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Journal of Islamic Philosophy

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The *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* encourages the academic study of Islamic philosophy. The journal provides a unique peer-reviewed forum for scholars interested in the philosophical study of diverse topics in Islamic philosophy. Classical Islamic philosophy of past masters will be re-examined with a new focus. The underlying issues regarding the many ethical, metaphysical, existential, and epistemological challenges posed by western philosophy will be explored in comparison to Islamic philosophy. We hope to serve as an impetus toward the renewal of the rich and dynamic spirit of Islamic philosophical discourse in the current era.

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Contents

Editorial 1
MACKSOOD AFTAB

Disconnection and Doubt: Revisiting Schacht's Theories of *Ijtihād* 3
AARON SPEVACK

Being-towards-God: Heidegger and the Relationship Between Man and God in Muslim Ritual Prayer 24
MATTHEW A. MACDONALD

A Critical Study of *Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*: The Role of Islam in the Philosophy of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī 45
ALEXANDER WAIN

Behind the Good, the Bad, and the Obligatory in al-Ghazālī's *al-Mustaṣfā min al-uṣūl* 79
OMAR MOAD

Literature Review:

Ibn Sabʿīn and Islamic Orthodoxy: A Reassessment 94
BENJAMIN G. COOK

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Abbreviations of Journals and References

BJMES	*British Journal of Middle East Studies*
IJMES	*International Journal of Middle East Studies*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JIP	*Journal of Islamic Philosophy*

CAP	*Classical Arabic Philosophy, An Anthology of Sources*, trans. Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007).
CCAP	*The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
EI^2	*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–2006).
EIr	*Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982–).
EP	*The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, 4 vols. (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1967).
HIP, Corbin	Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993).
HIP, Nasr and Leaman	*History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996).
HIP^1, Fakhry *HIP*^{2}, Fakhry	Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970; 2nd edition 1983).
HMP, Sharif	*A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M. M. Sharif (Wiesbaden: O. Harrasowitz, 1963)
MPP	*Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (New York: Free Press, 1963).
REP	*The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy,* ed. Edward Craig, 10 vols. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

Short forms of frequently-cited works

Afnan, *Avicenna*	Sohail M. Afnan, *Avicenna: His Life and Works* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958).
Alfarabi, trans. Mahdi	*Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002)
Arberry, *Avicenna*	A. J. Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology* (London: John Murray, 1951).
Averroes, *Tahāfut*	Averroes, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* (*Tahāfut at-Tahāfut*), trans. Simon Van den Bergh, 2 vols. (London: Luzac, 1954).
Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, trans. Marmura	Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of Healing*, trans. Michael Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005).
Avicenna, *Najāt*, trans. Rahman	*Avicenna's Psychology: An English Translation of Kitāb al-Najāt, Book II, Chapter VI*, trans. Fazlur Rahman (Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1952).
Bouyges, *Essai*	Maurice Bouyges, *Essai de Chronologie des œuvres de Al-Ghazali* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1959).
Corbin, *Avicenna*	Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, trans. W. R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).
Davidson, *Alfarabi*	Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
Fakhry, *Occasionalism*	Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and Its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958).
Frank, *Creation*	Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1992).
Frank, *Ghazālī*	Richard M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

Griffel, *Ghazālī*	Frank Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
Ghazālī, *Incoherence*, trans. Marmura	Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, ed. and trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2000).
Gohlman, *Ibn Sīnā*	William E. Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sīnā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974).
Goichon, *Avicenna*	Anne Marie Goichon, *The Philosophy of Avicenna and Its Influence on Medieval Europe*, trans. M. S. Khan (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1969).
Gutas, *Avicenna*	Dimtri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988).
Ibn Khaldūn, trans. Rosenthal	Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967).
Leaman, *Medieval Islamic Philosophy*	Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
Macdonald, *Muslim Theology*	Duncan B. Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926).
Maimonides, trans. Friedlander	Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedlander (London: Routledge and Sons, 1904).
Maimonides, trans. Pines	Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).
McCarthy, *Freedom*	Richard McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Boston: Twayne, 1980).
Nasr, *Cosmological Doctrines*	Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn*	Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy* (Tehran: Academy of Philosophy Press, 1978).
Rahman, *Mullā Ṣadrā*	Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975)
Rasāʾil	Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, ed. Buṭrus Bustānī, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957).
Shāfiʿī, *Risāla*, trans. Khadduri	Shāfiʿī, *Risāla*, trans. M. Khadduri (Cambridge, MA: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961).
Walzer, *Farabi*	Richard Walzer, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).
Walzer, *Greek*	Richard Walzer, *Greek into Arabic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).
Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*	M. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1985).
Wensinck, *Creed*	A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1932).
Wolfson, *Kalam*	Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

A Critical Study of *Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*: The Role of Islam in the Philosophy of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī

Alexander Wain

The purpose of this article is to assess the extent to which the thought of medieval Muslim philosopher, Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, and as principally contained in his *Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila* (or 'Principles of the opinions of the citizens of the virtuous city,' henceforth known as *Mabādiʾ*), is compatible with the Islamic tradition. Before doing this, however, I provide a few words on both why this study is necessary and why the *Mabādiʾ* has been chosen as the main text to be looked at.

Those scholars who concern themselves with the study of al-Fārābī have traditionally concluded that his legacy, in like manner to those of other Muslim philosophers from both before and after his time (such as al-Rāzī or Ibn Sīnā), essentially amounts to a continuation of the Greek philosophical tradition, owing relatively little to Islamic thought or ideology. Thus, Majid Fakhry states, in both a 1965 and separate 1986 article, that al-Fārābī is essentially a thinker concerned with uniting Aristotelian and Platonic thought, so placing him in a Greek intellectual tradition of late antiquity called Neoplatonism.[1] To substantiate this, Fakhry points to numerous of al-Fārābī's works that apparently illustrate such a preoccupation—one in particular being his *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm* [The enumeration of the sciences]. In that work, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is discussed in full as a means of determining the nature of existing entities and the nature of those existents that have no bodies (i.e., incorporeal entities).[2]

1 Majid Fakhry, "Al-Farabi and the Reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle," in Majid Fakhry, *Philosophy, Dogma and the Impact of Greek Thought in Islam* (Aldershot, VT: Variorum, 1994), 469–478, at 471–472.

2 Majid Fakhry, "The Ontological Argument in the Arabic Tradition: The Case of al-Farabi," in Majid Fakhry, *Philosophy, Dogma and the Impact of Greek Thought in Islam*, 5–17, at 11–12.

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Consequently, the foundations of it are clearly Aristotelian. But at the same time, an attempt is also made in *Iḥṣāʾ* to move beyond Aristotle and, when talking about the nature of incorporeal existents, establish that there must be one that is more perfect than all others, preceding all else and imparting both unity and truth to all things.[3] This, Fakhry claims, is a Platonic preoccupation absent in the work of Aristotle. This is indeed true as, although in *Metaphysics* Lambda 7 Aristotle postulates the existence of an incorporeal Prime Mover who is eternal, precedes all else, and is more perfect than all other things,[4] this entity is by no means alone and, in Lambda 8, Aristotle goes on to speculate that there are either forty-seven or fifty-five such Prime Movers, all of whom are responsible for the different kinds of movement to be found in the heavens.[5] In Plato's *Timaeus*, on the other hand, it is implied that only one such entity, termed the *demiurge*, exists. Thus, in maintaining that there is only one such perfect being in his *Iḥṣāʾ*, Fakhry claims that al-Fārābī is essentially incorporating a Platonic idea into something that is Aristotelian in other respects, so making him a Neoplatonist.

Furthermore, in addition to Fakhry, I. Netton, R. Walzer,[6] T.-A. Druart,[7] and D. L. Black have also pursued a similar (although not always identical) line. Thus, in an article by Black (1996) we find it stated that al-Fārābī's ideas revolve primarily around Aristotle's, occasionally being modified by that of the Neoplatonists.[8] To illustrate this, Black looks at al-Fārābī's discussion of the nature and creation of the universe in *Mabādiʾ*. There he adopts a twofold view of the universe which divides it into worlds both below and

3 Ibid., 12

4 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 1998), 373.

5 Ibid., 376.

6 For an example of his work taking this line, see his commentary on *Mabadiʾ*, referenced below.

7 See both her "Al-Farabi and Emanationism," in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John F. Wippel (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 23–43 and "Al-Farabi's Causation of the Heavenly Bodies," in *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, ed. P. Morewedge (New York: Caravan Books, 1981), 35–45.

8 Deborah L. Black, "Al-Farabi," in *HIP,* Nasr and Leaman, 178–197, at 181.

above the moon, the latter being more perfect than the former and with a Supreme Being sitting at the top. This structure, Black says, is essentially Aristotelian (see his *Physics*). But, she points out, in Aristotle there is a gap between the Supreme Beings (or Prime Movers) and the sublunary world below, the two not being connected in any way or sense. In al-Fārābī, however, this gap is filled with the Neoplatonic idea of emanation as a means by which the (again Platonically singular) Supreme Being creates the sublunary world (see below for more detail on this issue), something not thought of by either Aristotle or his later followers.[9] Thus, Black claims, both Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ideas are present in al-Fārābī, appearing intertwined therein. Equally, if we then turn to Netton when he discusses al-Fārābī's epistemology in *Al-Farabi and his School* (1992), he states on similar evidence that al-Fārābī's thought is likewise a "mixture of the Aristotelian and the Neoplatonic [schools]."[10] Thus, from just this brief survey, it can clearly be seen that a trend exists which seeks to classify al-Fārābī's work as a continuation of the Greek tradition. What is more, all of these authors fail to mention Islam as a substantial influence upon al-Fārābī's thinking. What I intend to examine here, however, is the possibility that, although the presence of Greek ideas in al-Fārābī is definite (as illustrated) and cannot be denied, those ideas, when they are used, are underscored by an Islamic theology. In other words, I wish to see if it is possible that Greek ideas are used by al-Fārābī in such a way as to modify (or adapt) them to a consideration of Islamic thought, so suggesting that it is the latter that is more central to al-Fārābī's work because it clearly controls the presentation and form of the other. If this is so, it would suggest that scholars such as Fakhry, Black or Netton have misunderstood the role of Greek thought in al-Fārābī's work, essentially making it too central.

Such then is my reason for writing this article and, as already mentioned, I intend to focus principally upon al-Fārābī's *Mabādiʾ*. This choice is dictated by the fact that the *Mabādiʾ*, although

9 Ibid., 189.

10 Ian Richard Netton, *Al-Farabi and his School* (London: Curzon Press, 1992), 52.

neglectful of some topics al-Fārābī refers to in other treatises (most particularly logic), is nonetheless a comprehensive overview of his work as a whole. Thus, it takes in most of the major topics al-Fārābī showed a preoccupation with—namely politics, God, the cosmos, creation (or, more precisely, emanation), justice, life after death, prophecy, and the nature of humanity. In this respect it is almost unique, as the majority of al-Fārābī's treatises tend to deal with only one subject in depth (e.g., his *Introductory Sections on Logic* deals only with logic).[11] Consequently, as our aim shall be more satisfactorily achieved if Islam can be identified as an ideological principle underlying al-Fārābī's thinking as a whole (and not just in the case of one particular aspect of it), we must look at the *Mabādiʾ* as a work that displays that thinking in its most comprehensive form. It should be noted, however, that the *Mabādiʾ* cannot be considered in isolation from the other texts al-Fārābī is known to have written. This is because, although comprehensive in the sense of being representative of the types of issues discussed by al-Fārābī, it may not be so with regard to his opinions thereon. It may be that the *Mabādiʾ* does not represent al-Fārābī's most considered (or mature) view on the topics he writes about and, as such, would not supply us with an accurate representation of his thought. Thus, in order to provide as complete a picture as possible of al-Fārābī's thinking, it is necessary for us to flesh out our argument with further evidence from his other works when and where appropriate. In particular, it is of value to also look at his *Siyasa al-madaniyya* (known in English as either the 'Principles of being' or 'The political regime') and *Risāla fi-l-ʿaql* ('Letter concerning the intellect'). The former of these is often seen as a parallel piece to the *Mabādiʾ*, concerning itself with many similar themes (such as politics, the natural world and how it is ordered),[12] whereas the latter is a detailed treatise on

11 See Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, "Introductory Sections on Logic," trans. D. M. Dunlop, *Islamic Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (1956), 264–282.

12 *MPP*, 31–32.

psychology that also parallels the *Mabādiʾ* in many respects.[13] As such, and where relevant, these works (among others) are also examined.

Unfortunately, we do not have the space to examine everything al-Fārābī addressed in the *Mabādiʾ*. Instead, we must take a general overview encompassing his ideas on the key issues of creation, human nature, prophecy, and politics. To a lesser extent, his notion of God is also looked at.

The Process of Emanation

This first section looks at al-Fārābī's proposed explanation for the origin and creation of the universe—that is, at his account of the process of emanation. I begin by setting out briefly what al-Fārābī has to say on this topic, and then proceed to examine where these ideas may have come from and what type of ideology may underpin them.

Emanation (Chapters 2, 3 and 8 of the *Mabādiʾ*)

Al-Fārābī begins his second chapter of the *Mabādiʾ* by stating that "The First (*al-awwal*) is that from which everything which exists comes into existence."[14] Thus, everything that exists (unless, we are later told, it is a product of man's will or desire) comes from the First, or God who is, al-Fārābī claims, the first thing to have existed. Furthermore, "The genesis of that which comes into existence from it [i.e., the First] takes place by way of an emanation . . . so that the existence of something different from the First emanates from the First's existence."[15]

Thus, the process of creation is described as being a type of emanation—that is, an 'emergence' of other entities from the existence of the First itself. The exact nature of this emergence remains obscure, but the Arabic term used is *fayḍ*, which provides a sense of something overflowing—i.e., that the First 'overflows' in some way to give rise to other entities. From other parts of the text we learn

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13 Alfarabi, "The Letter Concerning the Intellect," in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic and Jewish Traditions*, trans. Arthur Hyman, ed. Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 215–221, passim.

14 Richard Walzer (trans.), *al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī's Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 89.

15 Ibid., 89–91.

that this is the result of the First's self-contemplation, suggesting that the emanations (or at least the first one) are the product of the First's self-image, or what it thinks of itself, and which might hint at a similar process occurring as that which happens when humanity's acquired intellect is formed. Nonetheless, in addition to this, emanation is also described as taking place out of nothing (i.e., no pre-existing matter) due to the fact that the First is an incorporeal entity (because it can admit of no limitation), and so matter-less. For al-Fārābī it also takes place out of time because time, he argues, originates from the movement of created objects (i.e., the heavens).[16] Thus, it cannot be used to measure the progress of emanation if it, itself, only comes into being after this event, when emanation has given rise to those objects which, in turn, create it. It should also be noted that emanation, despite giving rise to everything that exists, whether perfect or deficient, is not the cause of the First itself. This is because, al-Fārābī claims, the First must be perfect and without deficiency—which ultimately means that it can lack nothing. As such, it is not possible that it would admit of any cause because, if it did have such a thing, then it would be dependent upon it in so far as it existed and be deficient in its absence (in that it would no longer exist). Indeed, because the First is perfect in the manner described, it is not possible that it did not exist at some point in order to be created because, if this were so, then it would mean that it was deficient prior to that time (because it would have lacked existence).[17]

Of those things that do emanate from the First, however, they progress as Intellects—that is, as incorporeal entities (also called 'Movers' by al-Fārābī—see his *Risāla*).[18] Thus, when the Second (as the first emanate) emerges it is also incorporeal because, being an overflowing of the First, it shares in its nature. It does not, however, stay this way because its self-thought leads to its self-substantification (or realization), which in turn gives rise to a material First Heaven (how or why is not explained). To this the Second (as an intellect)

16 Muhsin Mahdi, "Alfarabi against Philoponus," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 26, no. 4 (1967), 233–260, at 236.

17 Walzer, *al-Farabi*, 91.

18 Alfarabi, "Letter Concerning the Intellect," 221.

is attached, resulting in it becoming inhibited by the matter of that heaven because matter (or the material of which a corporeal object is composed) is a limitation. In other words, matter is a finite structure with a temporal beginning and end, and of definable limits. Thus, any object composed of it will also have a clear temporal beginning (birth/creation), end (death/destruction), and be limited in extent by its physical form. In terms of these Intellects, however, matter inhibits them by encasing them. This has an obscuring effect, meaning that the Intellect which is thus encased is no longer capable of pure (or, as al-Fārābī says, 'actual') perception because it can no longer peer beyond itself effectively. As a result, its perception is said to have become potential and, after the Second is attached to its heaven and then 'thinks' the First, it (as an intellect) cannot perceive it exactly because it is no longer fully actual. Rather, its picture of the First is slightly deficient (or potential), and this slightly deficient version of the First is that which then overflows from the Second to become another incorporeal Intellect (or Mover), which is called the Third. As such, the Third emanates (again, *fayḍ*) from the Second as its perception of the First, which is a less actual version of it. The Third is then self-substantificated and associated with a heaven as the Second was, going on to the think the First in order to give rise in the same way to the Fourth, a still less perfect version of the First. In this manner the process continues until there are a total of ten emanations and nine heavens, each one inferior to the previous.[19] In full, these are: the Second and the 'First Heaven;' the Third and the fixed stars; the Fourth and Saturn; the Fifth and Jupiter; the Sixth and Mars; the Seventh and the Sun; the Eighth and Venus; the Ninth and Mercury; the Tenth and the moon; and then the last emanate is a slightly different entity called the Active Intellect, which shall figure more heavily in our discussion later on.[20] All of these are "arranged in an order of rank [according to their perfection], and . . . every existent gets its allotted share and rank of existence from it [the First]."[21]

19 Walzer, *al-Farabi*, 101–105.

20 Ibid., 101–105

21 Ibid., 95.

They are, along with their associated material heavens, the most perfect of the emanates and are said to exist above the realm of the moon, as the superlunary bodies. From their heavens, however, comes what al-Fārābī calls Prime Matter—a primeval, homogeneous substance that forms the basic building blocks of everything that is corporeal and in existence below the level of the moon. Thus, each heaven produces (or emanates) this Prime Matter by virtue of its nature as a material heaven. Equally, according to al-Fārābī, the differences in the celestial bodies, which can reach the level of contrariety (that is, of each heaven being so different from another that they become opposites), influences the Prime Matter to produce other objects composed from it. In other words, al-Fārābī posits that the heavens will either draw near to or away from other things existing apart from themselves (even if these are only other heavens) in accordance with the degree of sympathy they have with those things (because things in sympathy will be naturally drawn to each other as an act of friendship). Thus, contrary heavenly bodies in sympathy with the same thing may find themselves drawing near to each other as they draw near to that thing. Under these circumstances of movement, Prime Matter receives contrary forms associated with those heavens (exactly how is not explained) which mix in an effort to neutralize their contrariety and, in the process, create new and more complex forms (because they combine all of the original features of the initially separate contraries) from the original substance of Prime Matter.[22] The first such forms to arise are the elements, these being the simplest material bodies after Prime Matter. These new material bodies then gain the ability to move and act upon one another, so allowing the new contraries that have arisen within them to mix and combine to produce yet new bodies, again of increasing complexity. Each generation of new bodies moves further and further away from Prime Matter in nature and complexity until a point is reached where no new bodies can be formed, the utmost complexity having been reached. This stage represents the emergence of the human body, the most complex

22 Ibid., 135–137.

and sophisticated of all the material existents below the moon.[23] But, regardless of their complexity, all such corporeal entities are less perfect than the superlunary bodies which preceded them.[24]

This brings to an end our brief outline of al-Fārābī's vision for the emergence of the universe and the entities within it. From it we see that the universe is divided into two halves, both of which contain entities ranked in accordance with their level of perfection. Furthermore, insofar as the First apportions these shares of the universe to these entities in this manner, it is both generous (in that it gives) and just (in that it gives according to what is due). Let us move on, however, and examine what underlying influences are present within this scheme.

The Possible Origin of al-Fārābī's Concept of Emanation

On the surface, it would seem highly unlikely that the above is Islamically based for the simple reason that, in the Islamic tradition, there is no detailed exposition of how the universe was created. The attributes al-Fārābī gives his First entity have equivalents in the image of Allāh—i.e., the perfection of Allāh can be found in 59:23 of the Qurʾān,[25] that He is 'First' in 57:3, the beginner of creation in 10:4, and that He gives to things according to their due in 13:8 and 2:212—and much of the terminology al-Fārābī uses to describe the First is also used in the Qurʾān to describe Allāh. Thus, the First is *ʿālim* (knowing), *ḥaqq* (truthful), and *ḥakīm* (wise), all of which are among the ninety-nine names of Allāh, and as indeed is *al-awwal* ('the First').[26] But, with specific regard to creation, a perusal of the Qurʾān will reveal that Islam simply limits itself to stating that God is the one responsible for it (6:102), that the universe was created in time (32:4), and that it was created from nothing (2:117 describes

23 Ibid., 139–141.

24 Ibid., 135.

25 All Qurʾānic references and quotations are taken from *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc., 2001).

26 See Shems Friedlander and al-Hajj Shaikh Muzaffereddin, *Ninety-Nine Names of Allah: The Beautiful Names* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 38, 70, 47, 92.

how Allāh merely needs to say 'Be' and something is, implying that it comes from nothing, the verse failing to mention any substance or entity from which it must arise in order to 'Be'). In addition, in 21:30 we find the remark that the universe was all closed up until God rent it apart, and in 23:12–14 that humanity was made from an extract of clay and then a clot of blood. These few statements amply illustrate the differences with al-Fārābī's work and, despite the similarity of creation from nothing and by a Supreme Being, there are even direct contradictions between the two. Thus, the Qurʾānic statement that humanity was created from clay and blood stands in sharp contrast to the idea of their emanation from Prime Matter, a substance distinct from the elements, of which clay (or earth) is one. Equally, we have also seen al-Fārābī reject the notion of creation in time and, in another of his works, *Against John the Grammarian*, he specifically challenges this concept as expressed by the Christian philosopher Philoponus, and despite that representation of it being very similar to the Islamic position.[27] It should also be noted with regard to the First that, although some similarity with the Islamic concept of Allāh is apparent, in his *Risāla* al-Fārābī claims (as Fakhry, above, would hypothesize) that he bases this entity upon Aristotle's Prime Mover, as found in the *Metaphysics*.[28] Consequently, it appears to be clear that Islam is not the inspiration for this section of al-Fārābī's work. So, where instead does it come from?

A closer examination reveals clear indications of influence from a Neoplatonic philosopher called Plotinus (204–270 CE).[29] Al-Fārābī would have had access to Plotinus' work via the translation into Arabic of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ b. Nāʿima al-Ḥimʿi (d. 217/835).[30] Equally, it had already been used by previous Muslim philosophers to explain creation, such as al-Kindī (d. 252–256/866–870) in his *Fī l-falsafa al-ulā* ('Treatise on first philosophy'), and so establishing

27 Mahdi, "Alfarabi against Philoponus," 236.

28 Alfarabi, "Letter Concerning the Intellect," 221.

29 Paul Henry, introduction to Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber and Faber, 1917–1930), xxxiii.

30 Majid Fakhry, *Al-Farabi: Founder of Neoplatonism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 77–78.

a precedent for this type of usage.[31] As such, it is significant that Plotinus is the first thinker to propose a specifically emanatory solution for the origins of the universe, and as found in his *Enneads*.[32] Thus, for Plotinus, the creative process begins with an emanation (or an 'irradiation') of the Divine Mind (the *Nous*) from the First Existent (see 5:2 of the *Enneads*),[33] which occurs because of the First's perfection. The Divine Mind then shares in this perfection and, from it, creates what is below through another act of emanation. This is the All-Soul, which in turn, and in the same manner, creates everything else: "[And] so it goes on from the beginning to the last and lowest, each [generator] remaining behind in its own place, and that which is generated taking another, lower, rank."[34]

This is obviously similar to al-Fārābī's account, the sense of emanation being an irradiation (or, a 'shining out,' from the Latin *irradiatus*) being akin to his *fayḍ*, and there clearly being an attempt to rank the resultant emanations from the first one, which is the highest, to the last. But, before accepting this similarity as a basis for directly equating the two, it should also be noted that there are differences—not only does Plotinus make no mention of any material 'heavens' in association with the incorporeal emanations, but he lists a different number of them than al-Fārābī, his emphasis on the perfection of the First being the cause of its 'overflowing' differs from al-Fārābī's claim that it is the result of its self-contemplation, and the production of corporeal entities via the movement of the celestial bodies and the effect this has on Prime Matter is also absent. Consequently, although the basic concept of emanation is similar to al-Fārābī's, and there is also clearly a division in Plotinus between an upper incorporeal world and a lower material one, al-Fārābī's work can be seen to differ from Plotinus substantially. Can we, therefore, trace any other possible influence?

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31 Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 179.

32 F. E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam* (London: University of London Press, 1968), 9.

33 Plotinus, *Plotinus*, vol. V (*Enneads* V. 1–9), trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 59.

34 Ibid., 61.

With respect to al-Fārābī's presentation of the incorporeal bodies and their association with different heavens, we can. A closer examination reveals that they parallel the work of second century Roman writer Claudius Ptolemaeus. Thus, in Ptolemaeus' *Almagest*, we find an account of the spheres (or heavens) above the moon exactly as here. They are even given the same names—that of the pagan Roman gods. Indeed, al-Fārābī is reported to have written a commentary on this work,[35] a fact which is not impossible considering that manuscript evidence suggests it had been translated into Arabic by 805 CE.[36] But, if this work can provide a direct parallel for one aspect of al-Fārābī's work, it is sadly an exception. Other differences are not so readily explained. Thus, there is no parallel for the idea of Prime Matter and the production of material entities through contrariety in any writer aside from al-Fārābī, perhaps suggesting that it is an idea unique to him. Consequently, at this stage it is difficult to determine exactly what may have influenced al-Fārābī, although the above similarities with Plotinus and Ptolemaeus, coupled with al-Fārābī's claim that his First is modeled on Aristotle's Prime Mover (despite Aristotle listing more than one of these), suggests that Greek ideas are the most important to him. But, let us continue our discussion and attempt to unearth yet more evidence that may help clarify matters.

Humanity in Isolation: On the Nature of the Human Soul and Prophecy

In this second section, my intention is to examine the schemes presented in *Mabādiʾ* for the structure of the human soul, how ultimate human perfection can be attained, and how the phenomena of prophecy can be rationally explained. Each of these issues is taken in turn and then, drawing upon the discussion of both this and the last section, an overall conclusion is presented as to what kind of a role Islam plays in al-Fārābī's cosmological theory.

35 Fakhry, *Al-Farabi*, 9.

36 Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries)*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 182.

The Faculties of the Human Soul (Chapter 10)

Al-Fārābī conceives of the human soul as a unity of different 'faculties' (or different inherent abilities), all individual and performing different tasks, but ultimately indivisible as one entity. They appear in the mind one by one as humanity develops through contrariety and build in perfection and complexity as they go. Thus, the first faculties are relatively simple (being concerned only with, for example, sense or appetite), but the later ones are increasingly complex.[37] It is the very last two that are the most important to us and so we shall now focus on a brief examination of them.

Of the last two faculties, the first (or second to last) is that by which images of sensibles (or those objects outside of the body which are perceived by its senses) are retained after they stop being perceived, and which is called the faculty of representation, akin to memory. It gathers and retains images of sensibles presented to it by the senses of its own accord, sometimes directly and sometimes by imitation or reproduction. As such, al-Fārābī claims that this faculty does not always recognize that within it as it truly is.[38]

The last faculty is the intellect (or rational faculty). This is that by which good and evil (as opposed to what is simply liked or disliked, so implying a reasoned view of the actual, and not just apparent, nature of something, its value being accurately judged) is perceived and those objects in the faculty of representation are properly recognized.[39] Furthermore, this faculty is seen to rule over all the other faculties of the soul by dictating that all the information they provide be gathered to it, so essentially making them serve it.[40] Thus, it ultimately dominates the other faculties, itself being the matter of nothing and serving nothing. It is also, unlike the other faculties, pictured as capable of detaching from the body so that it might survive after the latter's death—although whether it actually

37 Walzer, *al-Farabi*, 165.

38 Ibid., 165–169.

39 Ibid., 165.

40 Ibid., 169–171.

achieves this depends upon its level of knowledge (see below), and so is not an option available to all.[41]

The Possible Origin of al-Fārābī's Conception of the Human Soul

Turning to Islam first, we see that, and as was the case with the issue of creation, Islam does not provide a detailed description of the nature of the human soul. Indeed, although Islam does provide some vague statements on creation with which a basic comparison with al-Fārābī could be undertaken, in this instance there is not even that amount of data with which to work. All that can be inferred from the Qurʾān is that the human soul, like everything else, was created by God (see 91:7) and will survive after death as part of a universal bodily resurrection (2:259–260). Al-Fārābī's statement that everything originates from (or was created by) the First would seem to imply a degree of agreement with the first of these statements, and his belief in survival after death might partially tally with the second, although only to a limited extent given that he postulates a survival only for some and does not hint at a bodily resurrection (see below). But in any event, two such fleeting points cannot be considered evidence enough for a substantial likeness between al-Fārābī's account and that of Islam. Consequently, some other source of influence must be at work, but what?

To begin with, it should be noted that in *Risāla*, where al-Fārābī presents a very similar account of the human mind, he claims that he has based it upon the third book of Aristotle's *De Anima*.[42] Indeed, turning to that source, the account presented therein is very similar to al-Fārābī's, especially in its claim for the rational faculty's survival after the death of the body.[43] But, and as maintained by Walzer in his commentary on the *Mabādiʾ*, al-Fārābī's elaboration on Aristotle's work (particularly the extended structure of the soul and implied positioning of the rational faculty in potentiality as part of the body, resident in the heart) corresponds very closely, not to Aristotle himself, but to the Peripatetic (or Aristotelian) philosopher,

41 Ibid., 199.

42 Alfarabi, "Letter Concerning the Intellect," 215.

43 Aristotle, *De Anima (On the Soul)*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 201.

Alexander of Aphrodisias (d. 200 CE).[44] Indeed, this individual was a member of the Alexandrian branch of Aristotelian learning which, according to al-Fārābī in his *On the Rise of Philosophy*, eventually came down to the Arabs after the rise of Islam. As such, al-Fārābī considers himself to be part of this same philosophic tradition and, if we look at Alexander's own *De Anima* (which is essentially an interpretation of Aristotle's work by the same name), and to which al-Fārābī would have had access through a translation by Isḥāq b. Ḥunayn, which he is also reputed to have written a commentary on (called *al-Qifṭī*),[45] we see references to all of the faculties of the soul as listed and described here.[46]

RATIONAL KNOWLEDGE (CHAPTER 13)

The two faculties we have just described are important to al-Fārābī because they underscore his ideas on knowledge, how it is gained and what constitutes its perfect realization—all of which determines who can and who cannot found and rule his 'virtuous city'. Thus, for al-Fārābī knowledge is to be gained by either the rational faculty or the faculty of representation (in the latter case, either alone or in conjunction with the faculty of sense perception).[47] The more important of these two is the first, and so let us now examine this.

The rational faculty is characterized by al-Fārābī as a disposition (or tendency) within a material body that can, within the matter of its own essence, receive the imprints of intelligibles—i.e., those things outside of the body that are (or have been) perceivable and, at the same time, also knowable/intelligible as they actually are (and so differ from sensibles, which may only be perceivable, or capable of being sensed, but not also knowable). Furthermore, al-Fārābī claims that the ultimate goal of this faculty is to attain perfect knowledge—its search for which shall, according to the *Risāla*, take it through three stages. The first of these is when the faculty

44 Walzer, *al-Farabi*, 383.

45 Ibid.

46 All references to Alexander's work are taken from: Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima: Praeter Commentaria Scripta Minora*, ed. I. Bruns (Berlin, 1887–1892), p. 35, 1.2, p. 36, 1.19, p. 68, 11.16–21, or p. 74, 1.17.

47 Walzer, *al-Farabi*, 171.

is said to be in potentiality. At this stage it is concerned only with trying to abstract the true (or actual) forms of things from their material objects, so that it may know them correctly (i.e., as they are, or in actuality). When it achieves this, these forms, according to al-Fārābī, become 'stamped' upon it. This is in the sense of being reproduced exactly (in so far as they are abstracted accurately) in its essence (or itself). In other words, when the rational faculty in potentiality abstracts and forms the image of something within itself, it essentially recreates that object from its own essence. When this occurs, the rational faculty moves from potentiality to actuality because, in so far as it has reproduced true images of objects within itself, it has become actual.

The above is the second stage of the faculty of reason's development and represents its achievement of the highest form of knowledge (i.e., the ability to see something as it is in reality).[48] Normally, however, this ability is only a possibility within humanity because of the inhibiting effects of the matter which encases the human mind.[49] Indeed, according to al-Fārābī, the ability to gain actual knowledge is not naturally occurring within such a material/potential entity as humanity. Consequently, if we are to attain such knowledge, a third party is required who is capable of inducing it in us, of transferring humanity's intellect from potentiality to actuality. In the *Mabādiʾ*, it is stated that such an entity would do this by providing humanity's means of perception with a stimulus like light, which would 'illumine' objects so that their true natures could be revealed through the matter that otherwise obscures them.[50] As such, subject to this light, humanity would be able to perceive these things in actuality. But, which entity is it that can thus present things to humanity?

According to al-Fārābī, it must first of all be an entity that is actual itself because, to be able to show humanity things as they actually are, it must itself be aware of what that image of something is so as to know what to reveal. Equally, if it is thus in actuality,

48 Alfarabi, "Letter Concerning the Intellect," 215.

49 Walzer, *al-Farabi*, 199.

50 Ibid., 201–203.

and if something in matter can only reach actuality through its intervention, then it must be incorporeal—that is, one of the original ten emanates. Given this, al-Fārābī labels this medium the Active Intellect, or the last (and so closest to the material world) of these incorporeal beings. When it arises in the rational faculty of the human soul, intelligibles become seen in actuality for the first time and their images preserved (or remembered) in the faculty of representation. As such, the ability to attain actual knowledge is given to humanity by a higher being.[51]

Following on from this, the *Risāla* reveals the third stage of the rational faculty's development to be when it progresses to think the actual intelligibles within it—that is, to think itself in actuality. When it does this, it becomes the acquired intellect.[52] In other words, when the rational faculty in actuality thinks itself (i.e., the forms within it), this thought leads to its own substantification because, under these circumstances, the rational faculty in actuality becomes a sensible and then, when it is thought, an intelligible which, like the other intelligibles, is then reproduced within the rational faculty's own essence. As such, it becomes another entity, and it is this part of the soul that is capable of surviving the body after death.[53] If the rational faculty fails to attain this stage, it will simply perish with the body.[54] Thus, for al-Fārābī, philosophy (defined by him, in common with others who use the term, as the pursuit of pure knowledge through reason) is that which will lead to the utmost perfection and, in turn, life after death.

Prophetic Knowledge and Symbols (Chapters 14 and 17)

Now that we have examined how knowledge can be gained through the rational faculty, let us turn to the other method of gaining it—that via the representative faculty. This is of importance to us because, for al-Fārābī, it contributes to an understanding of a particular sort of religious phenomena—prophecy. Thus, the faculty of representation essentially occupies a functional position in between that of

51 Ibid.

52 Alfarabi, "Letter Concerning the Intellect," 217.

53 Walzer, *al-Farabi*, 205–207.

54 Ibid., 271.

sense and reason. The former acts upon it, bringing sensibles to it that are imprinted and stored therein, whereas the latter draws upon that store and uses it to gain knowledge via deliberation and deduction.[55] With regard to the sensibles given to the representative faculty by sense, these can (and as briefly stated above) be either received directly (i.e., as they are), or reproduced—that is, when the representative faculty retains a sensible according to its likeness and not according to how the senses themselves received it. For example, the representative faculty may not become moist if the senses come into contact with moisture, but simply imitate it according to what it perceives moisture to be. This imitation of the sensible will be attained through a comparison between the image presented of it by the senses and the other sensibles the faculty of representation already possesses, the latter being combined in accordance with the perceived nature of the new sensible so that, together, they reproduce it more or less accurately. As such, the representative faculty does not always receive something according to the nature of that thing, but by imitation of it.[56] This al-Fārābī calls 'reproductive imitation,'[57] and it can be used to explain prophecy when we consider what happens to the representative faculty when the body is asleep.

During sleep, the representative faculty is alone, free from the above relationship to sense and reason, both of which lie dormant. Thus, it neither receives any fresh imprints from the senses nor is it required to provide any service to the rational faculty. Under these circumstances, and because al-Fārābī says it cannot rest (why is not clear), the representative faculty turns its attention to itself and the store of sensibles it contains. These it associates with and disassociates from at will as it would in response to new sensibles in order to create imitations of them. But, because it is not receiving any new sensible (the body is asleep) it must instead concentrate on recombining its stored sensibles in order to produce new images of old ones. This process is essentially thought of as dreaming, and

55 Ibid., 211.

56 Ibid., 213–215.

57 Ibid., 219.

has the same mechanism as reproductive imitation.[58] As well as involving old sensibles, however, it can also, according to al-Fārābī, involve the imitation of actual intelligibles that have been stored in the representative faculty by the rational faculty after they have been imparted to it by the Active Intellect. As such, something shown to the rational faculty by the Active Intellect could be reproduced by the representative faculty during sleep using those sensibles within it that it feels are equivalent to it. Thus, by implication, just as the rational faculty is acted upon by the Active Intellect, so is the representative faculty (albeit indirectly). Furthermore, according to al-Fārābī these intelligibles given to representation through reason need not have been discovered by the latter first. They may be something it possesses unwittingly, and thus may appear as flashes of inspiration (or visions) when they surface as dreams, reason not having previously encountered them consciously. Thus, visions can come from the Active Intellect via dreams, being intelligibles represented by imitation of what they actually are. These are called *waḥy* (revelation) by al-Fārābī.[59]

The above becomes explicitly relevant to matters of prophecy when al-Fārābī states that, although the above process will only occur for most people during sleep, there are some for whom it can also occur during waking life. Although rare, this happens when the individual has a representative faculty so highly developed (how or why is not made clear) that it is not overpowered by the two tasks usually required of it during waking life. Thus, although for the majority of people the representative faculty would be too busy receiving sensibles and serving reason to do anything else while the body was awake, in the case of these exceptional people it may also perform the above task of 'dreaming' while awake. When this occurs, the person is said to be a prophet and they occupy this position solely by virtue of possessing this ability.[60] Furthermore, according to al-Fārābī, as well as having all of the above characteristics, the representative faculty of a prophet's mind will also be able to present

58 Ibid., 211.

59 Ibid., 219–221.

60 Ibid., 221–225.

many of the things given to it by the Active Intellect in the form of "visible sensibles that imitate them."[61] In other words, it will be able to 'impress' its imitations of intelligibles upon the senses—that is, upon sight or hearing—so that the *waḥy* can appear to the mind as something from without and not as an imitation of something within. But, what role does this type of prophecy play in al-Fārābī's overall scheme?

Essentially, prophecy is the means by which the highest form of knowledge possible, as present in the acquired intellect of a philosopher, can be represented through imitation to the rest of humanity who could not otherwise understand or attain it because their intellects are only potential. This imitation is effective in getting this knowledge (or truth, because it is indisputable) across because it is based on the sensibles of the prophet, which are those things he has experienced during his life and stored in his memory. As such, they can be assumed to be understandable to those around him because they will fall within the general experience of their social context. Furthermore, these imitations (or 'symbols of the truth,' as al-Fārābī calls them) will be combined by the prophet into an overall system of imitations, called a religion (*dīn*). The purpose of this religion shall be to instruct the people in this symbolic truth so that they might live in accordance with it. This method of imparting actual knowledge through symbols is, however, inferior to how the Active Intellect helps impart the same to reason. This is because, in the latter case, the information received is not an imitation, but things in actuality. Thus, it is superior because it is what it refers to, instead of just something that is like it. As such, philosophy is superior to religion because it represents knowledge 'actually' and, as a result, and in so far as it is dependent on this actual knowledge, life and death cannot be attained through religion.[62]

Parallels with al-Fārābī's Work

Before we begin an examination of possible parallels between the above and other sources, let us first take a step back and see exactly

61 Ibid., 223.

62 Ibid., 279–283.

what it is we have been presented with and what its implications are for our overall discussion.

Essentially al-Fārābī has, by arguing that philosophy alone is the path to rationally attained 'actual' knowledge, human perfection, and life after death, placed it at the very top of human endeavor. Thus, because his self-stated aim in the *Mabādiʾ* is to discover the best way for humanity to live so as to attain this perfection, the implication must be that philosophy is that way of life. Comparatively, religion is reduced to a lower position, being nothing more than an inferior representation of this truth. As such, we should perhaps not expect Islam to play a heavy ideological role in al-Fārābī's text because, in line with this reasoning, to include it in such a way would run against his own aim. But, before accepting this as final, it should be noted that a prophet (such as Muḥammad) must also be a philosopher, a person who has attained perfection. Given this, that al-Fārābī would ignore Islam and its founder completely would seem unlikely (assuming that he does see Muḥammad as a prophet in the way defined above). Thus, let us continue further with our analysis and see exactly where Islam is to be placed in al-Fārābī's thought.

Returning to the issue of parallels, if we begin with the detail al-Fārābī brings to his description of the rational and representative faculties of the soul, we see that this is again based on Alexander, having equivalents in the same extracts we cited above. Similarly, the role of the Active Intellect in the human psyche also has some parallels from here. Thus, in Alexander's *De Anima* 11.5, we find mention of an incorporeal entity, also called the Active Intellect, whose role it is to enter the human intellect from the outside in order to bring all forms (or entities) within it from potentiality to actuality. By this Alexander means that it is responsible for helping humanity gain accurate self-knowledge—i.e., of what they are in actuality. It is capable of doing this because it is synonymous with the Divine Mind, or the most actual of all minds, with perfect (or actual) knowledge of all things.

This obviously corresponds very closely to what al-Fārābī has to say, but again with some differences. For example, al-Fārābī does not associate the Active Intellect with the Divine Mind, which is

the First in his conception. Equally, Alexander's emphasis seems to be upon the Active Intellect bringing humanity to actuality by providing it with the ability to attain self-knowledge. Although there is some parallel in al-Fārābī for this when it comes to the creation of the acquired intellect, the overall focus of his ideology in this context is upon the Active Intellect providing humanity with the ability to gain knowledge of things external to itself. As for explaining these differences, it is hard to do so with reference to other Greek thinkers. Indeed, the second point appears to have no parallel outside al-Fārābī. But, more importantly for us, in addition (yet related) to these differences there would seem to be another which indicates that al-Fārābī altered Greek thought on this point to accommodate Islam.

As seen, the activity of the Active Intellect is also associated by al-Fārābī with the provision of *waḥy*, which is given to humanity in general through the agency of a prophet when they found a religion upon it. But, does this idea of prophecy figure in any Greek source? In short, it does not—there are no equivalents for it in any example of ancient Greek literature. Instead, for the Greeks prophecy was synonymous with being able to foretell the future, nothing more. Thus, in the work of Plato, as a typical example of Greek thought on this subject, we find references to prophecy very different to those expressed in al-Fārābī. *Timaeus* 71d, for example, states: "What care the law took [in instructing humanity about how to live] . . . searching out and comprehending the whole order of things down to prophecy and medicine."[63]

This describes prophecy as something associated with the law (i.e., the way men should live) in the sense of being something the latter must prescribe a ruling on. Thus, it is subject to the law and, later, we are told it is that by which humanity foresees future events.[64] As such, what we have here is an image that differs very much from the one given by al-Fārābī—for the latter, prophecy is not restricted to divination and, by virtue of it presenting to humanity the truth

63 Plato, "Timaeus," in *The Essential Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, with M. J. Knight (n.p., 1999), 1203–1217, at 1209.

64 Ibid., 1209.

by which they should live, is in fact the definer of law and not something subject to it. This is a high level of contrast and suggests that al-Fārābī's ideas on this issue could not have come from the Greeks. But, if not, where then did they come from?

By being a way for a higher entity to convey to humanity the real nature of the universe and how to live correctly within it so as to attain perfection, al-Fārābī's concept of prophecy essentially shows itself to be very similar to the Islamic view—i.e., the Qurʾān is a revelation (again, *waḥy*) from Allāh (as a higher entity) that provides guidance to humanity about how to rule itself (i.e., by following the *sharīʿa*) if it is to live properly, and thereby attain spiritual perfection.[65] Thus, there is undoubtedly a high level of similarity between these two, some commentators of the *Mabādiʾ*, including Walzer, even suggest that the Active Intellect, as an incorporeal entity capable of appearing in visions and transmitting *waḥy* to a prophet, is comparable with the Islamic angel of revelation. Indeed, in *Siyāsa*, al-Fārābī does directly equate these two beings—although, and despite being an intriguing comparison, it should be noted that they are not equivalent concepts. Thus, in Islam the angel of revelation (Jibril) is spoken of as giving revelation to a prophet directly on behalf of Allāh, actually appearing in the visions of that person, reciting the message he is to convey from the Deity (see Qurʾān 2:97).[66] The supernatural reality of these events is never doubted, but for al-Fārābī the Active Intellect would never actually appear in a vision (although the representative faculty might imagine it does) because the implication of al-Fārābī's view of visions as dreams is that they never really occur, being simply delusions. Indeed, in the *Mabādiʾ* revelation would seem to be, not so much a divine communication, but simply a human response to the help it has been given by a superior entity to attain perfection. But, before we accept this as a definitive presentation of al-Fārābī's position, it should be noted that in *Siyāsa* he also claims that "because the Active Intellect emanates from the being of the First Cause, it can . . . be said that

65 Denny, *Introduction*, 70–71.

66 Ibid., 63.

it is the First Cause that brings about revelation to this man [the prophet] through the mediation of the Active Intellect."[67]

This would suggest a stance far closer to the Islamic position, *waḥy* clearly being described as a communication from the Supreme Being. But nonetheless, that the nature of this communication is the same in each case would seem doubtful simply because al-Fārābī does not picture the Active Intellect as imparting knowledge to humanity like Jibril does, but only the ability to see things as they are. Equally, al-Fārābī's prophet occupies the position he does because (and only because) he possesses this ability, and not because he has been specially 'selected' by the Divinity as in Islam (see Qurʾān 52:48, where Muḥammad is described as being in the eyes of Allāh, suggesting that the latter has purposively singled him out).[68] Despite these differences, however, al-Fārābī's own identification of Jibril with the Active Intellect, the use of the same word (*waḥy*) to describe the phenomena of revelation, and the same overall purpose for it in each case (i.e., as an educative tool) makes Islam rather than the Greeks far closer to al-Fārābī in this instance.

This essentially concludes our discussion of al-Fārābī's cosmology. From it we have seen a body of evidence supporting the suggestion that Greek philosophy significantly influenced al-Fārābī, from Plotinus' notion of emanation to Alexander's psychology. But, we have also seen al-Fārābī alter Greek ideas. Thus, we have seen, not only evidence for originality on his part, but also a case for Islamic influence. In particular, we have just examined the possibility that al-Fārābī's use of prophecy illustrates the insertion of a largely Islamic concept into an otherwise Greek-inspired work on psychology. Thus, it is certain that Islam does play a role in al-Fārābī's thought. But, how significant this role is remains problematic as, at times, we see al-Fārābī's account directly contradicting Islam, such as with the statement that philosophy (in direct contrast to religion) is the means of attaining ultimate human perfection. The result of this is that it becomes very difficult to know exactly what role al-Fārābī

67 Alfarabi, "Political Regime," trans. Najjar, in *MPP*, 36–37.

68 Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh, eds., *Philosophy in the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic and Jewish Traditions* (London: Harper & Row, 1967), 213.

allows Islamic doctrine to play. What is certain at this stage, however, is that those scholars whose work we examined at the beginning of this article, and who claimed that al-Fārābī's thought was purely a mixture of different Greek ideas, were incorrect.

Humanity as a Social Group: On the Concept of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*

Turning now to the final section of the article, I look, first, at al-Fārābī's concept of *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* and second, at the ruler who is said to found and govern it. Each of these topics is discussed in turn, and a comparison between them and Islamic and Greek ideas follows. Equally, from the evidence of the previous discussion, consideration is also given to any possible basis these ideas may have in the context of al-Fārābī's overall thought, and what this may tell us about their potential origins. From all this, it is hoped that a final conclusion as to the role of Islam in his thought can be reached.

al-Madīna al-Fāḍila (Chapter 15)

Perfection (as defined above) can admit of no deficiency and, as such, in order for humanity to truly attain it via the method described, al-Fārābī tells us that they must acquire knowledge in actuality of everything. But, al-Fārābī further claims, this knowledge of everything cannot be attained by someone in isolation. This is because, in order to know something, we have to first encounter the object of thought knowledge is required of so that the awareness necessary for knowledge can be established—i.e., we cannot know what we have not encountered (bearing in mind once again that the Active Intellect does not impart knowledge to humanity, but only the ability to see things as they are). Such direct experience of everything, al-Fārābī says, is simply too much for any one person to accomplish during their lifetime. As such, humanity must, if it is to gain the knowledge it seeks, live as part of a social group so that the people who cannot directly encounter an object they need knowledge of can, instead, do so indirectly through the experience of another who has and can communicate their experience.[69] As

69 Walzer, *al-Farabi*, 229.

such, each member of the society should compensate for what another might lack so that, together, they can make up a complete whole in experience. In this way, al-Fārābī lists three types of social association (also listed in like manner in his *Siyāsa*)[70] that can help humanity attain perfection, and which are ranked according to size: large (the union of all the people of the world into an empire, or *umma*), medium (the union of all the people of a particular nation), and small (the union of the people within a city).[71]

As we have seen, al-Fārābī's ideas on human perfection relate to his proposed structure of the mind and how it interacts with the Active Intellect which, in turn, is based on Alexander of Aphrodisias' interpretation of Aristotle. Given this, we might also expect some parallel between Alexander and the above, as the latter clearly rests upon the former. As such, it is interesting to note that Alexander does not enter into the issue of social groupings, preferring instead to avoid the issue of political discourse altogether (politics being the concern for public affairs, which presupposes a social group, or public, to be concerned about).[72] As such, we cannot suppose that al-Fārābī gets his ideas from him here. Indeed, to find a Greek parallel for the above we must turn to Plato. He does take up this issue of politics, stating that humanity should live in social groupings so that it may attain perfection through the practice of philosophy (see his *Republic*). Although this obviously resembles al-Fārābī's ideas, the latter's statement that societies can be either big or small, with the ideal social arrangements being either cities, nations, or the whole world, is unlike Plato. For him, the ideal form of society is exclusively that of the city state (*polis* in Greek), the favored style of political arrangement in his own time. Indeed, al-Fārābī does postulate the city as the best form of social association in his *Siyāsa*,[73] but nonetheless the fact that he also incorporates the idea of a much wider world than just the city into his political ideology is

70 Alfarabi, "Political Regime," trans. Najjar, in *MPP*, 32.

71 Walzer, *al-Farabi*, 229.

72 See Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima*, passim.

73 Alfarabi, "Political Regime," trans. Najjar, *MPP*, 32.

interesting because it essentially represents a break from this Greek source. So, where else could this idea have come from?

Walzer, who also notes this break, postulates that the largest (world) association is an idea al-Fārābī bases upon the achievements of either Alexander the Great or the Roman Empire—i.e., both of these, through their acts of conquest, made the idea of a world empire seem plausible by almost achieving it themselves. Plato, on the other hand, who did not experience either of these empires, could not consequently (in light of the political realities of his own time) conceive of an area larger than a city state being governed effectively by a single power.[74] As such, the idea of a world order is absent from his work, while al-Fārābī, who did know about these empires, includes it. But, before accepting this argument, we should note that there is no textual evidence to support an association between al-Fārābī's ideas on the largest form of social grouping and these ancient empires. Thus, he fails to make any mention of either of them (or of anything that could refer to them) in either the *Mabādiʾ* or any other text he is known to have written. Equally, he uses the word *umma* for this world empire, which is also the term used for the Islamic empire of his time, in which lived. This empire of the faithful was actually (at least in principle) larger than either of the empires created by Alexander or Rome and so, by the above reasoning, could have provided just as good a model for al-Fārābī's concept of a world order. As such, perhaps al-Fārābī postulated his world community on the basis of this example from Islam, rather than anything from the Greek or Roman worlds.

In contrast to this world association, and as already mentioned, al-Fārābī claims that the city is the best form of human association. This is because, provided the city is dedicated to its production, perfection among humans will arise here first. It is not certain why al-Fārābī should think this, as he does not elaborate upon the point, but he does go on to say that the internal arrangements of the city should be like that of the human body—i.e., it should be composed of different 'organs' (or of different social divisions, each performing different social functions) that work in harmony for the benefit

74 Walzer, *al-Farabi*, 432–433.

of the whole.[75] These organs are not elaborated upon in either the *Mabādiʾ* or *Siyāsa*, so for a fuller explanation of what they entail we must turn to another of al-Fārābī's works called *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa* [Aphorisms of a statesman]. There, these divisions are said to be created by the ruler of the city (who occupies the highest rank, as the philosopher) and are listed from the bottom (or least perfect) up as being (1) the merchants; (2) the army; (3) a group called the *muqaddirūn* (a phrase perhaps meaning mathematicians); (4) a group called *dhū l-alsina* ('the masters of the spoken word'); and (5) the philosophers. What is significant about this arrangement is that it partially mirrors that of Plato's *polis*. Thus, if we look at *Republic* IV, 423a and 422b,[76] we see a threefold division of the city state into the army, the merchants, and the philosophers (who are also the rulers of the city and the highest rank). Missing are the *muqaddirūn* and 'masters of the spoken word.' The first of these is described by al-Fārābī in the *Fuṣūl* as a kind of cultural element in the city, responsible for its science and arts, whereas the second is said to be responsible for the creation of religion—i.e., the prophets.[77] As such, part of what we see added to Plato's image of the internal structure of the city is the Islamic concept of prophecy. This might suggest that al-Fārābī is, once again, modifying a Greek idea with an Islamic one. Interestingly, although the concept of prophecy in *Fuṣūl* is the same as in the *Mabādiʾ*, there is clearly a separation put in place in the former between the philosophers and the prophets, whereas in the *Mabādiʾ* (and *Siyāsa*)[78] they are identified, suggesting that there the top two ranks would be merged. To justify this supposition further, let us now look at this top rank in more detail.

The Ruler of al-Fārābī's State (Chapter 15)

For al-Fārābī, the ruler of his state (especially the initial ruler) is the highest and most perfect of all the citizens of the 'virtuous city.'

75 Ibid., 231.

76 All extracts from Plato's *Republic* are taken from Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin, 1987).

77 Walzer, *al-Farabi,* 437–438.

78 Alfarabi, "Political Regime," trans. Najjar, in *MPP*, 36–37.

He is the heart of the city as the First is the heart of the universe.[79] Indeed, "All it's [the city's] parts ought to imitate in their actions the aim of their first ruler."[80]

Thus, each social division of the city (or each 'part' of it) should follow the example of their first ruler. This is not only because this ruler has attained perfection—i.e., he is a philosopher with actual knowledge of everything—but because he is also a prophet capable of transmitting that knowledge to the masses. He is, al-Fārābī claims, the highest form of humanity and the other citizens should, for the sake of drawing closer to their own perfection without being, themselves, in direct contact with the Active Intellect, follow his lead as a precedent and means of encountering those things (even if symbolically) they do not have, but require, knowledge of.

In terms of origins, this emphasis on following the example of the ruler in order to attain the highest form of human perfection brings to mind the case of Muslims being required to follow the example of the Prophet Muḥammad, as contained in the Sunna (traditions). Thus, Muḥammad is also thought of as the highest form of humanity in Islam, and believers should try to emulate his mannerisms and characteristics so they too can reach a similar level of perfection.[81] Indeed, al-Fārābī also uses the word *sunna* to refer to the law that is put in place by his ruler, which the ordinary citizens of his 'virtuous city' should follow in this same manner.[82] Equally, the above picture suggests that, for al-Fārābī, the role of a philosopher is a public one—i.e., one of responsibility toward others, to educate them about the highest good in a style compatible with their abilities. This aspect also bears some resemblance to characteristics of the Prophet Muḥammad, who also saw himself as needing to take an active role in society to ensure the salvation (or perfection) of the people around him.

79 Walzer, *al-Farabi*, 235.

80 Ibid., 239. This act of imitation is also called for in *Siyāsa*.

81 Bassam Sulaiman Abughosh and Waffaa Zaki Shaqra, *A Glossary of Islamic Terminology* (London: Talha, 1992), 117.

82 Alfarabi, "Political Regime," trans. Najjar, in *MPP*, 37.

But, we should also bear in mind that this image of the ruler (excluding the article of prophecy) is also like Plato's. Thus, the latter also postulates (for the same reasons as here) the necessity for a philosopher, as the holder of absolute truth, to rule and found the perfect state.[83] Indeed, if we examine the characteristics of al-Fārābī's first ruler in more detail, we shall see further likenesses in comparison to Plato's equivalent figure. Thus, al-Fārābī enumerates twelve different features for his philosopher–prophet, all of which must be possessed by any individual claiming to be this figure. In short, these are: (1) sound limbs and organs; (2) possession of a good understanding and grasp of things according to how they are in actuality; (3) excellent memory; (4) high intelligence; (5) eloquence; (6) fondness for learning; (7) fondness for truth and hatred of falsehood; (8) a moderate attitude toward food and sexual intercourse, and a hatred for gambling; (9) fondness for honor; (10) little regard for money; (11) fondness of justice; and (12) a determination to carry out what he knows is best.[84]

All of these characteristics, albeit with some modification, can be found in Plato's *Republic*. Indeed, in another work of al-Fārābī's, called *Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda, falsafa Aflāṭūn, falsafa Arisṭuṭālīs* [Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle], it is specifically stated, when these characteristics are again presented, that he has taken them from Plato's *Republic*.[85] Thus, al-Fārābī himself clearly links them directly to Plato and, if we examine the latter's *Republic* in more detail, we see the following direct parallels: (1) the health of the ruler is mentioned in VI, 494b6; (2) quick understanding in VI, 486c3; (3) good memory in VI, 486cd; (4) enjoyment of study in VI, 485b; (5) love of truth and hatred of falsehood in VI, 485c3; (6) self-control in VI, 485c; (7) money being of no interest in VI, 485e3; and (8) love of justice in VI, 486b10. Indeed, all the features mentioned above, with the exception of the ruler being quick-witted, eloquent, and having a sense of honor and courage, have parallels in Plato. Of the missing ones, we could probably see being quick-witted as

83 Plato, *Republic*, *passim*.

84 Walzer, *al-Farabi*, 247–249.

85 Ibid., 445.

an extension of intelligence, wit (in the sense of quick thinking) generally being associated with intellect. Equally, courage and honor may be explained with reference to another comment al-Fārābī makes in the *Mabādiʾ* that his ruler should be a competent general. This role would necessitate courage so that the ruler would not run away from battle, and honor so that he would deal justly with his enemies. As for eloquence, this is probably to be seen as a result of the educative role of the first ruler. Al-Fārābī states that this requires him to be forceful and compelling in speech so that the people will be convinced by his symbols and elect to follow him.[86] Therefore, as eloquence is the ability to express oneself well, this characteristic may be explicable in this manner.

Thus, we see that most of the characteristics of the ruler can be explained with direct reference to Plato, while those that cannot are to be seen as the result of other specifications al-Fārābī gives his ruler. But why did he add these specifications? To answer this it is pertinent to note that much of what we see above is also to be found in Islam as an attribute of the Prophet. Indeed, a consultation of any biography of the Prophet (*sira*) will reveal equivalents for all of the characteristics above, including the one's absent from Plato—e.g., eloquence when expressing the divine revelation in the form of Arabic poetry (i.e., the Qurʾān), and honor and courage with regard to the treatment of his enemies and the upholding of agreements (such as the constitution of Medina).[87] Equally, in the *Siyāsa*, al-Fārābī makes the additional claim that all prophets will agree in their endeavors, purposes, opinions, and ways of life while being permitted to change a law one has set at a particular time for another, if it is deemed better to do so at that other time.[88] This also puts one in mind of the Islamic doctrine of prophethood, which states that all prophets come to their people from Allāh with the same basic message (i.e., the 'clear message' of 16:35 of the Qurʾān) while, in terms of specific laws, these may be changed from era to

86 Ibid., 245–247.

87 Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, trans. Alfred Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), *passim*.

88 Alfarabi, "Political Regime," trans. Najjar, in *MPP*, 37.

era in response to specific circumstances. Thus, could al-Fārābī again be adapting Greek philosophy to a consideration of Islamic ideology? Given the already observed insertion of the Islamic notion of prophecy in this context, it might appear possible. But, it should also be noted that the Prophet's characteristics are not limited to those of al-Fārābī's ruler. As such, the similarity is limited—it is close in so far as it exists, but limited in that it is not comprehensive.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that, with regard to his cosmology, al-Fārābī consistently shows his chief concern to be Greek thought. Indeed, he has been seen to borrow from a whole range of different Greek sources, without necessarily displaying any measure of consistency in his choice of authors. Thus, we see the process of emanation, as an explanation for the creation of the universe, being extolled in a manner which indicates that al-Fārābī's understanding of it has very deep roots in the work of the Neoplatonist Plotinus. But, al-Fārābī does not limit his discussion of this issue to this writer's perception of it. Rather, he proceeds to mix it with other ideas from antiquity, such as those from Ptolemaeus. Furthermore, although al-Fārābī chooses to use Plotinus consistently in his first chapters of the *Mabādiʾ*, later on, when he turns to the subject of psychology, he abandons this thinker altogether in favor of the Peripatetic Alexander of Aphrodisias' interpretation of Aristotle. Indeed, of all the Greek sources al-Fārābī consults on cosmology, Alexander is the one he reproduces most faithfully. But, regardless of this hopping to and fro between sources, it is clear that Greek thought is used extensively by al-Fārābī in every cosmological section of the *Mabādiʾ* examined here, thus establishing the dominant nature of this ideology.

Concerning the role of Islam in al-Fārābī's cosmology, ultimately we have seen that this is difficult to determine with exactness. Islamic concepts are not used or respected by al-Fārābī with any measure of consistency. Thus, at times Islamic doctrine is contradicted by al-Fārābī—such as with statements to the effect that life after death is only for some, with no mention of a bodily

resurrection—so suggesting that Islam is fairly insignificant to him if he can chop and change it as he sees fit. But we have also seen that there are instances where the opposite is true. Thus, we have seen the psychology of Alexander and Aristotle be made to fit around the Islamic concept of prophecy, which is distinctly unlike anything the Greeks would have understood. The end result of this is that Islam does indeed begin to emerge as a seminal influence on (at least some) of al-Fārābī's cosmology, although it is perhaps overwritten by Greek thought on too many occasions for it to be the overriding concern. Equally, it should also perhaps be noted in this context that one of al-Fārābī's notable predecessors, the philosopher Abū Yaʿqub al-Kindī (d. ca. 866 CE),[89] demonstrated an overriding concern to bring Greek thought in line with Islam. Thus, although few of al-Kindī's treatises have survived to the present day, what we do have indicates a thinker who saw no contradiction between these sources, who thought that human knowledge (i.e., philosophy) ran parallel to the Divine in all respects.[90] As such, and while considering that al-Kindī was a very prominent figure, having received the patronage of three caliphs (even tutoring the son of al-Muʿtaṣim) and being reputed to have produced two hundred and seventy works,[91] it is possible that al-Fārābī was influenced by him, and so developed a similar line of thought, of which the above account of prophecy is an indication. But, such a supposition would stand in contrast to the fact that, in all of his surviving texts, al-Fārābī only mentions al-Kindī once, and then in order to critique his approach to music.[92] As such, there is little evidence to substantiate the above claim. Nonetheless, what we have presented here strongly indicates that those scholars who have claimed Islamic thought was of little importance to al-Fārābī are incorrect.

Turning now to al-Fārābī's concept of the state, this has also been shown to be divided between Islamic and Greek influences. In

89 Fakhry, *al-Farabi*, 1.

90 Ibid.

91 W. Montgomery Watt, *The Majesty that was Islam: The Islamic World 661–1100* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984), 137.

92 Muhsin S. Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundations of Islamic Political Philosophy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 52.

this case, however, we see that Greek influence was fairly consistently Platonic, both in its emphasis on the city as the best form of social gathering, and its characterization of the city's ruler as a philosopher. As for Islamic influence, the image of the first ruler was shown to have much in common with the Prophet Muḥammad, although it also has many features from Platonic thought. But, given the almost certain adoption of the Islamic notion of prophecy in this context, it may be probable that the latter was also made to accommodate the Islamic image of Muḥammad. Thus, it is suggested that Islam also plays a seminal role here, even if not a dominant one, and that a similar conclusion with regard to the inaccuracy of previous scholarly opinions about the role of Islam in al-Fārābī's thought can be drawn here too.