfection comes into being through the actualization of the theoretical intellect or theoretical reason, both parts of the rational faculty must be perfected for the actualization of human reason as such

<sup>54</sup> In several articles Pines presents evidence that Alfarabi did not believe in man's ability to attain complete knowledge of metaphysical things. He argues that the doctrine that human happiness consists in political activity is a corollary of this belief (Pines 1974, p. 76, 1979, p. 83). I do not see how the unavailability of complete theoretical knowledge requires the conclusion that happiness in the best case consists in action or political activity, as opposed to the lifelong effort to attain as much theoretical knowledge as is available, unless some or most of the metaphysical beings do not actually exist. In an earlier work, Pines describes the doctrine that human happiness consists in practical action as a "plausible conclusion" from the impossibility of union with the agent intellect (Pines 1963, p. lxxx). At the same time, on the basis of the text in Averroes' commentary on the *De Anima* referred to earlier, he says that Alfarabi may have concluded from man's inability to cognize fully the agent intellect that discursive but not intuitive knowledge is available (Pines 1963, p. lxxx). For an analysis of Alfarabi that stresses the importance of metaphysical knowledge for his philosophy as a whole, see Druart (1987).

to occur. This doctrine is implied in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, where on two occasions Alfarabi appears to describe the agent intellect as interacting directly with both aspects of the rational faculty (*Madīnah* 218:11–16/50:15–20, 244:7–12/58:18–23).<sup>55</sup> The doctrine is also implicit in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* in Alfarabi's enumeration of the powers possessed by a person whose rational potential has reached the stage of being an "acquired intellect,"<sup>56</sup> since the result of the human intellect's last contact with the agent intellect is said to be the ability to determine and direct actions toward the attainment of happiness (*Siyāsah* 79:15–17 with 79:7–8)—an ability associated with practical reason.

To grasp the interaction between the theoretical and the practical aspects of the rational faculty, it is necessary first to clarify the elements that, taken together, comprise the practical reasoning process: practical intellect, deliberation, and art (see *Siyāsah* 33:3–4, *Fuṣūl* No. 7, 29:7, 29:14–30:2, No. 33, 50:7). Deliberation (*rawiyyah*) is the mental process involved in all reflection on the means to promote specific ends. Alfarabi evaluates deliberation along two dimensions, the effectiveness of the means it discovers in realizing the end sought after and the value of the end it seeks. When deliberation discovers the most effective means for bringing about a really good end, whether happiness itself or some condition or component of happiness, it is called prudence or practical wisdom (*ta'aqqul*, Greek *phronēsis*) (*Fuṣūl* No. 39, 55:6–9, see *'Aql* 5:3–5, 7:5–8). When the end in view is not excellence, happiness, or a real good, the mental activity that discovers the most effective means to achieve the end is "cunning" or "cleverness" (*dahā'*) (*Fuṣūl* No. 39, 55:10–56:1, see *'Aql* 5:1–3).<sup>57</sup> Deliberation is thus the morally neutral core of the practical reasoning process.

All deliberation has recourse to principles relating to practical matters. A rough analogy can be made between the premises of practical reasoning and deliberation based on them, on the one hand, and the premises of the

<sup>55</sup> The thrust of this passage thus conflicts with the work's initial classification of the soul and the rational faculties, in which the theoretical-practical distinction was not made (*Madīnah* 164:13–15/34:22–23, 168:14–170:2/35:22–36:3). The distinction is first introduced at *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* 208:2–4/47:1–3. In light of the nearly identical classifications in both *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* (No. 7, 29:5–30:2) and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* (32:15–33:15), it seems fair to say that in the initial classification of the soul in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, the theoretical-practical distinction is deliberately omitted.

<sup>56</sup> For the doctrine of the acquired intellect in Islamic philosophy, see Davidson (1972), pp. 141–144, 160–161; Rahman (1958), pp. 12–14, 19–20.

<sup>57</sup> In *Kitāb al-Millah* this seems to be the faculty that Alfarabi labels *judah qarīḥah khabīṭah* ("thoroughly evil genus") (*Millah* 61:3, see *Iḥṣā'* 130:6). In this work, Alfarabi appears to use the term "experiential faculty" (*al-quwwah al-tajribiyyah*) to refer to practical reason viewed without regard to the character of its goal. See *Fuṣūl* No. 93, 93:19–94:19.

sciences and syllogistic reasoning from them, on the other (*'Aql* 10:2–4). The analogy is not precise for two reasons. First, deliberation does not necessarily make use of syllogistic reasoning. In particular, syllogistic reasoning, which accommodates a single middle term, is impossible whenever practical reasoning must take several factors into account simultaneously at each step of the reasoning process. Because practical reasoning is made up of branching, as opposed to linear, sequences of means-ends determinations, it is ordinarily characterized in terms of forming judgments (*tahakkama*), while its theoretical counterpart takes place by means of demonstrating conclusions (*barhana*). Second, practical premises are not necessarily universal and invariable, as are their theoretical counterparts. They may be universal at one time and indeterminate or even completely invalid at another. Some practical principles may cover only a single or isolated instances (*Fuṣūl* No. 38, 54:13–55:2, *Sa'ādah* 65:19–66:5/18:5–11). The reason that practical principles are not uniform and predictable is that they deal with the accidental and variable attributes that characterize individual objects and events when these have concrete existence. Accidental attributes are subject to frequent change, infrequent change, or anything in between; and they change as a result of occurrences and influences of a similarly limitless variety. Since beings and events of this kind are variable, and the conditions that cause them to vary cannot be classified exhaustively, the rules that describe their accidental, but necessary, characteristics suffer from a similar indeterminacy (see *Sa'ādah* 65:16–67:8/18:2–19:10, *Fuṣūl* No. 92, 93:15–16, see *Millah* 49:9–50:3).

There are, therefore, two generically distinct kinds of principles involved in practical reasoning about human things. One kind consists in cognitions about human things in their universal aspect—when they have a universal aspect. For example, such cognitions include the idea or the essential properties and causes of justice as such, as opposed to a specific kind of justice; human happiness, understood in terms of the nature of the rational animal and not in terms of a particular group of people or specific individuals; the organization and operation of political communities as such, without reference to particular governments; and moral virtue as a state of soul acquired through practices or education that can be discussed in general terms or in terms that do not depend for their validity on particular traits considered virtuous by specific communities. This first genus of practical principles also includes cognitions of greater specificity than those just enumerated, which can nonetheless be properly classified as universal. For example, simple or pure types of regimes—such as aristocracy, democracy, and despotism—possess a universal character. Each of these can be examined in terms of its essence or defining structure, i.e., abstracted from the accidental characteristics that neces-

sarily attach to concrete instances of actual governments (*Fuṣūl* No. 91, 92:18–93:1). In short, these are the political or human insights available to the political philosopher through theoretical inquiry. They are the practical insights subsumed under theoretical perfection and grasped by the theoretical intellect. In contrast to these is the second genus of practical principles, those that account for the nonessential attributes and causes of practical things as they actually exist. Cognitions of this kind do not account for every last instance of a given phenomenon. They are limited to describing patterns of behavior that the observed instances exhibit. Examples of practical principles of this second kind would be general rules that describe the ways in which different geographical locations, natural resources, population size, levels of technology, and the like alter the creation, operation, preservation, and even usefulness of human phenomena as understood in their universal aspect (*Fuṣūl* No. 92, *Sa'ādah* 18:13–20:3, see *Millah* 59:5–6).

The role played by knowledge of practical principles of the second kind in the attainment of rational perfection is elusive and needs to be explored. According to Alfarabi, a person deliberating about the means to achieve a particular goal ordinarily relies upon generally accepted opinions held by people at large or upon premises the person recognizes as a result of his own experience or observations (*Fuṣūl* No. 46). The principles that people possessing practical wisdom or prudence make use of, on the other hand, are exclusively of the latter variety (*Fuṣūl* No. 38, see *'Aql* 9:5–10:2). To put it another way, the excellent or best condition of the practical rational faculty depends on personal insight based upon experience. Only when one is no longer speaking of practical virtue or excellence can the experience of others be substituted for one's own experience (see *Millah* 61:5–9).

Alfarabi does not spell out the details of the process of reaching practical insights on the basis of experience. In *Kitāb al-Burhān* he refers to it as a kind of inductive reasoning that is set in motion by a case-by-case review of particular observable objects or events. However, this mode of inductive reasoning differs from induction proper in that it reaches certain (and not merely probable) conclusions (*Burhān* 24:17–25:3/139v9–16).<sup>58</sup> Although he states in *Kitāb al-Burhān* that for purposes of the

<sup>58</sup> In *Kitāb al-Jadal* Alfarabi distinguishes two kinds of induction, one scientific, the other dialectical (*Jadal* 101:16–102:18/244v8–245r18). Dialectical induction is induction that aims at establishing certainty in the form of a universal proposition. Dialectical induction attempts to arrive at such universals as a result of canvassing all of the particular instances of a thing or one of each species. Scientific induction, on the other hand, has as its object *taṣawwur* or *fahm*, that is, a conceptual understanding of a thing, as contrasted with an assertion of its existence or attributes. It seems that dialectical induction is classified as dialectical, in the sense of less than certain, because one can never be sure that all the relevant



study of logic it is unnecessary to discuss where primary premises come from (*Burhān* 25:6–9/140r1–4, see 24:15–17/139v6–9), elsewhere he explains experiential knowledge as knowledge that arises from the “practice” of an art, as contrasted with “book learning” or knowledge arrived at through syllogistic reasoning (*Millah* 57:19–59:2, see *Burhān* 72:19–21/171v8–10).<sup>59</sup> In *Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr* Alfarabi elaborates further the experiential process.<sup>60</sup> According to this work, after individual instances have become objects of sensation and imagination, and the intellect abstracts and combines such impressions, a natural faculty or power (*quwwah*) of the intellect forms a judgment based upon what has been impressed upon the mind (*dhihn*) in this fashion. This process is different from induction, which does not involve the intellect’s specific activity of forming judgments in the manner described (*Mūsīqā* 92:9–96:7). Although Alfarabi does not in this work explain the process involved more concretely, he does note that the intellect cannot perform this function at will (*Mūsīqā* 93:10–13), and that the number of sensible individual instances that must be experienced before certainty can be achieved can vary greatly—from a single exposure to a single object, on the one hand, to repeated exposures to multiple objects, on the other (*Mūsīqā* 94:9–95:1). Alfarabi’s description of the experiential process in *Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr* is thus consistent with the suggestion in *Fuṣūl Muntaza’ah* and elsewhere that there is a sense in which the practical intellect may never be fully actualized and additional practical principles will always remain to be discovered (*Fuṣūl* No. 38, 55:3–5, see *‘Aql* 10:9–11:1, 11:6–9). Whether or not this poses more than a logical obstacle to the attainment of happiness must be considered.

The portrait of happiness as essentially theoretical presupposes that the actualization of the practical intellect is desirable only when and to the extent that it contributes to the actualization of the theoretical intellect. However, several passages in Alfarabi’s works point toward a more autonomous role for practical reason. First, Alfarabi makes clear in *Al-*

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instances of a thing have been reviewed. In contrast, since an examination of certain particulars may expose the essential nature of a thing without establishing its universal existence, it would appear that there is no need in the case of “scientific induction” to review every particular or one of every class. In any event, Alfarabi emphasizes that “scientific induction” merely resembles (*shabīb*) induction (*Jadal* 101:16/244v8–9) and that the certainty resulting from scientific induction does not result from the induction directly, but from the understanding triggered by the induction (see especially *Jadal* 102:3–5/244v18–245r2, 102:14–18/245r14–18).

<sup>59</sup> See *Burhan* 71:14–72:11/170v15–171r18, 74:3–75:24/172v7–174r7, on the role of experience in the arts.

<sup>60</sup> Although *Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr* is concerned with the art of music (to be precise, with the practical art of music and the theoretical art of music), the passage referred to purports to discuss the first principles of all arts, not just the musical arts.

*Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* that a person can know what happiness is and fail to pursue it (*Siyāsah* 73:13–17, 74:9–12, *Madīnah* 208:13–210:1/47:11–15). In the passages at issue, “knowledge” of happiness appears to be used in the technical sense of theoretical understanding (*Siyāsah* 73:11–13, 74:9–12, *Madīnah* 208:10–210:1/47:8–15).<sup>61</sup> Passages in *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* and *Taḥṣīl al-Sa‘ādah* also depict happiness as discovered in the last stages of philosophic inquiry, after logic and the theoretical sciences have been studied extensively, if not mastered in their entirety (*Fuṣūl* No. 94, 97:12–98:8, *Sa‘ādah* 63:4ff./15:16ff.). The statements in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* are problematic for the account of happiness in terms of theoretical perfection because if happiness is only known after the theoretical sciences are close to completion, and happiness consists in theoretical activity exclusively, it will be virtually impossible for a person to know what happiness is and fail to pursue it, since the very activity that makes possible knowledge of what happiness is, is itself the activity that knowledge prescribes. Alternatively, if we were to posit that the theoretical sciences are close to completion but metaphysics or some other inquiry is still incomplete when the theoretical character of happiness is discovered, the action dictated by knowledge of happiness would be something like the lifelong attempt to resolve those philosophical questions still unanswered and, possibly, inherently incapable of definitive resolution. In that case, the practical knowledge made possible by partial theoretical perfection would be knowledge of the need to devote oneself totally to philosophical inquiry into such remaining questions.

Although the latter interpretation of the action dictated by philosophic insight into happiness cannot be dismissed, it is difficult to reconcile with Alfarabi’s repeated statements to the effect that *after* a person has discovered what happiness is, the person first deliberates to discover the means to attain happiness and then harnesses the appetitive, imaginative, and sense faculties to facilitate the attainment of this goal. This description seems too elaborate to refer to a process whereby one continues to engage in the activity that one has already been engaging in successfully for the greater part of one’s adult life, namely, theoretical inquiry. In short, if the action dictated by knowledge of human happiness is further philosophical

<sup>61</sup> In the passage in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, verbs from the root ‘\*l\*m are used both when happiness is known and made the end of action and when it is known but not made the end of action. In contrast, in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, different verbs are used, possibly to suggest that the type of knowledge involved is different in the two cases. Contrast *Taḥṣīl al-Sa‘ādah* 95:16–18/45:12–13 (the false philosopher is someone who has acquired the theoretical sciences without achieving the corresponding degree of perfection that comes from introducing such things to others to the extent their ability permits) and 96:10–15/46:6–10 (the false philosopher has the same view of happiness as the multitude).

inquiry, a way of life qualitatively the same as the activity engaged in up to that point, Alfarabi's description of the role played by appetite, imagination, sense perception, and practical reason would not seem to fit the actual undertaking at hand. Alfarabi's description suggests rather that the action dictated by knowledge of human happiness is qualitatively different from the activity previously engaged in and thus that human happiness consists in more than theoretical perfection. In other words, one inference from Alfarabi's suggestions that not all action directed toward happiness is directed toward the pursuit of theoretical activity is that happiness consists in more than theoretical perfection and that practical reason is in some measure autonomous.

#### D. THE DOCTRINE OF THE AGENT INTELLECT

One feature of Alfarabi's metaphysics as it is presented in *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* that points in the direction of a comprehensive understanding of human happiness is the relationship he portrays between the character of perfection and the nature of the agent intellect. The most obvious import of human perfection conceived in terms of proximity to or similarity with the agent intellect is theoretical activity, since the agent intellect is described in terms of sustained intellection having as its object the purest transcendent beings (*Siyāṣah* 34:16). At the same time, the agent intellect is not a typical secondary cause. In addition to its purely contemplative activity, which parallels the activity of other secondary causes, the agent intellect appears to be distinguished by its concern for human development. The agent intellect is said to "seek" (*fi'luh* . . . *iltimās*) and "want" (*rāma*) the ultimate perfection or transcendence of those in its sphere of influence (*Siyāṣah* 32:6–7, 55:6–7); and its efforts on behalf of humanity are repeatedly described as the agent intellect's purpose (*gharad*) (*Siyāṣah* 73:2, 3, 4, 6, 8). In contrast, the other secondary causes achieve their effects through an emanation that appears to operate out of mechanistic necessity. There is no sense in which they exist for the sake of their effects, whether on one another or on other beings (*Siyāṣah* 39:15–17, 41:13–14). In *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* Alfarabi thus separates the agency of the agent intellect from the agency of the remaining secondary causes by attributing a kind of intentionality to it.

According to *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*, it is Aristotle's opinion that when the human intellect attains its final perfection, its substance comes close to being the substance of the agent intellect (*Aristūṭālīs* 128:6–8). Further, in that work the human intellect in its most perfect state is said to follow the example (*yaḥtadhī ḥadhwa*) of the agent intellect (*Aristūṭālīs* 128:8–17). Were Alfarabi to adopt a similar doctrine, the implication would be

that the fully actualized human intellect also has a twofold nature, part contemplative and part acting to perfect something external to it.

There are indications in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* that Alfarabi's understanding of human perfection involves the same relationship between the human intellect and the agent intellect that he attributes to Aristotle in *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*. Foremost among these is the similarity in the terminology Alfarabi uses to describe the effect the agent intellect has on the human realm, on the one hand, and the effect the supreme ruler (i.e., the recipient of revelation) has on those subject to his rule, on the other. The agent intellect takes the rational faculty, which is supplied by nature, and causes it to become intellect in act (*yusayyiruhā 'aqlan bi'l-fi'l*). In this way human happiness becomes perfect (*Siyāsah* 35:6, 10–11). According to a parallel passage involving the supreme ruler, the actions determined by the supreme ruler and directed toward happiness strengthen the part of the soul innately disposed to happiness and cause it to become actual (*tusayyiruh bi'l-fi'l*) and perfect (*Siyāsah* 81:10–11). Again, the agent intellect seeks to enable the rational animal to reach ultimate happiness, defined as becoming a separate substance capable of subsisting without matter, and to stay in that condition forever (*Siyāsah* 32:6–9). Similarly, as a result of the actions prescribed by the supreme ruler, the part of the soul disposed to happiness ceases to need matter to subsist and will not perish when matter perishes (*Siyāsah* 81:11–13). There is, then, an analogy clearly suggested in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* between the activity of the supreme ruler and the operation of the agent intellect.

In sum, the doctrine of perfection as achieving, or almost achieving, the rank of the agent intellect; the portrait of the agent intellect as a providential force in the world; and the parallels between the terminology used to describe the concern for mankind displayed by the agent intellect and the terminology used to describe the actions of the supreme ruler all provide theoretical grounds for the comprehensive portrait of happiness that Alfarabi sketches in more political, and possibly more rhetorical, contexts. The passages just discussed thus lend support to Alfarabi's assertion that the ruler of the ideal political community obtains an excellence that is available nowhere else and that is the highest human excellence attainable (*Fuṣūl* No. 89, 92:5–6). They likewise provide a theoretical basis for Alfarabi's claim that the happiness of the king of the city of excellence is most perfect because the king is the cause of the happiness of all the other citizens (*Fuṣūl* No. 30).

The preceding analysis is open to certain objections. First, complete transcendence of one's bodily existence, which is presupposed by the typical description of the contemplative ideal, and political or other practical activity appear to be mutually exclusive. According to *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* the agent intellect is said to engage in its disparate activities

without possessing a dual nature as a result (*Siyāsah* 32:9–10). However, the manner in which it interacts with corporeal beings without sacrificing its transcendent character is mysterious, and Alfarabi offers no express explanation. On one level, the explanation may be found in the circumstance that the aid provided by the agent intellect is confined to supplying or illuminating *intelligible ideas*; and it performs this function indirectly, according to certain of Alfarabi's descriptions, by a process analogous to the illumination that makes vision possible (*Siyāsah* 35:12–17). In contrast, the supreme ruler contributes to the existence of happiness by discovering and communicating *beneficial actions* and *opinions*. The ruler may thus be forced to employ subrational faculties, especially imagination, to ensure that his advice or commands will be effective. At the very least, he will have to take account in his reflections of the corporeal natures of those he seeks to guide. Thus, if theoretical perfection is understood in terms of transcendence, and practical perfection consists in the activity of the supreme ruler, the activities presupposed by practical perfection would seem to be incompatible with, and possibly to undermine, the activity comprising theoretical perfection.

Second, the rational part of the soul is presented in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* as completely self-contained when it has become actualized to the point of becoming, or almost becoming, a separate substance; i.e., its existence is confined to itself, without anything emanating to others (*Siyāsah* 42:3–8). Once the rational soul is separated from the remaining psychic faculties, it can act as a cause only by virtue of serving as an end (*ghāyah*), not as an agent (*Siyāsah* 42:10–13). In contrast to the situation with the first and secondary causes, then, the greater a person's intellectual perfection, the more self-contained the person appears to be. For human beings, bliss (*jamāl*, *bahā'*, *ghibṭah*) consists in intellection alone, whereas for the higher beings it consists in a combination of intellection and causing existence to emanate to others (*Siyāsah* 40:6–41:2, 41:13–14). Thus, to the extent that ultimate happiness, according to *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, consists in becoming a separate substance or coming as close to pure incorporeality as possible (*Siyāsah* 32:6–9, 35:7–11, 55:6–10), it should follow that the end of man is a self-contained state of intellection. The argument of this passage in the metaphysical half of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* thus supports the portrait of human happiness as essentially theoretical.

#### E. POLITICS AS METAPHOR

The sharpness of the antithesis between the alternative portraits of happiness is reduced, albeit not eliminated, by the unconventional meaning Alfarabi bestows on such key concepts as "city," "rule," and "supreme

ruler.” If the understanding of happiness as a combination of theoretical and practical perfection were his final teaching, we would expect as a consequence that only the philosopher-king could be truly happy, since only a founder or a supreme ruler can be the agent or cause of the citizens’ happiness. Yet Alfarabi always stops short of saying precisely this.<sup>62</sup> In *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* and *Taḥṣīl al-Sa‘ādah*, Alfarabi asserts that the supreme ruler, true king, or true philosopher is what he is even if no use is made of him by the community in which he resides, i.e., even if he does not found or govern a political community (*Sa‘ādah* 96:18–97:9/46:12–47:2, *Fuṣūl* No. 32, 49:3–11). In other words, in these two books the initial emphasis on action as part of philosophy and of being human is not sustained, and governance is not ultimately presented as a necessary part of true philosophy or true kingship.

In both works the shift comes as a surprise. In *Taḥṣīl al-Sa‘ādah* the thesis has just been advanced that a philosopher who fails to use the theoretical sciences on behalf of other people or fails to try to share his discoveries with others in some fashion is a false philosopher. Similarly, immediately before the passage in *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* that discusses the result if no use is made of the philosopher, there is an aphorism asserting that man’s first or moral perfection consists in doing the actions of the virtues and not merely in possessing the virtues (*Fuṣūl* No. 28, 45:13–46:3). Curiously, in the earlier of the two aphorisms the analogy of the doctor is appealed to in order to defend the necessity of action (*Fuṣūl* 46:4–5), whereas the later aphorism has recourse to the doctor analogy to support the nonessential character of action for the ruling art (*Fuṣūl* No. 32, 49:6–10).

In both books a pattern can be observed in the statements Alfarabi makes about true and false philosophers. The true philosopher is repeatedly attributed with the actual possession of the theoretical sciences but with only the faculty (*quwwah*) or capacity (*qudrah*) to utilize that knowledge to help others (*Fuṣūl* No. 32, 49:3–4, 10–11, *Sa‘ādah* 89:10–20/39:11–18, 92:4–6/42:5–7). It might seem, then, that Alfarabi can be

<sup>62</sup> With the possible exception of the passage in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* (58:18–59:3/244:7–16), discussed above, where Alfarabi claims that the philosopher-king-prophet attains the highest degree of happiness. He does not, however, claim that only the philosopher-king-prophet reaches this degree of happiness or that no other degree of happiness is real happiness. Similarly, in *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* (No. 30) the king of the city of excellence is said to be the most perfect in happiness of the city’s inhabitants, but there is no indication that only he is truly happy or that in any other setting he cannot be truly happy. Contrast *Falsafat Aflātun* (No. 32, 20:13–14), which appears to make the city ruled by philosophers a condition of the attainment of happiness. On this passage, see Strauss (1945), p. 379. See also *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* (No. 89, 92:5–6) (in the regime of excellence [*al-siyāsah al-fāḍilah*] the ruler [*sā‘is*] acquires a kind of excellence not available elsewhere—the greatest excellence that a human being can acquire).

cleared of the charge of inconsistency if the practical component of philosophy or happiness is an expression of art and not of virtue.<sup>63</sup> In the former case it is a kind of understanding that is stressed; in the latter the emphasis is on conduct. Militating against this solution is the fact that the practical arts, like the “practical virtues,” are themselves products of action and habituation (*Sa’ādah* 79:16/31:3, *Millah* 57:19–58:6, 59:1–2, 60:7–8). Thus, it is not sufficient to say that the true philosopher’s practical excellence consists in a power that is divorced from action. At the same time, there is a sense in which art presupposes action for its genesis but not for its continuance. The political art might, then, be analogous to the art of writing in that, once established, it does not need to be exercised regularly to be possessed. If this is correct, then Alfarabi’s dictum equating philosophers and kings could mean that the general rules grasped by the practical intellect as a result of engaging in political activities are needed either to perfect practical reason, which is part of being human, or to enable theoretical intellect to reach a full understanding of human things.<sup>64</sup> Political experience would not, according to this view, be sought for its own sake, i.e., it would not be sought because the nonphilosophic aspects of human potential are essential ingredients of human flourishing.

The reformulation of practical perfection in terms of an ability that can at any moment be realized appears at first to afford a position midway between the portrait of happiness as essentially theoretical and the comprehensive portrait. Initially Alfarabi seems to expand the meaning of moral virtue from a fundamentally private activity to political excellence, i.e., the moral and deliberative virtues whose sphere of operation is the improvement of an entire community. Yet he also seems to say that given the unwillingness of communities to acknowledge philosophy’s authority in the political arena even in the best case, i.e., when the community’s religion is itself based upon philosophy (*Hurūf* No. 149, 155:1–14), the philosopher needs to expend effort on nontheoretical pursuits only to the degree necessary for learning how to rule. Although actually ruling and the demands of philosophy may be mutually exclusive, training to be a ruler and philosophic investigation need not be antithetical over the span of a lifetime. Alfarabi’s reformulation of the comprehensive portrait of happiness, as elaborated here, would transform the philosopher’s moral

<sup>63</sup> See *Sa’ādah* 97:1–3/46:15–16 and Mahdi (1969A), p. 156.

<sup>64</sup> In a discussion of the partially analogous relationship between the practical art of music and the theoretical art of music, Alfarabi states clearly that, contrary to the popular view of the relationship between the sciences and the practical arts, the practical art of music precedes the theoretical art of music in time. The popular view, namely, that those in possession of the sciences establish the corresponding practical arts, rests on an exaggerated view of the knowledge possessed by men of science and a failure to appreciate the extent to which experiential knowledge depends on the practical arts (*Mūsīqā* 98:3–99:7).

life into an exclusively selfish enterprise. A person would learn how to make the world a better place to live in, not with any expectation of bettering mankind, but in order to develop the person's own human potential to the fullest. Thus, the level of Alfarabi's works that, when taken literally, supports the contemplative portrait of happiness would be valid inasmuch as it indicates the predominantly intellectual, private, and selfish character of happiness in the best case. The level that, when taken literally, depicts the philosopher as ruler would also be valid as an indication of the fact that the highest human potential extends beyond the perfection of theoretical reason.

This interpretation of the practical component of happiness accords with another feature of Alfarabi's political philosophy—the conditional nature of the ideal political community or city of excellence. Were it the case that the actual founding or rule of an ideal political community is a condition of happiness, it would follow that the highest human end is impossible in any but the city of excellence and the true philosopher must establish or govern such a city. In fact, however, the claim made in *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is only that people need to live and associate with others in order to achieve their best state, that is, that ultimate perfection or happiness is possible primarily within the confines of communal life (*Madīnah* 228:2–10/53:8–16, 230:3–7/54:1–5, *Siyāṣah* 69:16–17). Alfarabi never claims that happiness is possible only in the city or nation of excellence. Rather, the city of excellence is presented as unique because it is the only form of political association that has real happiness as its deliberate and immediate goal (*Madīnah* 230:7–8/54:5–7, see *Fuṣūl* No. 28, 46:10–11).<sup>65</sup> In other words, Alfarabi's indications that happiness is possible in cities less than ideal accord with his characterization of true kingship in terms of an art or ability, since both imply that living in a city of excellence is not a necessary condition of happiness. Moreover, participation in imperfect forms of government may be all that developing a person's experiential faculty and practical reason requires (see *Millah* 57:21–58:2). The hypothesis that rule is a means of actualizing the practical intellect, therefore, could explain Alfarabi's insistence that happiness presupposes political life but not necessarily the establishment of an ideal political order.

Consistent with this interpretation of the tension between the theoretical and the practical in Alfarabi's writings are remarks he makes in *Kitāb al-Burhān* about the varieties of art, the kind of knowledge available to each, and the ways one art can depend upon or be otherwise related to another. According to that work, among the arts are pairs of theoretical and practical arts that are related (*mujānis*) in that they share the same

<sup>65</sup> See Chapter IV below, on cities of excellence.



subject but differ in method and in the type of knowledge obtained. Examples of such pairs are mathematical astronomy and the empirical study of the stars, or, in the political realm, scientific politics (*al-siyāsah al-‘ilmiyyah*) and practical politics (*al-siyāsah al-‘amaliyyah*). One member of each pair is based on experience, the other on reasoning (*qiyās*). Since neither discipline is self-sufficient, a reciprocal exchange of information takes place between them (*Burhān* 71:16–72:11/170v17–171r18). By “practical politics” in *Kitāb al-Burhān*, Alfarabi appears to mean the activity associated in the political treatises with practical reason, that is, the combination of the deliberative and productive faculties.

Two arts may be mutually supportive without losing their peculiar identities. In particular, Alfarabi warns, one must be wary of confusing arts that are accidentally practical with those that are essentially practical, or the reverse. An art may be essentially theoretical even though it makes use of judgments realized through experience and even though there exists a corresponding practical art that investigates the same subjects as a prelude to action (*Burhān* 74:20–24/173r7–13, *Mūsīqā* 89:5–12). The example given is natural science and medicine, the pair of related arts to which political science is most often compared. Finally, in *Kitāb al-Burhān* Alfarabi indicates that political science, or practical philosophy, is thought to be both scientific and practical because its subject matter is will, choice, and custom, although in fact it is not essentially related to action (*Burhān* 74:25–75:2/173r14–16). The teaching of *Kitāb al-Burhān* is thus consistent with the view that political activity is necessary for philosophy because it is a source of the raw material with which the investigations of political philosophy are concerned. In this respect, the two arts of politics resemble other pairs of theoretical and practical arts where the practical art supplies the theoretical art with knowledge of what exists and the theoretical art ascertains the causes or grounds of the same objects (*Burhān* 75:10–22/173v7–174r4). The teaching of *Kitāb al-Burhān* is also harmonious with the teaching of *Kitāb al-Jadal*, which contains the most emphatic statement that happiness, and not will or action, is the ultimate principle of practical philosophy and political science.

At the same time, the reformulation of practical perfection in terms of ability does not resolve all the difficulties connected with Alfarabi’s understanding of happiness. To begin with, the idea of the true philosopher is said to encompass the idea of the imam. “Imam,” in turn, connotes “the one whose example is followed and who is well received: that is, either his perfection is well received or his purpose is well received” (Mahdi) (*Sa‘ādah* 93:8–9/43:9–10). Essential to the idea of imam, in other words, is the ability to communicate persuasively, whether by words or by deeds. If the idea of the imam forms part of the idea of the philosopher, therefore, it follows that widespread, popular hostility to the philosopher’s

mission would be inconsistent with the idea of the philosopher. Thus, the situation envisioned in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, where no use is made of the philosopher, should not occur at all or should be the exception rather than the rule. The philosopher's practical excellence should include both the capacity to rule and the ability to ensure the exercise of that capacity (see *Sa'ādah* 77:17–19/29:7–10). Thus, far from the philosopher's seclusion from politics being an article of faith, the idea of the philosopher would seem to entail the ability to make members of a community willing to submit to the rule of philosophers. Given the specific meaning that Alfarabi imparts to the idea "imam," in other words, the reader is forced to ask whether Alfarabi's statements about practical perfection are coherent—a question that is independent of the larger problem of the tension among the competing interpretations of happiness.

A number of passages, spread throughout Alfarabi's political and other treatises, ascribe a somewhat circumscribed but concrete practical activity to philosophers. According to *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* the people governed by the rule of the supreme ruler, or true king, are virtuous, good, and happy, whether they live together in one community or separately in distant countries (*Siyāsah* 80:5–9). The words used for "governance" and "rule" are *tadbīr* and *riyāsah*, expressions that ordinarily signify political rule. Yet the passage makes clear that "rule" of one person over another is possible when some or all the people involved live in geographically distinct places or in different centuries. "Rule" thus appears to be employed in a fashion contrary to ordinary usage. The obvious meaning of a "governance" that could transcend geographical or generational boundaries is the perpetuation of a religious or other doctrine through adherence by disciples in different lands or epochs. In either case we can speak of an identifiable group of people whose lives are governed in important respects by a common set of laws or rules, even if they are governed politically by widely differing laws or rules. Ordinary usage would designate the latter political and the former apolitical governance. Alfarabi, it appears, has in this passage availed himself of political vocabulary in a seemingly apolitical context.

The same borrowing occurs in *Ihṣā' al-'Ulūm*. At first *riyāsah* is explained as causing "virtuous actions and ways of life . . . [to be] distributed in the cities and nations according to a certain order and . . . practiced in common" (Najjar) (*Ihṣā'* 125:3–7, see *Millah* 54:8–11). In a later passage the description is repeated and the stipulation that the virtuous actions and ways of life must be practiced in common is dropped (*Ihṣā'* 127:12–13, see *Millah* 59:10–13). *Ihṣā' al-'Ulūm* thus reflects the two Farabian doctrines that appear in his other works: happiness is possible only when people live in cities or larger political units, and happiness does

not depend for its existence on everyone's possessing the same way of life or even different ways of life that work together toward a unified goal.

A brief paragraph in *Kitāb al-Jadal* helps to clarify the preceding idea.

It is clear from the present [discussion] that in Aristotle's opinion the philosopher is the person who has attained the end of the two parts of philosophy. That is, philosophy has two parts, one theoretical<sup>66</sup> and one practical. The end of the theoretical is truth and knowledge simply. The end of the practical is choosing one thing and avoiding another. Human beings attain the end of the practical part not through their own insights, but through knowledge of it that precedes or is simultaneous with action. On the other hand, when a person attains knowledge of it without acting, then that knowledge is in vain. (Something is in vain when it exists but is not accompanied by the end for the sake of which it exists.) Just as the person who possesses theoretical knowledge will not be a philosopher by virtue of inquiry and investigation unless he attains the end for the sake of which inquiry and investigation exist—i.e., setting up demonstrations—so the person who possesses practical knowledge will not become a philosopher unless he, too, attains its end.

(*Jadal* 70:7–14/224v6–15)

Knowledge and action are here unequivocally asserted to be partners in the specifically human enterprise. In fact, by speaking of “the [one] end of the two parts of philosophy,” Alfarabi indicates that the actions that should be chosen in the name of happiness are the “actions” of philosophy per se, theoretical as well as practical. He then appears to identify the action of philosophy with the construction of demonstrations. However, as it is used here, demonstration appears to follow and somehow complete philosophic investigation, without itself being the core of the investigative process.<sup>67</sup>

Alfarabi's works contain several accounts of demonstration used in a similar fashion, i.e., as a supplement to philosophic investigation proper. In *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* investigation and discovery are for the most part depicted in terms of an inductive ascent toward universal principles, while the deductive reasoning process is largely confined to ordering and extending discoveries arrived at inductively. According to one of Alfarabi's introductory essays to his commentaries on Aristotle's logical works, the possessor of the philosophic art makes use of syllogisms for discourse with others as well as for discovering things when alone (*Risālah* 226:6–

<sup>66</sup> Reading *al-naẓarī* with MS Tehran Malik No. 1583 instead of *al-naẓar*, which appears in both MS Hamidiyyah 812 and MS Bratislava No. 231, TE 41.

<sup>67</sup> For a contrary view, based largely on Alfarabi's *Falsafat Aflātun*, see Najjar (1958), pp. 101–102 (philosophy is identified with the art of demonstration, which “leads to the science of the beings”). On Alfarabi's understanding of the relationship between demonstration and philosophy, see Mahdi (1957B), pp. 123–124, and Galston (1981).

7). Demonstration understood as a mode of discourse<sup>68</sup> is identified further in *Kitāb al-Hurūf* with the method of instructing the élite, in contrast to rhetoric and poetry, which are presented as the main methods for instructing the multitude (*Hurūf* No. 143, 152:2–6). In light of these indications, the passage from *Kitāb al-Jadal* quoted could mean that the one end of the two parts of philosophy is some species of organizing knowledge or some kind of education, i.e., an effort to introduce others to philosophic discoveries through arguments of a certain kind.<sup>69</sup>

*Kitāb al-Hurūf* appears to contain a more radical doctrine as well. The work maintains that the ruling practical art (*al-sinā'ah al-ra'īsah al-'amaliyyah*) is one of the parts of philosophy (*Hurūf* No. 113, 133:18–19), although it also gives the impression that the philosophers and the lawgivers are not the same people (*Hurūf* No. 113, 134:11–13, see No. 144, 152:7–13). The general teaching of these sections of *Kitāb al-Hurūf* is that the essence of “leadership” is the effort to transcend unexamined opinion, whether in a particular subject area or in relation to all knowledge (*Hurūf* No. 111, 132:20–23, No. 113, 133:14–134:4). An understanding of leadership as a function of overcoming ignorance, and not as a function of power or any other attribute of political office, is thus one explanation for the ambiguities in Alfarabi’s teachings about the conjunction of philosophy and rule and about the meaning of true happiness.<sup>70</sup> According to this understanding, not only should wisdom command the same authority as political office; rather, the holders of political office properly command authority only because and to the extent that they display the critical faculties and the impulse to truth of philosophers. In other words, philosophic activity is the archetype of governance, and political rule is the metaphor.

<sup>68</sup> For a comparable theory about the purpose of demonstration according to Aristotle, see Barnes (1975).

<sup>69</sup> See Strauss (1945), p. 384: “We may say that Fârâbî’s Plato replaces Socrates’ philosopher-king who rules openly in the perfect city by the secret kingship of the philosopher who lives privately as a member of an imperfect community. That kingship is exercised by means of an exoteric teaching which, while not too flagrantly contradicting the accepted opinions, undermines them in such a way as to guide the potential philosophers toward the truth.” Although the quoted sentences appear to be harmonious with the thesis advanced in the text, Strauss (1945), p. 370, also contends that Alfarabi uses the identification of philosophy with the royal art “as a pedagogic device for leading the reader toward the view that theoretical philosophy by itself, and nothing else, produces true happiness in this life.” In light of this contention, the first sentences of Strauss quoted should not be read as including the philosopher’s secret kingship within the philosopher’s perfection or happiness—a view at variance with the thesis advanced in this chapter. See Pines (1963), p. cxxi (Maimonides possibly went beyond Plato’s view of the philosopher’s regret in returning to the cave).

<sup>70</sup> See *Fuṣūl* No. 32, 49:12–50:4 (being obeyed or honored by citizens and having riches or power are not part of the essence of kingship; however, because they may follow upon kingship, they are thought to comprise it).

Philosophic activity, however, must be understood with the special meaning conferred upon it by Alfarabi, i.e., as encompassing both private inquiry and the education of others by means of arguments of a certain kind. In *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* Alfarabi comes close to making explicit the respective ranking of the purely theoretical life and the life combining theoretical and practical excellence. In that work he distinguishes between the genuine élite and those who are members of the élite in a relative sense or by way of analogy only. There are only two genuinely superior human types: the supreme ruler and the person who possesses the part of science encompassing intelligibles based on certain demonstrations. All other people belong to the multitude (*Sa'ādah* 87:17–88:2/38:5–6).<sup>71</sup> Given that Alfarabi equates theoretical excellence with the sciences whose ultimate purpose is to make the beings and what they contain intelligible with certainty (*Sa'ādah* 49:7–9/2:5–7), he thus singles out as genuinely superior human types both the person of wholly theoretical accomplishments and the supreme ruler, who combines theoretical and practical excellence.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, inasmuch as only the supreme ruler belongs to the élite of the élite (*akhaṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*) (*Sa'ādah* 87:9–10/37:16), in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* Alfarabi expresses a clear preference for the more expansive kind of perfection at the same time that he validates the possession of theoretical perfection in isolation as one of the two possible lives of excellence.<sup>73</sup>

## F. CONCLUSION

Although there are indications to the contrary, on balance it appears that Alfarabi views governance, and not merely political philosophy or political science, as a constitutive part of happiness. This insight appears to be what underlies the Farabian dictum that “philosopher,” “supreme ruler,”

<sup>71</sup> Members of the multitude may, however, belong to an élite with respect to a particular discipline or art (*Sa'ādah* 87:8–9/37:14–15).

<sup>72</sup> The person possessing knowledge of the beings with certainty (or the science of intelligibles) probably possesses practical or political philosophy as well as theoretical philosophy, given Alfarabi's description of “theoretical perfection” (*Sa'ādah* 64:7–9/16:15–17). The perfect philosopher without qualification, in contrast, must both know these things and be able to bring those things within human control into actual existence (*Sa'ādah* 89:10–20/39:11–18).

<sup>73</sup> This is also suggested by two hierarchies that Alfarabi describes in *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah*—one hierarchy comparing people's excellence in grasping intelligibles and one comparing their excellence in the arts and the sciences. In other words, in these passages he ranks people with respect to the entire range of rational cognitions, primary and reasoned (*Siyāṣah* 75:4–76:2, 77:1–17). In both instances he concludes that when two people are equal in the knowledge or faculties they possess, the one who can in addition benefit other people or convey to them his own discoveries is superior to the one who merely possesses the knowledge or faculties without the corresponding ability to help others (*Siyāṣah* 75:17–76:1 with 77:9–12, reading *al-irshād*, a variant noted by Najjar, for *al-istmbāt* at 77:12).

“king,” “lawgiver,” and “imam” comprise one idea. This interpretation of Alfarabi’s teaching makes sense of Alfarabi’s assertion that the two parts of philosophy have one end, even though theoretical and practical philosophy are presented as having different ends. And it resolves the difficulty that one can know what happiness is and fail to do it, even though knowledge of what happiness is presupposes theoretical perfection, or most of it.

At the same time, Alfarabi views the governance that is part of happiness as political in a special way. It is political in that it involves ordering the lives of others, and not merely the individual philosopher’s way of life. Practical perfection entails public as well as private virtues. At the same time, practical perfection does not necessarily entail governance in a territorial sense. Governance may mean ordering other people’s opinions and actions so as to enable them to attain happiness to the extent possible, whether by means of a government ordered to excellence, a religion devoted to excellence, or an education aimed at promoting excellence in certain people. In the latter two cases the philosopher can “rule” people who are subject to a variety of organized governments and even people of future generations.<sup>74</sup> Alfarabi’s suggestion that the philosopher’s governance may not find its expression in organized government is, moreover, consistent with his teaching about the necessity of political communities for a life of excellence, since he never makes the city of excellence a condition of the attainment of happiness.<sup>75</sup>

Happiness understood as the coincidence of theoretical and practical perfection, i.e., as the combination of philosophy and governance, raises several difficulties for understanding Alfarabi’s philosophy. In particular, this understanding of happiness is incompatible with certain basic precepts of Alfarabi’s thought. Foremost among these is the doctrine that happiness, or ultimate happiness, consists in becoming a separate substance (*Siyāṣah* 32:7–8, *Madīnah* 204:16–206:2/46:8–10). Such transcendence is defined as the soul’s ability to dispense with material existence for its constitutive activities (*Siyāṣah* 32:8–9, *Madīnah* 204:15–16/46:7–8, see *Aql* 31:11–32:1).<sup>76</sup> Governance understood as determining people’s opinions and actions so as to enable them to attain happiness would necessarily impose material constraints on the philosopher, since it is the essence of the philosopher’s practical judgments that they reason, in part, from the characteristics and consequences of people’s corporeal natures. Thus, happiness viewed as pure transcendence of material exis-

<sup>74</sup> See *Siyāṣah* 80:5–11 for nonterritorial rule.

<sup>75</sup> Alfarabi does, however, argue that political association, as contrasted with the city of excellence, is a precondition of survival and the best life. See Chapter IV below.

<sup>76</sup> See *Fusūl* No. 28, 45:9–11.

tence would appear to preclude the possibility that happiness encompasses governance in addition to theoretical perfection.<sup>77</sup>

A second difficulty raised by the comprehensive view of happiness stems from Alfarabi's assertion that happiness is sought for its own sake (*Madīnah* 206:7–9/46:14–15, *Fuṣūl* No. 28, 46:5–7, see *Millah* 52:11–14). If happiness is comprehensive, Alfarabi's assertion implies that both theoretical and practical perfection are sought for their own sakes, with neither being sought for the sake of the other, or else that theoretical and practical perfection are names for two aspects of one reality. Otherwise, one is forced to wonder how happiness can encompass a life devoted to both contemplation and governance and still deserve characterization as the human end that is sought for its own sake. The resolution of this difficulty may depend on the reason those who have attained theoretical excellence seek to govern—for example, whether they do so in order to contribute to the betterment of mankind, to actualize their practical rational faculties as a component of actualizing the rational faculty as a whole, or out of the desire to ensure that the rational substratum of the world will continue to be apprehended by future generations.

In sum, Alfarabi's understanding of the nature of happiness must be viewed against the backdrop of his understanding of the meaning of “theoretical perfection” and “practical perfection”—the two fundamental human alternatives. He rejects the narrow interpretation of theoretical perfection as the possession of the theoretical sciences. Then, at the same time that he expands theoretical perfection to include practical philosophy or political science, he also redefines practical philosophy by characterizing its inquiries in terms of the light they shed on happiness and misery, and the noble and the base, instead of confining it to an investigation of the contingent or the voluntary. Alfarabi appears to be saying that because theoretical perfection is concerned with human as well as natural and metaphysical subjects and because knowledge of human things finds its completion in the realization of their best state, theoretical and practical perfection must together constitute the true human end. Moreover, in one work Alfarabi appears to go further and connect governance with revelation (*Millah* 44:6–13), as if to say that the ability and willingness of the possessor of theoretical perfection to use practical wisdom on behalf of others is, in the last analysis, the measure of divinity in the nature of mankind.

<sup>77</sup> *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* may avoid this dilemma by suggesting that human beings never attain the rank of the agent intellect (*Madīnah* 206:2–3/46:10). Since the agent intellect is the least perfect secondary cause, the implication is that at their most perfect, human beings never achieve pure transcendence. Despite this indication, a life devoted to the pursuit of pure transcendence would surely differ from one devoted to the pursuit of governance in addition to contemplation.

## Chapter III

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### THE ROYAL CRAFT<sup>1</sup>

Intelligence deals with both kinds of ultimates, since it is intelligence, not reasoning, that deals with primary definitions and with ultimates. In connection with demonstrations, it deals with the unchangeable and primary definitions, whereas in practical matters, with the ultimate, contingent fact and the minor premise.

—Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* VI. 11

IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTER the theme of the philosopher's participation in political life was examined from the perspective of the philosopher's well-being. The question raised was, "Do individuals need practical virtues in addition to theoretical ones in order to tap their human potential to the fullest, i.e., in order to be perfect or happy?" The theme of the relationship between philosophy and politics in Alfarabi's thought is examined again in the present chapter, this time from the perspective of the well-being of political life. The question raised here is, "Do cities or nations need to be governed, at least in part, by philosophers for a political community of excellence<sup>2</sup> to be realized?" This question implies two subsidiary questions: does a philosophic understanding of logic, physics, metaphysics, or politics give rise to the kinds of practical insights on which politics depends, and, if so, is it possible to reach these insights in the absence of philosophy?

<sup>1</sup> "Royal craft" is a translation of *al-mihnah al-malakriyyah*—literally, "kingly craft." Craft, according to a classification of the soul in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, is one of the two aspects of the practical rational soul (the other aspect is deliberation, *rawiyyah*). Craft as an aspect of the rational soul also includes two subdivisions, the arts (*al-ṣinā'āt*) and the crafts (*al-mihān*) (*Siyāsah* 33:3–6). "Craft" thus refers to both the genus and one of the species in the genus. Sometimes Alfarabi appears to use "art" and "craft" interchangeably (see *Fuṣūl* Nos. 30, 32). At other times they are distinguished: the king's art is political science and his craft is the combination of the art of political science and the faculty of practical wisdom (*Millah* 60:5–13). Used in this way, "art" refers to a kind of knowledge that cannot lead to action directly; whereas "craft" includes the most specific knowledge needed for action. In any case, a craft is a rational faculty; it is not the actual making or doing that popular usage associates with the term (see *Fuṣūl* No. 32).

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter IV, which examines the concepts "city of excellence" (*al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*) and "cities of excellence" in order to clarify the character and range of political orders directed toward excellence.



The answer to the former question, the relevance of philosophy for practical wisdom, would appear to be obvious, given the prominence and frequency of Alfarabi's assertions that the philosopher and the supreme ruler are the same person and that the idea of philosophy and the idea of rulership turn out to be the same in the best case, i.e., in the case of real philosophy and supreme rulership. At the same time, the analysis of the preceding chapter suggested that at times Alfarabi invests the philosopher's political activities with a metaphorical meaning. If "rulership" means self-governance or exerting an apolitical influence over others, the same texts that appear to argue a closeness between philosophy and politics could be construed as teaching the philosopher's aloofness from politics, as the term "politics" is ordinarily understood. More importantly, Alfarabi's assertion of an identity between the supreme ruler and the philosopher, as well as related doctrines, may reflect the perspective of the philosopher's well-being exclusively. Thus far, at any rate, we have examined them only with the problem of the individual's happiness in view. These doctrines must, therefore, be considered afresh, focusing on what politics stands to gain from its association with philosophy. Second, even when philosophy's contribution to political life has been identified, it will be necessary to consider whether its contribution can be duplicated through nonphilosophic means. For on a number of occasions Alfarabi presents nonphilosophic statesmanship in a favorable light, even, in a few instances, appearing to prefer the nonphilosophic statesman to the philosophic king.

One of the difficulties in assessing Alfarabi's understanding of the kind and degree of wisdom that rulers should possess stems from the large number of ruling types that he discusses. The most basic distinction he makes among the various types of rulers is that between founders and subsequent rulers. Alfarabi calls the founder "supreme ruler" or "first ruler" (*al-ra'īs al-awwal*), and nonfounding rulers are designated "secondary rulers" or "successors" (*al-ra'īs al-thānī*).<sup>3</sup> His understanding of founders differs from the popular view of founders. According to the popular view, the identification of a founder is a historical problem, the problem of discovering which of the people associated with the emergence of a political community was in fact responsible for its existence and for designing its charter or code of laws. Alfarabi would agree with the popular view that a founder is a person not bound by precedent. According to the popular view, however, the person not bound by precedent is the one who first frames a constitution or promulgates a legal code, whereas

<sup>3</sup> On founders as contrasted with successors, see *Sryāsah* 78:16–81:4, *Madīnah* 246:5–252:4/59:11–61:6. However, *Kitāb al-Millāh* 56:8–14 presents a founder as someone who first establishes a regime. Compare *Millāh* 49:9–50:15, 60:5–14.

for Alfarabi the person not bound by precedent is the person who acts on the basis of personal understanding, as contrasted with received opinion. In other words, the Farabian founder is the person who subjects all beliefs to thoroughgoing scrutiny before accepting them or deciding upon a course of action (*Sa'ādah* 86:10–13/37:1–3, 87:9–11/37:16–18). A historical founder is not a supreme ruler in the philosophical sense if his political judgments are unexamined or generally accepted opinions or deductions from such opinions.<sup>4</sup> Thus, a “successor” is any ruler who takes the pronouncements or legislation of one or more predecessors as givens and seeks to legislate for new situations by deductions from those precedents wherever possible and by returning to his predecessors’ ultimate objective when mechanical application of existing law proves to be impossible (*Millah* 50:4–15, 56:12–14, *Siyāsah* 81:2–4, *Madīnah* 250:4–252:4/60:15–61:6).<sup>5</sup> When Alfarabi wishes to speak unequivocally about a founder, he uses the expressions “supreme ruler” or “real king” (*al-malik 'alā al-ḥaqīqah*, *al-malik fī al-ḥaqīqah*).<sup>6</sup>

#### A. PHILOSOPHIC AND NONPHILOSOPHIC SUPREME RULERS

Examined in the present section are, first, the Farabian texts that assert a supreme ruler’s need for philosophy in order to perform his political activity properly and, second, the texts that assert the view that a more limited form of knowledge is sufficient to ensure the excellence of a political community. The former texts are very numerous; the view they develop is the dominant one in Alfarabi’s writings. The latter texts, though far less frequent, nonetheless constitute a strand of Alfarabi’s political philosophy whose claims must be balanced against and ultimately reconciled with the dominant strand.

In this section, the two types of texts will be marshaled to support the thesis that there are in fact two distinct viewpoints deliberately presented

<sup>4</sup> Generally accepted opinion does, however, figure in the supreme ruler’s calculations. See Section C below.

<sup>5</sup> It is unclear at which point laws are codified or made permanent. It appears that laws should be codified only when there is a break in the succession of founders or supreme rulers, i.e., when no ruler arises with all of the qualities of a founder or supreme ruler of excellence (*Siyāsah* 81:2–4, *Madīnah* 60:15–17, *Millah* 50:4–9). However, as a psychological matter it is difficult to imagine rulers arising who are inferior to supreme rulers and yet recognize themselves as inferior. Yet only founders are entitled, indeed required, to change the laws as circumstances change (*Millah* 49:10–14, *Siyāsah* 80:15–81:2). In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* Alfarabi uses the passive voice to describe the transition to laws that are made permanent when a person of the caliber of a supreme ruler cannot be found (*Siyāsah* 81:2–3).

<sup>6</sup> See also *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* 79:3, which discusses the supreme ruler without qualification (*al-ra'īs al-awwal 'alā al-ṭlāq*).

in Alfarabi's works. However, the present section will stay on the level of assertions. The arguments advanced to justify each of the views will be introduced only to the limited extent necessary to clarify the exact meaning of each of the views. These justifications, whether explicit or implicit, will be the object of analysis in the remaining sections of the chapter. Further, the present section deals only with founders. Hence, it excludes rulers of excellence who benefit from the philosophic insights of others, whether contemporaries or predecessors. The nature and cognitive status of practical judgments dependent on theoretical or practical insights of someone other than the person engaged in deliberation will be considered in the conclusion to the chapter. In the present section, therefore, the expression "nonphilosophic ruler" will refer somewhat artificially to the completely autonomous ruling type.

At several junctures in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, Alfarabi asserts or argues the inseparability of philosophy and political deliberative excellence (*Sa'ādah* 74:17–75:5/26:11–19, 81:15–17/32:19–33:2, 89:10–90:2/39:11–40:2). This doctrine emerges as a corollary of a more general thesis, namely, that right action presupposes philosophy. The justification offered for the latter thesis is that a person cannot cause something to exist unless he first knows what he wants to make exist. Alfarabi defends this claim on two levels. On the level most immediately connected with specific actions, he declares that actually to do or make a thing, or to cause a thing to be done or made, one must have in view the object to be done or made as it is when it possesses the specific concrete and variable attributes it has when it actually exists (*Sa'ādah* 65:14–19/17:19–18:5, 67:8–11/19:10–13). On this level, "knowledge" of things subject to human control means practical knowledge, that is, knowledge of human things as particulars. Both because the objects of such knowledge are particulars and because they are known as they are with nonessential attributes, they are grasped by the deliberative faculty (*al-quwwah al-fikriyyah*) of human reason (*Sa'ādah* 68:2–11/20:3–11). Alfarabi also states that the practical rational grasp of things subject to human control itself depends on a theoretical rational grasp of human things as such, that is, a grasp of human things as intelligible ideas conveying only the essences or essential features of the things in question (*Sa'ādah* 65:7–10/17:12–15, 74:17–20/26:11–13, 91:14–16/41:12–15, 91:20–21/41:18–19). The picture evoked by these passages is of a person who begins with a theoretical grasp of the essential nature of something that can be made, done, or otherwise willed, and then *adds* further information about its nonessential characteristics to the intelligible account of the thing. It is because practical reason achieves its grasp of the object by joining the observations specific to it to the insights specific to theoretical reason that action needs philosophy to ensure its rightness.

*Kitāb al-Millah* also asserts that practical reason needs philosophy in order to operate properly, although both the thesis and its initial justification tend in a different direction than they did in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*. According to certain passages of *Kitāb al-Millah*, for the king's art or craft to be complete (*tamām*), it must combine theoretical philosophy with practical wisdom (*ta'aqqul*) (*Millah* 60:5–7);<sup>7</sup> the supreme ruler of the city of excellence must already possess theoretical philosophy completely (*Millah* 66:8–9).<sup>8</sup> In these passages of *Kitāb al-Millah*, the utility of practical philosophy for practical wisdom is omitted in the discussion of the ruler's art. This omission is curious because, as Alfarabi makes clear in the same treatise, it is practical philosophy that makes known the ruler's need to join theoretical philosophy to practical wisdom.<sup>9</sup> According to a parallel account of the royal craft contained in *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm*, it is the “theoretical and practical sciences” that must be joined to practical reason before individual practical judgments can be successfully arrived at (*Iḥṣā'* 129:2–5).

*Kitāb al-Millah* elaborates the need for philosophy in the political realm by clarifying the logical relationship of practical judgments to philosophic insights. According to this work, one kind of knowledge is part of or “subsumed under” (*taḥt*) another when the latter proves what the former assumes or when the latter supplies the universals that comprehend the particular instances of the former (*Millah* 47:8–10). Religion is defined as the totality of practical judgments and theoretical and practical teachings that a ruler transmits in his effort to lead a community to a specific goal or set of goals (*Millah* 43:3–4, 44:14–46:10). Founding a religion is thus a concrete action; and its provisions constitute the means devised to attain a practical goal. In the best case—when a religion is virtuous, i.e., when it seeks to promote excellence among its followers—practical philosophy contains the universals of which the specific concrete practical provisions in the religion are the particulars. The specific theoretical and practical teachings of the religion, in turn, are the very doctrines or images of the doctrines reached by theoretical philosophy (*Millah* 46:22–47:17).<sup>10</sup> The thesis that in the best case religion is part of or

<sup>7</sup> Contrast the account of the ruler's art contained in *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* 126:9–10 and *Kitāb al-Millah* 58:7–9.

<sup>8</sup> According to the passage in question, theoretical philosophy is necessary for the supreme ruler to perceive, and thus follow, God's governance of the world (*Millah* 66:8–10).

<sup>9</sup> See *Millah* 59:3 (the political science that is part of philosophy makes these things known) with *Iḥṣā'* 127:3 (political philosophy makes these things known). From the similarity between the two accounts, it seems clear that “the political science that is part of philosophy” is “political philosophy.”

<sup>10</sup> See note 68 below for a discussion of *Kitāb al-Millah* 46:22–47:16. The portrayal of the relationship between religion and philosophy in this passage in *Kitāb al-Millah* appears to make rather exaggerated claims about the kinship between religion and philosophy. By

subsumed under philosophy is thus one illustration of the larger teaching that right action needs philosophy. In *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* the account of this dependence is in terms of intelligibles, essences, and accidents; in *Kitāb al-Millāh* the account is in terms of more formal, logical relationships.

The most famous instances of Alfarabi's insistence that politics needs philosophy are found in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*. According to the former, the absolutely supreme ruler—the person who is ruled by no one and who is able to guide all others toward happiness in the manner appropriate for each—reaches this self-sufficiency and power as a result of the conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) of his intellect with the agent intellect (*Siyāsah* 79:3–17). The conjunction of the human intellect with the agent intellect represents the highest level of intellectual perfection available to man—the complete actualization of human reason, theoretical and practical.<sup>11</sup> In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the same claim is made, although the person so described is said to be both a philosopher-king and a prophet and is the recipient of both revelation and prophecy (*Madīnah* 240:3–246:7/57:10–59:13).<sup>12</sup> Finally, in *Fuṣūl Mun-*

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maintaining that practical philosophy gives a demonstration (*burhān*) of what religion contains, the passage seeks to give the impression that the practical judgments of religion are somehow deduced from the universal account of practical things contained in practical philosophy. In fact, as Alfarabi concedes, the universal account of these things does not contain the concrete and variable attributes contained in the practical account of the practical things as individuals. Even the part of practical philosophy that offers guidelines (*rusūm*) for applying the insights of that discipline to concrete cases in no way limits the range of possibilities to the point where speaking of a demonstration is even remotely plausible. See the discussion of the practical reasoning process in Section B below. Similarly, the parallel claim made about theoretical philosophy is untenable, if for no other reason than that the theoretical opinions contained in religion are to some extent arrived at through practical reason or imagination or both. This is as true of the religion of excellence as it is of lesser religions, since the portrayal of theoretical subjects in religion must take into account the natural limitations of the population to be addressed if it is to be persuasive. Hence, there can be a multiplicity of virtuous cities or virtuous religions. Moreover, the claim made about theoretical philosophy in this passage is untenable as regards religion's account of first principles, which, by definition, cannot be demonstrated.

<sup>11</sup> An earlier passage in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, in which the ability of an individual to do good and avoid evil is at issue, appears to be based on the same premise, although the need for theoretical perfection is implied rather than asserted. See *Siyāsah* 73:9–18, 74:5–12.

<sup>12</sup> The philosopher-king-prophet is discussed in chapter 27 of Dieterici's edition and in sections 10–11 of chapter 15 of Walzer's edition and translation. Subsequent to the description of the philosopher-king-prophet, Alfarabi introduces several additional rulers of cities of excellence. In the course of the discussion of the additional ruling types, Alfarabi refers to the "six" qualities of the supreme ruler of excellence. See Walzer (1985), p. 447, (1962), pp. 245–246, and Dunlop (1961), pp. 86–87, for discussions of these six qualities. Possibly Alfarabi is referring to (1) being wise, (2) being a philosopher, (3) having complete prudence, (4) being a prophet, warning of future events, and announcing which (unseen) particulars now exist, (5) having oratorical abilities enabling him to cast what he knows in images and

*taza'ah* right action is also said to depend on philosophy (*Fuṣūl* No. 94, 95:14–96:8). In this work as well, revelation is said to consist in practical reason determining actions in the presence of complete theoretical reason (see *Fuṣūl* 98:18–99:2).<sup>13</sup>

To turn now to the contrasting portrait of the supreme ruler, the single occasion on which Alfarabi explicitly and unequivocally defends the integrity of nonphilosophic rulers occurs at the beginning of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*—a compilation of political aphorisms expressly identified as “sayings of the Ancients” and heavily influenced by Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>14</sup> The work begins with the assertion of a kinship between the health and sickness of the body on the one hand and the health and sickness of the soul on the other, a kinship between the well-being of bodies and the well-being of cities, and a kinship between the activity of physicians possessed of the medical art and that of statesmen or kings equipped with the royal art. On the basis of these analogies, Alfarabi argues that political life may promote excellence when a ruler possesses only practical wisdom and a smattering of the subjects ordinarily considered the province of philosophy and philosophers.

Just as the doctor who treats bodies needs to know the body as a whole, the parts of the body and their relation to the whole, the diseases which are liable to affect the whole body and each of its parts, whence they occur and from what amounts of a thing, the method of their removal and the states which when they appear in the body and its parts, the actions existing through the body are perfect and complete, so the statesman and king who treats souls needs knowledge of the soul as a whole, the parts of the soul, the defects and vices which are liable to affect it and every part of it, whence they occur and from what amounts of a thing, what are the states of soul by which a man does good deeds, and how many they are, how the vices are to be removed from the people of the cities, the device for establishing them (sc. the virtues) in the souls of the citizens and the method of proceeding [*tadbīr*, governance]

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to guide others to happiness and the means to happiness, and (6) having bodily strength for military purposes (*Madīnah* 244:11–246:5/58:23–59:9).

<sup>13</sup> *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* 98:8–19 gives the impression that revelation of practical judgments is being contrasted with practical excellence attained through a combination of philosophy and practical reason, and that the former bears the same relation to the latter that divination bears to natural science. *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* 98:20–99:1, in contrast, implies that both the former and the latter are forms of revelation, although the recipient in the one case has achieved theoretical perfection and the recipient in the other case has not. See *Millah* 44:6–13 (the supreme ruler of excellence determines the opinions and actions of a religion through revelation, either revelation of the opinions and actions themselves or revelation of the ability to discover them).

<sup>14</sup> For the relationship between *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, see Dunlop (1961), pp. 79–95 (Notes to the English Translation). For the relationship between Alfarabi’s book and Plato’s *Statesman*, see Dunlop (1961), pp. 17–18.

for their preservation among them, so that they do not cease. But it is requisite for him to know about the soul only as much as he needs in his art, just as the doctor requires to know about the body, the carpenter about wood and the smith about iron, only as much as he needs in his art.

(Dunlop) (*Fuṣūl* No. 5, 25:14–26:12)

The claim here is that in order to perform their functions well, statesmen and kings do not need the complete science of the soul, much less all of natural science, of which the science of the soul is a part. The list of items that the ruler must master is, to be sure, extensive. The ruler needs to know not only the attributes of the soul and the manner in which it operates, but also the origin and, hence, the causes of virtue and vice. The statesman's knowledge of the soul thus bears a resemblance to that of the philosopher inasmuch as they both understand the functioning of the soul in light of its causes. But the statesman's knowledge differs from that of the philosopher in that it is extremely partial and confined to aspects of the soul with obvious utility for the statesman's practical goals. Indeed, it is because the statesman carries out his inquiries animated by practical concerns that his understanding is extensive in some areas and sparse or entirely lacking in others. Alfarabi reveals what he means by a working knowledge of the soul by the way he draws on the discoveries of natural science in the following aphorisms. The distinctions between nature and art, form and matter, and actuality and potentiality are dealt with in a single aphorism of a few lines (*Fuṣūl* No. 6); the contents of Aristotle's *De Anima* are then summarized in a lengthy aphorism (*Fuṣūl* No. 7); and the rest of the first half of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* consists of paraphrases of key passages of *Nicomachean Ethics* II–VI.<sup>15</sup>

The initial aphorisms of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* provide the only unambiguous endorsement in Alfarabi's writings of the rule of those neither themselves versed in philosophy nor guided by philosophers. The nonphilosophic statesman may, in fact, figure less obviously in several of Alfarabi's

<sup>15</sup> Not only the contents but also the structure of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* illustrates the gap separating the nonphilosophic statesman and the philosopher. The *Nicomachean Ethics* begins with an extended discussion of the ultimate end of human action, which leads to the conclusion that the ultimate end is excellence in performing the specifically human function or activity. Aristotle thus seeks to ground his subsequent examination of the moral virtues in a comprehensive view of the fundamental type or types of human activity. In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, in contrast, Alfarabi does not introduce the subject of the ultimate end of action—and thus of human life—until the last stages of the discussion of the moral virtues (see *Fuṣūl* No. 28). Up to that point, moderation is defined exclusively in terms of the external circumstances surrounding the behavior in question. As a result of adding the consideration of the ultimate end of action to the argument, Alfarabi reformulates his description of moderation in actions. According to the final formulation, moderation “should, among other things, be useful for achieving happiness; and the person who discovers [which actions are moderate] should have happiness in view” (*Fuṣūl* No. 29).

other political treatises. In particular, in *Kitāb al-Millah* (and in the paraphrase of parts of *Kitāb al-Millah* contained in chapter 5 of *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm*),<sup>16</sup> Alfarabi appears to describe political life, the supreme ruler of excellence, and the royal art twice in a row. That this repetition occurs in *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* as well as in *Kitāb al-Millah* and maintains an almost identical structure in both works may be taken as evidence that the repetition is intentional. However, it is the coherence of each of the parallel accounts that, in the last analysis, supports this interpretation. When the parallel accounts are compared, it appears that the supreme ruler described in the first account is the nonphilosophic statesman discussed in the opening aphorisms of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, while the supreme ruler depicted in the repetition is a king equipped with a combination of philosophy and practical wisdom—the Platonic philosopher-king who dominates most of Alfarabi's political writings.

Alfarabi signals the difference between the two parallel accounts by labeling the first “political science” and the second “the political science that is part of philosophy” or “political philosophy” (*Millah* 52:10, 59:3, *Iḥṣā'* 124:4, 127:3). These two forms of political science cover roughly the same subject matter, namely, happiness, morals, actions, political communities, and rulers. The two disciplines differ, however, as do some of the substantive details.<sup>17</sup>

The royal craft of the supreme ruler, according to the political science not identified with philosophy, consists of knowledge of all the actions that establish or preserve for people the ways of life and acquired dispositions conducive to happiness (*Millah* 54:16–17, 56:14–16) together with the faculty for discovering, when confronted with specific situations, what action will achieve the desired result (*Millah* 58:8–59:2). The former, general knowledge is of universal things (*ashyā' kullīyyah*), that is, the universals of the ruler's art (*Millah* 58:7–8, 59:1–2).<sup>18</sup> Alfarabi does not describe the content of this knowledge. However, he illustrates what he means by the requisite universal knowledge by offering an example of the kind of general knowledge a doctor should have if he is to cure individual sick people. It helps the doctor who must cure a particular individual's jaundice to know that opposites combat opposites; or, on a less general level, that fever should be combated by chilly things; or, on a still less general level, that tamarind water and barley water both combat jaundice (*Millah* 57:1–6). Extrapolating from these remarks about the

<sup>16</sup> For the relationship between chapter 5 of *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* and *Kitāb al-Millah*, see Mahdi (1968A), pp. 11–12 (Arabic Introduction).

<sup>17</sup> See Mahdi (1975B), pp. 131–137, for an analysis of the two accounts of political science.

<sup>18</sup> Similarly *Iḥṣā'* 126:9–10. Cf. *Millah* 60:5–6 (the universals of “this art,” i.e., the ruler's art according to the political science that is part of philosophy).



medical prong of the analogy to the political prong (where no illustrations of the requisite universal knowledge are given), it appears that the universals of political science might well consist in such things as the working knowledge of the soul, nature and art, actuality and potentiality, and form and matter that is outlined in the initial aphorisms of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*.

In contrast, according to the political science that is part of philosophy, in addition to practical wisdom the royal craft of the supreme ruler needs theoretical philosophy (*Millah* 60:5–7, 66:8–9) or the theoretical and practical sciences (*Iḥṣā'* 129:2–3). In short, although Alfarabi joins practical wisdom to the “universals” of political science in both the original statement of the royal craft and the second formulation, the universals referred to do not appear to be identical in the two cases. In the restatement, the universals are at least in part philosophic discoveries or inferences from philosophic discoveries; in the original statement, the source is not identified. In the case of the doctor, to whom the supreme ruler in the original statement is compared, Alfarabi says that the universals are learned from books (*Millah* 57:19–21, *Iḥṣā'* 126:13–14). Possibly Alfarabi's stipulation that the supreme ruler described in the original statement must know “all” the actions that establish or preserve the desired attributes of cities and nations (*Millah* 53:1–2, 56:14–16) is meant to suggest that the ruler without philosophy arrives at universals through induction. This interpretation is consistent with Alfarabi's account of practical reason in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, where he presents a faculty he calls “practical intellect” (*al-'aql al-'amali*) (as distinguished from “practical reason”) as the source of premises for practical reasoning, since practical intellect is said to arrive at such premises on the basis of experience and observation (*Fuṣūl* No. 38). The doctor analogy, which is also introduced in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* when Alfarabi is discussing the statesman without philosophic grounding, thus can be seen as involving a kind of dipping into subjects of theoretical interest for an exclusively practical purpose coupled with inductive reasoning from empirical observations to rules of general application.

In *Kitāb al-Burhān* Alfarabi discusses briefly the character and operation of the art of medicine. According to that work, although the arts of medicine and natural science are independent or separate arts, they engage in a reciprocal exchange of information. In this respect these two disciplines are said to resemble “practical politics” (*al-siyāsah al-'amaliyyah*) and “scientific politics” (*al-siyāsah al-'ilmiyyah*). In particular, the medical art is presented as supplying natural science with some of the knowledge it derives from experience and, in turn, receiving from natural science certain syllogistic principles (*mabādi' qiyāsiyyah*) and premises (*muqaddimāt*) that it requires (*Burhān* 72:5–11/171r11–18, 74:12–19/

172v18–173r7, 75:10–13/173v7–11, 75:20–22/174r1–4). Because the art of medicine inquires into some of the same things as does natural science, Alfarabi observes that it is easy to confuse the two arts or to assume that natural science is both theoretical and practical.

Alfarabi's comments in *Kitāb al-Burhān* help to clarify the relationship between philosophy and the political science that is not part of philosophy. To the extent that the analogy with the art of medicine and natural science is valid, it would seem that there can be two distinct disciplines each of which is called "political science" (see *Burhān* 75:1–5/173r16–v1). One of these, the political science that is part of philosophy, would be purely theoretical, although it is sometimes mistakenly thought to be partially practical because it investigates things subject to the will, choice, and practice (*'ādah*) (*Burhān* 74:25–75:1/173r14–16) or because it is confused with practical political science. The second political science would be a fundamentally practical science that both inquires into some of the subjects investigated by theoretical political science and needs its counterpart science for certain of its premises. Presumably, however, practical political science would rely on experience, i.e., empirical observations, for most of its premises. The use of premises borrowed from theoretical political science would not make practical political science part of political philosophy, any more than the counterpart use by the art of medicine of premises from natural science would make it part of theoretical philosophy, and such use would not imply that the practitioner of practical political science engages or should engage in political philosophy.

Additional characterizations of supreme rulers of excellence, which occur in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, appear to reinforce the suggestion of *Kitāb al-Millah* that it is possible for there to be a ruler of excellence who does not possess philosophy, theoretical or practical. In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* three additional ruling types are introduced after the description of the philosopher-king-prophet (the first ruling type), all of whom are identified as rulers of excellence. The description of the first of these additional ruling types (i.e., the second ruling type), who appears to be a philosopher-king but not a prophet, contributes no additional information bearing on the foundations of practical reasoning, since all the rational aptitudes and achievements of the philosopher-king-prophet are possessed by this ruling type as well (*Madīnah* 250:2–4/60:13–15).<sup>19</sup> The third ruling type, on the other hand, does not share all

<sup>19</sup> The second ruling type possesses all the aptitudes and accomplishments of the first ruling type—the philosopher-king-prophet—except for the imaginative faculty that warns about the future (*Madīnah* 250:2–4/60:13–15). Alfarabi's description of the second ruling type amounts to an admission that the philosopher-king ranks on a par with the philosopher-king-prophet. See Walzer (1962), p. 245; Dunlop (1961), pp. 86–87. Walzer (1985),

the intellectual attributes of the preceding two ruling types (*Madīnah* 250:4–252:4/60:15–61:6). In particular, of the intellectual achievements attributed to the third ruling type, the only one that could be a product of theoretical reason is wisdom (*an yakūna ḥakīman*) (*Madīnah* 250:8–9/60:19). In contrast, the previous two types (the philosopher-king-prophet and the philosopher-king) were said to be both wise and philosophers (*Madīnah* 244:12/58:23, 250:2–4/60:13–15).<sup>20</sup> Since wisdom is usually thought to be part of philosophy and inasmuch as it is the most exalted branch of philosophy, its possession would seem to imply the possession of the other branches of theoretical philosophy.<sup>21</sup> Yet Alfarabi's description in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* of the philosopher-king-prophet as "wise, a philosopher, and possessing complete practical wisdom" (*Madīnah* 244:12/58:23) appears to separate wisdom from philosophy. Elsewhere he notes that "wise" can be used as a synonym for those who possess practical wisdom (*Sa'ādah* 89:6–7/39:7–9, *Fuṣūl* No. 52, 61:10) and for those who have acquired experiences that are real (*ḥaqīqiyah*) and valid (*ṣaḥīḥah*) (*Nawāmīs* 3:9–10). In several works he warns that wisdom is an ambiguous term, often used metaphorically or in a qualified way to refer to experts in any one of the arts (*Sa'ādah* 89:2–5/39:4–6, *Fuṣūl* No. 37, 54:8–9, No. 52, see *Hurūf* No. 113). Moreover, the third ruling type in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is said to arise when no one like either of the preceding two ruling types can be found, and because of this

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p. 447, calls the second ruling type an "almost equally valuable" type of ruler of the perfect state. Note, however, that Alfarabi's failure to characterize the second ruling type as inferior to the first type as a ruler leaves unresolved whether the second ruling type is a lesser human being (see *Madīnah* 244:15–16/59:2–3). In any event, Alfarabi's failure to call the second ruling type inferior suggests that the ability to predict future events is not indispensable for the creation or preservation of a city of excellence. That imagination and practical reason are in some contexts alternative means of access to particular kinds of information pertinent to ruling is implied by *Al-Siyāsah al-Madanīyyah* 33:2–3, 12 (both deliberation and imagination can grasp the useful and harmful in human affairs). However, only deliberation can discern the noble and the base (*Siyāsah* 33:1–2, 12–13). Since these are what lead to the human good and its opposite (*Siyāsah* 72:15–18, 73:9), the implication is that the person who rules on the basis of imagination can successfully arrive at the means to achieve his goals but cannot know whether his choices are real goods or contribute to real goods.

<sup>20</sup> Walzer (1962), p. 245 (1985), p. 448, believes that the third ruling type is likewise a philosopher, although he acknowledges that such a ruler is inferior to the philosopher-king-prophet discussed first. Dunlop (1961), pp. 86, 88, calls the third ruling type "second best." However, he only mentions what the best and second best have in common, without remarking on the omission of philosophy in the list of this ruling type's attributes.

<sup>21</sup> See *Fuṣūl* Nos. 37, 53 (emphasizing wisdom as knowledge of the beings in light of their ultimate causes) and *Sa'ādah* 88:10–18/38:14–39:1 (the Greeks called the science that makes the beings intelligible such things as "unqualified wisdom" and the "highest wisdom"). In his commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, Alfarabi alludes to Socrates' equation of wisdom with philosophy concerned exclusively with human things (*Burhān* 82:5–8/177r11–15).

lack, the Laws (*sharā'i*) and traditions (*sunan*) pronounced by the previous supreme ruler or rulers are to be codified and preserved permanently (*Madīnah* 250:4–6/60:15–17). Codified or fixed laws, however, have no place in a political community ruled by a supreme ruler of excellence.<sup>22</sup> For the supreme ruler of excellence is in no way ruled by anything or anyone external, nor is his art subordinate to any other art (*Madīnah* 238:14–240:9/57:6–17). In particular, such a ruler may need to alter or eliminate existing laws when changing circumstances render them ineffective or counterproductive (*Millah* 49:11–14, *Siyāsah* 80:15–81:2). Thus, a regime with codified laws is inconsistent with the rule of supreme rulers, whether philosophers or statesmen, even if the laws accurately reflect a philosophic ruler's or a statesman's original pronouncements. The third ruling type of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is not, therefore, a philosopher-king; and it appears that he may not be a statesman (who is a supreme ruler) either. As a consequence, upon analysis, the account of the additional ruling types in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*<sup>23</sup> sheds no light on the intellectual equipment of the nonphilosophic supreme ruler because the work, like *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, appears to envision only supreme rulers possessing philosophy and rulers constrained by codified laws.

*Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* also contains an enumeration of ruling types of excellence.<sup>24</sup> In aphorism No. 58, which lists four types of ruler (*ra'īs*) or governor (*mudabbir*) of the city of excellence, the first type is called a supreme ruler and is said to be wise as well as in possession of complete practical wisdom (*al-ta'aqqul al-tāmm*) and other practical attributes necessary for rulers (*Fuṣūl* 66:3–8). Unlike the governance of the third excellent ruling type of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, who is similarly credited with wisdom but not philosophy, the governance of the first ruling type of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 58 is entirely discretionary, without laws constraining the ruler's actions (*Fuṣūl* 66:7–8, cf. 67:1–3). There is, thus, an inconsistency between the two books, which is only partially explained by the fact that in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* the ruler with wisdom is not second best, but is presented as the most excellent of the rulers of excellence. The wisdom of the first ruling type in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 58 appears to be convertible with “knowledge of the end” (*Fuṣūl* 66:9). Presumably this means knowledge of the end of man, although the expression is ambiguous, given that earlier in the same work Alfarabi distinguishes between man's end and his ultimate end and attributes knowledge of the ultimate

<sup>22</sup> The third ruling type of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is nevertheless a ruler of excellence, although not a supreme ruler of excellence (*Madīnah* 252:9–10/61:11). See *Millah* 56:8.

<sup>23</sup> The next two ruling types in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* have the same qualities as the third ruling type (although the qualities are found in a group of two or more rulers, not in a single person) and thus are not discussed here.

<sup>24</sup> For an analysis of this passage, see Kraemer (1987), pp. 299–300.

end to wisdom (*Fuṣūl* No. 53, 62:12–13). In light of the equation of wisdom and knowledge of the ultimate human end in this earlier aphorism, a plausible explanation of the passage in the later aphorism is that the first ruling type of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 58 has only human, and hence partial, wisdom.<sup>25</sup> Since it is political science and political philosophy that investigate happiness and make known the difference between real happiness and illusory human goods (*Millah* 52:10–12, 59:8–9, *Iḥṣā'* 124:7–9, 127:11–12),<sup>26</sup> one interpretation of the wisdom of the first ruling type of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 58 is that it consists of political science without prior mastery of theoretical philosophy—in other words, that the first ruling type of aphorism No. 58 is the supreme ruler described in *Kitāb al-Millah* in the account of political science that is not part of philosophy.<sup>27</sup>

If this interpretation is correct, then we are left with the same puzzle in examining the formal classifications of ruling types in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 58 that we encountered in the passages in *Kitāb al-Millah* and *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* bearing on rulers and their royal crafts. On the level of assertions, the texts support two seemingly antithetical views of the supreme ruler. In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, and *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, the insistence on philosophy as a condition of supreme rulership is most pronounced; in the first part of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* we find the clearest statements of the viability of the nonphilosophic supreme ruler;

<sup>25</sup> Note also that Alfarabi sometimes speaks of “cities” of excellence, suggesting that there may be a variety of cities of excellence or a plurality of cities of excellence or both. In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 28, he describes the city of excellence in his own name and according to the “Ancients” (*al-qudamā'*). Although the difference between the two descriptions, if any, is unclear (compare *Fuṣūl* 45:3–5 with 46:10–11), there is the possibility that Alfarabi's city of excellence aims at individuals' “first perfection,” whereas the city of excellence according to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle aims at their ultimate or final perfection.

<sup>26</sup> Alfarabi says explicitly that political science investigates happiness (*Millah* 52:10, *Iḥṣā'* 124:2–4). It is not clear, however, whether the political science that is part of philosophy also investigates happiness (see *Millah* 59:3–4, contrast *Iḥṣā'* 127:3–4).

<sup>27</sup> Kraemer (1987), pp. 299–301, views the first ruling type of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* as a philosopher-king, and he interprets this ruler's “wisdom” as “speculative wisdom,” apparently meaning all of speculative wisdom and not just political philosophy. Since, as was noted above, Alfarabi's discussions in *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* and *Kitāb al-Millah* never reveal the origin of the universal knowledge of the ruler of excellence described in the political science that is not expressly said to be part of philosophy, but merely refer to that ruler as having the faculty for universal rules (*Iḥṣā'* 126:9–10, cf. *Millah* 58:7–8), Kraemer's interpretation may be correct. It would, however, eliminate one of the major differences between the two accounts of political science (assuming that *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* does in fact present the supreme ruler described in the first account of political science). Alternatively, since Alfarabi says explicitly that political philosophy gives an account of, among other things, universal rules concerning things subject to human volition (*Millah* 59:3–4, *Iḥṣā'* 127:3–4), it is possible that the political science that is not part of philosophy looks to political philosophy for certain of its principles. As was noted above, the ruler who governs in this fashion would not be a philosopher-king.

and in *Kitāb al-Millah* and *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* both of the two alternatives are presented and developed in succession.

Two approaches to resolving this ambiguity in Alfarabi's political thought suggest themselves. First, in both philosophic and nonphilosophic rulers the faculty that is called upon for reaching specific policies and decisions is practical reason—the core of which is either deliberation or practical wisdom (prudence). The operation of practical reason will be examined in the next section of this chapter with the goal of isolating those respects in which theoretical reason can or must inform practical reason if the ruler is to govern with a view to excellence. Then, in the remaining two sections, a second approach to resolving the contrasting accounts will be pursued, namely, reasoning backward from the specific activities that Alfarabi attributes to rulers of excellence and the specific kinds of information they are said to need to the role that theoretical reason would have to play for the ruler in fact to meet these obligations.

#### B. THE OPERATION OF PRACTICAL REASON

The human characteristic that enables its possessor to found a religion (*Millah* 43:3–4, with 44:6–8) or a political regime (*Millah* 54:14–15) or to rule cities (*Fuṣūl* No. 32, 49:3–4) is the royal craft. It is this craft that is responsible for a supreme ruler's ability to direct human affairs so as to promote happiness or excellence in himself and in those he governs. The regime (*siyāsah*), in the sense of the structure and character of a community, can thus be seen as the activity (*fi'l*) or outcome of the royal craft (*Millah* 54:14–15, *Iḥṣā'* 125:10–11). Hence, the royal craft can be considered the form of practical reason that is the immediate or proximate cause of the specific form that political life takes when it is the product of deliberate direction. To this extent, the relationship between philosophy and politics has a psychological analogue in the relationship between theoretical and practical reason. Or, more precisely, the relationship between philosophy and politics can be seen as one of the manifestations of the underlying relationship between theoretical and practical reason. The present section examines the operation of practical reason, as expounded in Alfarabi's political and other writings, in an effort to isolate the point or points at which theoretical and practical reason meet and to explore the character of their contact.

The species of practical rational activity that is operative when a supreme ruler of excellence (or some counterpart like “the king in reality”) governs human affairs is a subject discussed in each of Alfarabi's political works. However, he does not employ the same vocabulary throughout. Many of the key terms associated with the practical rational activity of the supreme ruler—such as practical wisdom (*ta'aqqul*), deliberative vir-

tue (*al-fāḍilah al-fikriyyah*), lawgiving (*wad' al-nawāmīs*), the royal craft (*al-mihnah al-malakiyyah*), and revelation (*wahy*)—appear in some of his works, but are absent in others.

One method for bringing together the several versions of the supreme ruler's art and their divergent terms is to differentiate, at least in the initial analysis, instances in which Alfarabi speaks in his own name from those in which the reader is presented with certain views "according to the Ancients." For example, Alfarabi speaks in his own name of revelation in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, and *Kitāb al-Millah*; in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, on the other hand, he describes the person whom the Ancients would credit with revelation.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the Ancients and Alfarabi appear to disagree about who is the king in reality and what is the city of excellence.<sup>29</sup> A second method for reconciling the several versions of the practical rational activity of the supreme ruler is to chart the terms on a cognitive map. When this is done, some of the terms will be seen to be identical, some overlapping, some subdivisions of others, and some alternatives to or competitors of one another. The way to construct such a map is to start from the most basic, technical descriptions of the processes labeled "practical wisdom," "royal craft," and the like. For example, in a number of places religion is equated with opinions and actions that have been determined (*muqaddar*) and directed (*musaddad*) toward happiness, and the consequence of revelation is said to be a person's ability to so determine and direct people's opinions and actions (*Millah* 43:3–4, 44:6–12, *Siyāsah* 79:13–17, *Fuṣūl* No. 94, 98:8–10). Elsewhere the identical practical rational activity appears in thoroughly secular contexts as a product of natural endowment and a certain kind of experience; and it serves as the basis of regimes without divine pretensions (*Sa'ādah* 91:18–22/41:18–42:2, *Millah* 54:9–14, 60:5–13, *Fuṣūl* No. 19, 38:5–39:3, No. 21, 39:13–14). The consistency among the technical descriptions thus makes it possible to evaluate apparently independent accounts with a common yardstick and to relate them to one another. This, in turn, makes it possible to identify and compare the multiplicity of ruling types that appear in Alfarabi's works and thus to penetrate a major source of the obscurity of Alfarabi's teaching about rulers and royal crafts.

The practical rational faculty (*al-quwwah al-nāṭiqah al-'amaliyyah*)<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Madīnah* 244:7–14/58:18–59:2, *Fuṣūl* No. 94, 98:8–99:2, *Millah* 44:6–13, 64:10–13, 14–18, *Siyāsah* 79:12–13. Cf. *Siyāsah* 80:1–3.

<sup>29</sup> Contrast *Fuṣūl* No. 12 with *Fuṣūl* Nos. 30, 58 (the true, or real, king); and *Fuṣūl* No. 28 with *Fuṣūl* Nos. 57, 60, 65 (the city of excellence).

<sup>30</sup> In the beginning of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, Alfarabi divides the rational faculty into the theoretical rational faculty (*al-quwwah al-nāṭiqah al-naẓariyyah*) and the practical rational part (*al-quwwah al-nāṭiqah al-'amaliyyah*) (*Siyāsah* 33:3, see also 73:11, 74:5–8). Contrast the parallel description in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, where the theoretical-practical

consists of two aspects: a faculty that grasps practical principles (the general rules that describe the way things within man's power behave) and a faculty that reasons to specific judgments or decisions on the basis, in part, of the practical principles. According to *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, the former faculty is called practical intellect (*al-'aql al-'amalī*), while the latter faculty is called deliberation (*rawiyyah*). Deliberation consists in the practical rational process whereby one discovers (*yastanbiḥ*) or figures out (*yastakhrij*) the concrete means to realize a specific goal. Once a person recognizes in a general way the type of action, process, or other means required to realize a goal, the person must still discern which specific, concrete attributes a particular instance of the general type must possess if the particular instance is to have an actual existence, i.e., if the means to a desired end are themselves to be realized. The specific, concrete attributes are not part of a thing's essence or nature. They are nonessential features that make possible its material or actual existence. Alfarabi calls these attributes "conditions" (*sharā'it*) and "states" (*aḥwāl*). Thus, in attempting to realize a specific goal, deliberation must first identify the general type of means that is appropriate and then discover the attributes a particular member of that class of means needs to possess so that the means chosen may be made to exist—as a result of which the original goal will be made to exist. Finally, once the attributes are thus discovered, the object so described must be made, done, or otherwise willed (see *Sa'ādah* 66:6–7/18:12–13, 67:8–11/19:10–11, 68:5–11/20:6–11).

In the previous chapter, deliberation emerged as a mode of reasoning with only a superficial resemblance to syllogistic reasoning. This is largely because reasoning to the discovery of means frequently involves more factors at each step of the reasoning process than the three terms of a syllogism can accommodate. It is not merely the need to juggle a wide range of variables simultaneously that complicates deliberation. The discovery of the means to secure an end depends as well on assigning the appropriate weights to each variable, taking into account the way each variable affects the behavior of the others, and even reevaluating the dimensions of the larger problem in light of the interaction among the variables. Alfarabi introduces the analogy of deliberation in the service of the medical

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distinction is omitted (*Madīnah* 164:13–15/34:22–35:1) and what is elsewhere referred to as practical reason is called the deliberative faculty (*al-quwwah al-fikriyyah*) (*Madīnah* 172:1–5/36:15–18). (Note that Walzer 1985, p. 173, translates *al-quwwah al-fikriyyah* as "the faculty of practical reasoning.") Elsewhere in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* reason is divided into practical and theoretical (*Madīnah* 208:2–3/47:1). See *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 33, where the rational part of the soul is divided into *nazarī* and *fikrī* (*Fuṣūl* 50:5), and No. 7, where the rational soul is divided into the practical and the theoretical, and the practical rational soul is then subdivided into the part based on craft (*mihnī*) and the part based upon deliberation (*fikrī*) (*Fuṣūl* 29:7).



art in order to clarify this aspect of practical reasoning. The doctor knows that in general chilliness combats feverishness and that jaundice, a type of fever, can be combated with barley water (*Millah* 57:1–6). To determine whether a particular person actually suffering from jaundice should be treated with barley water, a doctor must assess the chilliness-combats-feverishness universal in light of the general condition and specific complicating factors involved for the person in question. Even if barley water turns out to be the proper remedy—or the best of several available remedies—in the particular situation, it remains to determine the strength of the dose, the interval between doses, and the like (see *Millah* 57:6–19).

Alfarabi appears to distinguish between the faculty for deliberating well and deliberative virtue or excellence. Deliberating well<sup>31</sup> refers to the ability to discover the most effective means of realizing a specific end, without regard to the worth of that end (see *Sa'ādah* 68:16–18/20:16–18). Deliberative virtue or excellence refers to the ability to discover the most effective means for realizing some real good, whether real happiness or a significant intermediate goal that promotes real happiness (*Sa'ādah* 69:3–4/21:5–6, *Fuṣūl* No. 95). As was noted in the previous chapter, Alfarabi usually refers to the faculty for deliberating well in the service of evil—whether known to be evil or thought to be good—as “cunning” or “cleverness” (*dahā'*) (*Fuṣūl* No. 39, 55:10–56:1, 'Aql 5:1–3, see *Fuṣūl* No. 93, 95:6–8, No. 95, 99:7–8).<sup>32</sup> And he often calls the faculty for deliberating well in the service of a real good “practical wisdom” or “prudence” (*ta'aqqul*), an expression he traces back to the Greeks (*Millah* 58:15–59:1, *Fuṣūl* No. 39, 55:6–9, see 'Aql 5:3–5, 7:5–8).

For practical reason to be successful in weighing and balancing variables, the person who deliberates must have grasped the practical principles. As was noted earlier, practical principles are not necessarily univer-

<sup>31</sup> In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 4 Alfarabi refers to the doctor's purpose in treating bodies as making their conditions and actions the most perfect (*akmal*), regardless of whether the body is then used in the service of good or evil. In discussing practical reason, he never uses the expression “deliberative perfection” or “perfect deliberation,” but in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* he implies its existence when he says that “[t]he deliberative faculty is most perfect [*akmal*] when it discovers what is most useful for the attainment of these ends” (Mahdi), noting that the ends may be truly good, evil, or only believed to be good (*Sa'ādah* 68:16–18/20:16–18). See *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 39, where practical wisdom (*ta'aqqul*) and deceit (*khīb*), etc., are all defined in terms of *jūdat istimbāt* (*Fuṣūl* 55:6, 56:1–2). Cleverness (*dahā'*) is defined as *shīḥat al-rawīyyah* (*Fuṣūl* 55:10–11); see *Fuṣūl* 55:11 (*aṣlah* and *ajwad* appear to be used interchangeably).

<sup>32</sup> *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 93 appears to refer to the Ancients as unwilling to characterize the deliberative faculty in the service of evil as “deliberative excellence” (*Fuṣūl* 95:6–8). See *Sa'ādah* 69:4–6/21:6–7 (such a deliberative faculty should have other names) and 'Aql 5:1–3 (the multitude also gives such a faculty other names). Cf. *Sa'ādah* 71:1–4/22:18–23:1 (apparently attributing deliberative excellence to someone who discovers what is useful for an end presumed to be good by the person who desires it).

sal, invariable truths, as are the principles of demonstration and mathematics. Because they deal with what is individual and concrete, practical principles must take into account the accidental attributes belonging to and the external situations affecting the things they describe—both of which are subject to change, sudden or gradual. In other words, to the extent that practical principles describe behavior that is variable, they must be variable themselves—in time and in sphere of application (*Sa'ādah* 65:3–67:8/17:9–19:10, *Fuṣūl* No. 38, 54:13–55:2, see *Millah* 49:10–50:3, *Siyāsah* 80:15–81:2). They are thus working hypotheses and generalizations based on patterns recognized in the past.<sup>33</sup>

How, then, does practical reason succeed in grasping these variable principles? Alfarabi mentions three sources of the principles of deliberation. According to one formulation in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, which has a parallel in *Risālah fī al-'Aql*, the variable principles arise as a result of “much experience [*kathrah tajārib*] of things and long observation [*tūl mushāhadah*] of sense data” (*Fuṣūl* No. 38, 54:10–11) or “persistent exposure [*al-muwāzabah 'alā i'tiyād*] to and long experience [*tūl tajribah*] with every instance of each genus of things” (*'Aql* 9:4–8). *Kitāb al-Millah* also links knowledge of these rules to experience with and observation of particular events, actions, and the like (*Millah* 58:9–11, 60:7–8). Second, elsewhere in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and in *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, generally accepted opinion is mentioned alongside empirical evidence as a source of principles of this kind (*Fuṣūl* No. 46, 59:12–60:1, *Hurūf* No. 112, 133:11–12). Finally, jurists (*faqīh*, pl. *fuqahā'*) are said to deliberate on the basis of “received opinion” (*ārā' maqbūlah*), that is, opinions endorsed by a specific religious or political community and, hence, ordinarily less widely acknowledged than generally accepted opinions (*Hurūf* No. 112, 133:9–13). Even when the received opinions upon which a jurist relies happen to be generally accepted opinions, recognized by diverse people regardless of their national or religious affiliation, they are of a lower order than the premises used by the original lawgiver (and by others possessed of prac-

<sup>33</sup> In *Risālah fī al-'Aql* 9:7–8 Alfarabi describes the outcome of the rational process involved as “certainty about the propositions [*qaḍāyā*] and premises [*muqaddimāt*] having to do with volitional things to be chosen or avoided.” Although there is a tendency to assume that knowledge cannot be certain if it is not universal and necessary, Alfarabi makes clear in *Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr* that the first principles having to do with nonuniversal or non-necessary things must themselves be non-necessary to be accurate. Accordingly, if man's intellect attains certainty that something is predicated of most (but not all) of its subjects, or is predicated of all of its subjects but only at most times, or is predicated of most of its subjects at most times, the intellect's judgment does not constitute a mere probable opinion (*al-zann al-ghālib*) (*Mūsīqā* 95:4–9). In this passage of *Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr* Alfarabi discusses only things that exist for the most part (*'alā akthar*), but his observation would appear to be equally valid in the case of what exists less than “for the most part” as long as the underlying causal relationships are themselves necessary.

tical wisdom on a par with the lawgiver's). That is to say, by virtue of being the conclusions reached through a lawgiver's deliberations, a jurist's received opinions represent the end product of practical reason's attempt to discover the best means of realizing a lawgiver's objective in light of the particular features and situation of a particular community. As such, the principles of the jurist's deliberation are at least one degree more specific than the practical principles upon which the lawgiver based his judgments. Because what a jurist views as premises are conclusions from the vantage point of a lawgiver, the nature of a jurist's premises offers no additional information about the way theoretical reason influences practical reason during deliberation. Relevant to the present inquiry, therefore, are the first two sources of practical principles alone—experience and generally accepted opinion.

Given Alfarabi's observations about the sources of our grasp of the variable principles of action, two questions must be posed. First, does theoretical reason affect one's ability to grasp these principles, and if so, how? Second, does deliberation make use of any principles other than the variable principles of action? The first question can be broken down into two parts—how theoretical reason affects the ruler's use of generally accepted opinion and how it affects his observations and the experience he gains from them. In the former case, the utility of philosophic insights for a person deliberating will depend on the way that generally accepted opinions figure in practical calculations. In investigating the means to achieve the ruler's ultimate goal, the ruler of excellence must take into account both the way things are and the way they should be. Such a ruler needs to take into account the way things are, because the means to achieve a desired goal will be successful only if it forges a path between things as they are and things as they should be.<sup>34</sup> Generally accepted opinion, in other words, is part of political reality, one of the externalities with which the person deliberating must grapple. Hence, generally accepted opinion must function as one of the variables of the reasoning of the ruler of excellence. Philosophy will make it possible for a ruler to distinguish between true and false generally accepted opinions and, hence, between those generally accepted opinions that can be used to discover the means to realize the ruler's ultimate goal in the best case and those that must be recognized—and perhaps made use of—in order to achieve the ruler's goal in situations where part of the goal is to educate people to refine or relinquish those opinions. The ruler without philosophy, on the other

<sup>34</sup> Even the decision that a revolution is the best strategy for realizing one's goals (that is, the decision not to forge a path between things as they are and things as they should be) rests on the perception that a specific community is ready to accept the most radical break with the past or is capable of submitting to the degree of coercion necessary to create acceptance.

hand, can rank generally accepted opinions only on the basis of their practical effectiveness for promoting his ends; he cannot in addition rank them according to their desirability for an educated citizenry, one that adheres to true opinions.

As far as the principles arising out of observation and experience go, the empirical nature of the process involved would seem to preclude a dominant role for philosophy. One arrives at such generalizations as a result of one's familiarity with individual instances, which comes from working with those instances and discovering the way they behave through trial and error.<sup>35</sup> Further, by definition philosophy confines itself to an account of things—even things subject to human volition—in their essential or intelligible natures, while the variable principles describe them in terms of accidents and externalities. For example, theoretical reason (in this case, practical philosophy) perceives such things as moderation and wealth as intelligibles or ideas (*Sa'ādah* 67:1–2/19:4–5). Suppose that as a result of this intellectual grasp, a person defines wealth as “an amount of property in excess of what satisfies one's needs and ordinary comforts.” If the person then wishes to determine what constitutes wealth in a particular country at a particular time and for a particular individual (as a first step to discovering how that individual can become wealthy), the person will need to know that individual's particular circumstances (such as the number of dependents, their health, their educational needs, and the like) so as to determine the individual's necessary expenses, the average level of nonnecessary material possessions in the society as a whole or in the subgroup to which the individual belongs, and similar pieces of factual information. To take another example, the gap between a theoretical grasp of practical things and the corresponding practical grasp can be seen from the argument in *Kitāb al-Millah* designed to show that religion is subsumed under philosophy. The practical provisions of a religion, we are told, are subsumed under the practical part of philosophy, because practical philosophy contains the universals of those things whose particular instances are in a religion (*Millah* 47:1–2). The example Alfarabi gives of this contrast between something absolute or universal and that thing made specific by qualifications is “the man” versus “the man who writes” (*Millah* 47:3–5). The attribute “who writes” is in no way embedded in or a necessary consequence of “the man”; it must be supplied from an independent and, presumably, empir-

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, *Millah* 57:19–58:2, 59:1–2, 60:7–8, *Fuṣūl* No. 38, 54:10–13. The passages cited in *Kitāb al-Millah* deal with the role of observation in the deliberative process as a whole, not in connection with the formation of practical premises exclusively. That the same kind of active involvement with particulars is contemplated in the context of the formation of practical premises can be seen from *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 38, 55:4–5 (the practical intellect in actuality increases as a person's experiences increase).

ical source. In short, one cannot simply deduce the variable, practical principles from philosophic insights, because practical principles describe a stratum of existence outside the purview of philosophy.

While practical judgments cannot in general be deduced or otherwise reached solely on the basis of philosophic insights, theoretical and practical philosophy could play a role in the empirical, inductive process. One such possible role is suggested by the introduction to Alfarabi's commentary on Plato's *Laws*.

Since the thing because of which man is more excellent than the other animals is the faculty by means of which he distinguishes among the circumstances and matters with which he deals and which he observes (so that knowing what is useful, he will choose and attain it, but reject and avoid what is not useful), and that thing emerges from potentiality into actuality solely as a result of experience ("experience" meaning contemplating the particular instances of a thing and forming a judgment about its universal [characteristics] on the basis of what one comes across in these particulars), whoever has more experiences of this kind will be more excellent and perfect in humanity. However, a person who experiences things may err in his actions and experience, as a result of which he conceives the condition of a thing as being different from what it really is. There are many causes of error. They have been listed by those who discuss the art of sophistry. The wise among people are those who have had experiences that are real and valid. Yet it is the nature of all people to form a universal judgment once they have observed a few particular instances. ("Universal" here means what includes the particular instances of a thing in their entirety and in time as well.) As a result, once an individual is observed acting in a certain way on a number of occasions, the judgment is formed that he acts that way all the time. (*Nawāmis* 3:1–14)

Experience is more than the sum total of a person's observations. Although dependent on observation, experience presupposes the ability to supply connections linking observations. Experience is more than the sum total of observations because the connections cannot be observed; they amount to an interpretation of the empirical evidence. Thus, experience is part empirical and part reasoned (see *Mūsīqā* 92:9–96:7). The ability to supply these connections may exist without philosophy or theoretical reason. The ability to generalize may arise as a result of trial and error and may be a product of the operation of either reason or imagination. If attributable to reason, the ability would be an art; if to imagination, a knack.<sup>36</sup> That Alfarabi believes philosophy can be of use in this process is

<sup>36</sup> The faculties mentioned in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* Nos. 43–45 would appear to be of this kind. Alfarabi says that each is a kind of practical wisdom, but none of them is listed among the virtues or excellences enumerated in No. 33, whereas *dhihn*, *jūdat al-ra'y*, and *ṣawāb*

suggested by his two allusions in the passage just quoted to the relevance of training in logic for the person who aspires to practical wisdom.<sup>37</sup> In other words, philosophy can be an alternative source for lessons about the nature of observation and experience otherwise available only through trial and error. Similarly, philosophy makes known possible and predictable discontinuities between appearances and reality—for example, the difference between what people say and what they mean, the difference between what people say and how they act, and the difference between people's character and the character of their actions (see *Nawāmīs* 3:14–4:10).<sup>38</sup>

*Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* contains a reference to another benefit of practical philosophy for practical reason.

The Ancients [*al-mutaqaddimūn*] laid down rules only for the [preceding simple types of] ignorant regimes because science encompasses<sup>39</sup> and determines with precision only universal rules, even though the ignorant regimes that exist are for the most part mixed. [This is] because whoever knows the nature of each [type of] regime will be able to know the things from which the regime that exists is mixed, and he can form a judgment about it in accordance with the mixture he finds and what he knows of the nature of each of the simple types. (*Fuṣūl* No. 91, 92:18–93:3)

According to this passage, universal knowledge of the natures of things facilitates understanding of the particular concrete cases one actually encounters because the particular cases are composed of combinations of attributes exhibited in a pure form by the simple types. Yet in the very next aphorism, this potential benefit is severely circumscribed when Alfarabi reminds the reader that each of the nonexcellent regimes has numerous subdivisions, some potentially harmful and others potentially beneficial to particular groups of people (*Fuṣūl* No. 92, 93:7–9). This lack of predictability in the effects of particular nonexcellent regimes exists because of the complex nature and behavior of human souls, which

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*al-zann* are mentioned along with practical intellect and prudence as excellences or virtues of practical reason.

<sup>37</sup> First, a person would be wise to keep in mind the limited certainty available from induction, i.e., by keeping in mind the distinction between statements generally valid and those universally valid; and, second, the causes of error can be learned from discussions of the art of sophistry. Training in logic thus enhances experience by teaching the limits of sense perception and the disparity between empirical generalizations and universal truths.

<sup>38</sup> In his *Talkhīṣ Nawāmīs Aflātun* 3:18 Alfarabi says that the wise (*al-hukamā'*) know this aspect of people's natures. It is not made clear whether Plato reached this insight from philosophizing or from experience observing human affairs.

<sup>39</sup> Reading the variant noted by Najjar, which appears in Dunlop's edition and was apparently the basis of the Hebrew translation.

makes it impossible to formulate a simple rule about the effects of regime types on soul types (*Fuṣūl* No. 92, 93:9–18).

These two aphorisms call to mind Aristotle's classification of regimes in the *Politics*, where he elucidates the way social and economic characteristics of a population will affect the way democracy or oligarchy functions, once it is established (see *Politics* IV. 4–6). Alfarabi makes a similar effort in his discussion of imperfect regimes to clarify the range of effects each can have and the conditions under which these effects are likely to obtain. In *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* and *Kitāb al-Millah* Alfarabi appears to include analyses of this kind under the rubric of political philosophy.

Regarding the voluntary actions, ways of life, positive dispositions, and so forth, that it investigates, political philosophy gives an account of the universal rules. And it gives an account of the guidelines according to which they should be determined with due regard to particular states and times: how, with what, and by how many things they are to be determined. Beyond this, it leaves them undetermined, because actual determination belongs to another faculty, with a different function, which should be joined to this one.

(Najjar)<sup>40</sup> (*Iḥṣā'* 127:3–8)

The activities of political philosophy are thus conducted on two levels, the level of understanding the natures of volitional things as such and the level of guidelines (*rusūm*) for applying the universal insights to particular cases. On the level of guidelines, then, it seems that political philosophy takes into account the accidents and states that accompany individuals, albeit in a general way, i.e., insofar as they exhibit patterns of behavior which, although not universally valid, are sufficiently common or predictable to admit of classification. These guidelines are thus a kind of halfway house between the account of volitional things as intelligibles and the determination of specifics that can be done, made, or otherwise willed. However, the person who deliberates cannot simply deduce practical judgments from these guidelines, any more than one could deduce them from the intelligibles themselves. For the person who deliberates must determine whether a particular situation is one covered by the guidelines and then begin the process of bringing together the numerous guidelines that bear on the particular situation, assigning them weights, ascertaining how the guidelines affect one another, and the like.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> I have changed Najjar's translation in minor ways.

<sup>41</sup> The guidelines appear to be conceptually distinct from the practical principles, although in practice they may at times overlap. See the discussion in Chapter II, Section C, above. Alfarabi is emphatic that deliberation requires experience in addition to a grasp of universals—experience of a kind that cannot be acquired from books. Experience would clearly be necessary for learning to apply the guidelines properly even if the guidelines themselves can be taught.

Finally, in a passage in *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* devoted to distinguishing a “diviner” (*kāhin*) from a “natural scientist” (*ṣāhib al-‘ilm al-ṭabī‘ī*), Alfarabi suggests that the possession of philosophy will affect the character of a person’s interpretations of observations, if not the specific inferences the person draws from them. According to this passage, when a diviner “knows” what occurrence will take place, he does so without an understanding of all the individual possibilities (which are by definition infinite) and without knowledge of the nature of the possible—the latter of which the natural scientist possesses (*Fuṣūl* No. 94, 98:10–17). Thus, the knowledge of particulars possessed by a diviner and the counterpart knowledge possessed by a natural scientist are opposites and do not partake of the same substance (*Fuṣūl* 98:17). Alfarabi next makes the same assertion about the difference between deliberative excellence grounded in theoretical understanding and a deliberative faculty without that grounding (*Fuṣūl* 98:18–99:2). The announced subject of the passage in question is “On the ways in which the theoretical part of philosophy is useful, and that it is necessary for the practical part in several respects” (*Fuṣūl* 95:14–15). Because theoretical philosophy is said to be “necessary,” it is tempting to interpret the contrast between the natural scientist and the diviner and the parallel contrast between those who deliberate with and those who deliberate without philosophy as implying that the natural scientist will be able to make predictions and the philosopher practical judgments *different from* those made by the diviner and the non-philosopher. However, the literal text does not require this, and it can just as easily be taken to mean that both members of each pair can reach the same conclusions, but *for different reasons*. The diviner and nonphilosophic man of action could systematically get things right by “accident,” i.e., on the basis of a knack or imaginative understanding of the subjects with which they deal. This would justify Alfarabi’s characterization of the respective forms of knowledge as “opposites” (*mutaḍāddān*) (*Fuṣūl* 98:17), even if the two members of each pair agree on specific judgments.

In light of the foregoing, the effect of theoretical reason on one’s ability to grasp the practical principles or to deliberate on the means to achieve a particular goal can be summarized as follows. The philosopher’s insights neither replace experience nor dictate to it. However, they can inform experience by enabling one to distinguish appearances from reality, for example, by making known in a general way what cannot exist and what must exist and, in the contingent realm, by clarifying such things as the nature of causation and the way to ascertain causal connections. Thus, in addition to offering guidelines for applying philosophic insights to particular situations, as discussed above, philosophy can furnish guidelines against which practical reason can check some of its judgments and boundaries outside of which practical reason should not presume to ven-



ture. The strongest claim that can be made for philosophy is thus that it may facilitate the workings of practical reason in some people and perhaps encourage the emergence of practical reason in some who would otherwise lack it. However, philosophy does not seem to be indispensable for a person to grasp the variable principles of action or to reach sound practical judgments about what should be done, made, or otherwise willed.

That Alfarabi does not consider philosophy indispensable in this respect is implied by the distinction he makes between deliberative excellence and deliberating well, together with his suggestion that a person may deliberate well while pursuing evil ends.<sup>42</sup> Alfarabi sketches the mechanics of deliberating well when discussing the royal craft possessed by rulers lacking excellence, whom he calls rulers of ignorant cities (*al-mudun al-jāhiliyyah*) and kings whose rulerships are ignorant (*al-mulūk al-ladhīma riyāsātuhum jāhiliyyah*).<sup>43</sup> Rulers lacking excellence, we are told, can achieve their goals without political science and without philosophy (*Millah* 60:20–21, *Iḥṣā'* 129:17–130:3). All that such rulers need is the experiential faculty with which to grasp the principles of action relevant for their goals and “a thoroughly evil genius” (Butterworth) (*jūdah qarīḥah khabīthah*) or cunning (*dahā'*), that is, the ability to reason regularly and accurately from these principles to the specifics that need to be done, made, or otherwise willed in order to bring about their ill-conceived goals (*Millah* 61:1–9, *Iḥṣā'* 130:3–10).<sup>44</sup> In short, Alfarabi's claim that ignorant rulers can in principle achieve success means that whatever philosophy's potential contribution to practical reason's grasp of the practical principles or the process of deliberation, the extent of practical knowledge actually required for effectively manipulating the things in man's power can also be obtained by people with a natural shrewdness, when they acquire the appropriate experience.

<sup>42</sup> See the discussion above in this section.

<sup>43</sup> When Alfarabi is speaking in general terms, he contrasts the rule of excellence with the rule of ignorance. See *Iḥṣā'* 126:1–3, *Millah* 55:5–10. When he discusses nonvirtuous regimes in greater detail, he distinguishes the ignorant city from the immoral city (*al-madīnah al-fāsiqah*) and the erring city (*al-madīnah al-dāllah*). See *Siyāsah* 87:5ff., *Madīnah* 252:15ff./61:17ff. I use “ignorant regime” in the generic sense of a nonexcellent regime. Alfarabi also notes that rulers of nonexcellent regimes should not, properly speaking, be called “kings” at all, since according to the Ancients the word “king” itself connotes a ruler of excellence (*Millah* 55:10–11, see *Iḥṣā'* 129:17–130:1).

<sup>44</sup> Reading *quwwah qarīḥah khabīthah jayyidah* with Maḥdī (*Millah* 74:9) for *quwwah qarīḥah ḥabīthah jayyidah* (*Iḥṣā'* 130:6). In *Iḥṣā'* *al-'Ulūm* 130:3–10 there appear to be three elements of the practical rational faculty of rulers with neither political science nor political philosophy—the experiential faculty, an evil genius, and an imitative faculty. In *Kitāb al-Millāh* 61:5–9 it appears that the imitative faculty is necessary only when a person attempts to avail himself of the experience of others as a substitute for personal experience. This appears to be the case typically with jurists (*fuqahā'*).

Alfarabi does not say, nor does he imply, that practical reason is developed to the same extent in the case of the supreme ruler with philosophy and practical wisdom and that of the ignorant ruler with experience and natural cunning. Although they appear to be equally effective in their respective realms, the ignorant ruler's expertise seems to extend only to those things—whether general rules or details—in some way connected with the realization of his specific goal and associated with one particular community (*Millah* 61:2–5, *Iḥṣā'* 130:5–8), whereas the supreme ruler's practical wisdom can operate in connection with any community, large or small, any time frame, and any situation that may arise (*Millah* 56:14–16, 58:9–13, 60:8–12). This difference in the scope of their powers can perhaps be traced to a comparable disparity in the scope of their experiences.<sup>45</sup>

A different teaching regarding practical reason's need for theoretical reason is suggested by the justification in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* for the doctrine that political deliberative excellence and, in general, right action presuppose theoretical excellence or philosophy. In that work it is said to be clear that

the lawgiver does not seek to discover the conditions [of the means to his goal that are within his power] unless he has intellected them previously. He cannot figure out their conditions that will enable him to direct people toward ultimate happiness unless he has intellected ultimate happiness, and these things cannot become intelligible—by means of which lawgiving becomes the supreme ruling craft<sup>46</sup>—unless he has previously acquired philosophy. (*Sa'ādah* 91:20–92:2/41:18–42:3)

In other words, the lawgiver is said to need philosophic insight into the nature of ultimate happiness in order to devise the means (which will then be incorporated into laws or directives) to realize his goal; and to the extent that philosophic insight into ultimate happiness is itself possible only as the culmination of theoretical philosophy, the lawgiver needs philosophy as a whole. Since, as we saw above, perfectly effective deliberation does not require philosophy, the passage just cited must mean that

<sup>45</sup> Compare *Millah* 61:1–2 and *Iḥṣā'* 130:4–5 (the ignorant ruler's experiential faculty is limited to the genus of actions that contribute to the attainment of his particular objective) with *Millah* 60:7–8 and *Iḥṣā'* 126:10–12, 129:4–5 (the supreme ruler's experiential faculty develops from involvement with actions in individual cities, nations, and other communities). Considering Alfarabi's emphasis on the length of time and intensity of involvement necessary for developing one's practical reasoning abilities through trial and error, it is possible that as a practical matter philosophy could be a condition of deliberative excellence, even if it turns out not to be a theoretical necessity, because of its ability to enhance or hasten what a person learns from experience.

<sup>46</sup> Reading *mūhnaḥ* for *māhiyyah*, a variant noted by Al-Yasin (*Sa'ādah* 92, n. 4) and Mahdi (1969A), p. 155.

the lawgiver needs a philosophic grasp of ultimate happiness to identify the goal he should pursue, rather than to enhance his deliberative power as such. Alfarabi does say in the passage quoted that the lawgiver needs a philosophic grasp of both ultimate happiness and the things subject to human volition per se prior to deliberating about the specific, concrete means to realize his goal. But he may allude to a difference in the status of these two types of insights as requirements of deliberation by stating that the lawgiver “does not” seek to deliberate without having first intellected the things subject to volition, whereas he “cannot” deliberate without having intellected ultimate happiness (*Sa‘ādah* 91:20–22/41:18–42:2). If so, *Taḥṣīl al-Sa‘ādah* and *Kitāb al-Millah* would agree that a person can so come to know the variable, concrete attributes that his actions or other immediate objectives must have in order to realize his goal without a prior philosophic grasp of the realm within his power that he must manipulate. Right action requires philosophy only when one seeks to know the variable, concrete attributes of those things that will lead to ultimate happiness. Philosophy is necessary to identify the ultimate goal; in contrast, its effect on one’s ability to find the means to determine the end appears to be either indirect or nonexclusive.

This conclusion may also be required by the passage in *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* that presents happiness as known, or as knowable, only by means of theoretical reason, since the passage clearly implies that one and the same person both knows the nature of happiness with theoretical reason and deliberates about the means to bring it into being with practical reason (*Siyāṣah* 73:9–18). However, the literal text says only that for the good dependent on will (as contrasted with the good provided by nature) to come into being, (1) happiness must be “intellected” and “recognized” by theoretical reason (*Siyāṣah* 73:11–13), and (2) once a person “knows” happiness, then he must deliberate about the means to it using practical reason (*Siyāṣah* 73:13–14). It is thus possible that by using different verbs to describe a person’s grasp of happiness in the two parts of this description, Alfarabi means to leave open the possibility that a person who knows happiness by means of theoretical reason can transmit that knowledge to a second person, who will then “know” happiness thus transferred sufficiently to deliberate about the means to realize happiness. According to this interpretation, the dependence of practical reason on theoretical reason suggested in *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* would be weaker than the dependence stated in *Taḥṣīl al-Sa‘ādah*, where the lawgiver must himself intellect ultimate happiness before he can lay down laws directing people’s actions toward that goal. This interpretation is not, however, the obvious meaning of the passage in *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah*, and it is clear that the subsequent description of the supreme

ruler assumes the attainment of both theoretical and practical perfection on the part of one person (*Siyāsah* 79:3–11).<sup>47</sup>

The results of the preceding analysis of the operation of practical reason appear to support those parts of Alfarabi's writings that argue or assert the supreme ruler's need for philosophy, although the area in which philosophy is indispensable for rulership has been narrowed to knowledge of the ultimate end of action. This conclusion is problematic because it is inconsistent with the teaching of the first part of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and the account of political science that is not part of philosophy in *Kitāb al-Millah*. As was noted above, the political science that is not expressly linked to philosophy in *Kitāb al-Millah* is said to "investigate" happiness, to make known the difference between real happiness and presumed happiness, and to identify wealth, pleasures, honor, and similar things as presumed forms of happiness (*Millah* 52:10–18). It also makes known that real happiness is sought for its own sake and is possible not in this life, but in the next. Further, according to this account of political science, the royal craft of the supreme ruler consists of universal rules, i.e., the universals of political science, and an experiential faculty, i.e., practical wisdom or prudence (*Millah* 58:7–59:2). The thrust of this account of political science and the supreme ruler's art is that not only the variable practical principles, but also the end or ends of human and political life, can be known through experience, the universal rules of the political science not linked to philosophy, or some combination of the two. As was noted above, Alfarabi leaves the source of the universal rules ambiguous. In particular, it is unclear whether they are learned from "books" (see *Iḥṣā'* 128:5–7), as are some or all of the universals of the art of medicine, or from some kind of inductive process based upon an exhaustive review of particular cases. In the event that the universals of this political science are learned from books, the possibility emerges that some or all of the universal rules could be ultimately derived from the discoveries of political philosophy (see especially *Iḥṣā'* 126:9–10 with 127:3–4, and *Millah* 58:7–8 and 59:1–2 with 59:3–4).

*Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* appears to offer a summary of the operation of the political science that is not expressly linked to philosophy. The work

<sup>47</sup> Alternatively, the discrepancy between the two works may be related to a difference in the character of the ends in view: in the passage in question in *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* the lawgiver aims at directing people to "ultimate happiness," whereas in the passage in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* describing the origin of the good dependent on will, "happiness" is the objective. This hypothesis is questionable because in the passage in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* devoted to the supreme ruler, the perfection of both aspects of reason is presented as issuing in the determination of actions that lead to "happiness" (*Siyāsah* 79:3–8). Note, however, the contrast between *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* 74:13 (the objective of human existence is "happiness") and 78:1 (the objective of human existence is "ultimate happiness").

opens with a description of the health of the soul (*siḥḥat al-nafs*) and the health and soundness of the city (*siḥḥat al-madīnah wa-istiḳāmatuhā*) modeled on the health of the body (*Fuṣūl* Nos. 1, 3). The health of the soul is defined in terms of giving rise to good deeds (*khayrāt*), fine deeds (*ḥasanāt*), and noble actions (*af'āl jamīlah*) (*Fuṣūl* No. 1, 23:6–8), and the health and soundness of the city consists in the moderation or balance of its inhabitants' moral habits (*i'tidāl akhlāq ahlihā*) (*Fuṣūl* No. 3, 24:8). The end of the city and man thus seems to be known primarily on the basis of observation and a comparison with the body, whose health is also known without appeal to philosophy or a theoretical understanding of the nature of human and political things. Subsequently in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* it appears that from further reflection upon the health of the body and the art of medicine there emerges the possibility of a discrepancy between the good of the part and the good of the whole (*Fuṣūl* Nos. 26–27). This leads to a distinction between two kinds of cities—one devoted to necessities and one devoted to excellence—and a parallel distinction between two notions of the human end, a lower good and a higher good (*Fuṣūl* No. 28). The lower good appears to consist in moral perfection. The higher good, which is unnamed, is said to be ultimate happiness, the absolute good, and what is chosen for its own sake. The distinction between the lower good and the higher good is explicitly traced to beliefs held by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. As a result of these observations, moral virtue is redefined as a mean measured in relation to the end of human life, i.e., happiness (*Fuṣūl* No. 29).

These sections of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* reinforce and to some extent develop the view of political science that is not part of philosophy contained in *Kitāb al-Millāh*. What the account in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* makes clear is that the empirical understanding of the end of man and of political life initially revolves around the concept of health, which can be likened to the health of the body and which does not need the benefit of theoretical inquiry for its elaboration. The account in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* also suggests that the understanding of the soul and the city attributable to reflection upon empirical phenomena eventually develops to a point where questions arise that can be answered only by recourse to a deeper understanding of human phenomena. Alfarabi's appeal in the crucial passage to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle suggests that in his view, this movement will probably need to be informed by a philosophic understanding of human things, even if merely in popular form. *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* thus supports the view that an empirical political science is possible and that to attain a sufficient understanding of human excellence, such a science must borrow some of the conclusions of political philosophy to serve as its premises, especially as regards its understanding of the end of human life.

The conclusion that the political science that is not part of philosophy

may nonetheless need to look to political philosophy for knowledge of the end of action also appears to be problematic because, as Alfarabi points out, it was Aristotle's view that the person with practical wisdom aims at the proper goal when he possesses moral virtue (*Fuṣūl* No. 85, 89:12–15, 'Aql 7:5–8). Similarly, in one aphorism in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* Alfarabi makes the claim that the person who has practical wisdom needs moral virtue to ensure that he desires really good ends and makes them his goal (*Fuṣūl* No. 41, 57:3–7). When Alfarabi defines practical wisdom in his own name in *Risālah fī al-'Aql*, the presence of moral virtue is arguably implied by the equation of practical wisdom with "deliberating well to discover what is truly good so that it may be done and to discover what is evil so that it may be avoided" ('Aql 5:3–5).<sup>48</sup> However, the passage in *Risālah fī al-'Aql* is also consistent with Alfarabi's account of practical wisdom in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, where he conjectures that the motivation for pursuing or avoiding such goals is provided by theoretical virtue and a kind of natural virtue that behaves in much the same way as moral virtue, but is not strictly speaking moral virtue (*Sa'ādah* 75:6–76:13/26:19–28:4). Moreover, even in the two references to Aristotle, Alfarabi says only that the prudent person deliberates about the right end when he possesses the moral virtues, and not that moral virtue is what makes the end known (*Fuṣūl* No. 85, 89:12–15, 'Aql 7:5–8). Thus, he never rules out the possibility that the prudent person knows the end through reason but is moved to realize the end through moral virtue.<sup>49</sup>

If moral virtue can supply the end of deliberation without recourse to the theoretical sciences, and practical reason can deliberate effectively without theoretical grounding, philosophy would seem to be a helpful but not indispensable prerequisite for a supreme ruler of excellence. To be

<sup>48</sup> In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 39, practical wisdom is defined without reference to moral virtue. Arguably No. 41, where moral virtue is presented as a condition of practical wisdom, is intended to be read in conjunction with No. 39. The term "practical wisdom" is not mentioned in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*. See especially *Siyāsah* 73:9–74:12, 79:3–80:1 (the latter of which attributes to revelation the practical rational faculty by means of which the supreme ruler determines the actions that lead to happiness). In *Kitāb al-Millah*, in the context of the political science that is not expressly linked to philosophy, Alfarabi says that the Ancients called the experiential faculty of the supreme ruler of excellence "practical wisdom" (*Millah* 58:15–59:1). In connection with his account of the political science that is part of philosophy, he calls the experiential faculty of the supreme ruler of excellence "practical wisdom," without any reference to the Ancients (*Millah* 60:5–13). In neither case is moral virtue mentioned, although arguably it is implied in the case of the political science that is not a part of philosophy (see *Millah* 54:4–5).

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, *Siyāsah* 73:10–18. See *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 53, where Alfarabi presents the view that wisdom makes known the "ultimate end," whereas practical wisdom brings about the "end." The relationship between the end and the ultimate end is not clarified. *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* 73:10–18 can be interpreted so as to be consistent with this aphorism.

sure, because moral virtue is ordinarily a product of habituation, to avoid an infinite regress the moral virtue of one supreme ruler of excellence would itself presuppose a supreme ruler at some prior date whose deliberations were informed by theoretical excellence and the natural virtue referred to in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*. To that extent, philosophy would be indispensable both for the idea of supreme rulership and for its first concrete occurrence. However, from the practical perspective, if supreme rule of this variety has once existed, subsequent instances could be possible on the basis of complete practical wisdom and moral virtue alone.

To sum up, the dominant portrait of the supreme ruler in Alfarabi's writings is of a person who combines philosophy and the experiential faculty equated variously with practical reason or a part of practical reason. The first account of political science in *Kitāb al-Millāh* and *Ihṣā' al-'Ulūm* appears to offer a contrasting portrait of a supreme ruler equipped with "universal" rules and the same experiential faculty possessed by the philosophic supreme ruler. Several explanations of the source of these rules are possible. The universals are once identified as the universals "of this art," i.e., of practical political science. The suggestion is that this supreme ruler relies primarily or exclusively on premises about human and political things derived from reflection upon his observations and experience, although Alfarabi alludes to the possibility that some of the rules could be borrowed from the political science that is part of philosophy, i.e., from political philosophy. A borrowing of this kind would not, however, undermine the distinction between the two types of supreme rulers, since the supreme ruler without philosophy would simply adopt as premises conclusions arrived at through the philosophic inquiries of someone else, without himself participating in such inquiries. There is the additional suggestion that such a borrowing would be especially useful or necessary for enabling this ruler to grasp in some fashion the nature of human happiness in the highest case.

The portrait in *Kitāb al-Millāh* of the supreme ruler without philosophy appears to be consistent with the portrait of the statesman contained in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*. The latter work differs from the former by identifying a particular aspect of practical reason, i.e., the practical intellect, as the faculty that grasps the premises of practical reasoning based upon observation and experience. It is unclear from the account of practical intellect in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* whether that faculty can grasp the nature of human happiness in the highest case or is limited to discerning the variable practical principles that guide a person who seeks to bring a thing or event subject to volition into existence. There is some indication in that work that moral virtue may be sufficient to orient deliberation to the proper end or ends. In that event, practical reason could operate completely independently of theoretical reason and philosophy. However, Al-

farabi leaves it unclear whether moral virtue can make the end of action known or merely ensures that once the end is known by the rational faculty, a person will make it the object of deliberation.

Finally, *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* ultimately appears to retreat from its initial account of practical reason and statesmanship by asserting that there is no genuine relationship between the practical determinations of the person who lacks theoretical knowledge and those of the person possessing such knowledge. Although the practical determinations in both cases can be seen as products of revelation, only in the latter case do they truly deserve this designation. It is possible that the assertion in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* contradicts the position announced in the opening pages of *Kitāb al-Millāh* that there are two types of revelation, revelation of a faculty for arriving at specific judgments and revelation of the specific judgments themselves. A contradiction would exist if what Alfarabi refers to in *Kitāb al-Millāh* as revelation of a faculty can be identified with revelation in the presence of theoretical understanding in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*—in contrast to what he refers to in *Kitāb al-Millāh* as revelation of the specific judgments themselves, which can be identified with revelation in the absence of such understanding in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*. In that event the reader would be faced with two distinct and competing points of view as to the validity of the idea of a statesman as a founder of excellence. Alternatively, the statement in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* could be taken as distinguishing supreme rulers of excellence (be they philosopher-kings or statesmen) from what Alfarabi refers to generically as ignorant rulers, who neither understand nor seek to institute a regime of excellence. In either case, these works help to show that for Alfarabi revelation is merely a natural, albeit mysterious, phenomenon (see *Millāh* 44:12–13, *Siyāsah* 79:10–11). It is fundamentally a function of practical reason, a species of what the Ancients called practical wisdom.<sup>50</sup>

### C. THE RULING TYPES AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

In the preceding section an attempt was made to reconcile the divergent portraits of the supreme ruler presented in the first section by examining Alfarabi's understanding of the manner in which practical reason operates. The conclusion of this analysis of the psychological foundation of the royal craft supported the view that, if we assume a conventional political community, there are alternative modes of securing supreme rulership, one dependent on and one independent of the active exercise of

<sup>50</sup> This helps to clarify the reason why *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* discuss revelation but not practical wisdom, whereas *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, which gives the most complete account of the practical reasoning process contained in Alfarabi's political writings, does not even mention revelation.



philosophic inquiry. In the present section the same question is considered from another perspective, that of the activities the supreme ruler engages in. The purpose is to work backward from what Alfarabi says the supreme ruler does to a substantive account of what he must know to carry out his activities, in order to determine whether any of the activities attributed to the supreme ruler necessarily presupposes philosophy. Because the analysis of activities depends on a clear notion of what the supreme ruler actually does, the first part of the present section discusses the levels and types of rule that appear in Alfarabi's writings.

It is difficult to pinpoint the specific activities the supreme ruler undertakes. The dominant image derives from a parallel Alfarabi frequently asserts between the first principle's rule of the universe and the supreme ruler's rule of the city of excellence. This parallel appears to be one of the discoveries of political science, in particular of the political science that is the culmination of philosophic investigation (*Millah* 63:18–20, 65:7–13, 65:20–66:9, *Madīnah* 236:13–14/56:12–13, see *Sa'ādah* 63:11–64:7/16:4–15).<sup>51</sup> The first cause rules the universe by being the cause of the existence of all the other beings (*Siyāsah* 84:6–7, *Madīnah* 56:2–3/5:1) and by being that to which all the other principles and beings are subordinate in rank or being (*Sa'ādah* 63:18–64:3/16:9–11, *Millah* 62:13–63:2, 63:7–10). In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* the political activity explicitly attributed to the supreme ruler consists in assigning the classes of citizens and the individuals within these classes to the place that each deserves; in other words, the supreme ruler decides the extent to which each citizen should dictate to or take orders from the other citizens (*Siyāsah* 83:12–13). The level of political authority appropriate for each, in turn, depends on the natural dispositions, acquired habits, and actions of a person, that is to say, on the degree and kind of human perfection that each can claim or aspire to (*Siyāsah* 83:11–12, see *Millah* 63:12–15, 63:21–64:4). Since the specific form of happiness or supreme happiness available to individuals is also a consequence of the rank in the order of humanity of the type to which each belongs (*Siyāsah* 81:14–16, *Sa'ādah* 81:7–11/32:12–15), in effect the supreme ruler ascertains the level of happiness possible for each human type and then assigns people to the roles that will realize their maximum human potential.

It is unclear what kind of active participation the supreme ruler engages in beyond establishing the hierarchy among members of a political community. In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* Alfarabi says that “[a]fter having ordered these ranks, if the supreme ruler wishes to issue a command about a certain matter that he wishes to enjoin the citizens of the city or a group among them to do, and to arouse them toward it, he intimates

<sup>51</sup> See Mahdi (1969A), p. xvi, on the passage in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*.

this to the ranks closest to him, these will hand it on to their subordinates, and so forth. This continues until it reaches down to those assigned to execute that matter” (Najjar) (*Siyāṣah* 83:16–84:2). This passage may mean that the supreme ruler is not involved in day-to-day decision making, since the chain-of-command image the passage evokes makes sense only if the supreme ruler issues general directives that are then implemented by means of a series of more specific decisions made by others in positions of authority. If the supreme ruler were to command the very action or policy that is subsequently implemented by the last person in the hierarchy, i.e., the person who is assigned to execute the matter, there would be no need for a chain of intermediaries such as Alfarabi envisions. In a comparable passage in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, Alfarabi indicates that as far as the heavenly hierarchy goes, the beings at each level carry out the purpose of the beings one level above them; only the beings without any intermediary between themselves and the first cause carry out the very purpose of the first cause (*Madīnah* 236:14–238:5/56:14–20). Similarly, in the city of excellence, each part of the city should model itself after the supreme ruler in the sense of adopting his purpose, but in accordance with the rank order (*‘alā al-tartīb*) of each (*Madīnah* 238:9–10/57:1–3). In other words, according to *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the supreme ruler’s ultimate goal may not be the objective of most men, except indirectly. As a consequence, there is a whole spectrum of ruling types, all of whom rule others within the areas of their competence and who are ruled by others in other respects (*Madīnah* 230:12–232:14/54:10–55:4, *Millah* 63:21–64:5). It is because the supreme ruler’s directives get interpreted or translated into more specific terms at various stages in the chain of command that Alfarabi can say that people situated closest to the supreme ruler in rank engage in the most noble (*ashraf*) kinds of activities, whereas those lower down in the political hierarchy engage in the most ignoble (*akhass*) activities (*Madīnah* 236:1–7/56:1–7).<sup>52</sup>

Unless in all these passages “ruling” and “being ruled” or “serving” are taken simply as metaphors for ontological gradations, the claim that those subordinate to the supreme ruler both rule and are ruled in different respects and in proportion to their abilities (*Millah* 63:10–15) makes it unlikely that in most instances the supreme ruler commands ultimate particulars, that is, the specific practices that are actually adopted by the members of a particular community. Further, given the explicitness with which this doctrine of a *chain* of ruling types in the cosmic and political realms is presented in *Kitāb al-Millah*, it is worth noting that the passage

<sup>52</sup> “Ignoble” need not refer to something vulgar or unseemly, Alfarabi cautions; actions may be called ignoble if their purpose is trivial (when compared with the grandeur of ultimate ends) or if they are easy to accomplish (*Madīnah* 236:9–10/56:9–10).

begins with the assertion that the supreme ruler of the universe governs and rules everything beneath it (*Millah* 62:17) and that the governance of the supreme ruler of the city of excellence extends through the ranks to the most remote classes in the city (*Millah* 64:17–18). Thus, the simple assertion that someone rules all subordinates does not entail the further claim that the person rules all subordinates personally or directly.

The analysis of the supreme ruler's activities is complicated by Alfarabi's use in key passages of expressions other than "supreme ruler," leaving the reader to decide at each point whether the supreme ruler is still the referent. For example, after the description, just summarized, of the supreme ruler's activities in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, Alfarabi shifts to speaking about the city's governor (*mudabbir*) and king (*Siyāsah* 84:6, 84:11–12).<sup>53</sup> The function of the city's governor, we are told, is

to govern<sup>54</sup> the cities in such a way that all the city's parts become linked and fitted together, and so ordered to enable the citizens to cooperate to eliminate the evils and acquire the goods. He should inquire into everything given by the celestial bodies. Those of them that are in any way helpful and suitable, or in any way useful, in the achievement of happiness, he should maintain and emphasize; those of them that are harmful he should try to turn into useful things; and those of them that cannot be turned into useful things he should destroy or reduce in power. In general, he should seek to destroy all the evils and bring into existence all the goods. (Najjar) (*Siyāsah* 84:11–16)

It might seem from this that the supreme ruler and the governor are distinct types: the supreme ruler devises the organization a community must possess in order to attain the organic unity that characterizes its best state, while the governor devises the means to achieve this end.<sup>55</sup> Tending against this interpretation is the fact that the process of actualizing the supreme ruler's directives is said to involve eliminating natural evils that threaten the city's well-being as well as evils of human origin (*Siyāsah* 84:10–11). Both the need to exploit possible benefits and the need to neutralize possible dangers originating in the heavens would seem to necessitate that the governor be versed in physics and astronomy, parts of theoretical philosophy. Since Alfarabi never portrays any ruler subordinate to the supreme ruler as possessing philosophy, "governor" in this passage would thus seem to be a synonym for "supreme ruler." If this interpreta-

<sup>53</sup> *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* 84:6 speaks of "the governor of that city" (*mudabbir tilka al-madīnah*); 84:11–12 speaks of "the governor of the city, i.e., the king" (*mudabbir al-madīnah wa-huwa al-malik*). Najjar notes *malik* as a variant reading for *mudabbir* at 84:6.

<sup>54</sup> Najjar has "to manage" for *yudabbir* (Lerner & Mahdi 1963, p. 40). I have substituted "to govern" to reflect the common root of "governor" and "to govern."

<sup>55</sup> Note the ambiguity introduced by the use of "that city" (*Siyāsah* 84:6) and "the city" (*Siyāsah* 84:12).

tion is correct, then the supreme ruler orders the parts of a political community in two ways: he makes known the appropriate ranks of each of its parts and then dedicates himself to bringing the community so ordered into being.

That the supreme ruler does more than pronounce on the general structural objectives of the community does not conflict with the presence of the hierarchical chain of command mentioned in the same passage. It does, however, enlarge the spectrum of directives that the supreme ruler provides to include some policies for implementing his goal known through practical reason. The supreme ruler as governor of the city thus goes beyond the supreme ruler as political investigator who, after inquiring into the human nature common to all mankind and the human attributes specific to particular groups of people, “draw[s] up an actual, if approximate, list of the acts and the states of character with which every nation can be set aright and guided toward happiness, and specif[ies] the classes of persuasive argument (regarding both the theoretical and the practical virtues) that ought to be employed among them” (Mahdi) (*Sa’ādah* 84:1–5/34:15–18).<sup>56</sup> In terms of the schema set forth in *Kitāb al-Millah* and *Ihṣā’ al-‘Ulūm*, the supreme ruler as governor goes beyond political philosophy and discerns by means of the deliberative faculty directives for a particular city or nation. The directives of the supreme ruler as governor are of a different order than the directives establishing the overall structure of the community. In first establishing a city of excellence, the ultimate goal and (on the most general level) the means to achieve it are universal. In this respect, the supreme ruler’s determination of the community’s organization would be dictated by philosophy, whereas the governor must tailor the steps to achieve these most general means to the specific community in question. The supreme ruler issues directives that are too general to be acted upon; yet they have been formulated for a particular community and might not be applicable to other communities. An example will make this point clear. The terrain and other features of a specific location will lead a supreme ruler to articulate directives about the kind or kinds of military prowess required if the community is to defend itself properly and maintain its encouragement of excellence. Political philosophy may make known what kind of geographical and climatic features lend themselves to which modes of defense, and the particular location of the community may rule out some of these without further consideration; however, only practical reason can decide which of the remaining possibilities, or combination of them, is the best choice for a particular community (see *Millah* 57:6–19). Thus, practical

<sup>56</sup> Mahdi’s translation is based upon reading *wa-yuḥṣī* at *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* 84:1/34:15, a reading rejected by Al-Yasin in his edition (*Sa’ādah* 84, n. 2).

reason is operative whenever a supreme ruler establishes guidelines for a specific community with an eye to exploiting benefits and avoiding harms originating in the natural world.

*Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* offers further clarification of the extent and character of the political activity engaged in by a supreme ruler. In that work a king's care for his subjects and their well-being is presented<sup>57</sup> as not directly involving him (*min ghayr mubāsharah*) in their individual affairs. Instead, a king's rule consists in entrusting to selected assistants the job of ensuring that the requirements of truth and justice are satisfied (*Fuṣūl* No. 87, 91:8–10). This statement accords with the chain-of-command description in *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah*: both emphasize the distance the supreme ruler or first principle keeps from the everyday workings of their respective kingdoms. In another aphorism the supreme ruler appears to be directly involved in the education of youths likely to become rulers (*Fuṣūl* No. 93, 94:2–6). The education of young people would thus seem to draw the supreme ruler into more specific and daily judgments than does the supervision of adults in positions of authority, as suggested by the chain-of-command image. In the remaining occurrence of "supreme ruler" in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, the supreme ruler is equated with the true king, and his role in city life is presented as twofold: "He in whom all these [attributes] are united is the model [*dustūr*] whose way of life and actions should be emulated and whose works and commands should be accepted. It is for him to govern as he sees fit and in the manner he wishes" (*Fuṣūl* No. 58, 66:6–8). There is no indication whether the supreme ruler's words and commands are adopted directly or through intermediaries. This aphorism adds to the functions discussed so far the supreme ruler's possible influence on individual lives through the example that he sets by his very being.

*Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* provides additional evidence for the portrait of the supreme ruler as largely an indirect agent in everyday human affairs. In this work Alfarabi frequently compares the organic unity of the city of excellence to that of an individual body with heterogeneous parts that are hierarchically ranked and that cooperate with one another in each of the body's internal or external actions. The analogy between the city and the human body, which is also emphasized in the first sections of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, is revealing because Alfarabi spells out the interaction of the parts of the body more explicitly than he does the analogous functions of the parts of the city. Germane to the problem of what the supreme ruler actually does is Alfarabi's description of the connection between the heart

<sup>57</sup> The aphorism discusses two views of God's involvement with his creation. The view that includes the characterization of a king's involvement with his subjects described in the text is not expressly approved, although approval may be implied from the express criticism of the second view.

and the brain. The heart is the supreme ruler of the body;<sup>58</sup> it is the highest-ranking part of the body and the one that establishes the body's goals. All the other parts of the body are said to carry out its purpose. The brain is second in command; it takes orders from the heart and, in its turn, gives orders to all the other parts of the body (*Madīnah* 174:10–14/37:12–15). At the same time, Alfarabi compares the brain to a house steward who serves his master by attending to matters that the master could not himself attend to (*Madīnah* 174:16–176:1/37:16–19). To illustrate this point, he mentions the interaction between heart and brain in controlling the temperature of a body. The heart is the source of the raw heat (*yanbūʿ al-ḥarārah al-gharīziyyah*) that flows to the parts of the body, enabling them to function. But it is the brain that regulates the exact amount of heat that actually reaches each of the body's parts (*Madīnah* 176:3–10/37:20–38:3). Not only do the body's actions and motions—be they external or internal—depend on such regulation. The ability of the rational faculty to think also depends on receiving the precise level of heat that suits it (*Madīnah* 178:9–14/38:15–19). The brain thus defers to the heart for the ultimate goal it serves in carrying out specific tasks; however, it reaches some of its decisions without guidance from the master it serves. If this description of the hierarchy among the parts of the body is transferred to the political realm, it develops the picture of political life evoked by the chain-of-command image.<sup>59</sup> In particular, it suggests that the immediate subordinates to the supreme ruler exercise a high level of practical reason to achieve the supreme ruler's objectives.

A passage in *Kitāb al-Millāh* develops a different point of view.

It may occur accidentally that the supreme ruler determines most of the actions, but does not determine all of them exhaustively. And in some of those he does determine, it may happen that he does not determine all their conditions exhaustively. On the contrary, many actions of the sort to be determined may remain to be determined because of the occurrence of various circumstances. Death may carry him away or overtake him before he has given all the details. Alternatively, preoccupations with such necessities as wars and the like may prevent him. Alternatively, he may only determine actions for each event or occurrence that he observes or is asked about, at which time he will determine what should be done for that type of event and lay down a Law or establish a tradition for it. Since not everything that can

<sup>58</sup> On the supremacy of the heart and its relationship to the brain, see Walzer (1985), pp. 393–395.

<sup>59</sup> *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* supports using the description of bodily rule to illuminate political rule by comparing the king's rule of the city to the heart's rule of the body (*Madīnah* 234:6–236:1/55:12–56:1) and asserting a parallel between the interaction among the parts of the city of excellence and that among the parts of a healthy body (*Madīnah* 230:12–232:14/54:10–55:4).

happen will happen in his time or country, many things will remain that could possibly happen at another time or in another country—each needing a definite action to be determined for it. Therefore, he will not have made a Law for them. Alternatively, he may concern himself with the actions he presumes or knows are the axioms from which someone else can<sup>60</sup> figure out the rest. He would, thus, lay down a Law about the manner and amount of what should be done and leave the rest, knowing that someone else can figure them out by adopting his intention and using him as a model. Alternatively, he may decide to begin laying down Laws and determining the actions of the greatest power, utility, value, and worth for constituting, ordering, and organizing the city. He would, thus, lay down Laws for these things alone and leave the rest for his spare time or for someone else to figure out (at that time or after) by using him as a model. (Millah 48:6–49:8)

In effect, this passage sums up all the preceding possibilities, and more. The supreme ruler may fail to reach the level of ultimate particulars deliberately (setting himself the task of articulating the principles of a country's laws); he may determine some ultimate particulars, but only the most important ones; or he may determine some and then be interrupted. What is striking is that deliberate and inadvertent failures to determine some, most, or all ultimate particulars appear to be treated as equivalents, and none of the five alternatives is presented as a consequence of the ruler's nature. The suggestion is that for the supreme ruler's *purpose* to be carried out, he need only reach the level of the principles of actions or, beyond them, the ultimate particulars of the greatest moment. On the basis of the former very general or latter specific but partial pronouncements, someone who is not a supreme ruler can rule, as long as he retains the supreme ruler's intention and uses him as a model in his deliberations.<sup>61</sup>

The analysis of this section thus makes clear that the supreme ruler may not have all the attributes of a ruler in the ordinary sense of the term. The supreme ruler who rules at the founding of a political order has the task of constructing its initial constitution or charter, i.e., the structure of the regime and the relative ranks of the citizens. Such a ruler will begin to bring the community thus identified into existence by applying the variable practical principles to the particular community at hand. The supreme ruler may get no further than determining general guidelines (tailored for that community) to serve as the basis for subsequent legislation.

<sup>60</sup> Reading *yumkin*, a variant noted by Mahdi (Millah 49:2).

<sup>61</sup> The passage quoted gives the impression that a supreme ruler could be followed by a ruler who, in effect, reasons after the fashion of a jurist (*faqīh*). See *Ihṣā'* 130:12–131:2. Presumably this would depend on the breadth and specificity of the supreme ruler's explicit utterances.

These guidelines would then become axioms or constitutional principles for that community. The supreme ruler could then proceed to ultimate particulars; but whether he does or not is immaterial for the success of his project. If a supreme ruler should rule after the founding, his would be the task of making certain that the community preserves its original purpose. The most important exception to this general picture of the supreme ruler as distant from the ordinary affairs of a community may be his role as an educator, where there is the suggestion of some active involvement in training future leaders of the community.

Turning to the cognitive faculties implied by these various accounts of the supreme ruler's activities, foremost among the supreme ruler's functions is bringing order to a political community by establishing a hierarchy or series of hierarchies among the classes of citizens and their respective activities (*Siyāsah* 83:12–14, *Millah* 65:3–13, *Madīnah* 234:14–16/55:21–23). In the most general sense, the supreme ruler's goal is to create a unity or organic whole out of the divergent capabilities and ways of life of the citizens (*Siyāsah* 84:2–4, *Millah* 65:9–13, *Madīnah* 230:12–236:12/54:10–56:12). Such a ruler would seem to need philosophy in order to discover the principles of organization required to accomplish this goal, since the order in the political realm should to some extent mirror the order manifest in the workings of the natural world and the universe (*Siyāsah* 84:2–4, *Millah* 65:3–6, *Sa'ādah* 63:13–64:7/16:5–15). The cosmic prong of this parallel is described differently in different works: according to *Kitāb al-Millah* the source of order in the universe is the deity (*al-ilāh*) (*Millah* 64:15) or God (*Allah*) (*Millah* 64:17, 19, 65:20, 66:10), according to *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* it is the first cause (*al-sabab al-awwal*) (*Siyāsah* 84:6), and according to *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* it is a first principle (*mabda' mā awwal*) (*Sa'ādah* 64:3–4/16:9). The larger teaching, however, persists throughout Alfarabi's political writings: political life directed toward excellence presupposes philosophy because the supreme ruler must look to the unity and order in the universe as a model in designing the overall structure and, hence, character of a political community.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the appearance of this teaching in several of Alfarabi's political works, the assertion of a parallel structure between the cosmic and the political realms poses several problems. The first problem is to identify which concrete features of a political community the heavenly hierarchy dictates. Certain rough ordering principles are obvious in the supralunar sphere: immaterial ranks higher than material, eternal higher than corruptible, at rest higher than in motion, and simple higher than complex. However, if we include within the universe the sublunar sphere, several

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of this point, see Marmura (1983), p. 96.



of these ordering principles are reversed. For example, if we consider being from prime matter to man, complex is superior to simple, in motion is superior to at rest (inasmuch as animate objects are superior to inanimate), and more transitory is superior to less (comparing inorganic and organic—unless man, or some men, are immortal). The superiority of rationality or intellectual activity over the absence of reason would appear to be the principle of the universe that can be transferred to the political realm with the fewest problems; it leads, conveniently, to the thesis that the wise should rule the ignorant, or that the more wise should rule the less.

However, even this doctrine is challenged in at least one of Alfarabi's treatises, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*. In that work Alfarabi ranks the main human types as follows: the philosophers are the élite relative to all mankind, practitioners of dialectic and sophistry come next, lawgivers are third, theologians and jurists are fourth, and ordinary people are last of all (*Ḥurūf* No. 113, 134:12–14).<sup>63</sup> The hierarchy is not qualified in any way; it appears to embody the ranks of human types as regards human excellence in the sense of overcoming unexamined opinion or total devotion to that endeavor (see *Ḥurūf* No. 113, 133:19–134:7, No. 111, 132:20–23, No. 112, 133:8–13). Yet later in the same work Alfarabi asserts that, when a community is governed by a religion based on perfect philosophy (a religion that seeks, among other things, to communicate the discoveries of philosophy in some fashion to all its members) and when that religion conveys its philosophic foundations exclusively or primarily through images (as opposed to the literal truths themselves), philosophy will have no authority over that religion or over the community at large (*Ḥurūf* No. 149, 155:1–15). In other words, even though philosophy is the source of the religion or governing law, the religion or law will not advocate that the wise rule the others. Alfarabi does not present this situation as some kind of distortion. Rather, it appears to be a consequence of the nature of the relationship between the two forces at work. Further, he indicates that in all nations, whether governed by a philosophically based religion or not, sophistry and dialectic can do violence to religion by calling its beliefs into question (*Ḥurūf* No. 151).<sup>64</sup> Therefore the regime or religion animated by philosophic discoveries will rank philosophers and the practitioners of dialectic and sophistry differently as citizens than philosophy ranks them in terms of human excellence.

Since Alfarabi's remarks in *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* are made in the context of "a religion that is based upon perfect philosophy, and the theoretical

<sup>63</sup> See also *Hurūf* No. 112, 133:13 (the person with practical wisdom [*al-muta'aaqil*] belongs to the élite in relation to all people).

<sup>64</sup> Here, too, the impression is that it is the nature of these arts to have this effect, and not merely the consequence of some malpractice.

things are not set down with the very words used to express them in philosophy" (*Hurūf* No. 149, 155:1–2), the remarks might be taken to apply only to an atypical or imperfect case, i.e., one in which the philosophic account of theoretical things is not set forth in the religion literally. It is more likely, however, that the case referred to is typical in converting philosophic truths into images, since a ruler's decision to teach clear truths, as compared with images of truths, must take into account the natural limitations of the population being addressed (see *Hurūf* No. 152, 156:13–17), and most people are unable to understand theoretical truths except in an imaginative version (*Siyāṣah* 85:12–14). The temperament of a population, of course, is one of the political givens over which the supreme ruler has no control. Although a community will encompass people with a wide range of temperaments, most members of the community will fall within a much more narrowly defined range. Hence, Alfarabi mentions the possibility of a nation "such that its character should be formed by actions, deeds, and practical things alone, not by theoretical things, or at any rate, by very few of them" (*Hurūf* 156:16–17). Finally, there is no indication that a religion is defective when it is based upon perfected philosophy but uses images to convey its teachings, nor even that such a religion is inferior to one that tends to convey the literal truths. Both are a "correct" religion (*millah ṣaḥīḥah*) according to Alfarabi's definition (*Hurūf* No. 147, 153:13–15, 154:8–9).

Another difficulty raised by the doctrine that the supreme ruler should look to the order of the universe in establishing the order of political life stems from a second discontinuity between the supralunar and the sub-lunar domains. In *Kitāb al-Millah* this discontinuity is expressed in the statement that the deity directs the world one way and the virtuous city another way (*Millah* 65:1–2), although there are points of congruence between the two (*Millah* 65:2–3). *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* alludes to this by referring to the first cause as the proximate cause of the agent intellect as well as of the secondary causes (*Siyāṣah* 31:12–13). The secondary causes are the source of the heavenly bodies and, through them, the natural world, while the agent intellect has as its special task making human perfection possible (*Siyāṣah* 31:13–32:9, 55:3–12, 71:10–13).<sup>65</sup> The principles of the operation of the natural world are necessity and chance; those of the human realm are will and choice. Thus, the command to a supreme ruler to emulate the deity's direction of the world is ambiguous, because the deity rules "the world" in different ways, depending on whether it is ruling the natural world or the human world.

<sup>65</sup> For the role of the heavenly bodies in the operation of the natural world, see especially *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* 62:11ff. The natural bodies and the heavenly bodies may either help or harm the agent intellect in achieving its purpose in the human sphere (*Siyāṣah* 73:1–8).

Without a doubt, one of the major strategic questions the supreme ruler will continually confront is, in what situations is it proper to recreate the rule of necessity that governs the natural world and in what situations should one aim at the rule of volition that the deity itself carved out in a general way for mankind? On one level the political counterparts to the two modes of rule in the universe as a whole may be rule through persuasion and rule through coercion.<sup>66</sup> Persuasion, in this analogy, would be the means to create willing subjects, whereas coercion mirrors the rule of necessity. On another level both those whose actions are determined by fear of punishment and those whose ways of life are voluntary because based on persuasion may be seen as living under the rule of necessity as compared with the true freedom of those who act on the basis of understanding. Whatever the interpretation, the order in the universe turns out to be an ambiguous model for political life: because it suggests a range of political options, the order in the universe does not provide a simple rule for the mechanical determination of practical judgments. What a philosophic grasp of the universe teaches a supreme ruler may, then, be the need for distinct principles of ordering to govern divergent natures and, perhaps, some principles necessary for discovering appropriate matches between principles of ordering and human natures, in those cases where such matches lend themselves to regular rules.

A second Farabian claim that on the surface appears to support the necessity of philosophy for the city of excellence is that a supreme ruler must impart opinions about theoretical things to the population at large. This obligation arises from two sources. First there is a regime's need to claim cosmic support for its purposes and practices. In several of his political works Alfarabi suggests that the continuance of a political order of excellence depends on such support (*Siyāsah* 84:17–18, *Madīnah* 276:10–278:7/69:5–19, *Millah* 45:20–24, 66:10–13, *Hurūf* No. 144). Since a statesman without philosophy would be in a poor position to convey philosophic truths in popular form, it would seem that Alfarabi's insistence on opinions about theoretical subjects as a cornerstone of the city of excellence is tantamount to insistence on the need for philosophers as rulers.

At the same time, philosophy does not make known which opinions or images are the best translations of philosophic discoveries for a particular community. Thus, both a grasp of the truths themselves and a practical rational faculty for discovering the approximations best suited to specific

<sup>66</sup> See *Sa'ādah* 79:16–80:3/31:3–11. Although the performance of particular actions can be assured through either persuasion or coercion, moral virtue presupposes voluntary habituation (*Sa'ādah* 78:5–9/29:14–17). Theoretical excellence can be produced only through instruction (*Sa'ādah* 78:3/29:12), which makes use of persuasion and similitudes in the initial stages (*Sa'ādah* 79:6–10/30:13–17).

peoples would seem to be indispensable for establishing the opinions to be believed by a particular community. Philosophy does, however, make known a principle that acts as one constraint circumscribing the range of desirable choices. According to *Kitāb al-Millāh* the popular account of philosophic discoveries should portray those parts of the world and relationships among the parts that can serve as models (*mithālāt*) for structuring political communities and ordering individual lives (*Millāh* 45:20–24). This dictum complicates the procedure for using philosophic insights as one of the bases of political life. For example, one inference that could be drawn from this dictum is that philosophic insights with obvious political utility should be emphasized in laying down the opinions a community should believe, whereas philosophic insights of great theoretical importance but little or no practical significance should be eliminated. Yet if Alfarabi's own political works are consulted—especially *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, where he presents the opinions appropriate for citizens of a city devoted to the pursuit of human excellence—philosophic doctrines with no immediate or obvious practical bearing abound. The most one could say in support of a strict construction of the dictum of *Kitāb al-Millāh* is that it directs that opinions relevant to political life should receive disproportionately great attention as compared with their theoretical importance.

The case of potentially harmful opinions is easy when the opinions are simply false or in no sense an approximation of philosophic insights. In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* Alfarabi mentions the belief that God knows particulars (corresponding to the view that the first cause intellects all things in their particularity in the process of intellecting itself) and the belief that God exercises particular providence over the universe as illustrative of opinions both erroneous and likely to lead people to ignoble or otherwise undesirable behavior (*Fuṣūl* No. 86, 90:1–91:7, No. 87, 91:11–92:1). More problematic is the case of philosophic insights with clear theoretical import and potential social disruptiveness. In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* Alfarabi singles out a Hobbesian view of nature for attack on these grounds. The view is not there identified as philosophic; it is presented as a conclusion drawn on the basis of long observation of natural beings, which appear to exhibit a spontaneous and constant antagonism towards one another, even when they are not in competition for a scarce resource. Hence, it is their intrinsic nature rather than external circumstances that induces beings to seek to destroy or exploit one another. According to this view, it is a manifestation of the natural antagonism among beings that there is no permanence to their relative ranks and that there is in nature no principle of order or desert (*isti'hāl*) (*Madīnah* 286:4–290:4/72:1–73:2). This view leads some people to argue that human agents should emulate the other natural beings in their behavior towards one another. For example,

cities should regard one another as enemies and acknowledge no claims of desert beyond military strength. Further, since there is no natural bond among men, individuals should set themselves up in opposition to one another, except when, and only to the extent that, external circumstances force them to forge a temporary alliance. The belief in the natural antagonism among nonvolitional creatures thus leads to the view that the happiest person is the one who possesses the most coercive power (*Madīnah* 290:5–292:5/73:2–16).

Alfarabi calls this general outlook and its various corollary views “the predatory opinion” (*al-ra’y al-sabu’ī*) (*Madīnah* 292:4–5/73:16). At the same time, one of the themes of his own discussion of the origin and workings of the natural world is the presence and even predominance of contrariety, that is, contrary forms capable of subsisting and disposed to subsist in the same material substratum (*Siyāsah* 39:7–13, 55:13–56:12, *Madīnah* 144:3ff./30:6ff.). On the face of it, the theory of contrariety might seem to provide a theoretical foundation for the predatory view of humanity. That Alfarabi is aware of this possibility can be seen from the manner in which he handles the subject. While acknowledging the lack of continuity and permanence in the sublunar sphere, he presents the flux in nature as itself embodying a principle of order, namely, that it is the nature of matter to receive a succession of forms. The workings of the sublunar sphere may often appear to be random; but the behavior of bodies is, according to this work, in fact in accordance with principles of desert or merit (*ḥaqq, isti’hāl*). In relation to its form, each body *deserves* to endure; and in relation to its matter, each *deserves* to undergo change. Generation, corruption, and other modes of change are thus part of the orderly working out of these two claims. In fact, Alfarabi goes so far as to say that where natural beings are concerned, justice (*al-‘adl*) consists in forms replacing one another in matter at intervals and that it would be a breach of justice were some beings of this kind to endure eternally (*Siyāsah* 59:13–60:2, *Madīnah* 146:12–148:8/30:22–31:5).

The practical intent of introducing the political considerations of justice and desert into a discussion of form and matter is obvious. In his enumeration of the opinions that citizens must believe in order for their political community to promote excellence, Alfarabi includes the belief that the behavior of natural bodies exhibits exactness, precision, providence, justice, and wisdom, without any admixture of the opposite (*Madīnah* 276:14–278:1/69:10–13). This, together with Alfarabi’s critique of the predatory view of humanity and his exposition of contrariety as a form of justice, can thus be seen as a manifestation of his understanding that people’s belief in the fundamental orderliness of the universe is necessary above and beyond considerations of truth. It is the requirements of practical life that induce Alfarabi to characterize the flux in nature in terms of justice. To be sure, contrariety in natural bodies may be “just”

in some sense, although the determination of its justice would presuppose finding it “just” for the world to have a material aspect in the first place. Quite apart from the truth of the doctrine, however, the choice of political terminology appropriate for voluntary action on the part of free agents to describe the behavior of entities whose individual fates are often random or the result of external forces would seem to be dictated by the potential practical effects of particular theoretical doctrines.

A second source of the supreme ruler’s obligation to convey theoretical opinions is the need for instruction (see *Sa’ādah* 78:10–11/29:18–19, *Siyāsah* 84:17–18, *Madīnah* 276:10–278:7/69:6–19, *Millah* 60:14–20). That such a ruler frequently proceeds using persuasive arguments and images is no indication that his purpose is merely rhetorical or not aimed at developing his subjects’ minds. For the initial stages of all people’s education are similar and necessarily rudimentary, regardless of their potential for subsequent rational perfection (*Sa’ādah* 79:6–8/30:13–15). In the case of gifted people, this elementary instruction will eventually give way to investigation and philosophic understanding. It is clear that as individuals, gifted people stand to gain from instruction by philosophers. And it became clear in Chapter II that according to one understanding of the nature of man, human beings find their fullest perfection in sharing, as it were, their philosophic discoveries with others. But it is not obvious that to be excellent, politics as such needs theoretical types among the citizens, unless philosophers or persons trained or advised by philosophers must rule.

If one examines the portions of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* in which Alfarabi appears to offer examples of the theoretical opinions that a lawgiver should instill in the citizens of a city of excellence,<sup>67</sup> it is tempting to conclude that only a philosopher could have crafted either version of the opinions about theoretical subjects. Such a conclusion is also suggested by Alfarabi’s claim that theoretical philosophy demonstrates the theoretical opinions that are accepted without proof in a religion (*Millah* 47:6–7). Such a conclusion would, however, be difficult to prove. Among other things, one would have to become convinced that, for example, a theologian who was not also a philosopher would not be able to arrive at either version of the opinions or something comparable. The difficulty in reaching such a conclusion would be increased by the fact that Alfarabi appears to attribute the discovery of *both*

<sup>67</sup> Alfarabi’s purpose in the initial halves of these two works is not clear. According to Mahdi (1968A), p. 12 (Arabic Introduction), in each of the two works Alfarabi is giving an example of a specific religion, i.e., in each he is acting as a lawgiver legislating specific opinions and actions determined with an eye to a political community or he is giving a model of a religion for use by future lawgivers. According to the titles of the two works, they supply “principles”—in one case the principles of opinions and actions, as contrasted with the opinions and actions themselves, and in the other case the principles of beings.

the opinions and the actions of a religion to the same faculty—the supreme ruler’s practical reason (*Millah* 44:7–8).<sup>68</sup> If the theoretical opinions that a religion or political regime of excellence should espouse can be known through practical reason, it may be possible for a statesman without philosophy to recognize the content of the opinions that the citizens should believe as well as the need for citizens to hold such beliefs. This possibility seems more likely where opinions providing cosmic support for prescribed actions are at issue<sup>69</sup> and less likely in connection with opinions intended to lay the groundwork for a life devoted to philosophy.

The preceding analysis suggests that the supreme ruler may need philosophy to grasp some of the theoretical truths to be conveyed to members of the city of excellence, although this conclusion is less obvious than is commonly supposed and the number of and audience for such truths may be extremely limited. The true formulation of philosophic insights must in any case be adjusted in light of the possible effects particular beliefs could have on nonphilosophers’ views of the best way to live. Further, the formulation of philosophic insights for popular consumption should take into account the constraint, discussed in Chapter I, that such formulations must be easily understood and convincing if they are to be adopted by the population at large. For popular beliefs to be popular, the truth content of philosophic insights would frequently have to be diluted, sometimes well beyond the point of recognition. In fact, in one passage of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* Alfarabi implies that the truth content of images is not the primary objective a ruler should consider (*Siyāsah* 86:17–87:4). And he makes clear that a religion based on perfect philosophy may well convey philosophic insights solely or primarily through images (*Hurūf* Nos. 149, 152), since most men can understand only images (*Siyāsah* 85:12–14).

#### D. CONCLUSION

Few today would care to defend the view that philosophers make the best rulers. Philosophy connotes for most people a kind of abstract inquiry

<sup>68</sup> See *Iḥṣā’* 131:7–8 (*fiqh* has two parts, one that deals with opinions and one that deals with actions). Contrast *Kitāb al-Millāh* 46:22–47:16, where Alfarabi distinguishes between the sense in which the actions prescribed by a religion are “subsumed under” (*taht*) practical philosophy and the sense in which the opinions of a religion are “subsumed under” theoretical philosophy. Note, however, that this distinction is subsequently weakened when Alfarabi claims that the practical part of philosophy “demonstrates” the actions determined by the religion of excellence (*Millah* 47:12–14) and gives an account of the causes of the particulars contained in religion (*Millah* 47:10–12, see 52:4–6).

<sup>69</sup> See *Millah* 45:20–24 (in the religion of excellence, the opinions prescribed for the citizens should portray the world in such a way that the citizens will be able to emulate these teachings in their own lives).

possessing potential but remote political relevance. In part, Alfarabi and some of his predecessors could take up the theme of the philosopher-king in a serious way because for them philosophy encompassed the study of the totality of existence, natural and human. Philosophy compartmentalized was philosophy misunderstood and, thus, in an important respect no longer philosophy. Since by definition a philosopher had as his objective the attainment of both theoretical and practical philosophy, it made more sense to argue a philosopher's political expertise than it does today.

The present chapter has sought to indicate some areas where Alfarabi appears to doubt the indispensability of philosophy for a political community of excellence. Alfarabi invites this line of inquiry by elaborating the possibility that supreme rulers can dispense with philosophy under certain conditions without sacrificing the city of excellence. In this regard, the picture he paints is of statesmanship as an art, a rational account of empirical evidence, which transcends the level of imitative crafts without rising to the level of philosophic understanding. Alfarabi's elaboration of the possibility of nonphilosophic statesmanship is a consequence of the distinctions he makes among the qualifications for supreme rule. The main qualifications are knowledge of the end of political life, knowledge of the variable practical principles that describe the behavior of things within man's power, and the ability to deliberate or reason from these premises to the means to realize the end. The latter faculty appears to be entirely independent of philosophy. Its actualization depends on natural endowment and wide-ranging experience. The variable premises of action appear to be attainable through such experience alone, although the process may be made easier or more certain as a result of certain philosophic insights into the nature of necessity and contingency, deductive versus inductive argument, the limitations of sense perceptions, and the like. The aid that philosophy can provide should not be overstated. As far as subjects of immediate relevance to the ruler go (such as the moral virtues, the nature of human organizations, and the like), the political philosopher himself probably supplements strict theoretical deductions with empirical evidence in order to arrive at universal truths about human and political things in the first place. An isolated philosopher, in other words, would have at least as much to gain from a supreme ruler as he would have to offer that ruler. The truest formulation may well be that political philosophy and statesmanship reinforce each other. It seems, then, that the guidelines furnished by political philosophy for applying universal truths to particular situations are useful for the royal craft, but themselves depend on the kind of experience that makes nonphilosophic statesmanship possible.

The single qualification for supreme rule expressly linked in an unambiguous way to philosophy is knowledge of the end of human life. It is



this claim that creates the greatest problems for the theory of nonphilosophic supreme rulers. How does the statesman of excellence arrive at his understanding of the human end? As we saw, one suggestion is that moral virtue is an alternative method of enabling the person who deliberates to aim at the right ultimate goals. Presumably this means that the statesman aims at promoting excellence because of his own virtuous character, reinforced by true beliefs. If philosophy is the only avenue to knowledge of real happiness, and real happiness is the goal of the city of excellence, then the statesman's true opinions about the end of political life would point back to philosophic insight into the nature of man at some time in the past. This explanation has the merit of resolving the contradiction between Alfarabi's two portraits of supreme rule. It may also help to resolve another contradiction with extensive consequences for Alfarabi's political thought. In one passage in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, not only does he declare that deliberative excellence in the highest case depends on theoretical excellence; in addition, he suggests that the two must be found in the same person for deliberative excellence to exist (*Sa'ādah* 74:17–75:3/26:11–16). This strong formulation of the inseparability of the theoretical and deliberative excellences contradicts the claim Alfarabi makes in other works that a regime devoted to excellence is possible when several people, each of whom possesses part of the virtue of the supreme ruler, collaborate in ruling or when a king lacking some of the supreme ruler's attributes rules within the framework of his philosophic predecessor's directives codified into laws. If the coincidence of theoretical and practical excellence in one person is necessary only once in a historical epoch, group rule and rule in accordance with precedent can be saved. Unfortunately, the passage in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* does not obviously lend itself to this interpretation.

Finally, we saw another suggestion about the source of a statesman's knowledge of the end. According to *Kitāb al-Millah* the political science that is not part of philosophy investigates the nature of happiness, after which it makes known the difference between real and apparent happiness, whereas the political science that is part of philosophy arguably makes known this difference on the basis of a theoretical grasp of the nature of happiness. The inference is that political science can acquire understanding of happiness inductively, starting with the opinions about happiness that people hold and the view of happiness on which their ways of life are predicated. This inductive approach to happiness appears flatly to contradict, if not the claim that happiness is known by theoretical reason alone (*Siyāsah* 73:11–12), at least the claim that the intelligible idea of happiness can be grasped only on the basis of philosophy (*Sa'ādah* 91:22–92:2/42:2–3).

None of the above attempts to resolve the contradictions in Alfarabi's

teachings is completely satisfactory. One further possibility remains. The supreme ruler by definition is the one who founds or rules a city of excellence. Alfarabi is explicit about the possibility of different cities of excellence—not merely a plurality of such cities, but cities with different religions. The reason is that, even when two rulers pursue the same goal, the images and persuasive arguments necessary to achieve that goal may vary with different populations and historical periods. This is one sense in which there may be a multiplicity of cities of excellence. In light of the contradictions in the accounts of supreme rule just discussed, another interpretation of the multiplicity suggests itself. The accounts of supreme rule could be reconciled if cities of excellence with generically distinct goals are possible and if each type of city of excellence can be matched with the appropriate founder or ruler. This would be consistent with the fact that “excellence” is an ambiguous term; it spans the range of human perfections, moral and intellectual. Whether or not Alfarabi’s city of excellence admits of this multiplicity of ends is the question to which we now turn.

## Chapter IV

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### CITIES OF EXCELLENCE

For it is evident that these two ways of life are the ones intentionally chosen by those human beings who are most ambitious with a view to virtue, both in former times and at the present—the two I mean are the political and the philosophic. It makes no small difference on which side the truth lies, for a sensible person, at any rate, must necessarily organize matters with a view to the better aim both in the case of human beings individually and for the regime in common.

—Aristotle *Politics* VII. 2<sup>1</sup>

ALFARABI'S UNDERSTANDING of the regime or city of excellence is ordinarily viewed as a reworking of the city in speech elaborated by Socrates in Plato's *Republic*.<sup>2</sup> So understood, the city of excellence should not only be governed by philosophers; it should have as one of its goals the education of a philosophic élite. These two doctrines are not in principle inseparable: history provides examples of philosophers who believed that the best political order should sacrifice the development of élites of whatever kind to the well-being of the majority of members of a community, or that the best political order should have as its immediate objective the survival of its members while making only indirect provision for each member to pursue his or her own conception of individual perfection. And one can conceive of a ruler who is not a philosopher, but believes in the absolute superiority of contemplation to every other way of life, endeavoring to create a political order that would make the actualization of philosophic natures its primary purpose.

The two doctrines do go hand in hand in Plato's *Republic*. In contrast, the *Laws* appears to envision a regime with less ambitious goals.<sup>3</sup> Since

<sup>1</sup> This is the translation of Carnes Lord. "Virtue" in the Greek is *aretē*, which can also be translated as "excellence."

<sup>2</sup> See Kraemer (1987), p. 290; Strauss (1936), p. 12; Walzer (1962), pp. 243–244; Pines (1970), pp. 795–797; Mahdi (1963), p. 160; de Boer (1967), pp. 122–123; Rosenthal (1958), pp. 120, 124–125.

<sup>3</sup> It is unclear, for example, whether philosophy plays any part in the regime of Plato's *Laws*. The participation of philosophers arguably occurs in two ways: the Athenian Stranger helps to create a structural framework for the new colony's government and to legislate specific laws (ranging from statements of principle to detailed commands and pro-

Alfarabi wrote a commentary on Plato's *Laws*,<sup>4</sup> it is clear that he was acquainted with some of the less radical Platonic teachings presented in that work.<sup>5</sup> Even if Alfarabi equated the Platonic legacy with the picture of political life that emerges from the central books of the *Republic*, it is not safe to assume on the basis of the obvious and extensive similarities between Plato's best political order and Alfarabi's city of excellence that all the important characteristics or any particular characteristic will be common to the two versions.

The present chapter is devoted to an analysis of Alfarabi's teachings regarding the city of excellence. The purpose is to examine the objectives and operation of the city of excellence, including whether or to what extent the education of philosophers is the ultimate, if not the immediate, goal of political life. In addition to considering the nature of the most perfect excellence made possible by the city of excellence, the chapter contains an analysis of the nature of the excellence possessed by the citizens in general. The latter issue must be addressed because, even if it turns out that the city of excellence aims at the highest perfection of the most gifted members, Alfarabi makes it clear that the citizen body in general attains a perfection of a different character. The discontinuity between the ways of life of ruler and ruled thus makes it necessary to examine the status of moral excellence in Alfarabi's political thought as well as the happiness of those who possess the moral or practical virtues, but not theoretical excellence.

### A. MANKIND'S POLITICAL NATURE

The doctrine that human beings are political by nature can be traced to Aristotle's *Politics*.<sup>6</sup> Alfarabi asserts mankind's political nature in most of

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hibitions); and the Nocturnal Council acts as a kind of executive overseer with veto powers. It is, however, far from clear that the Athenian Stranger is a philosopher or that the Nocturnal Council is composed, at least in part, of philosophers.

<sup>4</sup> For the edition and partial English translation of this work, see *Nawāmīs* in the Bibliography. For the Arabic translations of the *Republic* and the *Laws*, see Arberry (1955) and Walzer (1985), p. 426.

<sup>5</sup> Although Alfarabi's reliance on Plato's *Laws* has been referred to by Rosenthal (1958), pp. 116–118, Mahdi (1963), pp. 161, 162, Walzer (1965), p. 779, and others, the significance of the *Laws* for his political philosophy is rarely discussed. The main exceptions are Strauss (1959) and Mahdi (1961B), both of which are entirely devoted to an analysis of Alfarabi's commentary on Plato's *Laws*. According to Strauss (1945), p. 380, n. 55, Alfarabi, like Cicero, tended to view the *Laws* as discoursing on the means to implement the city of the *Republic*, and not as a contrasting proposal for the establishment of a political community. When the *Laws* is interpreted in this way, the Platonic political ideal may be seen as a single, unified entity.

<sup>6</sup> *Politics* I. 2 1253a2–3; see 1252b29–30 (the city comes into existence for the sake of living, but it exists for the sake of living well), 1252b32–34 (a thing's nature is what the thing is when it is fully developed). Aristotle does mention two instances of people by nature

his political works, but he only alludes to the various respects in which the assertion is valid. In *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, for example, Alfarabi appears to distinguish between people's need to be near and associate with others in order to achieve perfection, on the one hand, and their impulse to seek shelter and to dwell near their own kind, on the other (*Sa'ādah* 61:19–22/14:11–13).<sup>7</sup> Although both tendencies are said to be innate, they are innate in different senses. The need to be near and associate with others to achieve perfection is presented as innate in each person as a human being (*Sa'ādah* 61:18–19/14:9–10), while seeking shelter and dwelling near one another is a reflection of people's physical natures, that is, what they are by virtue of their membership in the genus “animal” (*Sa'ādah*, 61:19–62:1/14:12–14).<sup>8</sup> Alfarabi also appears to distinguish between the perfection that man came into existence to achieve (*Sa'ādah* 60:20–21/13:13) and the ultimate perfection on account of which he came into existence and which renders human beings truly substantial (*Sa'ādah* 60:18/13:11, 61:9–10/14:2–3). Although he does not identify the content of the two types of perfection, and at times it is unclear which type of perfection is the referent,<sup>9</sup> he nonetheless makes it clear that people need or are attracted to others to some degree regardless of which type of perfection is at issue.<sup>10</sup>

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without a city (*apolis*): the (humanly) impoverished (*phaulos*) and the better-than-human (*krettōn ē anthrōpos*) (*Politics* I. 2 1253a3–4). See Alfarabi *Fuṣūl* No. 12 (the Ancients called “divine” the person who, as a result of natural disposition and training, possessed all the excellences or virtues, and they were of the opinion that he was too lofty to serve particular cities as a statesman; rather such a person should govern all cities as the king in reality; the Ancients gave the opposite of such a person no name or called him “beast of prey”).

<sup>7</sup> The former need is *ilā mujāwarah nās ākharīn wa-ītimā'ih ma'ahum*, the latter is *an ya'wriya wa-yaskuna mujāwiran li-man huwa fī naw'ih*.

<sup>8</sup> Contrast *fiṭrah kull insān* with *al-fiṭrah al-ṭabī'iyyah li-hādhā al-hayawān*.

<sup>9</sup> *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* 60:17–21/13:10–13 appears to distinguish between ultimate perfection and the perfection that human beings come into existence to achieve. *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* 61:1/13:14, which uses the expression “that perfection” (*dhālika al-kamāl*), appears to refer to the latter, i.e., the perfection that human beings come into existence to achieve. “This perfection” (*hādhā al-kamāl*) (*Sa'ādah* 61:11/14:4) appears to refer to the ultimate perfection that renders a human being truly substantial (*Sa'ādah* 61:9–10/14:2–3). This interpretation seems to lead to the result that political science investigates the means to ultimate perfection (see *Sa'ādah* 62:1–3/14:14–16), although Alfarabi may be saying that “human science” treats ultimate perfection and “political science” addresses the means to the lesser perfection. The teaching that political science investigates the means to ultimate perfection appears to contradict *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* 63:4–8/15:16–19, according to which political science investigates only the means to perfection. Perhaps *min dhālika* at *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* 62:3/14:16 should be read as distinguishing an unnamed science, which investigates ultimate perfection and the means to it, from human and political science. See Mahdi's translation, which seems to support the latter interpretation (Mahdi 1969A, p. 23).

<sup>10</sup> See *Sa'ādah* 61:11–14/14:4–6 (a human being cannot strive for ultimate perfection without making use of many natural beings potentially useful for this enterprise).

In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* there occur similar statements testifying to people's dependence upon others both because of their physical natures and in order to fulfill some of their loftier, more specifically human needs. According to *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* every person has an innate need for things that the person cannot supply alone,<sup>11</sup> both in the area of necessities and "in order to achieve the most excellent of his perfections" (*Madīnah* 228:2–4/53:8–10). Moreover, it is only in a city and not in any prepolitical association that "the most excellent good" and "ultimate perfection" can first be attained (*Madīnah* 230:3–4/54:1–2). *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* proceeds to explain people's dependence on one another as follows:

Therefore, a human being cannot acquire the perfection for the sake of which his innate nature was made except through many groups gathering together<sup>12</sup> and cooperating with one another—each supplying each with some of what is needed for sustenance [*qiwām*]. Thus, from what the group as a whole supplies each [member], there will be gathered together everything needed for sustenance and for achieving perfection. It is because of this that human individuals increased in number and settled in the inhabited part of the earth.

(*Madīnah* 228:5–9/53:11–16)

This passage confirms that human associations are a condition of survival and necessities on the one hand and of perfection on the other. At the same time, it adds the suggestion that the primary contribution citizens make to one another's lives is supplying the means for sustenance, and this activity then has the larger effect of making possible perfection as well. This passage, in other words, suggests that citizens contribute to one another's higher forms of perfection only indirectly, through securing the lower-order end of survival.

According to *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, not individual human beings, but the human species, has need of many groups gathering in a single place in order to obtain necessities and achieve its most excellent condition (*Siyāsah* 69:16–17). Similarly, the observation, made in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, that everyone is in this condition (*Madīnah* 228:4–5/53:10–11) is missing in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*. Finally, although *Al-Siyāsah*

<sup>11</sup> Literally, "He needs many things not all of which he can supply on his own" (*Madīnah* 228:2–3/53:8–9). This leaves undetermined the extent of individuals' dependence on one another. As it stands, the text allows for people who can supply almost all of their own needs on their own, in addition to people with very extensive dependencies. Likewise, according to *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, "each human being cannot on his own, by himself and without the aid of many other people, achieve all the perfections" (*Sa'ādah* 61:16–17/14:8–9). These passages give the general impression that most men need a lot of help from others; but they do not preclude the possibility that some individuals are almost self-sufficient.

<sup>12</sup> Reading *bi-ijtmā' jamā'at kathīrah*, a variant noted by Walzer (1985), instead of *bi-ijtmā'āt jamā'ah kathīrah* (*Madīnah* 228:6/53:12). See *Siyāsah* 69:17.

*al-Madaniyyah* more or less reproduces the classification of perfect human associations contained in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* (*Madīnah* 228:11–230:2/53:17–54:1), Alfarabi fails to assert in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* that the most excellent good and ultimate perfection can first be attained only in a city, as contrasted with a lower-order type of human association. Thus, the account of man's political nature in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* appears to assume, or to admit the possibility of, a greater disparity between the good of the individual and the good of the political community as a whole than first appears from the counterpart account in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*.

*Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* thus have in common assertions that human beings need political associations both in order to survive and in order to strive for perfection, coupled with indications that the nature of people's relationship to the larger community may differ depending on the purpose of the particular activity involved.<sup>13</sup>

For Aristotle the proposition that human beings are by nature political animals meant that the city was a condition of their living well.<sup>14</sup> Although the practice of viewing the city as the central form of human association was already well established by the fourth century B.C., Aristotle saw the need to defend the significance he assigned to city life as a force in human development. Thus, he begins the *Politics* with the claim that the differences exhibited by such forms of association as the city, the village, and the household are fundamentally qualitative, not merely quantitative (*Politics* I. 2 1252a7–18). He grounds this assertion in the further claim that the goals these forms of association pursue—and by their respective natures must pursue—are qualitatively different (*Politics* I. 2 1252b12–30). The end of a city is to enable its inhabitants to live well (*Politics* I. 2 1252b30); in no other form of association, according to Aristotle, are the conditions of living well to be found.

In several of his political treatises, Alfarabi repeats the above claims. However, as a consequence of expanding Aristotle's typology to include nations and empires or federations of nations, he creates a new conceptual framework for human associations. According to the Farabian for-

<sup>13</sup> See also the contrast implied by the differing accounts of political science, as compared with political philosophy, in *Kitāb al-Millāh* and *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm*. Political science makes known the voluntary actions, ways of life, moral habits, inclinations, and positive dispositions such as are distributed in cities and nations and practiced in common (*Iḥṣā'* 124:12–125:5, *Millāh* 53:3–5, 54:8–11); political philosophy enumerates the universal voluntary actions, ways of life, moral habits, inclinations, and positive dispositions such as are distributed among cities and nations (*Iḥṣā'* 127:12–17, *Millāh* 59:10–13). But see *Millāh* 55:17–56:3 (someone may be “part of” the city of excellence but dwell in a nonexcellent city). See Chapter III, Section A, above.

<sup>14</sup> See note 6 above.

mulation, human associations admit of two varieties, perfect and imperfect. The imperfect forms of association are villages, districts or neighborhoods (*mahāll*), streets, and households (*Siyāsah* 69:20–21, *Madīnah* 228:14–15/53:20–21). Alfarabi departs from Aristotle in enumerating three kinds of perfect human association—small, medium, and large. The large form consists in a federation of many nations that associate with and aid one another (*Siyāsah* 69:18) or in the association of all the associations to be found in the inhabitable world (*Madīnah* 228:11–12/53:18). The middle form of perfect association is the nation; and the small form, the city (*Siyāsah* 69:19, *Madīnah* 228:12–13/53:18–19).

Leo Strauss sees Alfarabi's typology of perfect forms of government as a practical concession to new "theological-political facts"<sup>15</sup>—presumably the emergence of the Islamic "nation," binding together previously autonomous political entities.<sup>16</sup> However, his claim that Alfarabi has at least a theoretical preference for the city as against the larger forms of perfect human association<sup>17</sup> is only partially substantiated. In one work Alfarabi

<sup>15</sup> Strauss (1936), p. 12. For a discussion of Alfarabi's typology, see Mahdi (1963), pp. 174–178.

<sup>16</sup> Wolfson (1936), pp. 369–370, traces Alfarabi's tripartite division to Aristotle's *Politics*, where Aristotle "refers . . . to three kinds of association: (1) the confederacy, *summachia*, (2) the nation, *ethnos*, and (3) the city, *polis*." However, in the chapter that contains the passage to which Wolfson refers (*Politics* II. 1 1261a24–30), Aristotle's point is that a city is generically different from a confederacy or a nation, inasmuch as the latter two are made up of homogeneous members that come together for mutual assistance (*boētheia*) for survival, whereas the city is composed of heterogeneous members and aims at self-sufficiency in securing the good life for its members. Thus, if Alfarabi did have *Politics* II. 1 in mind (and there is some question as to how much, if any, of the *Politics* was known to him), he would probably have excluded nations and federations of nations from the general heading of perfect human associations. Alternatively, he may have deliberately altered his Aristotelian source. See note 18 below. On the fate of Aristotle's *Politics* in the Islamic world, see Pines (1975) (concluding, after a review of the classical sources, that at least the content of books I and II of the *Politics* had been transmitted to the Arabs); Steinschneider (1956), p. 219 (the *Politics* was never translated into Arabic); Peters (1968), pp. 53–54. According to Strauss (1936), pp. 3–4, Averroes' failure to comment on Aristotle's *Politics* (and on his treatise on dreams) was not due to chance, i.e., was not due to the unavailability of these works.

<sup>17</sup> Strauss (1936), p. 12; see Strauss (1945), p. 379, n. 52. Strauss adduces as evidence for this claim the circumstance that Alfarabi called his fullest ("le plus ample") political treatise "The Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City." However, elsewhere Strauss conjectures that this treatise is more exoteric than Alfarabi's "Political Regime" (Strauss 1945, p. 358)—and the title of the latter is indifferent to the relative merits of cities and nations. Also, Strauss (1945), p. 359, n. 4, takes the word "opinion" (*ra'y*) in the title of Alfarabi's *Jam'* to indicate its exoteric character. If this standard were applied to *Al-Madīnah al-Fādilah*, it would further undermine the claim that the work's title establishes a preference for the city. Finally, Strauss also designates one of Alfarabi's shortest works (*Falsafat Afāṭūn*) his least exoteric political work (Strauss 1945, p. 375). In light of the preceding, Alfarabi's preference for the city should not, for Strauss, be part of his most profound teaching.



says that the city is “first” in the hierarchy of perfect associations (*hiya awwal marātib al-kamālāt*) (*Siyāsah* 69:20), which can mean either the lowest or the highest.<sup>18</sup> A few lines later the reader is informed that the absolutely perfect human association (*al-jamā‘ah al-insāniyyah al-kāmilah ‘alā al-iṭlāq*) is divided into nations (*Siyāsah* 70:5), which supports the conclusion that the largest of the perfect human associations is superior to the city. The same ambiguity can be found in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, where Alfarabi asserts that “the most excellent good and ultimate perfection are attained first [*awwalan*] in a city, and not in a less complete association” (*Madīnah* 230:3–4/54:1–2), since *awwalan* can mean either first in the order of emergence of perfect human associations or primarily in cities as against other, larger forms of association.

In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* Alfarabi’s preference for the city over other perfect forms of human association may be inferred from the fact that he mentions “real happiness” (*al-sa‘ādah fī al-ḥaqīqah*) as the goal of the city of excellence, whereas only “happiness” is linked to the nation of excellence and to the inhabited earth when it is excellent (*Madīnah* 230:6–11/54:5–10).<sup>19</sup> In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, on the other hand, no such preference can be discerned. After the initial tripartite classification of perfect human associations, Alfarabi singles out nations for further analysis, emphasizing the natural origin of the features that distinguish nations from one another (*Siyāsah* 70:5–71:10). He proceeds to describe the conditions of the attainment of happiness in purely individ-

<sup>18</sup> Najjar translates “the city represents the first degree of perfection” (Lerner & Mahdi 1963, p. 32). According to Pines (1975), p. 156, the implication is that the bigger communities are more perfect than the city. See Pines (1970), p. 796, n. 1 (for Alfarabi the world state is the most perfect political community because it is the most self-sufficient political community). According to Mahdi (1963), p. 174, Alfarabi may have deliberately modified the teachings of his Greek predecessors to justify the Islamic notion of holy war undertaken to spread the revealed law. However, he also notes that only the city is compared to a perfect living body in which heterogeneous and ranked parts cooperate to achieve a common goal (Mahdi 1963, pp. 176–177).

<sup>19</sup> This passage also states that “the association [*ijtimā‘*] of excellence is the association in which there is cooperation toward happiness” (*Madīnah* 230:8–9/54:7–8). Since the three forms of perfect human association enumerated at 228:11–13/53:18–19 are all mentioned separately at 230:7–11/54:5–10, and these are the only three perfect kinds, it is unclear what “the association of excellence” refers to if not the city, nation, or confederacy of excellence. If a prepolitical association were intended, this would contradict *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* 230:3–4/54:1–2, according to which the most excellent good and ultimate perfection are acquired primarily in a city, not in a less complete association. Perhaps Alfarabi means that happiness is possible in prepolitical communities, but only accidentally, i.e., in spite of the true nature of such communities. He does refer to an “association” contained within the city of excellence (*Madīnah* 230:7/54:6). Possibly Alfarabi has in mind the association of excellence referred to in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* (*Siyāsah* 80:12–14), although this association appears to be composed of homogeneous members, whereas the association of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* may not be so limited.

ual terms (*Siyāsah* 72:15–73:18). As was noted above, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* does not repeat the formula of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* that happiness is impossible in associations smaller than cities (*Madīnah* 230:3–4/54:1–2). Whereas in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the account of city life precedes the account of the supreme ruler, and the expressions “the city” and “the city of excellence” are mentioned throughout both of these discussions, the word “city” does not even appear until the end of the parallel discussions in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*. When it is finally mentioned, the city of excellence appears as the equivalent of the nation of excellence, except for the difference of size (*Siyāsah* 80:6–7).<sup>20</sup> In the subsequent passages outlining *citizen* happiness, however, the term “city” (with a geographical connotation) is pervasive (*Siyāsah* 81:5ff.).

Thus, the relationship between cities and nations in Alfarabi’s political writings is ambiguous and needs to be studied further. The present chapter uses the terminology of “city” or “cities” of excellence as a matter of convenience, and not to suggest the superiority of cities to nations. Since Alfarabi is unequivocal in calling three forms of association “perfect,” and since he emphasizes rulership (*riyāsah*) as what determines the character of communities (be they cities or nations) (*Iḥṣā’* 125:12–14, *Millah* 54:8–11),<sup>21</sup> the present chapter assumes that the results of this analysis of cities will be generally applicable to the problem of excellence in the larger communities, with appropriate modifications.

## B. THE POSSIBILITY OF CITIES OF EXCELLENCE

*Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* contains the classic description of the city of excellence: The city of excellence is the city that aims, through the association contained therein, at cooperation for the things by means of which

<sup>20</sup> In this passage a city is not portrayed as superior to a “rulership” that connects people dispersed throughout different nations by imparting to them a single way of life. At *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* 84:10 nations are reintroduced as an equivalent of cities. Other instances where cities and nations appear to be equivalents abound (for example, *Iḥṣā’* 125:4, 125:14, 127:13, *Sa’ādah* 49:4/2:2, *Millah* 53:19–20, 54:8–9, 54:16, 55:3–4). For other discussions of the significance of nations for Alfarabi, see Madkour (1934), p. 183; Rosenthal (1955), p. 161; Walzer (1985), pp. 431–432; and the articles cited in notes 15 and 16 above. Wolfson (1936) sees in Maimonides’ distinction between the city and the great nation or nations the difference between secular and religious communities. See Mahdi (1963), pp. 174–178.

<sup>21</sup> Rulership or rule (*riyāsah*) is distinct from regime or politics (*siyāsah*). The former is the agent cause of the form or character of a community (and itself points back to the royal art, *al-ṣinā’ah* or *al-mihnah al-malakiyyah*); the latter is the community’s form or character. Alfarabi calls *siyāsah* the activity or operation (*fi’l*) of the royal art (*Iḥṣā’* 125:8–11, *Millah* 54:8–16).

real happiness is acquired (*Madīnah* 230:7–8/54:5–7).<sup>22</sup> This is nearly identical to the description of the city of excellence that Alfarabi attributes to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* (*Fuṣūl* No. 28, 46:10–11).<sup>23</sup> Alfarabi frequently likens coordination among the heterogeneous parts of the city of excellence with the functioning of a healthy body, all of whose limbs and organs contribute to the larger activity of the body as a whole by virtue of carrying out their particular and subordinate immediate objectives.<sup>24</sup>

The description of the city of excellence in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* is much more elusive. First, the city of excellence is described in terms of its agent—the supreme ruler without qualification—and not in terms of its operation or end (*Siyāsah* 80:5–7).<sup>25</sup> The supreme ruler without qualification, in turn, rules by means of an art and rulership that direct people’s actions toward happiness (*Siyāsah* 79:5–8, 15–17). Thus, the city of excellence and the nation of excellence are, respectively, the city and nation whose inhabitants are the virtuous, good, and happy people ruled by the supreme ruler without qualification (*Siyāsah* 80:5–7). Second, as we saw in Chapter II, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* appears to contemplate the possibility that neither a city nor a nation of excellence will exist even though a supreme ruler of excellence exists: the reader is advised that *if* people who submit to the rule of a supreme ruler without qualification reside in a single geographical location, a city of excellence will result (*Siyāsah* 80:6–9). Finally, in the discussion of the city that follows the

<sup>22</sup> The passage continues: “The association by means of which they cooperate to acquire happiness is the association of excellence. The nation all of whose cities cooperate for that by means of which happiness is acquired is the nation of excellence. Similarly, the inhabited world of excellence exists only if the nations contained therein cooperate to reach happiness” (*Madīnah* 230:8–11/54:7–10).

<sup>23</sup> The description in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* speaks of “real happiness,” whereas the description in *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* speaks of “the final perfection, i.e., ultimate happiness.” Further, according to the former work, the association “aims at” cooperation, whereas in the latter work, the people are said to cooperate simply. Contrast the description of the city of excellence that Alfarabi gives in his own name earlier in the same aphorism (*Fuṣūl* 45:3–5): the city of excellence is the one whose inhabitants cooperate to reach the most excellent things by means of which are man’s existence (*wujūd*), sustenance (*quwām*), livelihood (*‘aysh*), and preservation (*hifz al-ḥayāh*). Although the matter is not free from doubt, it is possible that the end of the city thus understood is what the Ancients called man’s “first perfection,” as contrasted with ultimate or final human perfection (see *Fuṣūl* No. 25, 45:13–46:3).

<sup>24</sup> See *Madīnah* 230:12–232:14/54:10–55:4 (the analogy between the cooperation among the city’s parts and that among the body’s parts), 236:13–238:5/56:12–20 (the analogy between the city and the universe). See also *Sa‘ādah* 61:13–62:7/16:5–15, *Fuṣūl* No. 25, and *Siyāsah* 84:2–6 (in all of which “the city,” and not the city of excellence, is seemingly one prong of the analogy).

<sup>25</sup> In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, the discussion of the ruler is occasioned by the discussion of political associations; in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, the reverse is true.

preceding observations, Alfarabi drops the adjective “excellent,” making it difficult to identify which of the remaining passages, if any, should be understood as elaborating the city of excellence and which a lesser city.<sup>26</sup>

In *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* such expressions as “city of excellence,” “nation of excellence,” “regime of excellence,” and “rule of excellence” do not occur. In the first section of the work, which contains an account of the course of philosophic investigation and a general outline of its main discoveries, political science is said to investigate the things by means of which a human being achieves perfection (*Sa’ādah* 63:6–11/15:18–16:4). According to Alfarabi, it will become evident to the investigator that there is a correspondence between political association and the association of bodies in the universe, principally insofar as each exhibits a hierarchical order (*Sa’ādah* 63:13–64:7/16:5–15). However, the city and nation that are likened to the total world are not explicitly identified as excellent. In the second part of *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* Alfarabi explains the intellectual and moral abilities and accomplishments of the person who combines theoretical and practical perfection (*Sa’ādah* 64:11–77:17/16:19–29:7). The third part of the work follows with a description of how the theoretical and practical excellences can be made to exist in cities and nations (*Sa’ādah* 77:17–86:4/29:7–36:13). In contrast to *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, where the discussion of the supreme ruler’s perfection triggers a description of those subject to the rule of such a person and a reference to the possibility of a city of excellence ruled by such a ruler, in *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* neither the discussion of deliberative excellence nor that of the way to realize excellence in cities and nations prompts a comparable assertion.<sup>27</sup> Alfarabi’s failure to discuss the city of excellence in this connection combined with the contingent character of the city of excellence in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* forces the reader to ask whether or in what cir-

<sup>26</sup> After the initial typology dividing perfect communities into cities, nations, and federations of nations (*Siyāsah* 69:17–19), the term “city” next appears at *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* 81:3. The “city of excellence” is not mentioned a second time (after 80:7, discussed in the text) until *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* 84:17–18. See also *Siyāsah* 85:3 (the rulership of cities of excellence), 86:1 (nations of excellence and cities of excellence), 87:5 (the cities that oppose the city of excellence), 93:13 (the city that can be likened to the city of excellence), 101:2–3 (parts of the city of excellence in the democratic city), 102:3–4 (constructing cities of excellence out of nonexcellent cities).

<sup>27</sup> In the third part of *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah*, the nation replaces the city as the focus of Alfarabi’s and the supreme ruler’s attention. Instead of speaking of “cities and nations,” the third part deals with “nations and cities” or just “nations.” The discussion centers around “all nations,” “each nation,” or “classes of nations.” The role of coercion and the craft of war is taken up more extensively than in Alfarabi’s other political writings, except, perhaps, *Fuṣūl Muntaza’ah*. However, the political communities are never referred to in *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* as “ignorant,” “erring,” etc., as are the nonexcellent political communities in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Fuṣūl Muntaza’ah*, possibly because the city of excellence is not mentioned.

cumstances Alfarabi believes the city of excellence would be either impossible to establish or unnecessary for the attainment of happiness.

The contrast between the accounts of political science not expressly linked to philosophy and political science as part of philosophy in *Kitāb al-Millāh* and *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* reinforces the impression that the doctrine of the city of excellence is more ambiguous than first appears from *Al-Madīnah al-Fādilah*.<sup>28</sup> In both *Kitāb al-Millāh* and *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* the political science that is not expressly linked to philosophy says that actions, ways of life, and positive dispositions of excellence make possible the acquisition of real happiness; that the rulership of excellence establishes these actions, ways of life, and dispositions; and that the cities and nations that submit to such a rulership are the cities and nations of excellence (*Millāh* 54:1–55:4, *Iḥṣā'* 125:1–14). In contrast, in both works the political science identified with philosophy distinguishes the virtuous actions, ways of life, and dispositions from the nonvirtuous ones but does not link the virtuous ones with the attainment of happiness or real happiness; portrays royal actions, not a rulership of excellence, as responsible for establishing the virtuous actions, ways of life, and dispositions; and never explains what the city or nation of excellence is or does (although it does assert that the actions of the nonexcellent rulers and the actions, ways of life, and dispositions of the nonexcellent citizens are like sicknesses to the cities of excellence) (*Millāh* 59:10–19, *Iḥṣā'* 127:12–128:15). In short, the political science not identified with philosophy appears to be more optimistic than political philosophy about the potential for happiness on the part of citizens, and it portrays the ruler's art as more masterful, i.e., more likely to issue in an organized government directed toward excellence. In addition, the political science that is part of philosophy maintains that for cities of excellence to endure, once established, they must be governed by a succession of rulers with abilities and accomplishments identical to those of the founder, i.e., rulers with philosophy and complete practical wisdom (*Millāh* 60:14–16, *Iḥṣā'* 129:8–11),<sup>29</sup> whereas the political science not identified with philosophy lays down no such exacting prerequisites. By making the rule of living wisdom a condition of the regime of excellence, the political science that is part of philosophy presents the possibility of a politics animated by excellence as far

<sup>28</sup> The political science that is not part of philosophy is elaborated at *Millāh* 52:10–59:2 and *Iḥṣā'* 124:3–127:2. The political science that is part of philosophy is elaborated at *Millāh* 59:3ff. and *Iḥṣā'* 127:3ff. See the discussion in Chapter III, Section B, above.

<sup>29</sup> *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* declares explicitly that only the rule of living wisdom can prevent the deterioration of a city of excellence. The same view is implied by *Kitāb al-Millāh*, which says that the royal craft of excellence is not possible without theoretical philosophy and, subsequently, that a rulership based on tradition (*riyāṣah sunniyyah*) does not need philosophy by nature (*Millāh* 60:5–6, 13–14).

more remote than does the political science not identified with philosophy, which does not distinguish between living wisdom and the rule of law.

There is, therefore, an inconsistency among the teachings of Alfarabi's political treatises regarding the likelihood of establishing a city of excellence. *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and the account of political science not identified with philosophy contained in *Kitāb al-Millāh* appear to be the most hopeful about its existence; thus, it is in these works that the concept of a city of excellence is most clearly and forcefully portrayed. In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* the possibility of a city of excellence coming into being is presented more tentatively, and the detailed descriptions of the operation of political life are for the most part not clearly identified with either the city of excellence or an inferior political order. *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* presents both an account of the theoretical and practical excellences and an account of the way they can be realized in individuals and in political communities, without any express recognition of the possibility or desirability of a city of excellence.

### C. THE GOALS OF CITIES OF EXCELLENCE

Alfarabi's teaching regarding cities of excellence is problematic in a second respect. Because the ultimate goal is represented in terms of happiness, the character of such cities partakes of the same ambiguity as that expression itself.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, there is considerable inconsistency among Alfarabi's various characterizations of the goal that such cities pursue. According to *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the ultimate goal of the city of excellence is "real happiness" (*al-sa'ādah al-ḥaqīqah*) (*Madīnah* 230:7–8/54:5–7, see *Millāh* 54:17–55:4, *Iḥṣā'* 125:12–14). In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* the city of excellence according to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle is said to aim at "ultimate happiness" (*al-sa'ādah al-quṣwā*) (*Fuṣūl* No. 28, 46:10–11).<sup>31</sup> According to *Kitāb al-Millāh*, in a passage not specifically identified with either of the two accounts of political science, the religious community (*millāh*) of excellence aims at "the ultimate happiness that is real happiness" (*Millāh* 43:6–9). Finally, in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* the supreme ruler without qualification is said to be able to

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter II above.

<sup>31</sup> This is not to suggest that Alfarabi's views should necessarily be equated with the views of his Greek predecessors or with views that he attributes to them. His purpose may be to repudiate a tradition he believed was endorsed by the Greek philosophers. However, Alfarabi's inclusion of the aphorism in his collection does suggest that if it makes sense to conceive of two real forms of human happiness, he considers the view that political life should orient itself by the higher form to be deserving of philosophical consideration. See note 23 above.

determine, define, and direct people's actions toward "happiness," and those subject to this rule are characterized as "excellent, good, and happy" (*Siyāsah* 79:7–8, 80:5). The implication is that were such people to live together in a city of excellence, both the purpose and the outcome of that city would be the attainment of "happiness."<sup>32</sup>

Not only are there discrepancies in Alfarabi's descriptions of the goals of cities of excellence contained in his different works. There are also inconsistencies within individual works between the goals of the cities and the goals of the citizens, between the goals of the ruler and those of the ruled, and between the goals of different classes of citizens. One of the most important of these inconsistencies occurs in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, where the association within the city of excellence is said to aim at real happiness (*Madīnah* 230:7–8/54:5–7),<sup>33</sup> but the primary characteristic of the ruler who has attained perfect wisdom, philosophy, and practical wisdom is the ability to grasp everything that leads to happiness (*Madīnah* 244:11–246:1/58:23–59:5). A somewhat different dichotomy is suggested in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*: the people ruled by the supreme ruler without qualification are "virtuous, good, and happy" (*Siyāsah* 80:5), whereas the ruler himself is "truly virtuous" (*al-fāḍil alladhī huwa bi'l-ḥaḳīqah fāḍil*) (*Siyāsah* 101:14–15). Similarly, the supreme ruler without qualification directs people's actions towards happiness (*Siyāsah* 79:15–17), whereas according to that work the possibility for human transcendence extends to "real and ultimate happiness" (*al-sa'ādah al-quṣwā al-ḥaḳīqiyyah*) (*Siyāsah* 82:14–15).<sup>34</sup> In contrast to the preceding examples, in the beginning of *Kitāb al-Millah* Alfarabi maintains that "if a supreme ruler is excellent and his rulership is really excellent, he will seek in what he prescribes ultimate happiness, i.e., real happiness, for himself and for his subjects" (*Millah* 43:6–9). The same identity is posited in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, according to which "[t]he true king is he whose aim and purpose in the art by which he rules the cities are that he should

<sup>32</sup> In *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* 63:11–13/16:4–5 political science is presented as the science of the things by which inhabitants of cities acquire "happiness," through political association, to the extent of each citizen's innate capacity. Elsewhere in *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* the end of politics (not expressly identified with cities or nations of excellence) appears to be ultimate happiness or ultimate happiness combined with happiness, and the lawgiver (*wāḍi' al-nawāmīs*) is said to have the ability to guide others to ultimate happiness. See *Sa'ādah* 49:4–6/2:2–4 (happiness in this life and ultimate happiness in the next life), 64:7–9/16:15–17 (ultimate happiness), 86:3–4/36:12–13 (ultimate happiness), 91:18–92:2/41:17–42:3 (ultimate happiness).

<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in their actions the parts of the city of excellence should all follow the supreme ruler's intention according to their rank (*Madīnah* 238:9–10/57:1–3).

<sup>34</sup> See also *Fuṣūl* No. 53 (wisdom makes known true happiness, and practical wisdom makes known what leads to happiness).

afford himself and the rest of the people of the city true happiness, which is the end and aim of the kingly craft” (Dunlop) (*Fuṣūl* No. 30).<sup>35</sup>

Some of the inconsistencies noted could be eliminated if, for example, “true happiness” is viewed as a generic term, subsuming both simple “happiness” and “ultimate happiness,” or if “ultimate happiness” is viewed as the popular term for “true happiness.”<sup>36</sup> Possible support for the latter interpretation occurs in *Kitāb al-Millah*, where, after defining true happiness as what is sought for its own sake and never for the sake of anything else, Alfarabi adds that this is “what is called ultimate happiness” (emphasis added) (*Millah* 52:11–15).<sup>37</sup> Alternatively, “ultimate happiness,” “true happiness,” and “happiness” could be intended as equivalents. The virtue of this interpretation is that it eliminates a fundamental conflict among the teachings of several of Alfarabi’s political works and *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah*, the latter of which speaks of “happiness” instead of “ultimate happiness,” with rare exceptions.<sup>38</sup> For example, happiness is the absolute good (*Siyāṣah* 72:15); happiness is man’s ultimate perfection (*Siyāṣah* 74:13–14); and those who follow after happiness as conceived by the intellect and accept the principles of being in the same way are wise men, not mere believers (*Siyāṣah* 86:8–10).

The present section attempts to resolve some of the inconsistencies de-

<sup>35</sup> In the passage quoted, Alfarabi says “cities,” not “cities of excellence.” In the next sentence, he includes the phrase “cities of excellence,” the obvious interpretation being that the “true king” and the “king of the cities of excellence” are one and the same.

<sup>36</sup> According to Mahdi (1975B), pp. 131–132, the reference in *Iḥṣā’ al-Ulūm* to the “real happiness” attainable in the “other life” recalls both the religious view of life after death and the philosophic view that happiness consists in nonvulgar goods, i.e., in virtue or knowledge. He concludes that real happiness in this work refers in the last analysis to the life dedicated to virtue for its own sake, i.e., the life of moral virtue.

<sup>37</sup> Likewise, according to *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* 81:7–9/32:12–14, man’s specific ultimate perfection is “called” supreme happiness. The statement occurs within a discussion of the art of war. (See the paragraph divisions in Mahdi 1969A, p. 37.) The justification for war appears to be that every being is made to achieve the greatest perfection it can possibly attain, whether voluntarily or by coercion.

<sup>38</sup> The exceptions are *Siyāṣah* 32:6–7 (the agent intellect seeks to cause the rational animal to reach the utmost perfection attainable by a human being, namely, ultimate happiness), 55:9–10 (ultimate happiness, identified with becoming intellect in act, is the most excellent perfection a human being can achieve), 78:1 (what is intended by human existence is ultimate happiness), and 82:14–15 (the intellection by separate souls of one another is real and ultimate happiness). After the topic of the rational animal is introduced, *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* consistently refers to ultimate perfection and the highest good as “happiness” until the reference at *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* 78:1. Alfarabi clearly intends a contrast to be drawn between *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* 74:13 (what is intended by human existence is happiness) and *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* 78:1 (what is intended by human existence is ultimate happiness). The supreme ruler without qualification, who is discussed after *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* 78:1, is not expressly characterized in terms of happiness or perfection.



scribed by going behind Alfarabi's terminology to examine the substantive qualities that members of his cities are depicted as possessing. The inquiry begins from the assumption that the fundamental choices facing a body politic are to promote physical well-being, practical excellence, whether private or public, theoretical excellence, or some combination of these. For the purpose of the present investigation, it is not necessary to determine which of the alternatives discussed in Chapter II is the highest human end, since both are distinguishable from purely practical perfection by the actualization of theoretical reason. Thus, evidence that the ultimate goal of the city of excellence is to encourage its members to pursue the contemplative life or that its ultimate goal consists of such encouragement and something more should be considered as evidence that for Alfarabi, in the best case, political life should orient itself, whether in whole or in part, by the grandest possibilities attainable by the most gifted members of the community.

*Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* is the political work that most clearly makes the contemplative life a goal of the political community. In that work Alfarabi equates instruction (*ta'līm*) with "causing the theoretical virtues to exist [*iyjād*] in nations and cities" (*Sa'ādah* 78:3/29:12). He outlines a course of study (both intellectual and moral) to achieve this result, referring the reader to the guardians' education designed by Plato in the *Republic* (*Sa'ādah* 78:10–79:10/29:18–30:17). Further, the first part of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* is devoted to Alfarabi's effort to chart in some detail the path a person embarked on a life of investigation should follow. There is nothing comparable in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* or *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, although the latter work enumerates at length the attributes a supreme ruler needs to realize his potential (*Madīnah* 246:8–248:14/59:13–60:11), and both works describe the transformation a person's rational faculty must undergo in order for that person to become a supreme ruler (*Madīnah* 238:11–244:12/57:3–58:23, *Siyāsah* 79:3–11). The latter descriptions are highly abstract in character, miniature psychological treatises based upon themes treated in Aristotle's *De Anima*, and no attempt is made to explain the development of mind in terms of courses of study, much less to clarify the place of instruction aimed at theoretical virtue among political institutions. In contrast, according to *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* and *Kitāb al-Millāh*, it is one of the tasks of the political science that is part of philosophy to communicate the education appropriate to future supreme rulers (*Iḥṣā'* 129:15–17, *Millāh* 60:14–20).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> The theoretical instruction of kings is clearly implied in these passages (see *Iḥṣā'* 129:2–3, *Millāh* 60:5–7). Although *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* appears to assign to *ta'līm* the technical meaning of theoretical instruction, in contrast to *ta'dīb*, which connotes upbringing or education in the broad sense of *paideia*, Alfarabi does not seem to use these terms exclusively with the above meanings.

Despite the absence in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* of details about a philosophic education, evidence exists that the political orders they envision look beyond moral or political well-being to the pursuit of a contemplative life. First, *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* distinguishes two stages in the education to theoretical excellence, the curriculum for investigation just mentioned, and an earlier stage which relies primarily on rhetorical and poetical methods of persuasion. At this early stage theoretical instruction resembles the instruction without a theoretical purpose that Alfarabi recommends for people in general (*Sa'ādah* 79:6–9/30:13–16) inasmuch as both consist in an imaginative account of theoretical subjects such as the principles of beings. In other words, the early stage of theoretical instruction appears to reflect the need for what Alfarabi frequently refers to as religion (*millah*), or at least part of religion. Thus, the emphasis in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* on belief or opinions about theoretical things could in principle reflect a concern for the intellectual development of those who are taught such opinions.

At the same time, as we have seen, the dissemination of opinions about theoretical subjects to citizens at large is not in and of itself a sign of intent to promote a contemplative life, because such opinions can have the effect of reinforcing the practical virtues or political well-being of the citizenry as well. Indeed, as we saw in the preceding chapter, the teaching of *Kitāb al-Millah* is that the opinions the religion of excellence inculcates should be so constructed that they suggest to the citizens appropriate behavior in their dealings with one another (*Millah* 45:20–24). This requirement is in addition to, and is apparently meant to provide cosmic support for, religion's task of defining justice in human affairs and specifying the particular actions that are permitted in the citizens' ordinary activities and dealings with one another (*Millah* 46:6–9).

A second difficulty in assessing the intent of the city of excellence is the circumstance that not every nation or political community is suited to the emergence of philosophy. More precisely, not every nation or political community contains a group potentially receptive to theoretical instruction, and, hence, capable of preserving the theoretical sciences (*Sa'ādah* 84:5–7/34:18–35:1). In *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* Alfarabi advances the more radical view that some nations are not even fit to have their *characters* formed with the aid of similitudes of the truth. In such cases, theoretical excellence is not even an issue, and the community's moral education should proceed by means of "actions, deeds, and practical things exclusively—not by theoretical things, or at any rate, by very few of them" (*Ḥurūf* No. 152, 156:16–17). Presumably, if a supreme ruler found himself in such surroundings, he would simply abandon his plan to found a city or nation of excellence. One theoretical problem posed by the possi-

bility of thoroughly unreceptive people is whether the supreme ruler fortunate to govern in congenial surroundings should nonetheless attempt to construct a regime that would be appropriate for a possibly unreceptive future population as well as for the more promising community in which he finds himself. On the face of it, he cannot both envision the possibility of radical political or social change and establish a city of excellence. But to fail to envision such things is to ignore the possibility of a not uncommon occurrence—such as the evolution of a people’s character or the transfer of a religion or political system from one nation to another.

Finally, some of the most basic conditions of the life of inquiry are antithetical to the peaceful continuance of even the best political order. To take one of the most important examples, according to Alfarabi a thorough grounding in logic is an indispensable prelude to the search for truth, and this entails appreciating the special characteristics of all the logical arts through experience in using them (*Sa’ādah* 50:2–51:8/3:3–4:12, 78:17–18/30:5–6). Yet the proper use of dialectic and sophistry is socially and politically disruptive, “since the function of each of these two faculties is to prove and disprove the same thing” (*Hurūf* No. 151, 156:3–6). Hence, by their very nature, some of the logical methods “introduce doubts in regard to [a regime’s tenets], make them appear to be unverified opinions awaiting verification, and generate perplexity about them to the point where people suppose that neither these opinions nor their opposites are correct” (*Hurūf* 156:6–8). Because of the danger such things as the study of logic pose to political communities with an orthodox creed, whether cities of excellence or not, the supreme ruler described in *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* (or his representative) identifies those citizens who will profit from instruction in the theoretical sciences and confines his instruction to them (*Sa’ādah* 78:10–11/29:18–19, 79:3–14/30:10–31:1, 84:6–7/34:19–35:1). It will be necessary, Alfarabi advises, to distinguish even among similitudes (*mithālāt*) of theoretical things some that should be communicated to a particular group within a city, but not to other groups (*Sa’ādah* 79:13–14/30:19–31:1). It would seem that this advice, offered in *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah*, should be applied to the city of excellence as well, given that even Alfarabi’s best political order presupposes a range of human abilities. If so, there would be an imaginative account of theoretical things conveyed to defined groups as well as a technical level of instruction available to a more narrowly circumscribed audience. The selective character of some of the activities of a city of excellence thus presents a further barrier to assessing the intent of Alfarabi’s city of excellence. Since some, and possibly most, of the practices indicative of the intent to promote philosophy will not be appropriate for the citizenry at large, they will not figure prominently, if indeed they figure at all, among the official teachings endorsed by the regime.

What indications are there that the best political order conceived by Alfarabi is constructed so as to contain opinions of both kinds—those with primarily moral force or a practical purpose and those intended to encourage the emergence of philosophy in people with an aptitude for investigation? As was noted in Chapter I, in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* the first principle for selecting religious images is persuasive power.<sup>40</sup> As a consequence, images that are relatively faithful approximations of theoretical truths but likely to provoke controversy must be passed over in favor of less faithful but less provocative imagery. At the same time, both *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* make provision for increasing the level of understanding of those nonconformists (“weeds”) within the community who question the city’s official tenets or its defense of them because of a real desire to discover the truth (*Siyāsah* 104:17–105:6, *Madīnah* 280:15–282:5/70:18–71:1). Neither work specifies to whom this task belongs, although presumably it would be the custodians of the theoretical sciences; nor is the mechanism for identifying real seekers of the truth and distinguishing them from self-serving hedonists taken up.

Among the beliefs that the citizens of excellence are expected to share are some that seem to have intellectual growth as their primary motive. Foremost among these is the doctrine of the agent intellect as a seemingly supernatural force in the universe separate from, albeit lower than, the deity. Whether the agent intellect is intended as a graphic representation of a specific incorporeal force, a symbol of the rational side of divine creative power, a personification of the abstract assertion of the fundamental intelligibility of the universe, or something else,<sup>41</sup> the stipulation that the citizens of excellence must recognize its existence cannot be explained by the practical needs of the political community or its members understood as simply moral or political beings. The stipulation that the citizens of excellence must believe in a hierarchical universe is more ambiguous: although the picture of an emanationist universe can serve to buttress claims to authority in the political community, it is not clear that this kind of cosmic support for political phenomena is superior to the simple assertion of an omnipotent God, a revealed Law, and reward and punishment in the next life.

In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* Alfarabi lists only six things the inhabitants of the city of excellence need to know: the ultimate principles of the beings, the hierarchy among the beings, happiness, the supreme rulership of the city of excellence, the hierarchy within the rulership, and the praiseworthy actions (*Siyāsah* 84:17–85:2). The list is expanded in *Al-Madīnah*

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter I, Section C.

<sup>41</sup> Compare *Siyāsah* 84:17–18 with 85:12–14.

*al-Fāḍilah* to include such things as the origin or generation of each part of the universe and the workings of the heavenly spheres (*Madīnah* 276:10–278:7/69:6–19).<sup>42</sup> In contrast to the lists, the actual opinions about theoretical things that the two works themselves contain are largely explicable in terms of philosophic considerations. Accounts of form and matter, the four elements, and the movements and substance of the heavenly bodies would seem to fall under this heading. Again, the doctrine of the soul, especially the emphasis on intellection, provides little obvious reinforcement for political or conventional moral life. And surely such things as the doctrine of a multiplicity of religions of excellence (*Madīnah* 280:4–6/70:9–10, see *Siyāsah* 85:17–86:1) or Alfarabi's elaboration of prophecy as a function of man's imaginative faculty in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* go beyond the requirements of opinions for a healthy body politic, if they are not simply in conflict with them.

To sum up, the simple assertion that a community aims at promoting the happiness of its members does not in and of itself embody a commitment to encouraging the theoretical and related excellences that Alfarabi associates with human perfection in the best case. At the same time, given Alfarabi's frequently formal or ambiguous accounts of the best political order, there is no easy way to determine with certainty its ultimate goal. Obvious indications of philosophical concerns, such as a program of instruction in logic and natural philosophy, are missing in the major treatises dealing with the city or regime of excellence, while the opinions about theoretical things prescribed in those works are often suitable to purely moral and philosophic education alike. However, many of the opinions that Alfarabi himself includes in two of his political treatises appear to be introduced more for the sake of inquiry and the search for truth than for the sake of practical considerations.

At the same time, it may not be correct to equate the opinions Alfarabi introduces and discusses in his political writings with the opinions he believes a political community or religion should prescribe for its members. Without a doubt, in his treatises he examines these opinions in far greater depth than any constitution or statutes or sacred texts could or would. Alfarabi's political writings might find counterparts among theological works, but theological works themselves have a much more limited audience than do a community's laws and sacred texts. Perhaps the contents of his and similar books should be classified among the opinions appro-

<sup>42</sup> For the most part the list in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* matches the list of opinions in *Kitāb al-Millah* (*Millah* 44:15–45:9), except that the vocabulary in the latter work tends to be more religious and the vocabulary in the former work more philosophic. For example, *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* 276:11–12/69:7–9 speaks of the "first cause" and "separate substances," whereas *Kitāb al-Millah* 44:15–16 refers to "Allah, the exalted" and "spirits" (*rūhāniyyūn*).

priate for select groups *within* a community, although there is no textual authority for confining them thus. If this last interpretation is correct, then the city of excellence would include among its official teachings some beliefs with relevance for only a small group of citizens (such as the doctrines concerning the agent intellect and the philosophic achievements of the supreme ruler), while it would leave the elaboration of these teachings together with all discussion of further doctrines without utility for the political community as such to individuals obligated because of their citizenship to transmit the theoretical excellences on a quasi-private basis.<sup>43</sup> The claim that Alfarabi's city of excellence aims beyond the practical perfection of its inhabitants thus relies on the fact that the regime's official teachings include several prominent doctrines not necessary to ensure the stability of the community as a whole or the moral well-being of its individual members. For the most part, however, the provisions to encourage intellectual perfection appear in Alfarabi's writings to be less institutionalized or institutionalized in a less public manner than those in Plato's *Republic*.

The preceding analysis of Alfarabi's city of excellence raises a new problem in connection with the citizenry in general, namely, the quality of life of the ordinary members of the community who do not attain the city's ultimate end. Even if the city's intention is to promote the ultimate perfection of all (*Millah* 43:7–9, see *Madīnah* 230:7–8/54:5–7, *Fuṣūl* No. 30), its effect will be to produce the highest perfection of a few exceptionally gifted people and lesser forms of well-being for everyone else.<sup>44</sup> Since for Alfarabi the moral virtues derive their excellence in the first place from the ultimate ends they further, it is necessary to assess separately the lesser forms of well-being attained by most citizens. For it is not obvious that the lesser forms of well-being retain their goodness when severed from their ends. The question of the character of the citizens' excellence may thus be complicated by the circumstance that only those highest in authority actually pursue the ultimate goal of the city of excellence. In the lower ranks the ultimate goal is pursued indirectly, through the pursuit of the goals of those next in authority (*Madīnah* 236:1–10/56:1–10, 238:1–10/56:16–57:3, *Fuṣūl* No. 25, see *Siyāsah* 83:16–84:2, *Millah*

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, *Sa'ādah* 78:10–11/29:18–19, 80:2–3/31:10–11 (referring to instruction in the theoretical sciences in cities and nations—not the city of excellence). Note that the full title of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is “Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the City of Excellence.”

<sup>44</sup> See *Siyāsah* 81:14–15 and *Madīnah* 266:5/65:15 (there are different types of happiness and these differ in excellence), *Siyāsah* 85:12, 86:2–6 (a rational understanding of nature and human existence is beyond the abilities of the vast majority of men), *Sa'ādah* 81:9–11/32:14–15 (“to each man, according to his rank in the order of humanity, belongs the specific supreme happiness pertaining to this kind of man” [Mahdī]).

63:10–15, 65:3–14). Most citizens, in other words, pursue lesser, instrumental goals, on the assumption that they are final goals, at least of man's terrestrial existence. Given the discontinuity between the specific excellences of the supreme ruler and the citizens as well as the variegated nature of citizen excellence, it will be necessary to give a substantive account of citizen excellence in order to determine its benefits to those who possess it. In short, in order to understand fully the excellence embodied in cities of excellence as well as to grasp the extent of the political nature of man, it is necessary to turn to the nature and way of life of the typical citizen of excellence.

#### D. THE CITIZENS OF EXCELLENCE

*Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* contain nearly identical descriptions of the character of citizens of excellence and the manner in which the city is responsible for the perfection they reach.

When each member of the city does what he is typically charged with—by knowing it on his own or by the ruler guiding and urging him to it—he will acquire good [*jayyid*] states of soul through his actions. This is like a human being acquiring goodness in the art of writing (which is a state of soul) by practice in good writing. The more he practices, the stronger his goodness at writing will become, the greater the pleasure he will derive from the resulting state [of soul], and the more intense his delight in that state [of soul] will be. Similarly, the actions that are determined and directed toward happiness will strengthen the part of the soul that is naturally equipped for happiness and will actualize and perfect it to the point where it can dispense with matter because of the power it gets from becoming perfect. Thus, it gets free from matter, as a result of which it is not destroyed when matter is destroyed. For it no longer needs matter for sustenance or existence. At that time, therefore, it attains happiness. (*Siyāṣah* 81:5–13)<sup>45</sup>

According to this description the crucial trait that distinguishes citizens of excellence from citizens of ignorant and other imperfect cities and that makes their happy outcome possible is their souls' transcendence of matter. The ruler of excellence makes the citizens' overcoming of their bodily existence his primary objective when he constructs laws or issues commands intended to foster their well-being. In fact, the above description of the citizens' perfection in terms of actualizing the part of the soul naturally equipped for happiness and of coming to dispense with matter for

<sup>45</sup> The comparable passage in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is at 260:10–262:6/63:20–64:8. In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the citizens so described are expressly associated with the city of excellence (*Madīnah* 260:7/63:17), and the adjective “excellent” (*fāḍil*) is added to “good” (*jayyid*) throughout the passage.

existence and sustenance sounds very much like a description of the supreme ruler's own highest development. Some differences should, however, be noted. Until the last few lines of the passage in which the quoted description occurs, the citizens' transcendence is depicted as the perfection of *souls* (see *Siyāṣah* 81:6–7, 10–11, 82:6–7), in contrast to the ruler's transcendence, which is explained in terms of successive stages of *intellectual* perfection (*Siyāṣah* 79:8–80:1). In the case of the citizens, Al-farabi speaks of a conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) of souls (*Siyāṣah* 82:9–10); in the case of the ruler, what occurs is a conjunction of intellects (*Siyāṣah* 79:10–11).

Subsequently, toward the end of the passage, there is a new formulation of what has transpired.

The more the kindred separate souls increase in number and unite with one another, the greater the pleasure felt by each soul; and the more they are joined by those who come after them, the greater the pleasure felt by each of the latter through their encounter with the former as well as the pleasure felt by the former through their union<sup>46</sup> with the latter. For each soul will then be intellecting, in addition to itself, many other souls that are of the same kind; and it will be intellecting more souls as the ones that had passed away are joined by the ones succeeding them. Hence the pleasure felt by the very ancient ones will continue to increase indefinitely. Such is the state of every group of them. This, then, is true and supreme happiness, which is the purpose of the Active Intellect. (Najjar) (*Siyāṣah* 82:10–15)

The passage in *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* containing the two descriptions just quoted thus exhibits a shift in focus from souls to intellects and from happiness to true and supreme happiness. The earlier statements are consistent with the later ones if we posit that transcendence of matter can take place on a number of levels, all of them pertaining to states of soul, but only some of them issuing in the highest type of spiritual transcendence, namely, those involving the actualization of the rational soul. When the passage is understood in this way, the statement about the conjunction of kindred separate souls (*al-anfus al-mutashābihah al-mufāriqah*) (*Siyāṣah* 82:10) should be taken as limited to one subset of kindred souls that experience conjunction (*Siyāṣah* 82:9–10) as a result of transcending their material existence.<sup>47</sup>

Dividing the account of spiritual transcendence into the broader theme

<sup>46</sup> The Arabic is *ittiṣāl* (*Siyāṣah* 82:12), which I have translated as “conjunction.”

<sup>47</sup> One difficulty with this interpretation of *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* is that in between the two passages quoted there is a passage maintaining that types of happiness differ in quantity and quality, depending upon the varying degrees of excellence of the types of perfection people have acquired through their political activities (*Siyāṣah* 81:14–15). See the discussion in Chapter V, Section D, below.



of the perfection of souls and the special case of the perfection of intellects eliminates some possible contradictions in Alfarabi's claims about the inhabitants of cities of excellence in his other works: in particular, that the real king or supreme ruler aims at real happiness for both himself and his subjects (*Fuṣūl* No. 30, 47:7–8, *Millah* 43:6–9), that the real king's happiness is more perfect than that of the other citizens (*Fuṣūl* No. 30, 47:9–10), and that ruler and ruled alike attain in a regime of excellence a type of excellence unavailable elsewhere (*Fuṣūl* No. 89, 92:5–8). There are, then, distinct species of spiritual transcendence, each of which issues in some form of real happiness and perfection, but only one of which is real ultimate transcendence.

The character of the highest happiness—that of intellection or of intellection coupled with activities pursuant to intellection—was discussed in Chapter II. The character of the happiness associated with the lower forms of spiritual transcendence—the excellence of the citizens at large—is equally elusive. To begin with, although Alfarabi does at times admit that there are different types of happiness and that they can be ranked hierarchically, he does not clearly identify the character of each type. Instead, sometimes he presents the happiness of citizens as analogous to the goodness, excellence, or pleasure to be had from performing the art of writing well (*Madīnah* 260:10–262:5/63:20–64:6, *Siyāṣah* 81:5–10, *Fuṣūl* No. 9), and at other times he makes use of extremely abstract characterizations of the happiness attained by citizens with differing natural abilities and accomplishments (*Madīnah* 262:7–264:3/64:8–19, *Siyāṣah* 81:10–82:5).

The clearest statement of the fundamental alternatives for political life occurs in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, in the aphorism that divides all cities into those that seek necessities and those directed towards excellence (*Fuṣūl* No. 28, 45:1–5). Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, Alfarabi says, all believed that the goal of the city of excellence should be the final human perfection, and that this, in turn, presupposes the attainment of man's first perfection (*Fuṣūl* 46:10–11, 45:12–13). The first perfection consists of “doing the actions of the virtues” (*fadā'il*), as contrasted with merely possessing virtuous states of soul (*Fuṣūl* 45:13–46:5). The first perfection is thus moral virtue or, more accurately, the performance of the acts of the moral virtues while possessing the moral virtues. This discussion of the views of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle accords with Alfarabi's assertion in *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* that the happiness a citizen attains will be a function of the perfection he acquires through political activities (*al-af'āl al-madaniyyah*) (*Siyāṣah* 81:14–15),<sup>48</sup> and it is consistent with the

<sup>48</sup> In the parallel passage of *Al-Madīnah al-Fādilah*, Alfarabi omits the reference to political activities (*Madīnah* 266:5–268:3/65:15–66:6).

description of political life and happiness provided by the political science that is not a part of philosophy.<sup>49</sup>

In describing the level of excellence the souls of citizens can attain, Alfarabi emphasizes in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* that it is the best (*afdāl*) state possible, given the nature of each individual soul (*Fuṣūl* No. 89, 92:8–11). This reference to individuality in the context of transcendence is unexpected, since individuality, for Alfarabi, is a function of bodily characteristics. Alfarabi affirms the link between bodies and individuality in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, in the very chapter that contains the account of the salvation of citizens of excellence. He maintains there that the citizens' souls retain some distinguishing marks, even after their separation from their bodies, because of the differences among their (previous) bodily hosts and the effects of these differences on the souls themselves (*Madīnah* 262:13–264:3/64:14–19). In *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah*, in contrast, there is no mention of individual differences among souls freed from bodies, even when the souls are not explicitly characterized as separate substances. Instead, the reader is warned not to make the mistake of attributing physical characteristics to immaterial substances (*Siyāṣah* 81:16–82:5). In light of this warning, the assertion of individuality among souls in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* may be purely rhetorical, that is, it may represent a concession to the limits of popular understanding of the soul's transcendence or, equally plausibly, it may reflect the philosopher's reservations about the transcendent character of moral perfection.

Alfarabi alludes to a second aspect of citizen excellence, namely, the opinions about the principles of the beings, the universe, happiness, the supreme ruler, and similar things that the people should hold (see *Siyāṣah* 84:17–18, *Madīnah* 276:10–278:7/69:6–19). Although in the sections of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* devoted to the salvation of citizens of excellence Alfarabi mentions only actions as a source of spiritual transcendence, subsequently, in his account of what happens to the citizens of certain nonexcellent cities<sup>50</sup> after death, he refers to the possession of the opinions associated with the city of excellence as a source of their souls' liberation from matter (*Madīnah* 272:4–5/67:16–17).<sup>51</sup> The same chapter contains the claim that the souls of citizens of ignorant cities are chained to matter because they lack any impression (*lam yartasim*) of truth except the primary intelligibles (*Madīnah* 270:6–8/67:2–4). These observations are problematic because Alfarabi locates opinion as such in the imaginative faculty of the soul, regardless of whether specific opinions are true or

<sup>49</sup> See *Millah* 53:3–54:7, *Iḥṣā'* 125:1–5.

<sup>50</sup> Reading *al-fāsiqah* with Walzer (1985) instead of *al-fāḍilah* in Dieterici's edition (*Madīnah* 272:4/67:16).

<sup>51</sup> Reading *al-ārā' al-fāḍilah* with Walzer (1985) instead of *ārā' aslāfihim* in Dieterici's edition (*Madīnah* 272:5/67:17).

false. In contrast, transcendence in the cognitive realm is ordinarily associated with the actualization of the rational faculty or intellect. It is, then, difficult to see how the possession of particular opinions can be identified with overcoming material existence on a cognitive level. At most one could posit that when the imaginative faculty provides the rational faculty with some of the raw material for intellection, opinions of a certain kind may facilitate the soul's ability to transcend its material existence in the future.<sup>52</sup>

It appears, then, that two distinct aspects of citizen excellence contribute to the attainment of human fulfillment, although they do not, by themselves, constitute that fulfillment. Strauss comes to a different conclusion in his pioneering analysis of Alfarabi's *Falsafat Aflātun*. He argues that the teaching of that work is, first, that moral virtue is not part of true happiness and, further, that moral virtue does not lead to true happiness. He reaches this interpretation from the fact that Alfarabi's Plato makes "it known that the virtuous way of life is what leads to the achievement of this happiness" (*Aflātun* 4:8–9). The phrase "this happiness," according to Strauss, implies a distinction between "this happiness" and "that happiness," which he identifies as the distinction between apparent and true happiness or between the happiness of this world and the happiness of the other world.<sup>53</sup> He substantiates his claim that for Alfarabi moral virtue does not lead to true happiness by reference to the Maimonidean teaching that "the moral virtues serve the well-being of the body or man's 'first perfection' as distinguished from the well-being of the soul or man's 'ultimate perfection' which consists of, or is produced by, knowledge or contemplation alone."<sup>54</sup> The teaching of *Falsafat Aflātun*, Strauss concludes, is that true moral virtue leads to apparent happiness, whereas philosophic virtue, which is truly useful, is not truly moral, i.e., chosen for its own sake.

Strauss's interpretation of Alfarabi's understanding of Plato in *Falsafat Aflātun* is at odds with the position Alfarabi attributes to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*. As we saw above, according to the latter work human beings have two perfections, a "first" perfection and a "final" perfection. Man's first perfection consists in doing the actions

<sup>52</sup> It is much easier to envision a role for opinions in the attainment of transcendence through moral perfection, since there is an obvious connection between the beliefs people hold and the habits they form. Although correct opinions do not ensure the performance of moral actions, much less the formation of virtuous states of soul (see *Madīnah* 256:15–258:2/62:20–23, *Siyāsah* 103:14–17), false opinions can and frequently will lead to the formation of evil states of soul by reinforcing the natural disposition most people have to seek physical pleasures and material gratification of all kinds.

<sup>53</sup> Strauss (1945), pp. 385–386; but see p. 370, where Strauss indicates that Alfarabi's final teaching is that true happiness is possible only in "this life."

<sup>54</sup> Strauss (1945), p. 386.

of the virtues; his final perfection consists in the absolute and self-sufficient good that is never sought as a means to another end (*Fuṣūl* No. 28, 45:11–46:9). According to this passage, the three Greek philosophers agreed that the final perfection is realized only after the first perfection is possessed (*Fuṣūl* 45:12–13, 46:5). Alfarabi stresses that the first perfection entails performing the actions associated with virtuous states of soul; it is not enough merely to possess the virtuous states of soul that make such actions possible (*Fuṣūl* 45:13–46:3). Alfarabi's account of the three Greek philosophers thus agrees with Strauss's interpretation of *Falsafat Aflāṭun* in subordinating moral perfection to the highest human perfection; it departs from the latter, on the other hand, by making the lower perfection a condition of the higher.

In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* Alfarabi develops a similar view in his own name. He states there that both physical actions originating in virtuous states of soul and cognitive activities (*af'āl fikriyyah*) contribute to the attainment of happiness defined as overcoming one's material existence and joining the separate substances (*Madīnah* 204:15–206:6/46:7–13).<sup>55</sup> *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* equates the “noble” with the “voluntary good,” and defines the good as everything useful for the attainment of happiness (*Siyāsah* 72:15–18, 73:9). In *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* the “good, virtuous, and fair things” are identified as what is a means to or useful for “the perfection that man must achieve” (*Sa'ādah* 63:6–8/15:18–19, 68:18–19/20:18–19). In none of these passages is the term “moral” (*khulqī*) or “moral habits” (*akhlāq*) used: *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* speaks of virtues (*faḍā'il*), in the sense of excellences, without any qualification; *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* refers to the good (*khayr*), the noble (*jamīl*), and the praiseworthy (*maḥmūd*); and in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* it is a question of noble and fair (*ḥasanāt*) means to virtuous ends. It is possible, therefore, to argue that the above passages concern the philosophic virtue mentioned by Strauss as not really moral in the strict sense. Strauss's criterion for moral virtue, after all, was something chosen for its own sake or for the sake of its inherent goodness.<sup>56</sup> His main point is that Alfarabi did not intend to teach that there are two moralities, one higher and one lower, the former possessed by philosophers and the latter by ordinary men. Rather, he wanted to teach that “only the virtuous way of life in the ordinary [i.e., conventional] sense of the term is moral strictly speaking.”<sup>57</sup> In the above passages, in contrast, virtuous and noble things are instrumental to another, higher good, and, indeed, derive their goodness in the

<sup>55</sup> The adjective *fikrī* (“deliberative” or “reflective”) is usually used by Alfarabi to describe the activity of practical reason. See, however, *Millah* 46:23.

<sup>56</sup> Strauss (1945), p. 388.

<sup>57</sup> Strauss (1945), p. 388.

first place from that relationship (*Madīnah* 206:10–15/46:16–21, *Siyāṣah* 72:15–17).

This resolution of the conflict between Strauss's interpretation of *Falsafat Aflātun* and the literal meaning of Alfarabi's political treatises is not satisfactory, however, because it is clear that in the above passages describing the means to happiness Alfarabi is speaking about the moral realm as it is ordinarily understood, and not, for example, about contemplation as the truly virtuous way of life. In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* Alfarabi specifies that he is talking, at least in part, about physical activities that have their origin in states and positive dispositions of the soul (*Madīnah* 206:5–6/46:10–13). And in general "noble" and "fair" are unambiguously moral terms. On one occasion Alfarabi says that the voluntary actions, ways of life, moral habits (*akhlāq*), character traits (*shiyam*), and positive dispositions (*malakāt*) that are truly noble (*al-jamīlah fī al-ḥa-qīqah*) are those that lead to ultimate happiness (*Millah* 54:3–5).<sup>58</sup> In fact, the doctrine that actions must be chosen for their own sake to qualify as moral does not appear in Alfarabi's writings—not even in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, in his summary of Aristotle's doctrine of moral virtue as a mean, where a reader familiar with the *Nicomachean Ethics* would expect it. Further, in his treatise devoted to Aristotle's philosophy, the sole reference to Aristotle's moral philosophy consists in the statement that the virtuous, fair, and noble things are the actions and ways of life that lead to the perfection for the sake of which man is made (*Aristūṭālīs* 69:19–70:1). If it is true that Alfarabi's omission in *Falsafat Aflātun* of a well-known Platonic doctrine congenial to Islamic beliefs should give the reader pause,<sup>59</sup> so should the replacement of a well-known Aristotelian doctrine with one arguably much less hospitable to Islamic teachings.

Strauss's interpretation of *Falsafat Aflātun* is thus open to the following criticism. After noting that moral virtue is presented as a means to happiness in "this life," i.e., a means to the lower form of human perfection, he then asserts, without any obvious textual warrant, the irrelevance of happiness in this life for the possibility of happiness in "the next life." His interpretation contradicts the understanding of Plato that Alfarabi conveys in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* (*Fuṣūl* No. 28, 45:11–13, 46:5). Further, even if Strauss's interpretation of *Falsafat Aflātun* is correct, and the teaching of *Falsafat Aflātun* supersedes the teaching of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, there is no reason to assume an identity between Plato's views and those of Alfarabi, unless the texts themselves suggest this. As we have seen,<sup>60</sup> one theme of Alfarabi's writings—which is not a theme of the Platonic dia-

<sup>58</sup> Note, however, that a parallel assertion is missing in the account of the political science that Alfarabi characterizes as part of philosophy.

<sup>59</sup> Strauss (1945), pp. 374–375.

<sup>60</sup> Chapter II, Section A, above.

logues—is the possible harmony between certain generally accepted moral teachings and the morality that is instrumental for the attainment of the fullest human perfection. The latter morality is dictated by reason in the sense that it facilitates the growth of reason, and is not merely a product of chance developments or dictated by the conditions of survival and political stability.

Strauss appears to believe that the difference in tone and surface teachings between Plato and Alfarabi can be explained by Alfarabi's greater caution in the face of possible religious persecution. However, there is no clear evidence that Alfarabi in fact perceived the prevailing religious climate as threatening to the degree that Strauss's interpretation presupposes.<sup>61</sup> Hence there is no *prima facie* reason to assume a completely hostile relationship between Alfarabi (and those similarly situated) and the religious establishment at that time. This being the case, there is no *prima facie* reason to discount Alfarabi's indications of a harmony between part of the generally accepted morality and the morality conducive to a life of thought, or to assume that Alfarabi must have viewed the conventions of his time as disparagingly as Socrates regarded the way of life of the Athenians. Certainly, many features of Islam were a vast improvement over Greek morality and opinions. It is conceivable that for Alfarabi, the popular Islamic beliefs about God, the soul, and reward and punishment constituted enough of an advance over the counterpart beliefs in pagan Greek times that the "new politico-theological fact" he recognized was a milieu favorable to the emergence of philosophy in an unprecedented degree. This is not to argue that Alfarabi perceived a deep or pervasive harmony between religion and philosophy, as should be clear from the areas of conflict brought to light thus far. But it is worthwhile to differentiate among the points of contact between religion and philosophy some more and some less hospitable to a life of thought and, even more importantly, to the emergence of adults dedicated to pursuing a contemplative life. To the extent that Islam encouraged moderation of desires by exalting a disciplined life and by emphasizing the superiority of spiritual to bodily well-being, it created an environment that a philosopher could endorse. To the extent that Islam discouraged questioning and inquiry by insisting on

<sup>61</sup> See Pines (1970), p. 783, and the Introduction, above. Strauss may have been influenced by the situation of the philosopher Maimonides in reaching his interpretation of Alfarabi's concern about persecution. However, Pines (1963), p. lxxxvi, asserts that the two philosophers had "a different conception of the perils inherent in the study and the propagation of philosophic knowledge" and that Alfarabi was probably "less conscious than Maimonides of the danger that these pursuits represented for society at large." Alternatively, Alfarabi may have agreed with Maimonides about the nature of the conflict between religion and philosophy, but viewed himself as a pioneer who, of necessity, had to be more open than would have been desirable under other circumstances.

blind obedience to authority, it created an environment hostile to those suited to the life of the mind. Alfarabi may well have recognized the atmosphere of relative intellectual freedom in his time as a situation unlikely to endure and even as contrary to the nature of religion and the conditions of the continuance of Islam, and he may have appreciated the tension that naturally exists between philosophers and believers, without thereby dismissing the real improvements Islam had brought.

The actual character of the city of excellence is thus more obscure than first appears. It is a city dedicated to promoting happiness through promoting excellence. It promotes excellence on two levels, one intellectual and one moral. As we have seen, on the intellectual level, the method of Alfarabi's city of excellence appears to be less comprehensive and institutionalized than the method of Plato's republic in its encouragement of philosophy. In particular, the opinions that citizens in general ought to believe—and not the education designed to reveal and develop the gifts of a special few—are central to Alfarabi's account of the best regime. Since the city's concern with opinions may derive from its preoccupation with the moral and political activities of its members as well as from its regard for their intellectual growth, the entire city does not appear to revolve around the needs of an intellectual élite. At the same time, some of the key beliefs prescribed for the citizenry at large cannot be explained by the city's desire to promote the practical virtues. Were it not for Alfarabi's frequent assertions that the members of the city of excellence pursue a single goal, the reader would be unlikely to discern a uniformity of purpose from some of the descriptions Alfarabi provides of the city's operation.

Quite independently of the question of the city's ultimate goal or goals, the happiness of nonphilosophers has a questionable status. Even if some moral virtues are a condition of the highest form of human excellence, in most men moral virtue fails to complete itself in the higher form of excellence. And if there is a disjunction between moral and intellectual virtue, the question must still be raised as to the sense in which morally virtuous people are better off than their opposites. If one takes the extreme position endorsed by Strauss and then acknowledges that the vast majority of members of the city of excellence attain only the lower form of "excellence," one is forced to say that the city of excellence is ideal for a very few people and obstructs the gratification of the only pleasures of which everyone else is capable.

Nothing in the Farabian corpus makes a definitive assessment of Alfarabi's position possible. He does in one work claim that the city of excellence aims at the ultimate happiness of all, but he nowhere claims that it attains its purpose. On the contrary, although at times he speaks categorically of the citizens' happiness, at other times he speaks of gradations

among the types of happiness (*sa'ādāt*) they possess. The idea that happiness admits of degrees accords with our common-sense understanding of happiness; but it is not easy to reconcile with the definitions of happiness offered by Alfarabi, among other philosophers. That is to say, if ultimate happiness consists in some kind of assimilation to the intelligible stratum of existence, it would seem that greater and lesser degrees of moral perfection, however praiseworthy from certain perspectives, exist on a separate continuum.<sup>62</sup> Alfarabi's assertion in some works that the souls of the citizens of excellence retain some of their particularity in the next life also tends to cast doubt on the integrity of the happiness such people attain, since particularity has no place in the realm of the intelligible as Alfarabi presents it. "Transcendence of matter," ostensibly a genus subsuming both intellectual and moral transcendence of material existence, would appear to act as a kind of bridge connecting the two realms. Although the main instance of transcendence given is the liberation of mind from body, Alfarabi also speaks of transcendence of matter in the context of holding true opinions and living a moral way of life. So understood, transcendence would no longer refer to rational transcendence simply. Thus, the claim that the citizens in general are better off in the city of excellence—a claim that Alfarabi, unlike Plato,<sup>63</sup> makes—depends on the validity of extending the idea of transcendence of matter in this fashion.<sup>64</sup>

### E. CONCLUSION

To understand Alfarabi's teaching about excellence and political life, it is necessary to avoid one possible misunderstanding. E.I.J. Rosenthal maintains that for Alfarabi true human happiness "is only attainable in the ideal state."<sup>65</sup> This interpretation is contradicted by a number of texts. According to *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, happiness can in principle be attained in every city; the city of excellence is special in that in it the goal

<sup>62</sup> As we saw above in Chapter II, it is not clear that Alfarabi equates pure contemplative activity with the highest human perfection.

<sup>63</sup> See Plato *Republic* IV 419a–421c.

<sup>64</sup> According to Maimonides (*Guide* III 18), in the introduction to his (lost) commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* Alfarabi said that "[t]hose who have the capacity of making their souls pass from one moral quality to another are those of whom Plato has said that God's providence watches over them to a higher degree" (Pines). Pines notes that Alfarabi equated people's progress toward perfection with providence watching over them (Pines 1963, pp. 1xxix–lxxx). Alfarabi's comment thus implies that moral perfection constitutes a degree or kind of human perfection. Pines also observes that even though Alfarabi apparently mentioned only moral perfection, he meant to include intellectual perfection as well, "or rather first and foremost" (Pines 1963, p. 1xxx, n. 34).

<sup>65</sup> Rosenthal (1960), p. 148.



pursued by the community as a whole is the means to achieve true happiness (*Madīnah* 230:3–8/54:1–7). To take another example, a supreme ruler—the most unambiguous illustration Alfarabi gives of someone who has reached ultimate perfection—may rule a city of excellence, or his influence may be limited to guidance for individuals who inhabit imperfect cities, either because such individuals have not yet managed to form a city or because they were forced to disperse when a city of excellence deteriorated (*Siyāsah* 80:7–11, see *Millah* 55:17–56:1). Alfarabi's reference to the possibility that a truly virtuous person may arise in a democracy (*Siyāsah* 101:1–3, 14–15) may further belie Rosenthal's interpretation. Finally, the sole work that gives an account of the education to philosophy and of the relationship between theoretical and practical perfection is silent on the subject of cities or nations of excellence.

True human happiness can be found in imperfect political communities because some people are born with a natural disposition to achieve the ultimate end of man and a hardiness that enables them to realize their potential under adverse circumstances.<sup>66</sup> Further, individuals may achieve excellence in imperfect cities because some ignorant regimes can actually benefit a number of individuals greatly (*Fuṣūl* No. 92, 93:7–9), even though their overall effect is generally deleterious. To put it in Farabian terminology, all cities can have “weeds” (*nawābit*) or “strangers” (*ghurabā*)—atypical members who maintain a way of life at odds with their surroundings (*Millah* 56:1–2, *Fuṣūl* No. 93, 95:12, *Madīnah* 252:15–254:1, *Siyāsah* 104:7–107:19).<sup>67</sup> To the same purpose, Alfarabi says that it is not impossible for someone who is “part” (*juz*) of a city of excellence to “dwell” (*sakana*) in an ignorant city (*Millah* 55:17–56:5), since one is part only of that city whose way of life one shares. Thus, Rosenthal's assertion is true in the qualified sense that real happiness is possible only when one adheres to the way of life of the city of excellence, regardless of whether one physically dwells in such a city.

While Alfarabi acknowledges the existence of people of excellence in imperfect cities, in some works he also asserts that when the most excellent people are made to dwell in ignorant cities, they should emigrate (*hajara*) to a city of excellence, if one exists at the time (*Millah* 56:5–7). In *Kitāb al-Millah* Alfarabi's explanation of the need to emigrate is that a person who is “part” of the city of excellence, while “dwelling” in an ignorant regime, “may be likened to some animal that happens, for ex-

<sup>66</sup> See *Fuṣūl* No. 11 (it is not impossible for someone to be born disposed to all the virtues, moral and rational, although this is very unlikely to occur), No. 13 (not all natural dispositions can be weakened, much less eliminated, by habituation), No. 14 (the difference between the self-restrained and the temperate person).

<sup>67</sup> Reading *nawābit* with Walzer (1985) instead of *nawā'ib* in Dieterici's edition (*Madīnah* 254:1/61:18).

ample, to have the leg of an animal of an inferior species. Similarly, a person who is part of an ignorant city, while dwelling in a city of excellence, may be likened to an animal that happens, for example, to have the head of an animal of a superior species" (*Millah* 56:1–5). The gist of this analogy appears to be that it would be unseemly or contrary to nature to remain in a lower-order city, even though one first acquired excellence there and could, presumably, sustain it. In a similar passage in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, emigration from corrupt regimes is presented as a sacred obligation; and, in the event that no cities of excellence exist, death is preferable to life for the person of excellence.<sup>68</sup> This harsh doctrine is justified on the grounds that the rational faculties and the arts are more or less excellent in proportion to the goodness or evil of the circumstances in which they are employed. Hence, practical reason in the service of an ignorant regime is a vice, and not a virtue. In fact, when a regime is corrupt, the more effective practical reason is, the more vicious it becomes (*Fuṣūl* No. 93, 93:19–95:6). The sacred duty to emigrate thus follows from Alfarabi's insight that when they are employed in the worst regimes, the human things that in some circumstances are the greatest goods are likely to become evils, great harms, or the causes of great harm arising in the world (*Fuṣūl* No. 93, 95:8–10). This recalls the Socratic doctrine of the *Gorgias*, that one cannot long remain on good terms with a corrupt regime without oneself coming to commit acts of injustice.<sup>69</sup>

Although *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* lacks the doctrine of emigration, it contains the clearest explanation of the danger animating the warning of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*. In the chapter devoted to the recompense that will be visited upon the citizens of imperfect cities, Alfarabi argues that as long as those whose way of life is part of the city of excellence are coerced into performing the actions of ignorant cities and do so unwillingly, they will not acquire the states of soul that match those deeds (*Madīnah* 276:2–6/68:21–69:3). External conformity accompanied by internal resistance, in other words, can keep a person from developing the character usually associated with actions of a particular kind. Clearly this procedure is risky, given that in general the repetition of specific actions over a period of time will tend to produce the habit or character associated with actions of that kind.

Alfarabi raises the issue of attaining excellence in imperfect communities in *Falsafat Aflātun* as well. There he attributes to Socrates the conviction that death is preferable to life when the price of survival is "conforming to false opinions and leading a base way of life" (Mahdi) (*Aflātun* 19:3–7). On the face of it, Socrates' position is that endorsed by *Fuṣūl*

<sup>68</sup> *Fuṣūl* No. 93, 95:10–13.

<sup>69</sup> Plato *Gorgias* 510a–513c.

*Muntaza'ah*. Yet in *Falsafat Aflātun* Alfarabi depicts Plato's response to this dilemma as somewhat different from that of Socrates. Alfarabi's Plato appears to regard death, and similarly withdrawal from the community, as an inadequate solution, not obviously more desirable than a continued existence contaminated by one's corrupt surroundings (*Aflātun* 19:9–11). Alfarabi's Plato, therefore, chooses to search for a city of excellence, that is, to investigate what a city of excellence would look like and the conditions that would have to be met for it to come into being (*Aflātun* 19:12ff.). It is not at all clear how this search for the best political order will insulate the investigator from contamination by an imperfect political community, since the effort to reform or to direct the reform of imperfect political communities would also seem likely to plunge the investigator into "false opinions and base ways of life." Perhaps this is why Alfarabi's Plato leaves the actual founding to a lawgiver (*Aflātun* 21:11–13),<sup>70</sup> thereby avoiding the need to place his practical reasoning in the service of evil during the transition or in the event that the actual community to be reformed has a limited potential for improvement. If this hypothesis is correct, then the philosopher's moral principles would prohibit all but revolutionary reform.<sup>71</sup> Yet *Falsafat Aflātun* ends with Plato advocating gradual reform (*Aflātun* 23:3–6). Finally, if it is the case that Alfarabi's Plato finds solitude antithetical to the life of investigation (*Aflātun* 19:3–11), it is likewise unclear how these additional theoretical inquiries into political subjects will protect the investigator's humanity any more than inquiries into theoretical things can.

One final consideration should be mentioned. Alfarabi designates timocracy the best of the ignorant regimes and says it can be likened to the city of excellence (*Siyāsah* 93:13–94:2). A timocratic regime resembles the best regime in that the person generally regarded as the best man is also the ruler, the inhabitants value something beyond bodily goods and comfort, there is a hierarchy with fine gradations among the citizens, and the idea of rank is part of the ordinary citizen's understanding of the relations that exist among people and among the goals they pursue (*Siyāsah* 89:14ff.). Yet, in spite of timocracy's evident virtues, it is democracy in which people are most likely to attain excellence and which is easiest to

<sup>70</sup> It is also unclear whether the founding that Alfarabi's Plato describes is of the same city as is discussed in the *Republic*. If the founding is of a lesser city, the problem discussed in this paragraph would be more acute.

<sup>71</sup> This passage in *Falsafat Aflātun* does not on its face preclude the possibility that the political philosopher will found a political regime, although a more obvious interpretation is that the lawgiver is someone other than the investigator. The fact that Alfarabi's Plato proceeds to elaborate the lawgiver's qualities and offer guidelines for political reform does not resolve the ambiguity either way. For a discussion of the relationship between the lawgiver and the philosopher as well as Alfarabi's Plato's views on political reform, see Strauss (1945), pp. 379–384.

convert into a city of excellence (*Siyāṣah* 101:1–3, 102:3–4). This assertion is especially anomalous given that in a democracy all notions of merit are entirely eradicated, there is no hierarchy among the citizens nor distinction between ruler and ruled, and the whole range of illusory human goods is sought there (*Siyāṣah* 99:7–17). Alfarabi explains this contradiction by observing that the political community productive of the greatest evil can be productive of the greatest good (*Siyāṣah* 101:3–5). However intuitively appealing this explanation is, it widens the potential chasm between the good of the individual and the good of the community. Excellence in political life thus appears to entail a fundamental contradiction both in the best case, which demands the most favorable circumstances to be realized, and in the more viable regimes possible under ordinary circumstances.

## Chapter V

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### THE AUTONOMY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Thus, it is clear that wisdom would be the most precise of the kinds of knowledge. . . . Thus, wisdom would be intellect [*nous*] and knowledge [*epistēmē*—as it were, the head of knowledge of the most honorable things.

For it is absurd to suppose that political science or practical wisdom is the best [kind of knowledge], unless the human being is the best thing in the universe.

—Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* VI. 7<sup>1</sup>

ONE OF THE DEEPEST PERPLEXITIES raised by Alfarabi's works is whether and in what fashion political knowledge properly rests on the totality of theoretical inquiry, i.e., on natural philosophy and metaphysics as well as on political philosophy.<sup>2</sup> That there exists an especially close connection in Alfarabi's writings between metaphysics and political philosophy or science has often been noted. This connection is most apparent in *Al-Siyāsah Al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, two treatises that summarize the basic conclusions of theoretical and practical inquiry, beginning with the nature of the source of all being and culminating in the types of political regimes, perfect and imperfect. As a result, it is in discussions of these two works that the integrated character of politics and metaphysics in Alfarabi's thought is usually observed.<sup>3</sup>

Alfarabi also points to a special relationship between these two areas of inquiry in several other places. In *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* he alternates stages of metaphysical inquiry with stages of inquiry into human things (*Sa'ādah* 59:18–64:7/12:14–16:15). In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* practical philosophy is presented as engaged in simultaneously with the investigation into the first cause of being (*Fuṣūl* No. 94, 98:5–7). At the conclusion of *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*, Alfarabi portrays Aristotle as realizing that political

<sup>1</sup> See Alfarabi *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* No. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter III examined whether rulers need philosophy in order to found or rule a city of excellence. In general, that chapter examined the plausibility of an empirically based, as compared with a philosophically based, political science, but did not attempt to distinguish among the parts of philosophy those that are more and those that are less useful or necessary for political science.

<sup>3</sup> Najjar (1964), pp. 15, 20, (1958), pp. 96–97; Rosenthal (1955), p. 158; Fakhry (1983), pp. 116–117; Strauss (1936), p. 5.

and human philosophy need the results of metaphysical inquiry to be complete (*Aristūṭālīs* 131:18–133:1, cf. 68:7–69:18). Finally, Alfarabi inserts into his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* a largely anthropological and political essay—an essay without obvious connection with Aristotle's original text.<sup>4</sup>

A variety of interpretations of Alfarabi's understanding of the relationship between theoretical philosophy and politics have been advanced. Remarkable on the extended treatment of themes of metaphysics, physics, and psychology which occupies the first half of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, Leo Strauss concludes that in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* Alfarabi "treats the whole of philosophy proper . . . within a political framework."<sup>5</sup> Although less extreme in its formulation, Muhsin Mahdi's char-

<sup>4</sup> *Hurūf* 131–161. According to Mahdi (1969B), p. xi, this part of the commentary was inspired by *Metaphysics* XII. 8 1074a38–b14.

<sup>5</sup> Strauss (1945), p. 358. Similarly Mahdi (1969A), pp. xii–xiii (the opening paragraph of *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* "incorporates the theoretical virtues within a human or political framework"). Initially Strauss bases his thesis that theoretical philosophy is subsumed within a political framework on the title of the book in question—*Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* ("The Political Regime"). His reasoning appears to be that the title of the work is conclusive evidence that Alfarabi intended the work to be primarily or ultimately a political treatise; hence, the theoretical discussions that the work contains should be viewed as "within" a political framework. Despite the title, however, from a structural point of view *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* can also be seen as a work that presents theoretical philosophy alongside political philosophy. Further, as Strauss notes, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* was also transmitted in medieval times under the title *Mabādi' al-Mawjūdāt* ("The Principles of the Beings"), which emphasizes the part of the book devoted to theoretical philosophy. In regard to the book's title, see Najjar (1964), pp. 11–16 (Arabic Introduction). The bibliographical tradition is not clear about the source of this alternate title, and in particular about whether there is any reason to believe that it was coined by Alfarabi himself. Titles can easily be created by students or scribes, especially when, as in this case, the alternate title consists in a paraphrase of the opening sentence of the book. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, who relies heavily on Ṣā'id al-Andalusī, says that *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* is "known as" (*yu'raf*) *Mabādi' al-Mawjūdāt*. (He gives the book's political title as *Kitāb al-Siyāsāt al-Madaniyyah*.) Since Ṣā'id al-Andalusī refers to a single title, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, it is possible that Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah was influenced by a tradition, possibly unknown to Ṣā'id, originating in the fact that the work has two major subdivisions: an account of the principles of the beings and an account of political life. As far as the main bibliographical sources go, then, it is impossible to say with certainty whether the nonpolitical title was created independently of the author or was designed by him as a subtitle, one that was at times transmitted and at times ignored by subsequent generations. Further, it is also possible that Alfarabi in fact subordinated the part of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* devoted to theoretical philosophy to the part of the work devoted to politics without intending to indicate thereby that theoretical philosophy is itself subordinate to politics. He could, for example, have considered the account of politics to be the ultimate purpose of the book and also believed that political life cannot be fully understood without recourse to philosophy as a whole. It would not, however, follow on this basis alone that the ultimate purpose of the book is the ultimate purpose of philosophy as such.

The title of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is also ambiguous. The full title appears to be *Fī Mabādi' Ārā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* ("On the Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants

acterization of the first half of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* as “an introduction to, and a preparation for, an account of political life and a classification of political regimes”<sup>6</sup> tends in the same direction, i.e., it tends to subordinate theoretical to practical philosophy. Fauzi Najjar explains that this subordination is itself practical and not theoretical in origin, inasmuch as it originates in political science’s need to determine the nature of true happiness. Since true happiness entails knowledge of the beings, Najjar argues, there is a practical necessity for political science to “invade the domain of physics and metaphysics.”<sup>7</sup> For E.I.J. Rosenthal the structure of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* reveals the “dependence of politics on philosophy as a whole.”<sup>8</sup> In support of his characterization of the relative dependence of the two parts of these works, he notes that only nine of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*’s thirty-four chapters treat political themes.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Richard Walzer explains the first, nonpolitical half of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* in terms of Alfarabi’s desire to “show that human society in general should be organized in accordance with the human society in general should be organized in accordance with the hierarchical structure of the universe.”<sup>10</sup> Although he does not elaborate on this formulation, Walzer, like Rosenthal, appears to regard politics as dependent upon rather than as itself encompassing theoretical philosophy.

A different interpretation, advanced by Mahdi in connection with *Taḥ-*

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of the City of Excellence”), although it sometimes appears as *Ārā’ Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* (“Opinions of the Inhabitants of the City of Excellence”). Since the citizens’ opinions range from beliefs about the nature of the universe, to man’s place in it, to the relationships among men, one could say that all thought, theoretical and practical, is in this work presented through the filter of political life (citizens’ opinions). In other words, one could say that the philosopher “includes all of philosophy within a political framework.” At the same time, there is no reason to assume that the opinions of the inhabitants of even the best city are philosophical truths or that the principles of their opinions are philosophic findings, whether essentially or on the authority of philosophers. Yet without some such identification, it is questionable whether philosophy, as contrasted with religion, is subsumed within the political structure. Thus, attributing to Alfarabi the subordination of philosophy to politics on the basis of the title of this work would seem to presuppose equating the principles of the opinions of citizens of excellence with the principles of beings. See also Strauss (1945), pp. 362–385, which appears to argue that in the last analysis Alfarabi did not view philosophy as fundamentally political, although even theoretical philosophy must defend its claim to provide the best way to live.

<sup>6</sup> Lerner & Mahdi (1963), p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Najjar (1958), pp. 96–97 (1964), p. 15 (as a theoretical matter, metaphysics and theoretical philosophy are not subordinate to political science).

<sup>8</sup> Rosenthal (1955), p. 158.

<sup>9</sup> Rosenthal (1955), p. 158. Rosenthal relied on Dieterici’s division of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* into thirty-four chapters. Walzer (1985), p. 20, relying on Ibn Abi Uṣaybi’ah, notes that the work should be divided into nineteen chapters. Of these, five treat political themes.

<sup>10</sup> Walzer (1967), p. 658.

*ṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, is that Alfarabi in that work presents political science and metaphysics as “counterpart” inquiries. The natural scientist, according to this argument, is led to pursue both fields as an outgrowth of his desire to understand nature and natural beings. The two inquiries are counterparts because both study the incorporeal forces that make the physical universe intelligible.<sup>11</sup> Mahdi asserts further that Alfarabi’s investigator eventually comes to abandon metaphysical inquiry upon realizing that the human sciences are a “more fruitful line of inquiry.”<sup>12</sup> According to Mahdi, then, metaphysics and political philosophy are coordinate inquiries, only one of which is capable of completion.

The preceding interpretations suggest three distinct models of the relationship between political knowledge and philosophic inquiry. First, there is the Platonic model, according to which practical politics at its best is grounded in the totality of philosophy, culminating in metaphysics, the object of which is knowledge of a generic concept of the good that encompasses humans and nonhumans alike. Second, there is the Aristotelian model, according to which a regime of excellence based upon an autonomous political wisdom is possible. In this model, systematic knowledge of the human good that guides political life can be arrived at through reflection on the investigator’s observations of human affairs. Finally, Alfarabi’s works reveal the presence of a third model, one in which political wisdom rests on philosophic inquiry into the principles and operation of human rationality. This third model presupposes the necessity of philosophic psychology, as contrasted with the broad metaphysical inquiry that provides the foundation for the Platonic model of politics.

#### A. POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE PRECEDED BY METAPHYSICS: *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* AND *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*

*Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* are the two works of Alfarabi that most obviously reflect the Platonic model. Both books open with an account of metaphysical principles and heavenly bodies—their hierarchy, origin, and operation—and proceed to a discussion of the sublunar sphere and the hierarchy, origin, and operation of its elements, including matter and form, possible beings, and the plant and animal kingdoms (hereafter the “theoretical” half of these works). It is after this

<sup>11</sup> Mahdi (1969A), pp. xiv–xv.

<sup>12</sup> Mahdi (1969A), p. xv. It is unclear why Mahdi says that Alfarabi presents the investigator as abandoning metaphysical inquiry. In *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* Alfarabi traces the investigator’s path back to knowledge of the beings with their ultimate principles (*Sa'ādah* 62:18–63:1/15:10–13). The work does not reproduce the details of the inquiry or its results; however, this fact does not in and of itself indicate the impossibility of the inquiry. See note 26 below.



progression that political life is discussed. The implication of the structure of the two works, in other words, is that political science should be preceded by and, presumably, grounded in the totality of theoretical inquiry.

The initial, theoretical portions of these two works are frequently seen as differing only in emphasis or development, and at times they have been viewed as simply interchangeable.<sup>13</sup> The two works do, however, exhibit a few striking discrepancies not easily reconciled in accordance with these interpretations. The most conspicuous structural discrepancy between the first or theoretical halves of each of the two works occurs in connection with the account of the first cause. *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* opens with an extended analysis of the nature of the source of all the beings: its existence, substance, and connection with the rest of the universe, as well as the names that are appropriate to it (*Madīnah* 56:2–100:9/5:4–18:23). This section covers roughly one-sixth of the entire book. *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* contains an extended passage on the first cause of roughly half the size, covering much the same ground. However, the passage in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* occurs a third of the way through the initial half of the work (*Siyāsah* 42:14ff.), instead of at the very beginning. The reason for locating the account of the first cause at the very outset of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is obvious. The work proceeds from the simplest, most perfect metaphysical entity, down through the rest of the cosmic hierarchy, following the twin principles of causation and rank order. Accordingly, what is most prior absolutely is discussed first.

*Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* proceeds differently. The work opens with a brief classification of the six incorporeal principles (the principles of the beings) and the six classes of corporeal entity (*Siyāsah* 31:2–11). The opening classification takes up ten lines in the printed text and is followed by an overview, or summary explanation, of all the subjects enumerated in the classification. The overview covers eleven pages (*Siyāsah* 31:12–42:13). After the overview, the full discussion of the first cause, which parallels the discussion of the first cause in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, begins (*Siyāsah* 42:14ff.).

The overview in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* describes each of the six incorporeal principles—in conjunction with the corporeal entities associated with them, where appropriate—in varying degrees of detail. The first cause and the secondary causes, with the exception of the agent intellect, are treated most tersely (*Siyāsah* 31:12–32:5): the first cause is described in one sentence and then is mentioned again only briefly in order to clarify the explanation of other subjects (see *Siyāsah* 34:9–10,

<sup>13</sup> Davidson (1972), pp. 134–148, provides the fullest discussion of the metaphysical portions of these two works. Although Davidson concludes that the two works represent “one view,” he occasionally notes differences in emphasis or doctrine. See also the notes to the first half of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* in Walzer (1985).

34:13–15, 40:5, 41:8–9). The overall effect of thus postponing the full account of the first cause in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* until a third of the way into the half of the treatise devoted to theoretical themes is to deemphasize the importance of the first cause among the beings, even though its absolute supremacy and unique function are properly acknowledged. Moreover, the summary fashion with which the first cause is treated in the overview that follows the classification likewise minimizes its dominant position in relation to the whole. Finally, even the fact that the work opens with the initial classification has the same effect: it creates a comprehensive framework within which all the beings can be located, with a minimum of stress placed on the first cause.

One explanation of the lack of emphasis on the first cause in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, as compared with *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, is that it is a byproduct of Alfarabi's decision to proceed programmatically in the former work, by sketching an outline of the entire subject to be discussed prior to turning to an elaboration of the individual parts. This decision, in turn, might presuppose the intention to write for a more philosophic audience than was the case with *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* or for an audience versed in the basics of logic and taxonomy. This hypothesis is partially borne out by the presence in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* of other passages, to which there are no counterparts in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, where Alfarabi introduces a discussion with a schema situating the subject within a larger framework (see *Siyāsah* 69:5–14, 77:1–17).

Had Alfarabi begun *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* with the classification of the incorporeal and corporeal principles and then turned immediately to the discussion of the first cause, this explanation of the order and emphasis of the discussion of the first cause would suffice. It would also suffice if there were an overview of the parts of the universe following the initial classification but the overview accorded the entire sequence of incorporeal and corporeal entities roughly equal treatment. Instead, as the work is written, the overview offers a one-sentence description of the first cause (*Siyāsah* 31:12–13); an equally brief description of the origin and function of the secondary causes (*Siyāsah* 31:13–32:5); a lengthy discussion of the function of the agent intellect (which contains an account of the fourth principle of being, soul—especially the rational soul, the object of the agent intellect's activity) (*Siyāsah* 32:6–36:5); an extended discussion of form and matter, including their relationship to one another, to the souls of contingent beings, to the corporeal substances in which they inhere, and to the agent intellect and the secondary causes (*Siyāsah* 36:6–39:13); and a comparison of the degree and kind of transcendence possessed by the incorporeal entities with the perfected state of the nonrational sublunar beings and the transcendence of the rational soul (*Siyāsah* 39:14–42:13). The extensive treatment of the agent intellect in the over-

view, as compared with the cursory initial treatment of the first cause and the other secondary causes, conveys the impression that the work opens with an account of the agent intellect. The agent intellect thus appears to occupy the place in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* that is occupied by the first cause in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*.<sup>14</sup>

The substantive treatments of the agent intellect in the two works also display significant differences.<sup>15</sup> First, in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the agent intellect is specifically labeled tenth in the hierarchy of the separate substances below the first cause (*Madīnah* 202:7–9/45:9–10). In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* it is not referred to as tenth, and its precise place in the cosmic hierarchy is never stated.<sup>16</sup> Second, in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, where a strict emanationist scheme is maintained, the agent intellect is depicted as owing its existence to the intellect of the sphere immediately above it (*Madīnah* 104:4–5/19:23). In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, in contrast, Alfarabi emphasizes that the first cause is the *proximate* cause of the agent intellect (as well as of the other secondary intelligibles) (*Siyāsah* 31:12–13, see 52:5). That the first cause is the cause of the agent intellect is, to be sure, consistent with the teaching of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, where each secondary cause is said to give rise to the subsequent secondary cause as a result of intellecting the first cause (*Madīnah* 100:14–104:5/19:4–23). In this sense, the first cause is the cause of all the beings (*Madīnah* 56:2–3/5:4, see *Siyāsah* 52:8–9). At the same time, in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the first cause appears to be directly responsible only for the emanation to the first of the secondary causes (*Madīnah* 100:11/19:2). The emanationist scheme in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* thus suggests a distance between the agent intellect and the first cause that is lacking in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*. By the same token, as a result of emphasizing the connection between the agent intellect and the first cause and failing to state the agent intellect's exact place in the hierarchy of separate sub-

<sup>14</sup> Note also that although *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* both attribute revelation to the activity of the agent intellect, only the latter work calls the reader's attention to the possibility that the first cause is the source of revelation in name only (*Siyāsah* 80:1–3).

<sup>15</sup> On Hellenistic antecedents to the medieval doctrine of the agent intellect, see Davidson (1972), pp. 111–134; Walzer (1985), pp. 363–367.

<sup>16</sup> Since *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* 35:12–36:5 is the counterpart to *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* 200:3–202:9/44:13–45:10, and the latter passage ends with the statement about the agent intellect being tenth in the hierarchy of the separate substances, the reader might expect a comparable statement at the end of the former passage. Instead the passage in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* ends with the observation that, through its interaction with the agent intellect, the rational faculty becomes divine (*Siyāsah* 36:4). Cf. *Madīnah* 244:11–14/58:23–59:2. As far as I can tell, the number of secondary causes is not stated in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* (see *Siyāsah* 31:13–32:4, 53:5–7, 55:13–14).

stances, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* appears to elevate the agent intellect and make it the most prominent of the secondary causes.

The process whereby the agent intellect assists in transforming the potential human intellect is described in largely the same terms in both works. Nevertheless, a few significant discrepancies occur in this area as well. First, in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* Alfarabi notes the manner in which the agent intellect's activity is affected by its interaction with the forces of nature and the celestial bodies. In particular, in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* Alfarabi reveals that the agent intellect's activity may be hampered by natural forces set in motion by the heavenly bodies, and that even when these forces support the agent intellect in its work, the assistance is purely accidental (*Siyāsah* 73:1–8). Thus, the agent intellect must continually contend with powerful and independent forces that are fundamentally indifferent to its purpose. As a result, "it is possible that the sum total of what is produced by the celestial bodies should comprise at times things that are favorable, and at other times things that are unfavorable, to the purpose of the Active Intellect" (Najjar) (*Siyāsah* 73:7–8). The potential antagonism between the agent intellect and the heavenly bodies is not mentioned in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, although the ways in which the heavenly bodies at times facilitate and at times obstruct the workings of the natural bodies is acknowledged (*Madīnah* 142:8–144:1/29:20–30:4). The explicitness of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* about the agent intellect's potential helplessness when confronted with the forces of nature at once contributes to the picture of the agent intellect as an autonomous force and highlights the circumscribed character of its power.

Second, in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the agent intellect's role in actualizing the human intellect is presented as a necessary component of its nature, a kind of mechanical outpouring, exactly like the emanations flowing from the first cause and from the other secondary causes. In contrast, as we saw in Chapter II, in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* the agent intellect is from the very beginning depicted as *striving* for the end toward which it is innately directed: its activity consists in "seeking" (*iltimās*) to enable human beings to reach ultimate perfection (*Siyāsah* 32:6–7); it "wants" (*rāma*) human beings to attain a transcendent existence and ultimate happiness (*Siyāsah* 55:6–10); and human happiness is its "purpose" (*gharaḍ*) (*Siyāsah* 73:2, 3, 6, 8), even though it promotes its goal indirectly, by imparting to people the principles through which they can strive for happiness on their own. In short, in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* the agent intellect's relation to mankind is that of providence (*ināyah*) (*Siyāsah* 32:6). Alfarabi is careful to point out in connection with the first cause that the world is not its "purpose," since this would undermine the first cause's self-sufficiency and perfection (*Siyāsah* 47:11–48:6). By contrast, the implication is that the fate of the agent intellect is inextricably tied to

the fate of mankind, if not to that of individual men. In short, in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* a contrast is developed between the first cause and the agent intellect as forces for human development. Although both contribute to the actualization of human beings, only the agent intellect is portrayed as providential. The concern of the agent intellect in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* contrasts not only with the impassive nature of the first cause but with the mechanistic portrait of the agent intellect in its relationship to human development in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* as well.

#### B. POLITICAL SCIENCE AS AN AUTONOMOUS SCIENCE: *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*

*Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* is a book of aphorisms derived from statements of the "Ancients" (*al-qudamā*) about the governance of cities and citizens.<sup>17</sup> In the first half of the work, the establishment and maintenance of political life are presented as independent not only of metaphysics, but of theoretical inquiry altogether.<sup>18</sup> The nature and operation of the human soul is inferred from observations about the behavior of the body (*Fuṣūl* No. 1, No. 19, 37:9–38:4, Nos. 20, 40–41); the city's well-being is presented on the analogy of bodily health (*Fuṣūl* No. 3, 24:7–9, No. 25, 41:4); and the statesman's art is identified repeatedly with the physician's art (*Fuṣūl* No. 3, 24:9–12, Nos. 4–5, 21, 26, 29). The statesman thus needs to possess only partial knowledge of human psychology, i.e., only as much as is useful for the successful practice of his art (*Fuṣūl* No. 5, 26:9–12).<sup>19</sup> For example, the statesman does not need a philosophic understanding of such things as the distinction between nature and art, form and matter, or potentiality and actuality (see *Fuṣūl* No. 6). Similarly, it is enough to

<sup>17</sup> On the title and derivation of the work, see Dunlop (1961), pp. 9–10, 79; Najjar (1971), pp. 10–13 (Arabic Introduction); Davidson (1963), p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> In his edition and translation of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, Dunlop divides the work into two parts. This division is made in one of the two Arabic manuscripts underlying Dunlop's edition and translation and is also suggested indirectly by the other Arabic manuscript, which contains only the aphorisms included in part I (Dunlop 1961, p. 20). One, and possibly both, of the Hebrew manuscripts used by Dunlop omitted the division into parts. The main manuscript relied upon by Najjar in his edition of the work does not contain the division into parts. Regardless of which manuscript tradition is considered more authoritative, the content of the aphorisms itself suggests a development away from the teaching of the earlier aphorisms. Thus, it is not inaccurate to contrast the initial aphorisms of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* with the later ones, even if the work is not simply divisible into two parts.

<sup>19</sup> This account of the statesman's art as completely independent of philosophy should be compared with the statement in aphorism No. 94 that the theoretical part of philosophy is necessary for "the practical part" (*Fuṣūl* 95:14–15). Although the phrase "the practical part" probably refers to the practical part of philosophy, preserving the possibility of an autonomous political science (as contrasted with political philosophy), the reference could also be to the practical part of perfection, i.e., to action. See *Fuṣūl* No. 94, 95:15–17, 96:5–8, 98:7–8.

recognize the role of habit in creating moral virtues, the limits of human malleability given people's innate dispositions, and the difference between the actions of the moral virtues and the moral virtues themselves—without having to reflect deeply on each of them.

The picture of the statesman that emerges from the initial aphorisms in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* is thus of the supreme ruler, described in *Kitāb al-Mil-lah*, who combines knowledge of general truths contained in political science with a practical rational ability gained through observation and experience. At the same time, as we saw in Chapter III, the elaboration of the statesman's art in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* gradually introduces notions that appear to be unavailable through observation and experience alone and that call into question the adequacy of the general truths available through political science. The beginning of this process comes to sight when Alfarabi discusses the moral virtues, which he initially defines as means between two extremes (*Fuṣūl* No. 18). However, the mean must be determined relative to a particular context (*Fuṣūl* No. 19, 38:5–39:3, No. 20), and the purpose of the city and the end of man are among the criteria essential to that determination (see *Fuṣūl* Nos. 25, 29). The statesman's art thus entails understanding the good of the city, the good of the citizens, and happiness (*Fuṣūl* Nos. 26–27, 29), so that the moral virtues can be determined with these goals in view.

In order to define a city of excellence and distinguish it from a city devoted to securing mere necessities of life, Alfarabi has recourse to an understanding of human perfection that cannot be derived solely from experience and practical reason.<sup>20</sup> The goal of the citizens of the city of excellence may be seen as final perfection and ultimate happiness, which is equated with the afterlife (*al-ḥayāh al-akhīrah*), in which survival does not depend on anything external (*Fuṣūl* No. 28, 46:10–11). Although this is arguably an Islamic notion, Alfarabi attributes it to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. He does not in this passage convey the content of final perfection. He does, however, state unequivocally that for the three Greek philosophers it does not consist in a life of pleasure or wealth and, more importantly, that final perfection is distinguished from man's first and lesser perfection, which consists in doing the actions of the virtues (*Fuṣūl* 45:5–46:3). So understood, final perfection is the self-sufficient human end, which does not depend on anything external (see *Fuṣūl* 45:9–11).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> It is possible that in the passage in question Alfarabi presents two views of the city of excellence, one of which presupposes a statesman and the other of which presupposes a ruler informed by philosophic discoveries. See note 22 below.

<sup>21</sup> I am assuming an identity between "final perfection" (*Fuṣūl* 45:12, 46:10–11) and "the other life" (*Fuṣūl* 45:9). It is less clear that man's "first perfection" (*Fuṣūl* 45:13–46:3) and his "first life" (*Fuṣūl* 45:7–9) can be thus connected. See *Fuṣūl* 45:13 (associating man's first perfection with "this life of ours").

Toward the end of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, Alfarabi offers a definition of the afterlife in nonreligious and nonmiraculous terms that appears to fit the description contained in aphorism No. 28: the afterlife is the purely intellectual perception of the first principle, a perception that dispenses with the bodily senses and with imagination (*Fuṣūl* No. 81, 86:16–87:7). This definition is secular because the people who advance it do not make the actual separation of the soul from the body at death a condition of the afterlife (*Fuṣūl* 86:10–87:1).

Thus, the inquiry into the moral virtues in the first part of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* appears to point beyond the moral virtues to another type of human excellence.<sup>22</sup> The discussion of the health of the human soul, based on observation and presented in terms of an analogy with the health of the body, leads to a discussion of the statesman, the statesman's art, and virtuous actions and the moral virtues as components of or means to establishing the health of the soul. The need to determine which actions and states of soul are means, and thus virtuous or excellent, leads to a discussion of the standards in light of which such determinations can be made, i.e., to a discussion of the end of the city and the perfection of man. The ruler's need to identify the standards, in turn, leads to a discussion of the rational part of the soul, which provides the faculties by means of which the ruler apprehends the end of the city and the perfection of man (*Fuṣūl* Nos. 33–39). The account of the types of deliberation, practical wisdom, and the like (*Fuṣūl* Nos. 42–53) leads to a discussion of the characteristics

<sup>22</sup> As was noted in Chapter III, the extent of theoretical inquiry occasioned by the need to determine the moral virtues is unclear. According to *Kitāb al-Millāh*, the political science that is not part of philosophy will distinguish between real and spurious happiness, a distinction that Alfarabi casts in terms of happiness and ultimate happiness, or happiness in this life and happiness in the next life (*Millāh* 52:10–15). Alfarabi does not specify the content of ultimate happiness, and it is never clear whether the ultimate happiness identified by this account of political science is the same as the "real happiness" (*al-sa'ādah fi al-ḥaqīqah*) identified by the political science that is part of philosophy. Arguably *Fuṣūl* No. 28 retains this ambiguity: man's first perfection could be interpreted as performing the actions of the moral virtues, while the final perfection could be the transcendence over material existence that is the result of the morally virtuous way of life. However, the description in aphorism No. 28 of the understanding of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle suggests a perfection different in kind from moral perfection, along the lines of the secular definition of the afterlife set forth in aphorism No. 81. If aphorism No. 28 in fact has theoretical perfection in view, it is unclear whether the need to distinguish between a city of necessities and a city of excellence in turn makes recognition of the importance of theoretical perfection inevitable, or whether this notion has to be injected somewhat artificially into the discussion by importing the teaching of the three Greek philosophers. Note, for example, that Alfarabi gives a somewhat different definition of the city of excellence, apparently in his own name, later in aphorism No. 28 (*Fuṣūl* 45:3–5). This definition refers only to the most excellent things for human existence, sustenance, livelihood, and preservation—not to "another life," "final perfection," or "ultimate happiness." It appears that so understood, the city of excellence could be grasped by the statesman without the benefit of theoretical understanding.

of rulers and cities in which all these things can be realized (*Fuṣūl* Nos. 57–67). For the parts of the city to cooperate in working toward the end of the city, the citizens must share common opinions (about the world, justice, and virtue) and actually possess certain virtues in common (*Fuṣūl* Nos. 61–65). Thus, the discussion of political life in *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* is followed by a discussion of various opinions about theoretical things, such as those concerning the nature of necessary and contingent being, complete versus defective existence, contrariety and the nature of the beings, and characteristics of natural and voluntary beings, especially as regards the existence of goodness and evil (*Fuṣūl* Nos. 68–74).

In short, although *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* appears initially to offer a model of an autonomous political science, the themes treated become increasingly theoretical. It is difficult to reach any definitive conclusions about the nature of political science in this work, however, because of the elliptical and aphoristic character of Alfarabi’s remarks; as a result, it is difficult to tell when Alfarabi speaks in his own name, or even to determine which passages it is proper to employ to explicate others. The larger teaching of *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* is, accordingly, elusive. The thrust of the first part of the work seems to be that political life becomes excellent because of its pursuit of something beyond political well-being and that this fact may be recognized prior to the time when the true nature of the transpolitical end is understood. Further, the key aphorism dealing with the city of excellence appears to say that when citizens who actually possess the moral virtues become aware of the need to look beyond moral and political well-being, they are in a position to create a community conducive to the pursuit of the highest excellence. In other words, the thrust of the first part of *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* is that the pursuit of true excellence is possible in a city with only a dim understanding of its ultimate goals. Alfarabi’s manipulation of Islamic terminology and orthodox Islamic concepts may also suggest that a city guided by a belief in a religious understanding of the afterlife is capable of creating the conditions for the pursuit and attainment of the afterlife in its secular, i.e., intellectual, meaning. Thus, theoretical inquiry appears in the first instance to be unnecessary to ground political science: practical reason in the presence of the appropriate moral virtues should be able to serve effectively in its stead.

Yet it is difficult to say whether and to what degree a political order of this kind ultimately depends on theoretical philosophy for its continuance. As was sketched above, *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* becomes increasingly concerned with theoretical topics, culminating in aphorism No. 94, which asserts that right action presupposes theoretical philosophy. Since a discussion of theoretical opinions—presumably those that the citizens



should hold in common<sup>23</sup>—occurs after a discussion of justice and injustice within the city and of just and unjust wars, one might infer the following: in a regime founded on the basis of practical wisdom alone, theoretical inquiry will, at least initially, be largely driven and justified by the need to defend the regime.<sup>24</sup> Nor is it clear whether the aphorisms devoted to theoretical topics, such as the nature of being and of the beings, suggest a knowledge deeper than is available to a statesman equipped with political science and practical wisdom exclusively. It is clear, however, that a transition has occurred when, in aphorism No. 94, theoretical philosophy is presented as indispensable for right action. Although the justification is practical and political, the need for extensive inquiry into the entire range of topics covered by natural philosophy and metaphysics is unambiguously stated.

The dynamic quality of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* thus precludes characterizing the theoretical model contained in it as definitively as is possible for some of the other parallel works. At the same time, the few references in the work to metaphysical doctrines are striking because no mention is made of a hierarchy of beings located in the supralunar sphere of the universe, an ontological divide at the sphere of the moon, or any other teachings traditionally associated with an emanationist metaphysics.<sup>25</sup>

### C. POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AS DEPENDENT ON PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY: *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah*

The two foci of Alfarabi's metaphysics are the first cause and the incorporeal principles referred to variously as secondary causes, intellects, and secondary principles. The discussion of the first cause and other metaphysical principles in *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* is not, strictly speaking, an account of these things but a description of (1) the location of the inquiry into the metaphysical principles within the totality of philosophic investigation and (2) the method appropriate to the study of incorporeal beings. Once one understands the function of the first cause as the principle of all being, the character of the other metaphysical principles and the rest of the beings can be known in light of their ultimate causes (*Sa'ādah* 62:18–63:1/15:10–13). Alfarabi does not, however, identify in *Taḥṣīl al-*

<sup>23</sup> According to aphorism No. 61, the citizens must share opinions about such things as God, the spiritual beings, the universe, happiness, and the actions that lead to happiness. The topics covered by aphorisms 68–74 appear to illustrate opinions of the sort intended.

<sup>24</sup> See *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* 81:2–13/32:9–17, where Alfarabi places the first substantive remarks on supreme happiness in the context of the craft of war. (Reading *al-mihnah al-ḥarbiyyah* with Mahdi 1969A, p. 154, instead of the text at *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* 81:2–3/32:9.)

<sup>25</sup> See especially *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* Nos. 37, 94. Alfarabi does, however, mention the agent intellect once (*Fuṣūl* No. 94, 97:7–8).

*Sa'ādah* the metaphysical principles that are under investigation; for example, he does not call them secondary causes or refer to the agent intellect by name. Nor does he give any indication of their location in the universe or their function vis-à-vis one another or the other beings beyond the fact that they are the principles of being of the heavenly bodies and that they are themselves ranked. Further, he does not specify the results of the metaphysical inquiries or characterize the degree of completeness of the understanding thus obtained. But he does go on to describe the use the investigator should make of these insights when the investigator re-examines the beings originally studied prior to the inquiry into the first cause. Alfarabi calls the second inquiry into the beings, in light of insight into the first cause, the “divine inquiry” into them (*Sa'ādah* 63:1/15:14). It is, however, unclear what this phrase means, since in one passage Alfarabi suggests that the first principle will be grasped only as a cause, not in itself (see *Sa'ādah* 62:12–18/15:5–10), whereas in another passage he indicates that philosophy can attain a grasp of the first principle's essence (*Sa'ādah* 90:21–22/40:19–41:1).

*Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* thus appears to contemplate some kind of philosophic deduction after and based on the peak of metaphysical inquiry. However, because *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* presents all of philosophy, whether natural or metaphysical, in terms of an investigation, it is difficult to determine whether or to what extent the ultimate metaphysical questions can, in Alfarabi's opinion, be answered. At the same time the work gives the impression that enough metaphysical knowledge is available to serve as a foundation for the investigations of some or all of the other sciences.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See Mahdi (1969A), pp. xv–xxii. Mahdi contends that Alfarabi presents political inquiry as a “more fruitful line of inquiry” than metaphysical inquiry, that section 17 (of his English translation) indicates a descent from the principles of intellect to an account of man in light of these principles, and that metaphysical inquiry, i.e., inquiry into the principles of the heavenly bodies, is subsequently abandoned. Although these are possible readings of the texts in question, the texts can be interpreted otherwise. Since Mahdi does not explain the grounds for his interpretation, it is impossible to evaluate his theory properly. As I have indicated in the text, in section 19 (of the English translation) Alfarabi refers to an inquiry into the metaphysical beings up to the point of the ultimate source of all beings. Although Alfarabi does not claim in this section that the investigator understands the essence of this ultimate principle of the beings, he does say that on the basis of perceiving its attributes the investigator should reexamine all the beings previously studied in light of the knowledge thus gained. On its face, this passage does not support the view that metaphysical inquiry proves inaccessible and is therefore abandoned. Moreover, in the parallel passage of section 17, where Mahdi sees a “descent” (presumably a deductive reasoning process), Alfarabi says somewhat ambiguously that the investigator will “acquaint” (*yattali*) himself with the incorporeal principles for the sake of which the soul and the intellect are made, etc., and will know (*ya'lam*) that “the natural principles in man and in the world are not sufficient for man's coming to that perfection for the sake of whose achievement he is made” (Mahdi). In

The nature of the dependence of political science on metaphysics in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* is as problematic as the account of the outcome of metaphysical inquiry. In his outline of the scope of political science, Alfarabi mentions a hierarchy of principles and beings in the universe analogous to the hierarchy in the city (*Sa'ādah* 63:18–64:7/16:9–15), but neither the principles nor the beings are explicitly linked to the supralunar sphere, nor are they portrayed as emanating from one another. It is thus possible that the reference is to sublunar principles, for example, those associated with human rationality. Moreover, as Mahdi points out, the association of nonhuman entities that Alfarabi compares to a political association is that of the “bodies of the world” (*Sa'ādah* 63:13–17/16:5–8), which could refer either to heavenly or to natural bodies.<sup>27</sup> Further, even if the author intended to indicate a parallel between the hierarchy desirable in a city and the hierarchy in the universe (*jumlat al-'ālam*), this would not by itself prove that he viewed political inquiry as logically dependent upon metaphysical inquiry. For a relationship of dependence to exist, the investigator's understanding of the human realm would have to be derived in part from his metaphysical findings. In other words, not the mere existence of a parallel between the organization of a city and that of the universe, but the need for the organization of the city to be patterned after the organization of the universe, would have to be disclosed to the investigator in order for politics to be seen as dependent on metaphysics in any meaningful sense. In contrast, although each of the two references to metaphysical inquiry in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* (*Sa'ādah* 59:18–60:4/12:14–13:1, 62:4–63:4/14:17–15:15) is followed by a passage indicating the need for political association (*Sa'ādah* 61:14–62:1/14:6–14, 63:12–13/16:4–5), the results of the metaphysical inquiry are not presented as the foundation for the political observations. Rather, it appears that the need for a certain type of political organization becomes clear in political science and that as a result of this realization the investigator perceives a similarity between the structure of the world, or part of it, and the structure of the city (see *Sa'ādah* 63:13–17/16:5–8).

The relationship between metaphysical inquiry and what Alfarabi calls “human science” (*al-'ilm al-insāniyyah*) is equally difficult to ascertain.

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view of the preceding, the investigator's knowledge of the ultimate principle of human rationality does not obviously possess greater philosophic integrity than the counterpart perception of the principle of all being, nor is the descent on the basis of the former knowledge clearly presented as more secure than the descent on the basis of the latter perception. A possible piece of evidence for Mahdi's reading is Alfarabi's use of *ya'lam* at 60:19/13:11, as compared with *ma'rifah* at 62:21/15:13, since the Arabic root *\*l\*m* connotes rigorous scientific knowledge when used in its technical sense. These critical issues need to be clarified further, in part on the basis of an analysis of *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs* and the theoretical portions of *Al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*.

<sup>27</sup> Mahdi (1969A), p. xvi.

Human science and political science are first mentioned together (*Sa'ādah* 62:3/14:16–17), at the conclusion of the part of the inquiry into the soul that examines human rationality and the principles of reason or intellect. In this reference Alfarabi says only that human and political science arise out of or result from (*fa-yahṣul min*) the investigation of the intellectual principles and the actions and acquired dispositions with which human beings strive for perfection (*Sa'ādah* 62:1–3/14:14–17). Since this philosophical psychology appears to be coordinate with, not dependent upon, the initial stage of metaphysical inquiry, i.e., the stage prompted by the study of the heavenly bodies (*Sa'ādah* 60:11–17/13:7–10),<sup>28</sup> both human science and political science might appear to be similarly independent. However, Alfarabi turns to these two sciences a second time, after describing briefly the final stage of metaphysical inquiry. It is at this point that he distinguishes human science from political science (*Sa'ādah* 63:4–11/15:16–16:4). Immediately preceding is Alfarabi's reference to the "divine inquiry" into the beings (*Sa'ādah* 63:1/15:14). It is thus possible that the initial reference to the emergence of human science and political science was not followed immediately by an account of the contents of those sciences in order to suggest that an understanding of human perfection is incomplete in the absence of insight into the nature of the first principle or divine perfection. This would be the case if man is one of the beings referred to as subject to reexamination in light of the inquiry into the first principle (*Sa'ādah* 62:18–63:1/15:10–13) and if the account of what renders humans "really substantial" (*Sa'ādah* 61:9–10/14:2–3) is enhanced by knowledge of the ultimate cause of the beings' existence. If so, Alfarabi's purpose in arranging the course of inquiry as he does would be to suggest that, although human science first emerges as an outgrowth of philosophical psychology, it depends for its completion upon metaphysical inquiry or some portion of it.<sup>29</sup> Since political science appears to be devoted to discerning the means for realizing the perfection investigated in human science (*Sa'ādah* 63:6–11/15:18–16:4),<sup>30</sup> political science would

<sup>28</sup> See Mahdi's discussion of the dependence of political science on metaphysics (Mahdi 1969A, pp. xiv–xvi, xviii–xxii). Aphorism No. 94 of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* summarizes the course of inquiry described in the first part of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*. The aphorism does not contain the clear demarcation observed in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* between the inquiry into the causes of the heavenly bodies and the inquiry into the causes of human rationality, although the aphorism may contain an allusion to the existence of two distinct paths to the inquiry into the first cause (see *Fuṣūl* 97:18).

<sup>29</sup> When Alfarabi mentions human science and political science the second time, he says that human science should be embarked upon *after* the inquiries discussed in the preceding passages (*Sa'ādah* 63:4/15:16). In the counterpart passage in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, he says that the inquiry into the human end has been ongoing (*dā'imān*) (*Fuṣūl* No. 94, 98:5).

<sup>30</sup> According to *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* 63:11–13/16:4–5, political science contains knowledge of the means to the happiness of citizens through political association. The passage cited in

be similarly, if indirectly, dependent on metaphysical inquiry. However, understood in this way, metaphysics would inform political science only insofar as it adds to the investigator's understanding of the perfection of individuals; it would not necessarily supply any of the principles of political organization or political behavior.

Because Alfarabi's descriptions of the inquiries in question are so elliptical, it is impossible to be certain whether the account of human science does in fact rely on the conclusions of the metaphysical inquiry. According to Mahdi, the only commentator who addresses this question, the later passage does not rely on the preceding metaphysical inquiry.<sup>31</sup> Mahdi's assertion gains support from the fact that Alfarabi prescribes for human science an investigation into the character of human perfection (*Sa'ādah* 63:4–6/15:16–18) after prescribing the divine inquiry into the beings, i.e., the inquiry into the beings in light of their ultimate causes. This may suggest that human beings are not among the beings examined in the course of the divine inquiry or that for some other reason they are not known in light of the first principle. Tending in the opposite direction is the fact that Alfarabi prescribes that human science should investigate only the "what" and "how" of human perfection, but not the "from what" or "for what"—which may suggest that the inquiry into human perfection conducted by human science looks beyond itself to the conclusions of a prior inquiry for its grasp of the agent and final causes. Even assuming this dependence, *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* admits of two interpretations, namely, that the "from what" and "for what" of human perfection are grasped fully by philosophic psychology alone, without any enhancement from the divine inquiry into the beings, or that the two principles are fully grasped only through the combined efforts of these two disciplines—whether each discipline supplies one principle or each helps to clarify some aspect of both principles. Alternatively, Alfarabi's failure in this passage to mention the final cause of human perfection may be attributable to the doctrine that happiness is what is sought for its own sake, even though, logically speaking, what is sought for its own sake does not necessarily exist, or continue to exist, for its own sake.

Alfarabi offers a few indications of the potential utility of the inquiry into the metaphysical principles for the inquiry into human things. The passage, just referred to, describing the investigation of human rationality—and announcing the emergence of human science and political science—ends with a description of what a human being needs in order to strive for ultimate perfection. Alfarabi informs the reader that a person

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the text appears to connect the inquiries of human science, stated in terms of perfection, with the inquiries of political science.

<sup>31</sup> Mahdi tends in his analysis to speak only of political science, but he seems to have in mind both human science and political science.

cannot even strive for perfection without “exploiting a large number of natural beings”<sup>32</sup> and making them useful for helping him achieve his goal; that no one can achieve the totality of perfection;<sup>33</sup> and that each person who strives for perfection must depend upon one or more other people, either for the necessities of life or for some other ingredient of the search for perfection (*Sa’ādah* 61:9–21/14:2–12).

The investigator’s inquiries into human rationality thus move from the characteristics and end of the human intellect in the best case to the means of actualizing that intellect to the utmost degree possible. The inquiry into the means first discloses that the *natural* principles “in the human being and in the world” are not sufficient to bring about this transformation (*Sa’ādah* 60:19–21/13:11–13). The investigator then focuses upon certain *intellectual* and *rational* principles, presumably in humans and in the world,<sup>34</sup> that make this transformation possible. That phase of the inquiry gives rise to the realization that the intellectual and rational principles within a human being not only serve as the means for the attainment of perfection by the person possessing those principles; in addition, and as an outgrowth of their activity in furthering the individual’s perfection, they can have a direct and dramatic impact on the natural world outside the individual as well (*Sa’ādah* 61:5–14/13:18–14:6). Further, the passage conveys the clear impression that the exploitation by some individuals of their fellow creatures in the name of ultimate perfection could extend to the exploitation of their fellow men (*Sa’ādah* 61:14–62:1/14:6–14).

This progression of inquiries raises the question of the extent to which the actions necessary for the peculiarly human project are compatible with or run counter to the order or purpose of the natural world.<sup>35</sup> The inquiry into the rational animal is preceded by the inquiry into the lower-order inhabitants of the natural world, i.e., the elements, inanimate bodies, and animate beings lacking reason. The earlier inquiry into natural

<sup>32</sup> Mahdi’s translation.

<sup>33</sup> The text reads, “In addition, it became clear to [the investigator] in this science that every human can only acquire a portion of that perfection.”

<sup>34</sup> In a passage in *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs* dealing with some of the same themes, Alfarabi expressly identifies the intellectual principle in the world, which is a condition of the actualization of the human intellect, as the “agent intellect” (*Aristūṭālīs* 127:18–128:17). Not only the name but the concept appears to be missing in *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah*.

<sup>35</sup> *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* appears to allude to a harmony between the natural world and the world subject to volition, although that harmony is arguably merely the superficial harmony of two parallel tracks, each of which is hierarchically ordered and integrated. Despite the parallel, Alfarabi’s earlier remarks make it clear that members of the human hierarchy can and must invade the natural hierarchy of the natural world. Thus, the larger question of the unity of purpose of the two worlds, the natural and the human, is not resolved by the similarities between the two worlds that Alfarabi points out.

bodies culminated in the awareness of the need to understand the principles of the heavenly bodies, i.e., the metaphysical things (*Sa'ādah* 59:18–60:4/12:14–13:1). It was at that point that Alfarabi turned to the parallel inquiry into the beings with soul and intellect (*Sa'ādah* 60:5–9/13:1–6), thereby delaying the proposed metaphysical inquiry. Yet without the results of the metaphysical inquiry, the inquiries of natural philosophy are *prima facie* incomplete.

In other words, Alfarabi may turn back to the metaphysical inquiry at the point of the emergence of human science and political science in order to complete his inquiry into the whole world, as a prelude to ascertaining man's place in the larger scheme of things. This would be consistent with Alfarabi's portrayal of Aristotle's understanding of the relationship among the sciences, for Alfarabi's Aristotle explains that it is impossible to know a human being's purpose without knowing the purpose of the whole of which the human being is a part (*Aristūtālīs* 68:7–9). Thus, the inquiry into the end of man, as that end first comes to light in natural science, would force the investigator to inquire into the metaphysical things so as to understand more fully the specifically human enterprise. On one level Alfarabi's Aristotle makes the inquiry into the universe dependent upon the finding that man is a "part" of the universe in the sense that a finger is a part of the body, in other words, that man is an integral part of an organic whole. On another level, however, it appears that the inquiry into the universe is necessary to establish in the first place man's relationship to the larger whole, in other words, whether man is an integral part of an organic whole.<sup>36</sup> Understood in this respect, metaphysics would supplement the inquiry into human things, without necessarily supplying its premises or its substantive terms. Thus, it would be true both that metaphysical inquiry is necessary for human and political science and that human and political science do not have recourse to the discoveries of metaphysics in the course of their investigations.

Finally, the foundations of human science and political science are further obscured by the fact that Alfarabi identifies the subject of human science variously as "the purpose" of human existence and "the perfection that man must achieve" (*Sa'ādah* 63:4–6/15:16–18). Earlier, when the investigator's inquiries into natural bodies pointed to principles outside nature, Alfarabi described the investigator as becoming acquainted with "the ends and ultimate perfection" for the sake of which man came into existence (*Sa'ādah* 60:17–19/13:10–11), and he noted that a plurality of perfections (*kamālāt*) are available to human beings (*Sa'ādah* 61:16/14:8). That discussion moved back and forth from "perfection" to

<sup>36</sup> See Galston (1977), pp. 27–30, for a discussion of the relevant passages in *Falsafat Aristūtālīs*.

“ultimate perfection” and from “this perfection” to “that perfection.” Alfarabi thus indicated that there are distinct kinds or degrees of human perfection. As a consequence, when he subsequently summarizes the scope of human science in terms of man’s “purpose” and “perfection” (*Sa’ādah* 63:4–6/15:16–18), the possibility is raised that only a lower-order perfection is meant. This impression is reinforced when Alfarabi associates political science with the attainment of “happiness” (*Sa’ādah* 63:11–13/16:4–5) instead of “ultimate happiness,” since elsewhere in the work he equates ultimate perfection with ultimate happiness (*Sa’ādah* 81:7–9/32:12–14).<sup>37</sup> If a lower-order perfection is in fact his intention, then it is possible that Alfarabi fails to prescribe an inquiry into the “for what” and “from what” of perfection in human science because these subjects were already examined during the prior inquiry into the principles for the sake of which soul and intellect exist, at which time the investigator became acquainted with ultimate human perfection (*Sa’ādah* 60:18–19/13:11, see 62:1–3/14:14–16). Accordingly, the last sentence of the passage outlining that inquiry, which announces the emergence of the human and political sciences on the basis of the unnamed science concerned with human rationality (*Sa’ādah* 62:1–3/14:14–16), should be understood as alerting the reader to the dependence of human science and political science on the unnamed science and their independence of the subsequent metaphysical inquiry.

Thus, although the matter is not free from doubt, one strand of *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* points to a political science informed by certain theoretical inquiries, i.e., the study of human rationality, that precede or are concurrent with metaphysical inquiry, although possibly metaphysical inquiry itself is necessary to establish the irrelevance of metaphysics for the study of human beings.<sup>38</sup> To this extent *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* and *Fuṣūl Muntaza’ah* form a pair in dissociating political science from purely metaphysical doctrines. They differ in that *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* may teach that in the best case a philosophic account of human things is one of the starting points for deliberation, whereas in the first part of *Fuṣūl Muntaza’ah* the statesman knows specifically what the end for man, justice, and the virtues are not, but has only a general knowledge of what the true account of these things is or should be.

<sup>37</sup> In the summary of this passage contained in *Fuṣūl Muntaza’ah* (see note 28 above), Alfarabi speaks throughout of “happiness” or “real happiness” and “perfection.” See especially *Fuṣūl* No. 94, 96:7, 97:13, 15–16, 18, 98:6–7. Contrast *Fuṣūl* 97:12–16 with *Sa’ādah* 60:17–21/13:10–13.

<sup>38</sup> Because of the difficulty in differentiating purely religious teachings from metaphysical ones, it is difficult to work backward from the doctrines of the remaining three parts of *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* to the existence of a doctrinal dependence of political science on metaphysics. This is, however, one possible avenue of further inquiry.



## D. THE PARALLEL WORKS

This survey of the theoretical models contained in Alfarabi's major works raises the question of the reason he chose to write several books covering the same ground, at times in an almost identical fashion and at other times in distinct or even conflicting ways.

Several explanations for the existence of what may be termed Alfarabi's "parallel works" are possible.<sup>39</sup> First, the differences may reveal a development in the author's ideas. Thus, D. M. Dunlop attributes the different approaches of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* on the one hand and *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* on the other to different stages in Alfarabi's thinking.<sup>40</sup> If an author's later works are assumed to represent his or her mature thoughts, the developmental theory of parallel works makes it possible to identify those doctrines that truly represent an author whenever it is possible to date the author's works.

A second explanation for the differences exhibited by the parallel works is that they represent differences in emphasis. According to this account, the teachings of the various works would be fundamentally the same, although on the surface they might appear to adopt different doctrines. As E.I.J. Rosenthal points out, this theory is not dispositive in dating an author's works, since the fullness or sparseness of one book's treatment of a topic dealt with in the opposite fashion in another book by the same author is itself open to two interpretations: the sparse version may represent a formative, rudimentary effort, or, alternatively, the author may allow himself greater brevity when he has handled a subject adequately on a previous occasion.<sup>41</sup> These remarks are occasioned by Rosenthal's observation that in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* Alfarabi discusses both revelation (*wahy*) and prophecy, in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* only revelation, and in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* neither revelation nor prophecy—although the supreme ruler (*al-ra'īs al-awwal*) is treated thematically in all three. Rosenthal concludes that these terminological discrepancies are due to differences in emphasis and thus are ultimately of no doctrinal significance.

Third, the differences in the parallel works may be seen as flowing from the different intentions of the several works. According to this theory, the

<sup>39</sup> Strauss (1945), p. 358, who appears to have coined the expression, includes *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, and *Kitāb al-Millah* among the parallel works.

<sup>40</sup> Dunlop (1961), p. 12 (1952), p. 93.

<sup>41</sup> Rosenthal (1955), p. 164. Despite these reservations Rosenthal concludes, on the basis of the treatment of happiness in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, that it was written after *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and that the former work's failure to mention doctrines—such as revelation and prophecy—addressed more or less fully in the other two works is a consequence of these themes having been dealt with adequately in the earlier two works.

parallel works examine the same phenomena from a range of theoretical or practical perspectives. The books would, in the last analysis, be compatible, since they would all presuppose a single understanding of the world and mankind's place in it. The apparent differences, in other words, would ultimately be differences of presentation and not of substance. For example, in the introduction to his translation of Alfarabi's trilogy—*Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, *Falsafat Aflāṭun*, and *Falsafat Aristūtālīs*—Mahdi calls *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* “popular and political writings” as contrasted with Alfarabi's “scientific or philosophic works proper—his commentaries, especially his large commentaries, on individual works by Plato and Aristotle.”<sup>42</sup> In the introduction to his edition of *Kitāb al-Millah*, Mahdi elaborates on this thesis by identifying the “two popular and political” works as two concrete illustrations of religions that a founder would devise. *Kitāb al-Millah*, he argues, makes such things as religion, founders, and political science known in a general way; in other words, it provides the principles (*uṣūl*) that must be grasped and followed for concrete instances to exist. *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, on the other hand, constitute the working out of these principles. As such, they can be seen as models to guide real founders in their legislative enterprise.<sup>43</sup> Mahdi does not speculate on the differences between the two case studies, or why Alfarabi wrote parallel treatises that “discuss virtually the same subjects in virtually the same way.”<sup>44</sup> But he recommends that the teachings of both treatises be considered against the backdrop of *Falsafat Aflāṭun* and *Falsafat Aristūtālīs*, since on key issues these two works present “a position that seems to stand in sharp contrast with, if not to contradict, Alfarabi's teachings in his popular and political works.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, despite the underlying doctrinal unity, the surface teachings of the parallel works will frequently conflict, with one teaching being more authoritative than the rest.<sup>46</sup>

A fourth explanation takes as its starting point the three-dimensional character of the topics under discussion. To do such subjects justice, it is necessary to view them from a sequence of perspectives and then to integrate the partial observations so as to arrive at complete understanding. The premise of this theory is that the several accounts are genuinely different but can ultimately be reconciled because each looks at the same

<sup>42</sup> Mahdi (1969A), pp. 3–4.

<sup>43</sup> Mahdi (1968A), pp. 12–13 (Arabic Introduction).

<sup>44</sup> Mahdi (1968A), p. 12 (Arabic Introduction).

<sup>45</sup> Mahdi (1969A), p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> This appears to be the view as well of Strauss, who finds that the teaching of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* “consists, to some extent, of the silent rejection of certain tenets which are adhered to in [*Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Kitāb al-Millah*]” (Strauss 1945, p. 358).

object from a different point of view, with none of the points of view more authoritative than the others.

Finally, the parallel works can be seen as presenting a series of if-then propositions representing distinct philosophical alternatives. According to this theory, the teaching of each book would be that given certain premises about the world, a series of conclusions necessarily follows. The purpose of the parallel works according to this theory would be to flesh out the most fundamental or plausible philosophical alternatives in order to reveal their assumptions and consequences. The author's parallel works could, then, be both genuinely different and fundamentally irreconcilable. This theory is consistent with the author's favoring one of the alternatives presented, although no single alternative necessarily supersedes the others.

For the reasons stated in the introduction to this study, I believe that the developmental theory cannot, as a practical matter, be meaningfully applied to Alfarabi's works and that, in addition, it risks understating the importance of those of Alfarabi's works judged to have been written earlier. Although attractive and in certain situations clearly appropriate, the theory that doctrinal inconsistencies can be explained in terms of degrees of emphasis depends on the proposition that the most important inconsistencies in the parallel works are fundamentally reconcilable. In contrast, this study has concluded that at key points Alfarabi's works present teachings that are fundamentally irreconcilable. Clearly, the thesis that some of the discrepancies in Alfarabi's writings are due to the differing intentions of the different works may ultimately prove correct. However, it is inconsistent with the view, advanced in this study, that in certain instances the texts which present conflicting doctrines reflect roughly equal levels of philosophic seriousness. The thesis that the differences at issue can be explained in terms of the three-dimensional subject matter and the need to integrate the various treatments also gets at part of the truth, although it does not adequately appreciate the extent to which part of Alfarabi's purpose is to introduce the reader to fundamentally irreconcilable alternative responses to certain basic questions addressed by political philosophy. In my view, in short, the fifth alternative provides the most useful guide in the first instance for interpreting Alfarabi's writings because it is consistent with his emphasis on investigation and personal discovery, on the one hand, and his desire to recover both the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle and the ways to reestablish them, on the other.

#### *The Contrast between Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah and the Other Parallel Works*

In addition to the distinctive model *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* contains of the relationship between political science and philosophic inquiry, several ad-

ditional teachings have emerged in the preceding chapters that set *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* apart from the other parallel works. These are the emphasis on the statesman, as contrasted with the philosophic supreme ruler; the elaboration of the analogy between the statesman and the doctor; the extended discussion of the moral virtues; the doctrine of the moral virtues as means between two extremes; the preoccupation with practical reason and practical wisdom in all their forms; the discussion of justice and injustice within cities and among cities; and the doctrine of the practical intellect (*al-'aql al-'amali*), which is portrayed as the aspect of the rational faculty that apprehends the principles of practical reasoning.

To a large extent these teachings can be seen as a consequence of viewing political science as independent of theoretical inquiry. For example, it is hardly coincidental that a political work portraying political science as autonomous should posit the existence of a practical rational faculty, called "practical intellect," whose function it is to recognize the principles of practical reasoning. The existence of this faculty, which appears to move inductively from the data of sense perception to generalizations about matters of importance for action, makes it possible for the autonomy of political science to be mirrored in the psychological realm by the autonomy of practical reason.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, the emphasis on statesmen who, like physicians, rely primarily on observation and experience to develop their crafts has an obvious kinship with the doctrines of the autonomy of political science and of practical reason.

The attention paid in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* to the operation and types of practical reason, in turn, is a natural consequence of viewing practical reason as independent of theoretical reason and can be seen as a counterpart to the attention paid in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* to the process of intellection. However, to understand what is distinctive about the teaching of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, it is helpful to compare it to *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, which also contains an extended discussion of practical reason, but one that portrays practical reason, at least in part, as developing knowledge first grasped by theoretical reason (*Sa'ādah* 81:15–82:1/32:19–33:4). In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* practical wisdom is described as the ability to deliberate well and discover the best means for obtaining a really great good or an excellent and noble end (*Fuṣūl* No. 39, 55:6–8). Although *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* contains a comparable statement (*Sa'ādah* 68:16–20/20:16–19), the deliberative faculty is also presented as what discovers "the variable accidents of the intelligibles whose particular instances are made to exist by the will, when one attempts to bring them into actual existence" (Mahdi) (*Sa'ādah* 68:7–11/20:8–11).

<sup>47</sup> Contrast the description of the practical intellect in *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs* 124:1–3. In that work "practical intellect" appears to refer more generally to practical reason, and not to a specific aspect of practical reason.

*Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* elaborates numerous alternatives to practical wisdom, i.e., types of practical reasoning whose basis is imagination and generally accepted opinion (*Fuṣūl* Nos. 43–45, 47–50), whereas *Tahṣīl al-Sa‘ādah* lacks entirely an account of inferior types of or substitutes for practical reason. Instead, *Tahṣīl al-Sa‘ādah* elaborates the distinction between intelligibles of natural things and intelligibles of things subject to volition, on the one hand, and between essential or necessary attributes and accidental or variable attributes, on the other (*Sa‘ādah* 65:3–68:2/17:9–20:3). *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* is thus concerned with explaining practical reason in terms of observable phenomena, i.e., what the faculty looks like, whereas *Tahṣīl al-Sa‘ādah* provides a more theoretical account of practical reason’s nature and operation, i.e., not only how it looks and operates, but what in the nature of being and the beings is responsible for its operating in this fashion. Accordingly, *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* both portrays practical reason as independent of theoretical reason for its operation and gives an account of practical reason as it is apprehended by practical reason acting without the mediation of theoretical reason.

The characteristic approach of *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah* in part explains a second major discrepancy in the treatment of practical reason in the two works. *Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah*, which contains the most extensive discussion of moral habits and the moral virtues to be found in any of the parallel works, has only a brief and superficial account of the relationship between practical reason and moral virtue (*Fuṣūl* Nos. 41, 51), whereas in *Tahṣīl al-Sa‘ādah* there is little discussion of morals per se and an extended discussion of the relationship between moral and deliberative excellence.<sup>48</sup> The implication is that the person who possesses practical wisdom recognizes the importance of moral virtue but takes its existence for granted. For the person concerned with theoretical inquiry, on the other hand, one of the central issues for understanding practical reason and morality is the genesis of practical wisdom and moral excellence, given that practical wisdom appears to be a condition of the existence of the moral virtues but moral virtue appears itself to be a condition of the operation of practical wisdom (*Sa‘ādah* 75:6–77:12/26:19–29:2).

In an important sense, therefore, the statesman takes as his starting point certain basic assumptions of the city as it exists, without attempting

<sup>48</sup> *Sa‘ādah* 71:1–18/22:18–23:15, 75:6–77:12/26:19–29:2. The four parts of *Tahṣīl al-Sa‘ādah* do not correspond to the four human things by which happiness is attained (*Sa‘ādah* 49:4–7/2:2–5). The first part treats theoretical excellence, the second part treats deliberative excellence and moral virtue, and the third part treats the practical arts. In a sense the fourth part covers the same ground as the first three parts from a somewhat different perspective, although arguably the discussion of true philosophy can be seen as an account of the most authoritative moral virtue. See the analysis of this work in Mahdi (1975).

to recover or comprehend the justification for them. Differently put, recourse to the analogy between soul and body or between city and body serves as a substitute for a reasoned justification. The propriety of such analogies, however, is not an object of inquiry. The ruler with philosophy, in contrast, may as a practical matter act within the framework of a city's basic assumptions, but such a ruler will nonetheless understand the assumptions in light of their justifications. The statesman should not, however, be equated with the jurist (*faqīh*). For in the best case the statesman has a general understanding of human nature, the nature of political communities, and the various relationships of means to ends. In particular, the statesman is said to know all the actions that establish and preserve excellence in cities and nations (*Millah* 54:16–17, 56:14–16) and can figure out which specific actions are suited to a particular city or nation at a particular time and in particular circumstances (*Millah* 58:9–15). In contrast, the jurist works from the principles set forth by a city's founder and, possibly, by subsequent rulers, and he takes as given the applications of those principles to that city to the extent that these have been elaborated by his predecessors (*Millah* 50:4–15, see *Millah* 60:20–61:9, *Hurūf* 133:8–13).

The extent to which *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* elaborates on the definition and operation of justice in cities, as contrasted with the treatment of this theme in the other parallel works, can also be traced to its distinctive view of political science and practical reason. All of the parallel works agree that the inhabitants of cities should in general be united by sharing common beliefs and a common way of life. Both *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* focus on the particular beliefs the citizens should hold and the general connection between the beliefs, ways of life, and the attainment of perfection or happiness. *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, which in important respects shares the practical perspective of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, addresses itself less to the particular beliefs that citizens should hold and more to the institutional arrangements necessary for inculcating such beliefs (*Sa'ādah* 77:17–86:3/29:7–36:12). *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* differs from the other three parallel works in introducing the beliefs about theoretical things in a purely political context, i.e., ensuring political stability, with no allusion to the importance of such beliefs for the intellectual development of those with an aptitude for rational perfection (*Fuṣūl* No. 61). *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* also develops a theory of justice in terms of the distribution of goods among citizens in accordance with merit; discusses how exchanges of property, even voluntary ones, can be unjust; and refers to different views held by those who govern cities regarding injustice committed against individuals as compared with injustice committed against cities.

The relationship between these distinctive teachings of *Fuṣūl Mun-*

*taza'ah* and its view of the autonomy of political science and of practical reason can be briefly stated. It is characteristic of the practical reason that is itself divorced from theoretical reason to focus on that aspect of human fulfillment that is divorced from theoretical reason, namely, the goods of this life and man's first perfection. In other words, because of the empirical origin of the generalizations reached by practical reason concerning human affairs, the account of political life informed by practical reason alone is likely to give greater prominence to the distribution of goods than to the dissemination of ideas in discussing the foundations for harmony in political communities. Further, because the first half of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* presents the opinions that people hold as primarily instrumental to the city's practical objectives, people's opinions about practical things assume greater importance than their opinions about theoretical things, since the former have a more obvious and direct relationship to the goal to be promoted. In short, the political science that is not part of philosophy, which is exemplified in the first half of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, presents both the end of political life and the means to achieve that end differently than does the political science that is part of philosophy.

*Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah Compared with Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah and Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*

Turning to the three works in which the account of political life is presented as grounded in some form of theoretical understanding, the teachings of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* in several respects provide a contrast with those of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*. As we saw in the preceding sections, the former work includes indications that the requisite theoretical understanding may be limited to natural philosophy culminating in the philosophical study of the soul and reason; in the latter two works, both a description of the metaphysical universe and an account of the natural world precede the discussion of political life. This difference can now be related to some of the differences in the political teachings advanced in the three works.

First and foremost, in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* promoting and perpetuating theoretical understanding is one of the explicit goals of political life. Not only is theoretical excellence asserted to be one of the means to happiness (*Sa'ādah* 49:4–7/2:2–5, see 88:9–10/38:12–13); the entire first part of the treatise is a detailed description of the scope and method of the totality of theoretical inquiries. A large portion of the third part of the work is devoted to describing how as a practical matter the theoretical sciences or theoretical excellence are to be transferred from one generation to the next (*Sa'ādah* 78:10–80:3/29:18–31:11, 84:1–7/34:14–35:1, 84:14–86:3/35:9–36:12), and the last part of the treatise is dominated by the

twin questions of the meaning of wisdom and the meaning of true philosophy (or of who is a true philosopher). Thus, the content of theoretical excellence and the conditions for its emergence constitute two of the dominant themes of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*.

In contrast, philosophy and theoretical excellence are rarely mentioned in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*.<sup>49</sup> Both works provide an exclusively psychological account of rational perfection, i.e., how rational potential becomes actualized in successive stages through interaction with the agent intellect. Alfarabi notes that the agent intellect supplies a principle or primary intelligibles that enable individuals to strive for theoretical perfection (*Siyāsah* 71:14–72:10, see 74:2–3; *Madīnah* 204:13–15/46:5–6). However, neither work alludes to, much less describes, a course of study such as occupies the first part of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*. Moreover, there is no unambiguous indication in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* that theoretical excellence is one of the goals of political life. The goal of the city of excellence is described in a formal way, as cooperation in the things through which real happiness is acquired (*Madīnah* 230:7–8/54:5–7). This happiness, equated with man's final perfection, is said to be the product of cognitive activities (*af'āl fikriyyah*) and bodily actions (*af'āl badaniyyah*) (*Madīnah* 206:4–5/46:10–11). This formula suggests that the immediate object of political life is practical excellence, whether moral virtue, the actualization of practical reason, or both.<sup>50</sup> Certainly there is no indication of the need for an institutional arrangement devoted to the perpetuation of theoretical excellence, as there is in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*. Similarly, in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* Alfarabi prescribes only that the inhabitants of the city of excellence should understand the principles of beings, happiness, and the like (*Siyāsah* 84:17–85:2, *Madīnah* 276:10–278:7/69:6–19). Although this may refer obliquely to the need to philosophize,<sup>51</sup> Alfarabi expressly prescribes only that those unable to cognize such things as they are should be taught imaginative representations of such things (*Siyāsah* 85:12–14). The sole place where these two works adopt the counterpart suggestion, i.e., that those capable of grasping the truth should be helped to do so, is

<sup>49</sup> See *Siyāsah* 106:9 (certain people in the city of excellence have the status of ignorant simpletons according to the view of men of intellect [*al-'uqalā'*] and in relation to the philosophers), *Madīnah* 244:11–12/58:23 (as a result of revelation from the agent intellect, the recipient becomes wise, a philosopher, and in possession of complete practical wisdom).

<sup>50</sup> It is possible to interpret the passage referred to as reflecting the distinction between body and mind, with *fikriyyah* referring to all thought, theoretical or practical. However, it is more usual for Alfarabi to use *fikrī* in connection with practical reason alone. See *Sa'ādah* 20:3ff. The interpretation in the text is problematic in another respect, namely, in that *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* 230:7–8/54:5–7 refers to “real happiness,” whereas the second passage speaks of “happiness” without any qualification.

<sup>51</sup> See *Siyāsah* 85:3–5, 86:8, *Madīnah* 278:8–11/69:19–23.



in the discussion of the ignorant cities and the weeds (*nawābit*) or strangers (*ghurabā*) in cities of excellence. In that context Alfarabi mentions the problem of unbelievers, or “weeds,” who are not persuaded by the imaginative representations and arguments that they have been taught in the cities of excellence. If in rejecting the regime’s official teachings these people are motivated by the desire for truth, they should be given other teachings free of the objections they uncovered. If they then discover the limits of these revised teachings, they should again be given more refined teachings. As long as they keep finding objectionable aspects to what they are taught, the process of refinement should continue until they have been brought gradually to a realization of the truth (*Siyāsah* 104:17–105:6, *Madīnah* 280:15–282:5/70:18–71:1). Thus, it appears from these two works that only the weeds and not the citizenry in general or some pre-determined class should be the recipients of instruction in the cities of excellence.

Second, although practical reason and deliberation play almost no express role in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, they are central to Alfarabi’s account of the attainment of happiness in *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah*. The second part of that work is largely devoted to a discussion of deliberation. It contains an extended discussion of the stratum of the world that has deliberation as a condition of its existence, the character and operation of deliberation in general, the possible types of deliberation, and the hierarchy among them. As was mentioned in the previous section, the second part of *Tahṣīl al-Sa’ādah* also discusses the relationship between moral virtue and deliberation and makes known that in the highest case deliberation must be preceded by and based on theoretical understanding. In contrast, in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the function of practical reason is described in a few sentences (*Madīnah* 208:11–12/47:9–10, 218:13–15/50:18–19, see 244:7–14/58:18–59:2; *Siyāsah* 33:5–7, see 73:14), and the activities normally attributed to practical reason are attributed to revelation (*Siyāsah* 79:5–80:1, cf. 73:11–18; *Madīnah* 244:7–246:1/58:18–59:5; see *Fuṣūl* No. 94).<sup>52</sup> As was noted above, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* do not present the same doctrine. The latter work discusses both revelation, which is based upon theoretical perfection, and “prophesy,” which is dependent on imagination, whereas *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* acknowledges only revelation associated with theoretical perfection.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Butterworth (1983), p. 228, has noted the identity of practical wisdom and revelation.

<sup>53</sup> When the theoretical perfection is missing, *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* speaks of prophecy, not revelation (*Madīnah* 224:6–8/52:10–12). *Fuṣūl Muntaza’ah* appears to have such prophecy in mind in aphorism No. 94, which asserts that revelation based on theoretical perfection and revelation in the absence of theoretical perfection have nothing in common but the

Third, in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* ordinary citizens are to be educated through rhetorical arguments as well as through imaginative representations, and for those who cannot be thus persuaded to act rightly of their own volition, Alfarabi prescribes coercion (*Sa'ādah* 78:10–83:14/29:18–34:10). In contrast *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* mentions only arousing citizens through imaginative representations and imitations. In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* the art of rhetoric and rhetorical arguments are mentioned only in the account of the democratic city, where rhetoricians and poets are included along with philosophers as among the excellent types (*afādīl*) that the regime is capable of producing (*Siyāsah* 101:1–2). In *Al-Madīnah al-Fādīlah* the noncoercive method of influencing citizens is for the most part attributed to the ruler's imaginative faculty. Further, in both *Al-Madīnah al-Fādīlah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* no systematic or institutional role is given to coercion towards fellow citizens. Discussion of coercion is entirely lacking in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* (except in the account of ignorant regimes), and in *Al-Madīnah al-Fādīlah* the need for coercion is only implied when the rulers of cities of excellence are said to need bodily prowess and the ability to wage war (*Madīnah* 246:4–5/59:7–8, 252:2–4/61:4–6).<sup>54</sup>

Finally, as we have already noted, *Al-Madīnah al-Fādīlah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* preface their respective depictions of political themes with an extensive description of the workings of the entire universe, beginning with the attributes and function of the first cause and ending with form and matter, the parts and operation of the human soul, and related topics. *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* contains no such cosmology. The account of political themes is preceded by the discussion of theoretical excellence described above, i.e., the description of the path of philosophic investigation from logic through natural philosophy, metaphysics, and political science.

These differences between the orientation of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, on the one hand, and that of *Al-Madīnah al-Fādīlah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, on the other, can to some extent be traced to their respective

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name. See also *Kitāb al-Millāh* 44:7–12, which refers both to revelation of conclusions and to revelation of an ability by means of which the recipient of revelation can figure out what he needs to know on his own. *Kitāb al-Millāh* 44:8–9 (revelation of conclusions) may refer to the type of apprehension described in *Al-Madīnah al-Fādīlah* as “prophecy.” Note that after the initial reference to the possibility of revelation as it is conventionally viewed, i.e., revelation of conclusions, *Kitāb al-Millāh* never raises the subject again. Instead, the discussion of two types of practical wisdom—that of the statesman and that of the ruler with philosophy—replaces the discussion of the two types of revelation that the reader may have initially expected.

<sup>54</sup> Reading *a'māl al-ḥarb* with Walzer (1985) for *a'māl al-juz'riyyāt* in Dieterici's edition (*Madīnah* 246:5/59:9). For a thoughtful and provocative discussion of the place of warfare in Alfarabi's political thought, see Kraemer (1987).

views of the relationship between political inquiry and theoretical inquiry as a whole. First and foremost, the two works that present political life against the backdrop of the totality of philosophy, metaphysical and natural, appear to presuppose that metaphysics—and thus philosophy as a whole—is a fundamentally complete or closed system. Accordingly, it is possible to convey the conclusions of theoretical inquiry and to explain the natural universe in light of its metaphysical foundations. In contrast, *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* appears to view the progress of metaphysics—and thus the rest of philosophy—as more tentative. Accordingly, it portrays the “theoretical virtues” as a progression of inquiries rather than a series of hierarchically arranged conclusions. Arguably it is because *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* view, or appear to view, theoretical philosophy as fundamentally complete that they, unlike *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, make no provision for the acquisition of the sciences among the goals of the regime.<sup>55</sup> It is certainly a consequence either of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*'s view of theoretical inquiry as tentative or of its emphasis on the process of discovery that those charged with instructing groups in the theoretical sciences are required to habituate their charges to use all the logical methods and to pursue a course of study throughout a large part of their lives (*Sa'ādah* 78:10–79:5/29:18–30:12).<sup>56</sup>

It is more difficult to relate the differences in theoretical models to the works' varying treatments of practical reason. On a superficial level it seems natural for an account of political life grounded in metaphysics to

<sup>55</sup> As a logical matter, the view that theoretical philosophy is fundamentally complete and the absence of provisions for the acquisition of the sciences need not go hand in hand. One could view the sciences as fundamentally complete and still see the process of personal discovery as critical to rational development. See, however, *Kitāb al-Hurūf* No. 143, 151:17–152:6, where Alfarabi claims that philosophy, theoretical and practical, had become complete in Aristotle's time. As a result, there was nothing left to investigate, and so philosophy became an art to be learned or taught exclusively. According to this account, instruction of the elite proceeds by demonstration, and that of the vulgar through rhetoric and poetry and, to some extent, dialectic. Contrast the discussion in Chapter I of the importance of personal insight and discovery for the philosopher. See *Sa'ādah* 88:16–18/38:19–39:1.

<sup>56</sup> At the same time, there is a curious kinship between certain aspects of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*. As was noted above, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* departs from the structure of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* by emphasizing the role of the agent intellect in human development at the expense of the other secondary causes and, to some extent, the first cause. The former work also fails to locate the agent intellect in the supralunar sphere, as the latter work does. These features of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* may be seen as the counterpart to the indications in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* that philosophical psychology, not traditional metaphysics, serves as the theoretical foundation for human science and political science. The two works also share a refusal to acknowledge the possibility of supreme rulers without theoretical perfection, in contrast to *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, which contemplate cities of excellence governed by less accomplished supreme rulers. Finally, the emphasis in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* on striving for the attainment of perfection is reminiscent of the focus in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* on investigation and discovery.

give a supernatural explanation for the operation of practical reason, i.e., to speak of revelation from a cosmic force, where *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* speaks more mundanely of a wholly human faculty, deliberation. This analysis is superficial because the cosmologies of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* are not supernatural in any deep sense. The revelation of which they speak is presented in terms of the impact of the principle or principles of rationality on the development of human reason and, through this, on the formation of practical judgments. *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* is similarly concerned with rational perfection, and it advances the view that a theoretical understanding of practical things should precede a practical understanding of those things in the best case. On another level, the differing theoretical models could be seen as responsible for the portrayal of practical reason as dynamic in the one work and as static in the other two works: in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* practical reason, like theoretical reason, appears as a fluid process of investigation,<sup>57</sup> whereas the image ordinarily conjured up by “revelation” is of an instantaneous injection of conclusions, without the need for a process of discovery. However, this explanation does not withstand scrutiny either, since *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* both depict revelation as the imparting of a faculty or ability that enables the recipient to discover the desired knowledge himself.<sup>58</sup>

The works' disparate treatments may also be related to the fact that revelation in both *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* is intimately bound up with the activity of the agent intellect, a subject not explicitly discussed in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*. Rather, the impression given in the first part of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* is that human understanding, theoretical and practical, can be explained without recourse to the agent intellect or, possibly, that the agent intellect is an explanatory principle but not a metaphysical entity, as that term is ordinarily used.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the detailed discussion of practical reason in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* may be a consequence, in part, of the silence of that work about the role of the agent intellect in the development of human understanding, inasmuch as this

<sup>57</sup> See *Sa'ādah* 65:19–68:2/18:5–20:3, 83:15–84:7/34:10–35:1.

<sup>58</sup> *Siyāsah* 79:15–17, *Madīnah* 58:23. Cf. *Madīnah* 220:8–13/51:5–9 (possibly referring to what is described as revelation of conclusions in *Kitāb al-Millāh*).

<sup>59</sup> In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the supreme ruler is said to become, among other things, wise, a philosopher, and in possession of complete practical wisdom as a result of the interaction with the agent intellect. *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* links revelation expressly and directly with the practical rational perfection of the recipient of revelation (by calling him the real king [*Siyāsah* 79:12] and by stating that because of revelation he can define and direct things and actions toward happiness [*Siyāsah* 79:16–17]). In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the agent intellect is said to have an effect on both aspects of the rational faculty (*Madīnah* 244:7–8/58:18–19), whereas in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* this is implied by the description of the agent intellect transforming the passive intellect into the acquired intellect.

omission creates a need to explain how practical reason operates in the absence of any interaction with the agent intellect. To be sure, the accounts of revelation in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* also are incomplete without such an explanation, if revelation supplies the supreme ruler only with a faculty for arriving at practical judgments, and not with the judgments themselves. In this respect, the account of practical reason in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* is compatible with the portrait of revelation contained in those two works. In other words, from another point of view, what needs explaining is the omission in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* of a discussion of the practical reasoning process following the description of the rational faculty's interaction with the agent intellect. Were Alfarabi to spell out the details of the practical reasoning process in those two works, it would become obvious that the faculty that revelation provides is, in large measure, what the Greek philosophers called practical wisdom. So understood, the supreme ruler's practical judgments would be explicable solely in terms of natural processes,<sup>60</sup> and thus revelation, and possibly the agent intellect, would be revealed as images, pedagogic devices, whose purpose is to depict graphically, and provisionally, inaccessible philosophic ideas.<sup>61</sup> The result would thus be to undermine the regime's claim to a divine origin.

Difficulties also arise if one tries to account for the prominence in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* of imaginative representations in the education of the citizenry at large, as contrasted with *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, in which rhetorical persuasion and imaginative representations both play a central role. Rhetoric is or resembles a syllogistic art in that it makes use of arguments, among other things, and seeks to influence a person to act in a particular fashion as a result of a cognitive appreciation of the truth or falsity of considerations related to acting in that manner.<sup>62</sup> Purely imaginative representations, in contrast, dispense with reasoning altogether and cause a person to be drawn towards or repelled from acting in a particular fashion without the mediation of a cognitive appreciation of the truth or falsity of relevant considerations.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> See *Millah* 44:7–13 (natural science has made clear how revelation occurs and results in the ability to determine the opinions and actions of excellence, i.e., to establish a religion of excellence).

<sup>61</sup> The logic of the preceding argument requires that revelation play a far more central role in the exercise and perfection of practical reason than it would in connection with theoretical reason. While there is support in Alfarabi's writings for this point of view (see note 52 above and the accompanying text), it raises complex issues that cannot, in my opinion, be considered settled.

<sup>62</sup> *Fuṣūl* No. 55, 63:3–4, *Khaṭābah* 31:3, and *Risālah* 225:15–226:1 (rhetoric is a syllogistic art). On the tendency to confuse rhetoric and poetry, see *Kitāb al-Shi'r* 92:17–93:7.

<sup>63</sup> *Fuṣūl* No. 55, 63:4–10, *Shi'r* 94:1–14. According to *Risālah Ṣuddira bihā al-Kitāb*

Indeed, as Alfarabi points out in more than one work, a person may be moved to act in a particular fashion by an imaginative representation of something even though the person simultaneously knows or believes that the relevant considerations dictate acting in a contrary fashion (*Fuṣūl* No. 55, 63:10–64:2, *Shi'r* 94:14–15).

Given this understanding of the distinction between imaginative representation and rhetorical persuasion, two explanations of the greater weight given to rhetorical persuasion in *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* suggest themselves. The first turns on the special theoretical orientation of *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* as compared with the other two works. The inclusion in *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* of rhetorical persuasion alongside its imaginative counterpart may reflect the work's orientation toward the necessity or desirability of investigation and discovery, since for Alfarabi the art of rhetoric has a somewhat stronger claim to being a logical art than does the art of poetry, which is primarily confined to imaginative representations. In addition, if *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* are taken to be two examples of religions or models to be followed in founding a religion or a regime, the silence of these works about the place of rhetoric could be viewed as partly attributable to the works themselves being exercises in rhetoric to a greater degree, for example, than *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah*. According to this theory, *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* speak less about rhetoric—and practical reason—because part of their purpose is to clarify the nature of rhetoric and practical reason through deeds, whereas *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* has a more theoretical orientation and so clarifies these topics through speeches.

An alternative explanation for the greater prominence in *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* of rhetorical instruction by rhetorical methods emphasizes the different types of questions being addressed in the three works. This explanation does not depend on *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* being more theoretical, or more investigative, than *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*. Rather, as the title of *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* (“The Attainment of Happiness”) suggests, the focus of that work is the practical question of the *means* to attain happiness, whereas the other two books focus more on the prior question of what things are or look like. Although according to this theory all three would still be philosophic works first and foremost, their differences would stem from the circumstance that *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, on the one hand, and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-*

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225:15–226:1, poetry is also a syllogistic art. However, in *Qawānīn fī Smā'at al-Shi'r* 268:16–18, Alfarabi describes the art of poetry as going beyond syllogism, in the sense of induction, example, physiognomy, and similar things that have the force of syllogism. (I translate *firāsah* as physiognomy). See *Kitāb al-Khaṭābah* 79:12–18 on the role of facial expressions, etc., in the art of rhetoric.

*Madaniyyah*, on the other, address different stages in the investigator's project.

*The Contrast between Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah and  
Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*

As became clear in the preceding sections of this chapter, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* share a common approach insofar as they provide a description of the supralunar and sublunar spheres prior to the account of political life, although they exhibit many differences, of substance or of emphasis, as regards specific doctrines subsumed under the general heading of metaphysics and natural philosophy. As was the case with the other parallel works, some but not all of the major differences in the political teachings of the two works can be traced to these differences in metaphysics and natural philosophy.

It may be helpful to summarize the differences that came to light in the preceding chapters. First, according to *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, it appears to be possible for a few extraordinary individuals to attain complete theoretical perfection, that is, man's rational potential is capable of actualization to the point where it comes to resemble the separate substances (except insofar as their separateness is eternal) (*Siyāsah* 35:4–11), becomes divine (*yaṣīr ilāhiyyan*) (*Siyāsah* 36:4–5), achieves conjunction with the agent intellect (*Siyāsah* 79:8–11), and reaches or nearly reaches the rank of that intellect (*Siyāsah* 35:10, 36:1–3). In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* this ability is presented somewhat less affirmatively inasmuch as the work says that the human rational faculty is "as if united" with the agent intellect (*Madīnah* 244:16/59:3) and asserts that human reason at its peak will always be of a lesser rank than the agent intellect (*Madīnah* 204:15–206:3/46:7–10). Second, according to *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* only one reasoning process—based on an actualized theoretical and practical reason—warrants the name "revelation" and makes possible the practical wisdom of a supreme ruler (*Siyāsah* 79:3–80:1). *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, in contrast, envisions two parallel tracks: "revelation," which is depicted in terms similar to those used in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, and "prophecy," which is based on a powerful and perfected imagination united with the agent intellect. Third, *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* presents a range of rulers of political orders seemingly productive of political excellence (*Madīnah* 250:4–252:10/60:15–61:11), whereas *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* acknowledges only one regime of excellence explicitly and fails to indicate whether a regime ruled by someone inferior to a supreme ruler can attain excellence, other than accidentally (*Siyāsah* 81:2–4). Fourth, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* is in a key respect less political than *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, which uses "political" in its ordinary

meaning to refer to an entity with geographical boundaries, institutional structures, and a common language and way of life. *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* conditions the attainment of excellence, goodness, and happiness upon a certain kind of understanding and way of life. But it portrays these as capable of being instilled by a special kind of “supreme ruler,” someone whose teachings can decisively influence people in any country or generation, people who may thereby become strangers in their native lands (*Siyāsah* 80:7–11). Thus “the political regime” (*al-siyāsah al-madaniyyah*) refers in the last analysis to a way of life or education devoted to instilling the self-governance whereby individuals actualize their full human potential; and this may, but need not, coincide with the institutional government of their place of residence.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* asserts that the human *species* needs communal living in fairly extensive and complex societies in order to survive and to attain excellence (*Siyāsah* 69:16–17). *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* makes a comparable assertion as regards *individuals* (*kull wāḥid min al-nās*) (*Madīnah* 228:2–3/53:8–9). *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* asserts emphatically that ultimate perfection and the most excellent human good are not possible in prepolitical associations (*Madīnah* 230:3–4/54:1–2), that is, in associations of less magnitude, complexity, and self-sufficiency than a city. *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* lacks a comparable assertion. Finally, *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* contains several statements that have no counterpart in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, namely, that practical reason was made to serve theoretical reason (*Madīnah* 208:2–3/47:1–2); that happiness is always sought for its own sake and never for the sake of anything else (*Madīnah* 206:7–10/46:14–16); that the supreme ruler occupies the most perfect rank of humanity and the highest level of happiness (*Madīnah* 244:15–16/59:2–3); and that contemplation, deliberation, and the impulse toward discovery arise naturally in human beings once the primary intelligibles are grasped (*Madīnah* 204:6–8/45:22–46:1). As regards the last of these statements, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* implies the opposite by emphasizing the element of striving in the attainment of happiness.

A few correlations suggest themselves. In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* the tendency in the metaphysical portion to emphasize the importance of the agent intellect, which is the force for reason in man, goes hand in hand with the tendency in the political portion of the work to concentrate on the rational human possibilities. To be sure, the first cause—which dominates the metaphysics of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*—is a rational force in the universe by virtue of being the absolutely simple incorporeal principle. At the same time, the first cause is the source of all the beings, corporeal and incorporeal; as such, it represents both nature and reason in

<sup>64</sup> See *Millah* 55:17–56:3. Contrast Najjar (1964), p. 12.



the universe, that is, physical as well as transcendent existence. The special function of the agent intellect, on the other hand, is to transform potentially intelligible being into actually intelligible being—whether being that can be intellected or being that can engage in intellection as well as be an object of intellection. The agent intellect thus stands for the movement away from nature towards reason, whereas the first cause represents both nature and reason.

That this difference in focus—reason viewed in contrast to nature versus reality joining reason and nature—pervades the two books can be seen from the selections of natural philosophy included within them. For example, in its classification of the soul, *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* gives an account of all five faculties of the soul, including the nutritive part (*Madīnah* 166:1–12/35:1–10), whereas in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* the nutritive faculty is not even mentioned along with the other four faculties (*Siyāsah* 32:14–15). To the same point, one of the most extensive discussions in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* treats human anatomy (including lengthy accounts of the body's organs, down to various types of nerves, their interaction, and the way body heat affects the body's temperament in general) (*Madīnah* 174:10–196:3/37:12–43:8). In these chapters Alfarabi treats the reader to an account of the details of reproduction and of the existence and significance of male and female in the entire plant and animal kingdoms. None of the foregoing have counterparts in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*. Rather, the subrational aspects of human nature that influence human reason more or less directly are acknowledged, although not made objects of thematic treatment, and those that have no import other than for the preservation of man's bodily existence are ignored entirely.<sup>65</sup>

The difference in the two books' teachings about the possibility of attaining complete theoretical perfection may be traceable to the tendency of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* to view all existence through the prism of rational existence, while in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the dual nature of being is persistently maintained. In other words, Alfarabi may have been led in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* to speak of human reason as "divine" as a result of its interaction with the agent intellect and as "on the level" or "close" to the level of the agent intellect, while in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* he speaks of it as "below" the level of the agent intellect, because the former work abstracts from man's bodily existence whereas the latter work does not. The teaching of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* would then be: if human beings are capable of overcoming the bodily aspect of their nature, this is what the human possibilities will look like. Or the work might

<sup>65</sup> *Madīnah* 206:16–208:1/46:21–22 (the nutritive faculty was made to serve the body alone; sense perception and imagination were made to serve both the body and the rational faculty). See also *Madīnah* 196:4–5/43:8–9 (male and female do not differ as regards sense perception, imagination, and reason).

be declaring affirmatively that human beings, or some individuals, are in fact capable of complete transcendence. The teaching of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, on the other hand, would be either that man cannot completely divorce himself from his bodily nature or, conditionally, that if man cannot thus divorce himself, then the human possibilities are limited in the manner described.

The relative importance ascribed to man's rational and bodily natures in the two works can likewise explain the disparities in the way they treat the faculty of imagination as a source of practical insights and as a force in human development. Apart from acknowledging that imagination plays a role in the evolution of human volition (*Siyāsah* 72:6–9, 73:15–17), *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* systematically underplays its existence and its power. In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, on the other hand, the imaginative faculty is dealt with on the same basis as the other faculties of the soul each time that the soul as a whole is discussed. In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* imitation (*muḥākah*) is not mentioned among imagination's functions (*Siyāsah* 33:10–13). In contrast, *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* contains extended discussions of imitation and presents it as imagination's activity when it is most powerful and perfect. In *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* imagination is said to be capable of perceiving the useful and the harmful, and the pleasant and the painful (*Siyāsah* 33:12). However, the rational faculty can perceive both of these and distinguish the noble from the base in addition (*Siyāsah* 33:1–3), whereas imagination is incapable of the latter discrimination (*Siyāsah* 33:12–13). In other words, as *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* depicts the soul, almost anything imagination can do, another part of the soul can do as well or better, with the single exception of imagination's ability to falsify the sense perceptions it has received as soon as the objects themselves have disappeared from view (*Siyāsah* 33:10–12). In *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, in contrast, the types of perceptions that reason and imagination share are dropped from the description of the rational faculty (*Madīnah* 164:13–15/34:22–23), and the activity unique to imagination is elaborated. Finally, imagination's ability to combine sense impressions in ways at times faithful to objects as they exist and at times in disregard of reality is dignified in the first half of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* by being referred to as an expression of the faculty's natural tendency to "form judgments" (*Madīnah* 168:8–13/35:19–22). The description of this tendency culminates in two chapters devoted to an analysis of imagination as a source of true dreams and of prophecy, an analysis that has no parallel in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*.

The portrayal of the city of excellence in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* exclusively in terms of the rule of the possessor of revelation, i.e., the supreme ruler without qualification, is likewise traceable to the predominantly rational orientation of that work. *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* is in

this sense more idealistic than *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, insofar as it concentrates on the best case conceivable, whether in the context of the individual or in the context of the political community. Concomitantly, *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is more realistic, both in its description of the limits of theoretical perfection and in its expansion of rulers and regimes of excellence to include rulers without philosophy and rule by a group of people each of whom contributes one or more of the qualities possessed by the supreme ruler. In this respect, the peculiar orientation of *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* can be seen as lowering the expectations of political life, or as enlarging the definition of the best political community.

At the same time, and at first glance paradoxically, the distinctive portrayals of theoretical perfection and the city of excellence contained in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* may be ultimately attributable to a less optimistic view of human nature and of nature as a whole than is adopted in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*. For example, as was suggested above, the decision in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* to deemphasize man's bodily nature in certain respects could itself be a consequence of viewing man's dual nature and certain aspects of the natural universe as greater threats to the possibility of human perfection and political excellence than they are seen to be in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*. The characterization in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* of reasoning as arising "naturally" once primary cognitions are grasped (*Madīnah* 204:6–7/45:22–23) is one manifestation of the disparity of views.<sup>66</sup> Not only does *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* emphasize the need for striving to ensure human development, intellectual and moral (*Siyāsah* 71:14–72:14). In an extended passage without any parallel in *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, Alfarabi notes the wide disparities among the natural abilities of individuals, the susceptibility of people's natural inclinations to change as a result of external influences, the need for training to reinforce people's natural tendencies, and the ability of people with lesser natures to surpass people with superior natures by dint of training (*Siyāsah* 75:4–77:17). *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* is thus unexpectedly cautious about people's innate endowments: such gifts can easily be lost, and as a consequence, superior aspects of people's natures must be continually reinforced to be preserved.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, *Al-Siyāsah al-Ma-*

<sup>66</sup> See Aristotle *Metaphysics* I. 1 980a21 (all human beings by nature desire to know); *Falsafat Aristūtālīs* 59–71.

<sup>67</sup> The passage on human nature referred to may be the key to some of the perplexing features of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, such as the contrast between 74:13 (what is intended by human existence is to achieve happiness, which is equated with ultimate perfection) and 78:1 (what is intended by human existence is to achieve ultimate happiness), or the contrast between the account of the genesis of actions that lead to happiness at 73:9–18 and the parallel account at 79:3–80:1. The first of the two accounts of the origin of the means to happiness appears to have the individual as its focus. At that stage, "happiness" is equated with the absolute good (*Siyāsah* 72:15) and ultimate perfection (*Siyāsah* 74:13). Then Al-

*daniyyah* depicts the natural universe as potentially less hospitable to human development than is human nature. In contrast to the agent intellect, which has human perfection as its object, the natural universe may facilitate or obstruct human development, and even when the celestial bodies contribute positively to the agent intellect's efforts, they do so inadvertently (*Siyāsah* 73:1–8). The message is thus twofold. First, not only are superior natures rare; they must be assiduously cultivated to achieve their potential. Second, any voluntary actions undertaken to ensure that goal will have to contend with the workings of a sometimes hostile universe.

The abstraction in *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* from man's physical nature can thus be seen as a response to the work's appreciation of the potential antagonism between nature and reason as forces in the universe. On the one hand this leads the work to explore more forcefully than *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* the purely rational view of human existence. As a consequence, the work withdraws from politics in the traditional sense in favor of a metaphorical understanding of political activity. Education replaces participation in political life as the highest form of practical excellence because it is in the governance of individuals by individuals that the dictates of reason will be least encumbered by the constraints of material existence. Thus, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* substitutes the regime of excellence for the city of excellence. Further, probably as a result of its virtual abandonment of a politics of excellence in the name of a life of excellence, the work shows a disproportionately great amount of interest in specific types of nonexcellent cities, as compared with *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*.<sup>68</sup> Thus, *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* gives a detailed account of the basic features of specific nonexcellent cities, noting which one is the best (*Siyāsah* 94:1–2) and which most likely to permit the emergence of excel-

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farabi inquires into the conditions for realizing the means that lead to happiness. It is in the course of this discussion that he observes not only that some people are by nature incapable of following the path described at 73:9–18, but that persons with superior natures run a serious risk of losing their natural advantage and of being overtaken by people with inferior natures. It is unclear how far training can elevate a person who is not superior by nature, and in particular whether a person with a less than superior nature can through training be made the equal of a person with a superior nature who has been properly trained. But it is clear that it would be impossible for a person naturally suited for the highest human achievements to realize those achievements on his or her own. In other words, to prevent nature's bounty from being squandered, it is essential to provide for the education of those who can benefit from it. Thus, the passage on human nature leads as a matter of course to the restatement of human happiness as ultimate happiness and to the second account of the genesis of the means to happiness, i.e., the account of the supreme ruler without qualification who, according to the Ancients, should be seen as attaining revelation (*Siyāsah* 79:12–13). The implication is, as Alfarabi argues in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, that truly understood, the idea of philosophy entails a species of practical excellence.

<sup>68</sup> Of course, *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* contains an extended discussion of the opinions of citizens of nonexcellent cities (*Madīnah* 286:2–end/71:23–end).

lence among its members (*Siyāsah* 101:1–5). In the last analysis, therefore, *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is the more political and the more optimistic of the two works, since it links the excellence of individuals to the excellence of political communities and holds out the hope of viable cities of excellence. In the last analysis *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* is a more individualistic and less optimistic work, one in which human excellence is portrayed as much less directly dependent on the quality of political life than is the case according to *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*.

#### E. CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to resolve some of the issues raised in earlier chapters by the differing and at times conflicting teachings contained in Alfarabi's political treatises. It was set in motion by the belief that the differences among the works could not be explained simply in terms of the development of Alfarabi's thought. Consequently, this chapter has explored an alternative hypothesis—that the differences among the parallel political works arise out of Alfarabi's philosophical method, reflect his intention, and point toward his deepest political teaching. This alternative hypothesis presupposes that Alfarabi had something like a master plan in composing the parallel works—in other words, that these works comprise an integrated corpus the individual parts of which the reader must properly arrange in order to perceive the total Farabian picture.

This hypothesis rests, in turn, on two premises. First, there is the teaching suggested in Alfarabi's logical commentaries and elsewhere that personal discovery is a condition of philosophy. Accordingly, properly understood, the role of a teacher or writer is to instill in the student or reader a deep appreciation of the merits of the most philosophically convincing positions, some or all of which may be mutually exclusive. Such an appreciation requires recognition of the strengths and limitations of each position and presupposes a stage of perplexity in which the student's understanding of the issues is sharpened by the persuasive power of the opposing arguments. Second, to some extent the existence of the parallel works can be seen as originating in Alfarabi's desire to flesh out the meaning and consequences of different understandings of political science and political life, with each work resting on—and testing out—a different set of theoretical assumptions. So viewed, none of the parallel works can be presumed authoritative on its face, although one may ultimately be judged authoritative if, after examination, the picture it presents is found to be more credible than the others.

While the approach explored in this chapter has helped to resolve many of the perplexities in question, it cannot be judged a complete success. Four limitations are especially noteworthy. First, as we have seen, al-

though in some instances there is a meaningful correlation between the different metaphysical doctrines or the doctrines of natural philosophy, on the one hand, and the political teaching, on the other, not all of the most distinctive differences among the works can be explained by recourse to this relationship. Second, even when there is such a correlation, it often appears that there might be additional principles or purposes responsible for the discrepancies noted. In particular, the impression is inescapable that *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is intended, at least in part, to be a religious version of a project for which *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* is meant to be the secular counterpart. This suggests that there may be a distinctive rhetoric of each work partially or wholly independent of the doctrinal content. To take another example, if *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* are seen as two illustrations of an actual religion or regime that a ruler of excellence might devise, some of the differences separating these two works and the other two parallel works may be due to the circumstance that the other two works furnish an account of the ruler's art and its theoretical foundation, whereas *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* and *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* are examples of the ruler's art at work. Accordingly, some of the differences separating the works would be due to the fact that the four works, or two pairs of works, represent different stages in Alfarabi's political project. Third, upon scrutiny none of the works remains as internally consistent as first appeared. In particular, *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* opens with a distinctive orientation toward political science and rulership, but gradually evolves, so that many of the doctrines referred to in the later aphorisms resemble doctrines of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*. Similarly, *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* appears to contain both a theory of rulership akin to that of *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and a contrasting theory resembling that of the initial sections of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*. Finally, this analysis has concentrated on Alfarabi's political treatises, having recourse to his commentaries infrequently and, on those occasions, to his logical commentaries primarily. Alfarabi's commentaries on Plato's *Laws* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, together with his summaries of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophies, offer additional, fertile sources for understanding Alfarabi's own political teachings. Clearly the approach to the parallel works adopted here would benefit considerably from a thorough analysis of these other works. Until such a truly comprehensive inquiry into Alfarabi's political philosophy appears, we, like the investigator in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, know what topics to address but not what the outcome will be.



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