

MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC RHETORIC AND HUMANISM
AL-FARABI'S THEORY OF RHETORIC

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INDEX

1. The nature of the study	1
2. Al-Farabi al-gharib, al-gharb and al-Farabi	14
3. Al-Farabi: the Islamic bassoon	27
4. Al-Farabi and pedagogical logos	39
5. The rhetoric and its friends	54
6. The rest is silence	66
7. Bibliography	76

CHAPTER I

The nature of the study

Abu Nasr al-Farabi (870-950)¹ is said to have been born in Farab (Transoxiana, modern-day Kazakhstan). As Fakhry points out “Arab biographers are unanimous in lavishing on [... him] the highest praise” (Al-Farabi, Founder 6). Scholars have indeed named him “the greatest political philosopher of the period” (Mahdi 1) and “the second teacher” (after Aristotle). He lived in Damascus (where he also died in 950), Central Asia, Egypt and Baghdad. Al-Farabi is also a significant scholar insofar as he is the first Muslim of whom we have a substantial number of complete works. According to Mahdi, he is also almost the only Muslim philosopher who chose to explore the tension between the individual and the community, “and in the process brought to the fore philosophy’s philanthropic spirit and the philosopher’s high minded devotion to the true welfare of his community” (62). As such, he stands as an impressive figure who deserves to be studied.

The figure of al-Farabi has appealed to many scholars. In his 1962 annotated bibliography, Rescher documents 184 studies. Very few of those, however, were devoted to al-Farabi’s theory of rhetoric. In 1962 there was only one seven-page analysis (Nagy); in 2006 there is, to the best of my knowledge, only three more (Aouad; Butterworth "Rhetorician"; Parens). Each of them focuses on specific aspects² but none offers a comprehensive approach that presents al-Farabi’s theory of rhetoric and its relationship to the rest of his

¹ All dates are A.D. unless specified otherwise.

² Aouad studies the concept of point of view in al-Farabi. Butterworth focuses on al-Farabi’s politics with an emphasis on the figure of the ruler. Parens focuses on the relationship between Plato’s metaphysics and al-Farabi.

corpus. This fact is surprising if one heeds the plea for more research in medieval Islamic rhetoric appearing throughout the existing literature (Halldén 19; Netton 88; Peters vii; Rescher 127). My study aims at bridging this gap and benefits from the 1968 French translation of al-Farabi's treatise on rhetoric by Jacques Langhade.

While research on al-Farabi's rhetorical theory is scarce, the amount of scholarship about adjacent fields such as medieval Islamic history or philosophy is significantly bigger. I will try to relate these broader aspects to the subject of study by way of scaffolding and framing my investigation. I will include in my study a consideration of three aspects of al-Farabi: his medieval context, his Islamic essence and his theory of rhetoric.

Regarding the historical context, Netton defines *the age of Farabism* "as running from the birth of al-Farabi in AD 870 to the death of Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi³ in about AD 1023" (1). This period is centered around the Abbasid dynasty (750 – 945) and its fall. It is roughly equivalent to the Renaissance of Islam, "one of the richest intellectually in the entire development of medieval Islamic thought" (ibid.). It is also, however, a period "of deep instability and change" (2). The relationship between both of these aspects was analyzed by Kraemer in terms of its negative correlation (the less stable a period is, the richer it will intellectually be). Citing the European Renaissance as a parallel example, he claims that in the face of socioeconomic distress, humanistic culture and learning tend "to become the highest symbol of nobility" (Kraemer 27).

³ "One of the most dynamic and informative members of the group which we have termed 'the school of al-Farabi'" (Netton 16).

Another aspect that, according to scholars, contributed to the Islamic Renaissance was the Enlightened environment of tolerance and the endorsement of learning during the Abbasid rule. To this extent, Gutas has stressed that under the Abbasids “support for the translation movement cut across all lines of religious, sectarian, ethnic, tribal and linguistic demarcation” (5). Al-Farabi would have been a product of that very particular time whose spirit has been characterized by Kraemer as cosmopolitan (13), secular (14) and of economic crisis:

[M]ounting inflation, rising taxation, depletion of agricultural resources, stagnant markets. It was a time of lavish government spending on imperial building and on armies. The armies were raised for foreign wars of conquest and for control of the local populace. (27)

All these aspects can be said to have shaped al-Farabi’s thought. In this study, I will heed the interplay between al-Farabi and his historical context analyzing the Abbasids from a different perspective. I will also probe the relationship between the Abbasids and the school of the Mutazilah. Peters categorizes the Mutazilah as a part of the *falsafah* movement, which is defined as a natural, speculative theology of a Platonic nature (Peters 169). This is relevant insofar as al-Farabi is held to be one of the most authoritative scholars within the first generation of *falsafah*,⁴ the other is Avicenna.

The Platonic legacy of al-Farabi will be one of the aspects of my study. In opposition to the historical context, the degree to which Muslim scholars adopted western thought is an unresolved question in the literature to which my research

⁴ Another would be Abu Bishr Matta, a Christian philosopher.

aims to contribute. So far, only the relationship to Plato and Aristotle has been examined –and it has been done inconclusively.

Let us first focus on the dyad Plato - al-Farabi. On the one hand, we have Strauss who considered al-Farabi to be “a true Platonist” (qtd. in Colmo 2) for whom “Plato’s philosophy was true philosophy” (369). Could al-Farabi be a Platonist? According to Peters and Colmo, he could be a *Neoplatonist* but not a Platonist because the writings of Greek scholars had

entered this new cultural ground via the translation route, and were to some degree colored by the interpretations attached to them in their earlier career ... The Arabs received this tradition after five hundred years of shaping in the later Greek schools and another two hundred years at the hands of the Syrian Christians: between the corpus proper and the *falasifah* stand the massive efforts incorporated into the Berlin Academy’s *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*. (Peters 7)

Paraphrasing Peters,⁵ Porphyry was nearly as much the father of Platonism as Plato himself. Therefore, it would be more advisable to look for Neoplatonic influence in al-Farabi. In the field of philosophy, this work has been undertaken by Morewedge and Colmo; Mahdi has also explored al-Farabi’s Neoplatonism from the point of view of politics. My purpose will be to add a study focused on rhetoric to this literature.

But let us first examine the positions taken by the authors above. They are related but not identical. According to Mahdi, al-Farabi presents “an un-Platonic

⁵ “Andronicus of Rhodes was nearly as much the father of Aristotelianism as was Aristotle himself” Francis E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1968) 4, Charles E. Butterworth, "Ethics in Medieval Islamic Philosophy," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11 (1983).

interpretation of Plato” (36), a massively political Plato “whose other-worldliness is accidental and whose views of the relation between this-worldly affairs and other-worldly affairs are more adequate than those of Aristotle” (ibid.).⁶ We have therefore a distorted (Neoplatonic?) Plato.

Colmo accepts that al-Farabi used to a certain extent Neoplatonism as part of his philosophical rhetoric but his philosophical system lies in square opposition to both Plato and Aristotle’s thought. Focusing his study on al-Farabi’s trilogy *The Two Philosophies*, he claims that the two philosophies to which al-Farabi alludes are not the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, but, on one hand the combined philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and al-Farabi’s philosophy on the other. Furthermore, Colmo establishes a dichotomy between, first, a Hegelian approach to an idealized philosophy according to which “philosophy and religion have the same aim [...] Philosophy is the original that religion imitates insofar as philosophy seeks the truth of which religion is an imitation” (166) and, second, an approach that “denies our access to the veritable or eternal and denies that these are proper standards by which to judge our knowledge” (167).

Colmo’s thesis is similar to Parens’, who counters the Heideggerian view of Plato as a metaphysical dogmatist. Merging both Colmo and Mahdi, he argues that Plato did “not ground his account of politics on metaphysical presuppositions” (144). In his view, al-Farabi’s account of Plato would be more Platonic than Neoplatonic; and Plato would be a phenomenological thinker (ibid.), distorted by Western tradition and the Enlightenment (xi). It was the West, and not al-Farabi, that had misunderstood a Plato as oriented toward man and its context.

⁶ For a similar view, cf. Majid Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002) 22.

Something similar happened with Aristotle. The influence here is more obvious in the sense that complete translations and commentaries of his works are extant. Still, just as it was the case with Plato, the Arab reception of the *Organon* was not unmediated: it was received from both Alexandria and Constantinople. Al-Farabi was related to the former in that he was a product of the Baghdad branch of the school of Alexandria, which moved first to Antioch (ca. 720), then to Harran, and from there to Baghdad (ca. 900).

With regard to Aristotle, it was Druart who suggested that al-Farabi took liberties with the Stagirite's theory (135), modifying it so that it met his views. For example, al-Farabi had to go beyond Aristotle's theory of metaphysics, which did not include theology and posited proximity with the active intellect as the touchstone of man's ultimate happiness. The result would be a distorted Aristotle.

It seems that, even if distorted, scholars have found and analyzed relationships between the West and the East in the field of philosophy. This study will contribute to this comparative scholarship with a focus on rhetoric, broadened to include other systems such as that of Isocrates. To that extent, I should stress that the relationship between East and West is not unidirectional: just as the effects of introducing Aristotle and Plato into Islam "were manifold ... upset[ting] the equilibrium of the Islamic community" (Peters xxi), it seems that Islamic scholarship was "not a mere clone of Greek thought" (Netton). Indeed, as Halldén pointed out, "the influence of Greek rhetoric ... does not, however, [... mean] that Arab Islamic rhetoric is simply an amalgam of traditions that somehow are the

property of Western culture and civilization” (28). Rather, the Greek tradition was adapted to the special needs and the situation of Muslim society.⁷

This is not a negationist statement of Greek influence: as Peters points out, this influence is “as patent as the Greek etymology of *falsafah*” (135). Yet, I would take issue with his claim that “Hellenism created philosophy in Islam” (*ibid.*), which he supports suggesting that *falsafah* is “the only word the Arabs had to describe this utterly new phenomenon” (*ibid.*). Two remarks should be made about that argument. First, I would stress the fact that he used “Hellenism” instead of “Greece.” Indeed, as Cameron has suggested, the ancients may not have felt the distinction between “Greek” and “Semitic” culture with the same force as we do. To that extent, Halldén himself acknowledges that

The presupposition that ancient Greece was a “Western” society has lost its former credibility, and this should be taken into serious consideration when it comes to the history of rhetoric. “Greek” culture itself (both ancient and classical, to say nothing of its Hellenistic permutations) was the product of a composite of influences, some of which emanated from the East (ancient Babylon, Egypt, etc.). (30)

Second, we should also consider not only the tradition of *kalam*, but also research documenting pre-existing public speech and preaching practice in Islamic contexts prior to the advent of Greek scholarship. This study will not deal with this body of pre-existing theories but will analyze the school of *kalam* (the

⁷ We see, again, the relevance of taking the historical context into account.

Mutazilah) and its interplay with Greek scholarship as well as certain features of Islamic culture.

With regard to this point, one could well wonder what these characteristics of Islamic culture are. I contend that the features that will prove relevant to this study are the following:

1. Blurred distinction between what is lawful and what is aesthetically pleasant or effective. Sharia functions as the overall “definer of decorum in human behaviour” (Halldén 23).

2. “The Muslim community is never satisfied with the present. It looks to the future, but only insofar as it is called upon to bring about the revolution that will suppress its own rebellion” (Mahdi 17). This point can be said to be shared with Judeo-Christian thought, something classical antiquity lacked.

3. “Man is the central concern of both philosophy and divine law: philosophy is a human activity and the divine law is addressed to man ... both call on man to reach for something higher than himself, to become divine” (Mahdi 18).

4. Philosophy is “understood by analogy to the human arts whose practice is demanded by the divine law, but a divine law that left man free to perfect these arts according to his natural light” (Mahdi 27). According to Islamic philosophy, those capable should pursue free inquiry according to the best available method (Adamson in Bragg).

5. Islam is a “political, this-worldly religion” (Mahdi 36). This point summarizes previous aspects. Morewedge makes a similar claim stressing “the political dimension of the philosophical teacher [... as] fully accepted and expanded in Islamic political theory” (68).

6. “Islam is a religion of theocracy; collectivism is presupposed as an implicit premise in its political philosophy. The sage, the religious leader and the ruler of the community are all variations of the perfect man” (Morewedge 68). Both Aouad and Morewedge also make this point.

7. Muslims are conscious of their inability to know the whole. Their frustration from (and acceptance of) this fact derives into prayer “with a view to persuading the power who rules the whole to order the whole in accordance with the vision we have of it” (Parens xvi).

8. Islam is an inclusive culture with the ability to encompass within itself sophisticated minorities and external influences (Peters xix).

My claim is not to have gathered a comprehensive list of attributes of Islamic cultures. Rather, I have collected a list of characteristics which, according to my research hypotheses, influenced al-Farabi’s rhetorical theory. My purpose in the study will be to analyze to what extent and how it was affected by these features.

With regard to al-Farabi’s rhetorical theory, this is the focus of very few studies. I will expand my review to literature related to other fields such as the other syllogistic arts (focusing on poetics, philosophy, and dialectics), plus two areas that have proved significant in my review: politics and religion. I will concentrate on al-Farabi and their interconnections with his rhetorical theory.

Fakhry (Al-Farabi, Founder 26) presents us with a clear schema of the aims of each art. While poetry is concerned with imagination, science with demonstration and dialectic with opinion, rhetoric is the art of persuasion. As it is usually the case with clear schemata, the lines drawn are more defined than they are in reality. As we will see, al-Farabi’s very special theory of opinion is subsumed under the

frame of his rhetoric and encompasses both certainty and supposition. Also, just as opinion is not the exclusive realm of dialectics, persuasion takes place in other fields such as politics, religion and philosophy. To this extent, rhetoric can be said to play a part in those fields and this study also proposes to analyze the relations between each of the pairs. Scholars (Butterworth "Rhetorician"; Mahdi) have already suggested the existence of interplay among all these areas in Medieval Islam. Butterworth and Parens have done this from a political point of view; Mahdi did the same with a focus on philosophy; whereas Kemal and Aouad and Schoeler centered their investigation around the poetics. This study contributes to that conversation with a focus on rhetoric and the figure of al-Farabi. My research questions are derived from the gaps and unresolved controversies I have found in the literature.

1. How is the historical context of the Abbasid dynasty related to al-Farabi's theory of rhetoric?

This question arises in part from my New Historicist bias as a scholar. To that extent, it is important to me and my practice as a researcher. Furthermore, the question is relevant to understand al-Farabi's theory insofar as it can be said to be a product of the Renaissance period of Islam. It seems therefore reasonable to claim, together with Kraemer and the postulates of New Historicism, that, without the Humanist structure of that time and place, al-Farabi could not have written his works. Building upon the historical studies of Kraemer and Gutas, I will analyze the historical context in which al-Farabi's theory of rhetoric developed.

2. How are the eight characteristics of Islamic culture described above related to al-Farabi's theory of rhetoric?

This question is relevant in the face of scholarship (Langhade; Bohas, Guillaume and Kouloughli; Smyth, qtd. in Hallén 20) that questions the Islamic nature of al-Farabi's thought and those who adopt his views. Previous literature has already addressed this issue but it has not answered what is Islamic about the rhetoric of al-Farabi. The fact that it be Islamic, as opposed to Western, is an essential point: there are alternatives to contemporary Islamic societies that do not imply losing their identity.

3. How is al-Farabi's rhetorical theory related to Platonic, Neoplatonic, Aristotelian and Sophistic rhetorical theory?

I find this to be a very exciting and motivating question. As I suggested in my review of the literature, previous scholarship has inconclusively analyzed the writings of al-Farabi either from a Platonic or an Aristotelian perspective. I find al-Farabi's historical context to be similar to the one that allowed the sophists to flourish in ancient Greece. Also, several studies point to a phenomenological al-Farabi (Mahdi; Parens). Putting both aspects together, I expect to find an internal (rather than external) relation between the sophists' positions and al-Farabi's thought.

4. What are the relationships established by al-Farabi in his writings between rhetoric on one side and philosophy, politics, dialectic, poetics and religion on the other?

This question aims at presenting a broad and framing picture of al-Farabi's theory of rhetoric. To that extent, I will analyze the relationship between rhetoric and the other syllogistic arts, with a focus on philosophy, dialectic and poetics. This study will not probe the relationship between rhetoric and sophistry because

of a lack of a primary text on the latter. Instead, I will complement my study with an exploration of the relationship between rhetoric, politics and religion.

I think that the best way to answer these questions is to understand, together with McKeon, al-Farabi's theory of rhetoric as an argument for what rhetoric should be. With this aim, a careful close analysis of the argument al-Farabi makes in his texts will help us understand the context (RQ1), discover its structure (RQ4), identify the arguments (RQ3) and signal the inherent values of the position (RQ2).

Accordingly, chapter two will explore the dynasty of the Abbasids and the cultural revolution they espoused. Thanks to it, almost all non-literary and non-historical secular Greek scholarship was translated into Arabic (Gutas 1). The chapter will also expose darker aspects of the Abbasids; especially their strategies to create a closed society where dissent is not allowed. At this point, the chapter will also feature a presentation of the intellectual opposition force that the Abbasids faced: the Mutazilah. Chapter three will examine the claim that al-Farabi's thought is not external to Islam or Islamic society by analyzing to what extent al-Farabi can be presented as a scholar who fits within the frame of that culture and society. This chapter will also study al-Farabi's approach to Sharia.

Chapter four will present al-Farabi's theory of rhetoric and his conceptualization of the enthymeme. It will also consider any possible links between al-Farabi's theory of rhetoric and that of three classical Greek scholars (Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates). Chapter five will situate rhetoric within the structure of al-Farabi's thought. This chapter will explore the relations between rhetoric on the one hand and philosophy, dialectic, poetic, religion and politics on the other. Finally, chapter six explores future research possibilities that can spring

out of this study and points at possible obstacles one could find to that extent. It will also summarize the argument that this study tries to make about al-Farabi's theory of rhetoric.

CHAPTER II

Al-Farabi al-gharib, al-gharb and al-Farabi

One of the events [of this year] was the spread of the Qarmatian movement in the Kufan countryside. Shibl, a page of Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Tai, was sent against them. He was ordered to search for them, seize all of them that he might come upon, and bring them to the Caliph's court. He came upon a leader of theirs known as Ibn Abi al-Qaws. He was sent with the others to Baghdad. On al-Muharran 22, 289, (January 8, 902), al-Mutadid summoned him and interrogated him. He then ordered his teeth knocked out. Thereafter, his (limbs) were dislocated by stretching one of his hands with a pulley while a rock was attached to the other hand. He was left in this state from midday to evening. The next day, his hands and feet were cut off, and he was decapitated. His corpse was hung on the East Side. After several days, it was carried to al-Yasiriyyah, where it was hung together with the Qarmatians who had been hung there. (Al-Tabari 99)

This event took place only a couple of months after the arrival of al-Farabi from Farab to Baghdad in 901; this move and the situation in Baghdad marked his period of old age and full maturity. While it has traditionally been held that al-Farabi “devoted himself entirely to contemplation and speculation and kept himself aloof from political and social perturbations and turmoils” (Sharif 450), I would like to show that his rhetorical theory reflects the socio-political controversies and debates of his time. A presentation of these is therefore in order for us to better understand both their presence in al-Farabi’s work and the positions he favored. To that extent, this second chapter will probe the dynasty during whose

caliphate al-Farabi lived: the Abbasids and their competing persuasive forces, the Mutazilites. Counter to the traditional depiction of the Abbasids as a paradigm of humanist rulers, I will argue for an alternative understanding which, though acknowledging their project to revitalize Greek (and Persian) knowledge, also draws our attention to their self-perpetuating, repressive strains.

The Abbasids overthrew the Umayyad dynasty in 750, when the Abbasid general Abdullah invited eighty Umayyad leaders to a banquet at abu-Futrus (ancient Antipatris) and killed them in what is known as the Abbasid massacre (Hitti 285). This feast of blood followed the fall of the leading city of al-Kufah, in 749. Gibbon's analysis of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, according to which it was due to the loss of civic virtue among its citizens, has also been applied to the fall of the Umayyads,⁸ against whom the Abbasids presented their theocratic and orthodox program.

The establishment of the Abbasids involved a Copernican change in several aspects other than religious reformism. The geopolitics of the Middle East underwent a shift from the Arab and Byzantine-oriented Umayyads to the more international and Persian-oriented Abbasids. This change can be observed in the base of the new empire: Baghdad. Its etymology leads us to "the two ancient *Persian* words *Bagh*, 'God,' and *Dâdh*, meaning 'founded' or foundation –whence Baghdad would have signified *the city 'Founded by God'*" (Le Strange 11). The italics are mine and they remind us of the Persian and theocratic foundations of the Abbasid Empire.

⁸ Hitti records how "the characteristic vices of civilization, especially those involving wine, women and song, had seized upon the youthful Arab society" (280)

This Persian influence cut through all aspects and layers of society⁹ and meant a cultural revolution. For the Umayyads, Gutas tells us, "the prevailing high culture, especially among those Greek-speaking [Byzantine] groups with whom the Umayyads were in direct contact, was the Greek Orthodox Christianity espoused in imperial Constantinople" (18), which looked down on Hellenism as "the defeated enemy, to be treated with contemptuous indifference because it was irrelevant" (ibid.). Thus, the cultural orientation of the caliphate changed with the transferal of the capital from Damascus to Baghdad. That is relevant in as much as the Abbasids allowed interest in the Hellenist heritage which would have never taken place in the Umayyad Empire. Indeed, had al-Farabi not lived within the realm of the Abbasids and their promoted translation movement,¹⁰ it would be doubtful whether he would have written both his commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and his treatise on rhetoric.

The orientation of the Abbasids towards Persia and classical Greece was not disinterested: it was a means of legitimizing their ruling power. In order to clarify this point and suggest how it can be linked to both the opening quotation of this chapter and al-Farabi's rhetorical theory, I will analyze both of the following fragments:

⁹ Hitti tells us how "Gradually Persian titles, Persian wines and wives, Persian mistresses, Persian songs, as well as Persian ideas and thoughts, won the day. Al-Mansur, we are told, was the first to adopt the characteristic Persian head-gear ... in which he was naturally followed by his subjects." (294)

¹⁰ This movement was espoused by the Abbasids and took place mainly in Baghdad between the middle of the eighth century to the end of the tenth. It consisted in the translation of "almost *all* non-literary and non-historical secular Greek books that were available throughout the Eastern Byzantine Empire and the Near East" Dimitri Gutas, Greek Thought, Arabic Culture : The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries) (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998) 1.

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!	If the caliph is killed the whole
Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope	universe is disorganized, the sun
The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence	hides its face, rain ceases and
The life o' the building!	plants grow no more

The fragment on the right is uttered by Macduff in Macbeth's second act, third scene, upon the discovery of the assassination of King Duncan. The one on the left is taken from Ibn at-Tiqtaqa's *Kitab al-Fakhri* (190), a source contemporary to the fall of the Abbasid dynasty. Despite the temporal and geographical differences, both texts share the same conception of the divinity of the body politic. Thus, just as Claudius entrenched himself in the "divinity [that] doth hedge a king" (Hamlet, IV.5), the Abbasids used Persian Zoroastrian texts to construe the conception that their ascent to power was protected and commanded by God. Hence their usage of such texts as Abu-Sahl's *Kitab an-Nahmutan*, where subjects were reminded that

The people of every age and era acquire fresh experiences and have knowledge renewed for them in accordance with the decree of the stars and the signs of the zodiac, a decree which is in charge of governing time by the command of God Almighty. (8 qtd. in Gutas 46)

Gutas suggests that the Abbasids interpreted from passages such as the one above that God had commanded them to renew the sciences just as the Sasanians had previously done. Invested with such a divine protection, they set to confront their opponents through dialectic as a means to produce proofs against them and their socio-cultural foundations.

Al-Mahdi was the first caliph to command the theologians who used dialectic disputation (al-gadaliyyin) in their research to compose books

against the heretics and other infidels we have just mentioned. The theologians then produced demonstrative proofs against the disputers (mu'anidin), eliminated the problems posed by the heretics, and expounded the truth in clear terms to the doubters (al-Mas'udi 3447, qtd. in Gutas 65)

The disputers of the Abbasids were the Umayyads, who were trying to regain power, and return to their cultural foundations: Byzantium (the eastern part of what once was the Roman Empire) and the Greek orthodox Christians. Both of these foundations were the targets of Abbasid dialectic, which was used to establish the pre-eminence of their Hellenistic counterparts with arguments such as the following:

Both in their spoken and written language the Byzantines follow in the footsteps of the Greek, though they never reached their level either in the essential purity or absolute eloquence of the language. The language of the Byzantine is inferior in comparison to that of the Greeks and its syntax, in the way in which it is expressed and in the customary manner of address, is weaker. (Al-Mas'udi 664, qtd. in Gutas 89)

During the time of the ancient Greeks, and for a little while during the Byzantine [i.e. in this case, Roman] empire, the philosophical sciences kept on growing and developing, and scholars and philosophers were respected and honored ... The sciences continued to be in great demand and intensively cultivated until the religion of Christianity appeared among the Byzantines; they then effaced the signs of philosophy, eliminated its traces, destroyed its paths, and they changed and corrupted what the ancient

Greeks had set forth in clear expositions. (Al-Mas'udi 741, qtd. in Gutas 89)

Both of these fragments prove for Gutas the rationalistic policy of the Abbasids, which was a result of Sasanid thought according to which there can never come together in a single state a concealed religious leader and a declared political leader without the religious leader usurping the power from the political leader, because religion is the foundation and royal authority is the pillar, and he who controls the foundation is in better control of the entire edifice than he who controls the pillar. (Al-Abi 89, qtd in Gutas 81)

In other words, "the king ought not to concede to worshippers, ascetics, and the pious that they are worthier of the religion, more fond of it, and more angry on its account than himself" (ibid.). Consequently, according to Gutas, Abbasid caliphs favored a rationalist intellectual elite over religious leaders. I would like to show, however, that their rationalism is not as strong as Gutas suggests. Indeed, when Claudius' sentence above is put in its context, an uncomfortable sense of uneasiness can be perceived:

Let him go, Gertrude; do not fear our person:

There's such divinity doth hedge a king,

That treason can but peep to what it would,

Acts little of his will. (Hamlet IV.5)

This is relevant insofar it debunks the confidence asserted by a body politic that endows those in power with a halo of infallibility and perfection. The same

uneasiness can be felt in the reassuring mantra that Ali repeated to himself the night before he was assassinated in 661:

It is reported that ‘Ali had kept watch that whole night before the murder and that he kept repeating as he paced from the door to his bedroom, ‘God knows I have never lied, nor been accused of lying. (Al-Mas'udi 423 qtd. in Mernissi 28)

Again, Ali’s disquiet counters the divinity that hedges the body politic and hints at the opposition to a fallible ruler. What is more, his assassination¹¹ takes us closer to the irrationality and violence of the opening quotation from al-Tabari than to Gutas’ rationalism. Indeed, upon a reading of al-Tabari's or al-Mas'udi's histories it is hard to defend Gutas' benign account. To this extent, I would favor Fatima Mernissi’s approach, according to which the Abbasids did recruit an intellectual elite; but this elite was drawn from a specific tradition of thought: that of the Sharia, which was understood as a banning reflection and as based on Taa (obedience). This interpretation of the Sharia differs from the original meaning of Sharia which, as the historical dictionary *Lisan al-Arab* records, denotes “going to the source of water.” The mythological value of water in the Arabic culture has an element of life and energy but I suggest that the Abbasids turned to blood rather than water.

¹¹ “On the night of Friday 13 Ramadan [January 20, 661] that woman withdrew for prayer under a sort of mosquito net within the walls of the great mosque ... She brought a piece of silk which she cut into strips and put around the men's foreheads, while the men took their swords and went to sit facing the door through which ‘Ali would enter the mosque, as he did every morning at the first call of the muezzin ... [then] ‘Ali came out of his house and called out in a loud voice, 'Muslims, come to prayer, come to prayer!' Ibn Muljam and his accomplices threw themselves on him ... Ibn Muljam struck him a sword blow on the top of his head” Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj Al-Dhahab* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1982) 423.

Similarly, Mernissi contends that “in order to serve the needs of the Abbasid palace, the Sharia was stripped of its questioning, speculative dimension” and “[t]he Imam became a bloodthirsty despot” (37). This is illustrated in the inaugural discourse by Abu al-Abbas, the first Abbasid caliph, where he referred to himself as *al-saffah*, the bloodshedder (Al-Tabari 30). That self-appellation is a powerful indicator of the degree of turmoil and political instability reached during this period.¹² A brief analysis of al-Farabi’s lifetime results in a bleeding list of rebellions: he was born the first year of the Zanj revolt, a 14-year slave rebellion in which half a million people died (Hitti 468); he also experienced the uprising of the 13 vizirs against al-Muqtadir (908-32), who had succeeded his second cousin, Abdullah ibn al-Mutazz, upon being killed the day after he assumed the caliphate (December 17, 908).

What can be learned from all the facts and events above? Khomeini’s religious orthodoxy and repressive tactics of any opposition was not unprecedented in the history of the Islamic Middle East. Indeed, these can already be found in the Abbasids. And yet, there are various differences between Khomeini and the Abbasids. One of the most significant ones is that while the Abbasids could not suppress the idea of there existing an opposition, Khomeini had enough media power as to present a monolithic social depiction. The song *Comme d’Habitude* provides us with an analogous situation. Claude François created it but it was Paul Anka who made it world known. Also, while in François’ song the story is about a couple and the narration is focused on the other partner, on “you”; in Paul Anka’s

¹² Hitti points out that “the incoming dynasty [the Abbasids], much more than the outgoing [the Umayyads], depended upon force in the execution of its policies. For the first time in the history of Islam the leathern spread beside the caliph’s seat, which served as a carpet for the use of the executioner, became a necessary adjunct of the imperial’s throne” (288).

version, the other vanishes under a monolithic I-speaker (which does not mean that it does not exist: it is simply hidden). In any case, both Khomeini (less conspicuously) and the Abbasids (more conspicuously) repressed their opposition. To this extent, it is useful to cite Khallikan's account of Hallaj's execution:

He received a thousand blows and didn't utter a word (...) the executioner cut off his hands and feet, cut off his head, which he kept aside, and then burned the body. When it was nothing but ashes, he threw it into the Tigris and planted the head on Baghdad's bridge. (140, qtd. in Mernissi 20)

His crime? He would insist that the human being was a creature of God, capable of self-guidance. This is relevant insofar as it hints towards the existence of movements and ideas in line with what will be called much later in Europe the Renaissance. For the time being, I will focus my analysis on an emerging pattern: the Claudius-like Abbasid obsession and/or fear of opposition. To this extent, it should be noted that such opposition did exist and manifested itself in two different ways. One of the ways was intellectual. This was the trend followed by the Mutazilites. The other way was violent and was adopted by the Kharijites. According to Mernissi, there is a relevant difference between both of these ways. While the former "proposed a profound reflection on the nature of humanity and the nature of the divine, thus bringing up the question of the place of reason and personal opinion, as did the western philosophers of the Enlightenment" (21), the latter "never dreamed of changing the relationship between the leader and the community; they simply thought that by rebelling against the imam and sometimes killing him they could change things" (ibid.).

Each tradition has a certain vocabulary. Thus, Sharia is the core word for the Kharijites, who understand it is their duty to watch that the leader of the community stays within the *hudud* (Allah's limits). On the other hand, the keywords for the Mutazilites are reason (aql) and personal opinion (ray). Their goal is to apply both of these concepts to the political sphere. The relevance of the Mutazilite approach is suggested by Mernissi: it allows all the people who are capable of reasoning to enter the realm of the political and play an active role. Al-Masudi explained thus the Mutaliza as follows:

The Mutazilah and other schools maintain that the title of imam is obtained by the [free] vote of the nation. God and his prophet, they say, did not designate a particular imam, and the Muslims were not obliged to give their vote to any specially designated man. (236, qtd. in Mernissi 35)

This fragment debunks the divinity halo that the Abbasids, as Claudius, asserted to have. Similarly, one of the best definitions that I have found of Mutazilah (Fackenheim's) stresses the attempt to debunk mystical and religious doctrines to what seems to be the requirements of reason. And yet, the philosophy of the Mutazilah transcends that characteristic and materializes in five different ideas, which Nader describes: First, the unity of God (al-tawhid). This is very important because al-tawhid could be argued to be the ultimate touchstone of the Islamic nature of any religious group. Indeed, this is the only characteristic that all Islamic groups share¹³ and as such it is a relevant element to be taken into

¹³ I would however note that this feature is not exclusive to Islam. Besides, the interpretations of tawhid vary across Islamic groups. Thus, Nader alludes to the controversial Mutazilite interpretation of the attributes of God (attributes are not extrinsic to the Divine essence).

consideration in the examination of the alleged unislamic essence of this movement.

A second feature of the movement is Divine justice (al-adl). The Mutazilah heralds the liberum arbitrium of man basing its position both in what Isaiah Berlin would call the principle of alternative possibilities¹⁴ and in a Koranic interpretation favoring verses such as "The truth is from your Lord: let him then who will, believe; and let him who will, disbelieve" (The Quran 18: 28) over others such as "and whom God shall please to guide, that man's breast will He open to Islam; but whom He shall please to go astray, strait and narrow will He make his heart" (6: 125). Nader focuses on these two characteristics but, in the context of this study, I would stress the value of a different one: the intermediate position (al-manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn).

Such a position is so relevant that the name of the movement is derived from this root (Itizal). Itizal means separation and I will illustrate its meaning with an example that unites both features: divine justice and the intermediate position. It concerns the founder of the movement, Wasil ibn Ata. He separated himself from the circles of thought existing during his time regarding the characterization of great sinners (fasiqun). According to some they were unbelievers; according to others they were believers. Wasil ibn Ata was able to break out of the dichotomy and propose a Guiddens-like third way: their essence was neither believing nor unbelieving but a middle position between the two. The impact of this frame of thought is not to be belittled.

¹⁴ "A person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise" In Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," The Importance of What We Care About (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 1.

Neither are its consequences -and it should be noted that not all of them are positive. Indeed, the Mutazilite ideas presented above unsettled the Abbasid caliphs and religious imams alike. According to Mernissi, their reaction was to shroud their ideas in *the chador of foreignness*. With her sociological background, she analyses the metaphorical-mythological value the West, al-gharb, has in the frame of Arabic cultural assumptions:

Gharb, the Arabic word for the West, is also the place of darkness and the incomprehensible, always frightening. Gharb is the territory of the strange, the foreign (gharib). Everything that we don't understand is frightening. "Foreignness" in Arabic has a very strong spatial connotation, for gharb is the place where the sun sets and where darkness awaits. It is in the West that the night snaps up the sun and swallows it; then all terrors are possible.

(13)

In order to better understand Mernissi's definition, I propose to complement it with Susan Sontag's idea of illness. According to Sontag, illness is commonly explained as a consequence of natural law that relates to the sick person's psyche and morality. Consequently, illnesses are categorized by spiritual and moral attributes rather than by physical symptoms. Indeed, one of the things that struck me most during my conversations with Moroccans was that they saw Western society not only as foreign, but also ill, poisoned from a fast-food moral system. Attaching the Mutazilah and all its ideological system (moral responsibility, rationalism, third-way strategies, etc.) to the foreign and ill West was one of the most successful moves of the fearful (and feared) Abbasids. Mernissi argues that their successors (political and religious leaders) have succeeded in consolidating

the view that humanism and Islam are unrelated terms. In the chapters ahead, I plan to show not only how the rhetorical theories of al-Farabi share a common territory with the Mutazilah but also how close their tenets are to an Islamic identity.

I have contributed towards that goal in this chapter by presenting the historical context in which those theories developed. To that extent, I have introduced the Abbasids as the dominant players in a game where, feeling vulnerable and afraid, they resorted to violence and the stigmatization of their opponents. With regard to their opponents, I have focused on the Mutazilites because al-Farabi's theories of rhetoric will mirror their philosophies.

CHAPTER III

Al-Farabi: the Islamic bassoon

The Abbasid stigmatization of the Mutazilah began with al-Mutawakkil (847-861). In contrast to both his brother, al-Wathiq (842-847), and his father, al-Mutasim (833-842), he was more interested in power and magnificence than in knowledge. Thus, he is usually remembered for being the commissioner of the great mosque of Samarra -at its time, the largest and most fanciful in the world, covered with mosaics of dark blue glass and having a spiral minaret of 180 feet. The magnificence of this construction left very little space remaining in al-Mutawakkil's frame of thought for the Mutazilah, which, in Jakobson's terminology,¹⁵ suddenly gained the status of markedness and was presented as something strange and foreign to the Islamic tradition. Thus, they ironically shared the same condition the Greeks had suffered under the Umayyads.

The sad part of the story is that more than a thousand years later, the Mutazilah and what it stands for, still carry a scarlet F, for foreign, which continues to burn. This is relevant in as much as al-Farabi has also been condemned to wear that sign of markedness. Thus, Langhade in his introduction to al-Farabi's rhetoric claims that it is not an Arabic work. He then opposes the two terms in Arabic to talk about rhetoric: *khataba* and *balagha* concluding that "the true Arabic rhetoric will only be found in the Balagha" (Al-Farabi Rhetoric 27). Al-Farabi's own translator and editor will characterize him as foreign to the Arabic tradition! He does not however make explicit which are the specific elements that make him a stranger to

¹⁵ Roman Jakobson introduced the theory of markedness according to which dichotomies have a neutral, transparent side opposed to a marked one. The pair unmarked/marked has been likened to the pair norm/deviation.

Arabic culture and Islam other than his supposed abstractness. In this chapter I will counter-argue Langhade's (and the Abbasids') conceptualization of al-Farabi's theory of *khataba* as foreign to Islamic culture. Instead, I will present al-Farabi as a truly Islamic scholar in whose conception of the ideal Islamic society rhetoric is called to play a central integrative role.

I will begin by addressing Langhade's terminological claim about the *khataba/balagha* dichotomy. Here, it is useful to cite Halldén, who reminds us that the word in Arabic for public speech is *al-khataba* rather than *al-balagha*, which is backed by the fact that the words sermon (*khutba*), public discourse (*khitab*) and preacher or orator (*khatib*) are derived not from *balagha* but from *khataba*. What is more, "*al-khataba* was something for the rational mind to reflect on" (23). Indeed, rationality (one of the pillars of the Mutazilah) is therefore linked to *al-khataba* and is characterized as a central element of Arab-Muslim culture. Consequently, al-Farabi's *Kitab al-Khataba* (Book of Rhetoric) can indeed belong to the true tradition of Arabic rhetoric.

To probe the relationship between al-Farabi and the Islamic tradition, I will describe the extent to which the eight major characteristics of Islam outlined in chapter one can be found in al-Farabi's work. The first characteristic alluded to Sharia as the overall "definer of decorum in human behavior" (Halldén 23). Yet it is necessary to point out that Sharia is a concept with different sides (Gallagher). Indeed, Sharia is a polysemous concept and it means different things to different people. Thus, while for orthodox scholars it means the *fixed* doctrine of the Koran and the Sunna; for Ramadan it means "the path of fidelity to the principles of Islam" (Ramadan "The Way toward Radical Reform" 5), which implies that both

the Koran and the Sunna can be reinterpreted in accordance to each particular context. Finally, Mernissi cites the entry in Manzur's historical dictionary Lisan al-Arab for Sharia according to which its etymology would stem from the concept of "going toward the source of water . . . toward the element that assures life and renews energy" (33). This last definition, again, allows for a reinterpretation of the sacred texts contradicting orthodox doctrine. What is more, the guidelines for that reinterpretation spring not from Islam directly (as in Ramadan) but from human happiness, harmony and prosperity.

Does Sharia appear in the works of al-Farabi? If so, what is the position that he takes in this regard? I contend first, that one can find a theory of Sharia in his works. Second, I suggest that al-Farabi's concept of Sharia is not a fixed corpus. He will make this reinterpretability clear throughout his work. One of the most explicit passages in this sense is when he states how it can be modified in accordance with the current circumstances:

the successor [of the first ruler] will be the one who determines what the first did not determine. And not only this, but it is also up to him to alter much of what the first had legislated and to determine it in another way, when he knows that it is best for his time -not because the first erred, but because the first made a determination according to what was best for his time and this one makes a determination according to what is best subsequent to the time of the first, this being the kind of thing the first would alter also, were he to observe it. ("Religion" 99)¹⁶

¹⁶ Throughout this survey the terms Sharia and law will be used interchangeably in accordance with the practice most extended among al-Farabi's translators.

Both Ramadan and Manzur offer a flexible approach to Sharia. In my opinion, al-Farabi's conceptualization is closer to the meaning expressed by Manzur. This can be seen in his figure of the statesman, whom he describes as someone who “should be able to lead people well along the right path to felicity and to the actions by which felicity is reached” (Al-Farabi Perfect State 247). Al-Farabi’s text follows very closely the conceptualization of Sharia as a path toward the source of life and energy. Something similar is affirmed at the beginning of his *Book of Religion*:

If the first ruler is virtuous and his rulership truly virtuous, then in what he prescribes he seeks only to obtain, for himself and for everyone under his rulership, the ultimate happiness that is truly happiness; and that religion will be virtuous religion. If his rulership is ignorant, then in what he prescribes he seeks only to obtain, for himself by means of them, one of the important goods ... to win that good, be happy with it to the exclusion of them, and make those he uses to arrive at his purpose and to retain in his possession. ("Religion" 33)

I will stress two themes from the citation above. First, that al-Farabi’s conception of ruling restricts more the ruler than the ruled. Rulers are charged with the responsibility of leading everyone to happiness and are warned against abusing power for their own exclusive benefit. In this sense, al-Farabi classifies rulers in two types: virtuous and non-virtuous -ignorant- ("Religion" 93), laying the foundations for a critical attitude towards rules and rulers who are not infallible. This attitude, in spite of what rulers would rather have people believe, is Islamic insofar as the Prophet himself stated that “those who put in a position someone

who they know unworthy betrays God, the Prophet and the entirety of the community” (Ramadan *Islam & Société* np). Indeed, as Ramadan points out “if you are in front of God, develop a law that pleases God and God does not like injustice” (ibid.). It is the responsibility of the Muslim to make sure that the most honest and competent people rule the community. Therefore, there is a trend in Islam to warn against bad rulers, and suggest that there can be such a thing. This trend can be seen in al-Farabi’s work in his commentary about the ignorant rulers.

Second, al-Farabi's warning against exclusion is very much in line with Peters’ conception of Islam as “an inclusive culture with the ability to encompass within itself sophisticated minorities and external influences” (Peters xix). Indeed, for al-Farabi, there is a close relationship between the community and religion. Thus his treatise on religion starts placing religion within the domain of actions and opinions within the frame of a community.¹⁷ This is relevant inasmuch as it provides us with a distinction between Islam and al-Farabi, and other more-individual-focused religions and scholars. Furthermore, the communal aspect of religion is especially relevant from a rhetorical point of view because language will play a crucial role in regulating relations in the community.

This role of rhetorical speech can be seen when al-Farabi describes the ideal ruler, deeming it important for him to “be good at guiding the people by his speech to fulfill the laws of the first sovereigns as well as those laws which he will have deducted in conformity with their principles after their time” (*Perfect State* 252-53). Similarly, in *Aphorisms*, rhetoric is defined as “the ability to speak to others

¹⁷ “Religion is opinions and actions, determined and restricted with stipulations and prescribed for a community ... The community may be a tribe, a city or district, a great nation, or many nations” (93).

by means of statements that are excellent in persuading about each and every one of the possible matters that are such as to be preferred or avoided” (“Aphorisms” 35). Rhetoric thus becomes a powerful and indispensable element in the society about which al-Farabi writes. He envisions a virtuous society in which the rhetoricians are called to be the second pillar.¹⁸ Similarly, in his description of the statesman he acknowledges that “it is difficult to find all these qualities united in one man” (Perfect State 249)¹⁹ so he agrees to dropping some of the characteristics of the best statesman but the quality of good public speech will never be discarded: he needs to be a rhetorician. In this sense, out of the 12 characteristics the ideal ruler should have, al-Farabi deems six to be essential:

(1) He will be a philosopher, (2) He will know and remember the laws and customs... (3) He will excel in deducing new law by analogy... (4) He will be good at deliberating and be powerful in his deductions to meet new situations for which the first sovereigns could not have laid down any law; when doing this he will have in mind the good of the city. (5) He will be good at guiding the people by his speech... (6) He should be of tough physique (Perfect State 251-253)

This recognition of the impossibility of finding a platonic philosopher king is significant and will be further explored in the next chapter. In this chapter, I would however like to stress that in accordance to the political, this-wordly nature of

¹⁸ “There are five parts of the virtuous city: the virtuous, the linguists, the assessors, the warriors and the moneymakers. The virtuous are the wise, the prudent, those who have opinions about major matters. Then are the transmitters of the creed and the linguists; they are the rhetoricians, the eloquent, the poets, the musicians, the scribes, and those who act in the same way as they do and are among their number” (“Aphorisms” 37).

¹⁹ This cite matches aphorism n. 97. Some scholars claim this is a spurious addition to the text. While the present study does not aim at determining the status of this aphorism, it should be noted that it seems to be in accordance to the spirit of the rest of the text as the citation above shows.

Islam (characteristic number five in chapter one) and its awareness of the impossibility for man to know the whole (seventh characteristic of Islam in chapter one), al-Farabi does show both the awareness of the inability of humans, and an inclination towards a practical, this-worldly, approach to science and praxis. He states this point explicitly and clearly:

The virtuous regime is the one through which ... the ruled gain virtues with respect to their this-worldly life and the afterlife that they could not gain except by means of it. With respect to their this-worldly life, it is [a] that the body of each one have the best conditions possible for its nature to receive, [b] that the soul of each one have the best conditions possible for its individual nature and for its power to obtain the virtues that are the reason for happiness in the afterlife, and [c] that their subsistence be better and more pleasant than all the sorts of life and subsistence that others have ("Aphorisms" 58)

This practical, down-to-earth bias will show in all levels of al-Farabi's work and contradicts Langhade's vague claim that his is an abstract approach. Thus, at an epistemological level, he favors the use of inference as the basis for discernment,²⁰ and induction as the foundations for practical intelligence.²¹ What is more, actual customs and practices become a heuristic element in the establishment of Sharia and valid knowledge:

²⁰ Discernment is the ability to light upon the correct judgment with respect to recondite opinions that are disputed and the power to verify it. So it is excellently inferring what is sound in opinions and is, therefore, one of the kinds of prudence ("Aphorisms" 31)

²¹ Defined as "the faculty by which a human being -through much experience in matters and long observation of sense-perceptible things- attains premises by which he is able to seize upon what he ought to prefer or avoid with respect to each one of the matters we are to do" ("Aphorisms" 31)

He [the jurist] must be cognizant of what is generally accepted and what is customary. ("Religion" 100)

Stupidity is when someone's imaginative grasp of generally accepted things is unimpaired and he has preserved experiences ... his deliberation inevitably makes him imagine that what does not lead to that [particular] goal does lead to it or makes him imagine that what leads to the contrary of that goal leads to it. So his action and advice are in accordance with what his corrupt deliberation makes him imagine. ("Aphorisms" 34)

The assumption underlying these quotations illustrates the sixth characteristic of Islam, which can also be conspicuously found in al-Farabi's work: collectivism is ingrained in Islam. In this sense, al-Farabi describes as stupidity not acting in accordance with general knowledge and customs. He also posits again poetic imagination as bringing people apart in contrast to rhetoric, which is seen as fulfilling an integrative function ("Aphorisms" 36). The emphasis is, again, on the community rather than on the individual. As it has already been suggested, the community is responsible for the critical observation of the ruler and the touchstone against which the rules are to be measured.

An example of the importance of collectivism in Islamic culture is the fact that the traditional political system in Islamic countries is, according to Sluglett, the republic. Madzur's Lisan al-Arab traces back the origins of the word republic (jumhuriyya) to the verb jamhara, "gathering together." Jumhuriyya would mean in this context "the majority of the people." Mernissi quotes Manzur's example of this use of the term: "jumhuriyya wine: 'a wine that makes one very drunk'; it is called jumhuriyya because 'most people consume it.' So we conclude that

jumhuriyya describes a certain consensus, a unity within the collectivity” (Manzur, qtd. in Mernissi 72). Another example of the importance of collectivity can be seen the first pillar of Islam, the Shahada,²² the Islamic profession of faith. It was what the Prophet asked from the Quraysh council to pronounce so that they could rule over both Arabs and non-Arabs. At that point, the council rejected Muhammad’s request forcing him out of Mecca. When he came back from Medina, the Prophet imposed the Shahada ending the adoration of multiple idols. Abdullah bin Masud narrates the episode in the Hadith of Bukhari:

The Prophet entered Mecca and (at that time) there were three hundred-and-sixty idols around the Ka'ba. He started stabbing the idols with a stick he had in his hand and reciting: "Truth (Islam) has come and Falsehood (disbelief) has vanished." (Bukhari 3:658)

Individuality was in this way destroyed in the Islamic society. It has traditionally been assumed that this factor is of major relevance because it allowed Islam to expand as quickly as fire. As Mernissi puts it, they substituted freedom for rahma,²³ and rahma “made Islam a peaceful, unobtrusive traveler circulating in all simplicity, without armies or swords, using established trading routes” (110). Rhetoric will play a key role in the establishment of social cohesion and as such it is opposed to imagination:

Excellence in imaginative evocations [takhyil] is other than excellence in persuasion. The difference between the two is that what is intended by excellence in persuasion is for the hearer to do something after assenting to

²² “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet.”

²³ Rahma is a rich concept with multiple facets: sensitiveness (al-riqa), tenderness (al-ta’attuf), and also forgiveness (al-maghfira). It is everything that is sweet and tender, nourishing and safe, like a womb (Mernissi 88).

it. What is intended by excellence in imaginative evocation is to inspire the soul of the hearer to seek or to flee the thing imaginatively evoked, or to have an inclination or loathing for it, even if he has not assented to it.

(“Aphorisms” 36)

Takhyil in Arabic is related to *ikhtiyal* (arrogance) and it is contrasted by al-Farabi to persuasion as unifying force. He is, in this respect too a most Islamic scholar emphasizing the role of fraternity and social bonding in a collectivist Islamic society. Hazlewood defined the bassoon as a great homogenizer, an instrument which brings the sounds of other instruments together and it links them in a pool of sound. It seems that rhetoric is for al-Farabi the bassoon of Islamic society.

Another feature of Islam is the fact that philosophy is “understood by analogy to the human arts whose practice is demanded by the divine law, but a divine law that left man free to perfect these arts according to his natural light” (Mahdi 27). Indeed, God commands in the Koran to read and to learn (The Quran 96.1). Similarly, the first task that Ramadan proposes to Muslims is education together with the development of a critical attitude which he finds lacking in today's Islam but was a core element of the Prophet's life (“he argued with everyone”). Al-Farabi will show a similar approach going as far as to posit religion as a part of philosophy:

Jurisprudence about the practical matters of religion therefore comprises only things that are particulars of the universals encompassed by political science; it is, therefore, a part of political science and subordinate to practical philosophy. And jurisprudence about the [theoretical or] scientific

matters of religion comprises either particulars or the universals encompassed by theoretical philosophy; it is, therefore, a part of the theoretical philosophy and subordinate to it. ("Religion" 101)

Knowledge is an axiological virtue in al-Farabi's work. Thus the opposite of a virtuous ruler is not a vicious but an ignorant one. Similarly, he likens the ideal statesman to a physician knowledgeable of his art. To this extent, Ramadan complained that Muslim countries today "do not do put much effort in research about and diffusion of past intellectual works" ("Entrevista" 4); they seem more interested in arming themselves with weapons than with knowledge. Al-Farabi reminds us of the importance of the latter.

There is an interesting interplay between this characteristic and the seventh one, according to which Muslims are conscious of their inability to know the whole. Indeed, it is contradictory to a certain extent to claim on the one hand that humans must know, and state that humans cannot know on the other. Al-Farabi clears up this controversy in his Rhetoric allowing for an intermediate position (back again to the Mutazilah) drawn from his collectivist ideology: "Opinion can be strengthened or weakened and it is to that extent that man does not perceive the contrary or he does perceive it, which he can find by himself or through conversation with the others" (36). That is to say: the strength of any claim depends not on a factual determination of its Truthfulness but on the fact that it stands in opposition to counterclaims presented against it.

Therefore, it can be seen how all the pieces of the puzzle fit to create an Islamic scholar and an Islamic approach to rhetoric. Throughout this chapter, I have tried to counterargue the conception that al-Farabi's theory of rhetoric is

foreign to the Islamic tradition. Using a musical analogy, al-Farabi's thought is not foreign to the harmony of Islam: His collectivist, practical approach in which philosophy, critical thought, and law are key, situate him within the frame of an inclusive and unpositivist Islam as defined by the authoritative scholars in this period. In the next chapter I move to analyze whether his melody is also in tune with Greek classical thought and the type of relationship to three major classical scholars: Aristotle, Plato and Isocrates.

CHAPTER IV

Al-Farabi and pedagogical logos

While al-Farabi's poetics, politics and philosophy have been studied and written about extensively, his rhetoric is the least studied part of his corpus. In the present chapter, I aim at exploring this territory. I will firstly probe al-Farabi's treatise on rhetoric to uncover his conception of rhetoric, and its major procedures, with a focus on the enthymeme. Secondly, I will compare his theory to three main figures of classical Greek thought: Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates.

Al-Farabi's theory of rhetoric

Introducing the history of the text at this point may help understand the scarce treatment that it has received. There are two manuscripts of the text. One was found by Ahmed Ates in 1951 at the Hamidiye library of Istanbul while Dr. Karel Pretraček discovered the other in 1960 at the University of Bratislava. This is to date the only extant text on rhetoric directly written by al-Farabi. It is not, however, the only one he wrote. We know, for example, that he wrote two other commentaries, one long and another middle,²⁴ on Aristotle's rhetoric, but we do not have any manuscript of either so we only have references to them and partial translations of them in the works of other authors. Thus, for example, Averroes referred to al-Farabi's long commentary as the only satisfying one (Averroes and Aouad 26). The Book of Rhetoric was first (and only) translated into French in 1968 by Jacques Langhade. As such, both the fact that it was discovered less than

²⁴ Aouad distinguishes between long and middle commentaries. While both types cite and explain the source text, in the latter there is no distinction between explanation and citation. In opposition to the comprehensive approach of both of those types, the short commentary is restricted to the most important and necessary parts only. Averroes and Maroun Aouad, Commentaire Moyen À La Rhétorique D'Aristote (Paris: Vrin, 2002) 26.

60 years ago and that it has not been translated into more languages can be said to have played a role in the limited modern repercussion of the text. As I try to show, the fact that the text has not been properly explored before is not due to it being of little relevance.

The treatise begins with an invocation to Allah, “the Most Gracious, Most Merciful,” which is the standard prayer recited by Muslims at the beginning of any endeavor. Then, al-Farabi first describes and situates the art of rhetoric as a syllogistic art. As such, his treatise of rhetoric will be the seventh of his eight books on logic. According to al-Farabi, logic is “the art which includes the things which lead the rational faculty toward right thinking” (Al-Farabi and Dunlop 230). On the other hand, syllogistic arts “are those which, when their parts are integrated and perfected have as their action thereafter the employment of syllogism” (ibid.). The syllogistic arts are five: “philosophy, the art of dialectic, the sophistic art, the art of rhetoric, and the art of poetry” (ibid.). Following the steps of Black, who studied the conceptualization of the poetic syllogism in al-Farabi, I will try to analyze his theory of the rhetorical syllogism -the enthymeme- in al-Farabi but before that I will present his definition of rhetoric.

As it was mentioned in chapter 3, al-Farabi describes rhetoric as “the ability to speak to others by means of statements that are excellent in persuading about each and every one of the possible matters that are such as to be preferred or avoided” (“Aphorisms” 35). Three elements are worth considering in that definition. First, the notion of persuasion. Persuading in all fields²⁵ is the goal of rhetoric: “persuasion is indeed, the ultimate goal of the acts of rhetoric” (Deux Ouvrages

²⁵ “In all the ten genres” Al-Farabi, Deux Ouvrages Inédits Sur La Rhétorique, trans. Jacques Langhade and Mario Grignaschi (Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq, 1986) 30.

30). The question that arises is whether persuasion is *the only* goal. It seems that al-Farabi's answer is positive. To this extent, he affirms that "rhetoric has been instituted only to convince" (58).²⁶ And yet, related to persuasion there is a net of other functions that al-Farabi will not deny. One example is the creation of necessary and possible opinions, which the author characterizes as the proper task of rhetoric. Also, rhetoric enlarges our thought and expands our viewpoints. In this sense, al-Farabi (opposed to the repressive and closed conception of society envisioned by the Abbasids) notes that "persuasion, even when it achieves the strongest stage, necessarily lends space for the opposition, more or less [space], conspicuous or hidden" (36).

A second element of this definition to be taken into account is the relationship between rhetoric and probability. In his Risalah on Logic, al-Farabi contends that "rhetorical discourse seeks to satisfy the hearer by what will partially content his soul, without reaching certainty" (231). In his treatise on rhetoric he will stress this again: "persuasion is a type of opinion; and opinion, in general is to believe regarding that a thing is or it is not; and what one believes can be different from the thing itself" (30). Opinion is opposed to certitude, which is "to believe in the truthfulness of that which cannot be refuted" (ibid.) Contrary to what they might seem, they are the two sides of the same coin: "they are both [opinion and certitude] a point of view" (32); that is to say they both believe "that a thing is such or is not such" (ibid.). The difference is that while certitude is expressed only in necessary propositions, opinion can be expressed in *both* necessary *and* possible

²⁶ Al-Farabi does not make a distinction between "persuade" and "convince." In Langhade's translation to French these terms are used interchangeably for the Arabic root "قنع". I argue below that the connotations of this term bring al-Farabi closer to the meaning of conviction than to persuasion.

ones²⁷. This is relevant insofar as al-Farabi conceptualizes rhetoric as an art capable of achieving certainty and knowledge.

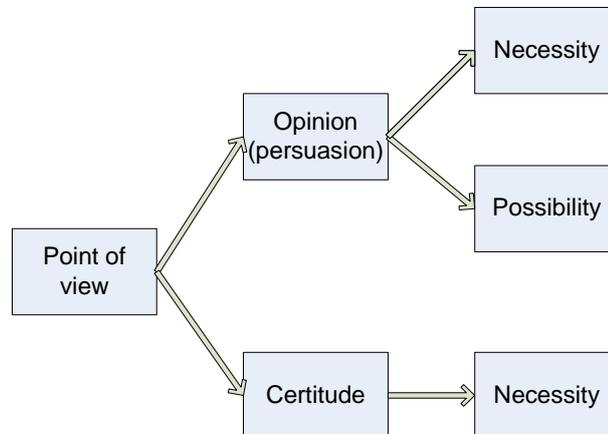


Fig. 1 Opinion and certitude in al-Farabi

The third aspect of the definition is the importance of “the other.” This element gains a special relevance for al-Farabi as it is related to both persuasion and certainty because “the firmest opinion is defined in relation to each particular man and not in relation to itself” (*Deux Ouvrages* 40). Persuasion does not take place in the realm of universal abstract Truth but on personal everyday encounters (36). Furthermore, the relevance of the audience can be seen in the Arabic term for persuasion: *Iqna* (الإقناع), which translates literally as “contentment.” In this sense, this Arabic term seems to stress the role of the listener. Paraphrasing Perelman, it seems the listener is content with the reasoning of the speaker rather than persuaded by it. Thus, according to al-Farabi the process of persuasion is as follows:

When someone discusses some thing, he examines it and forms a point of view about it, then he examines it further as much as he can. If, in this way the opposed to this point of view does not appear, nor does the truthfulness

²⁷ Al-Farabi establishes a dichotomy between these two terms: “propositions in which discourse is expressed and which form discourse are either necessary (ضرورية) or possible (ممكنة)” (*Rhetoric* 32)

of its opposite, due to the fact that the opposed to his point of view is hidden -hidden regarding him- then he has proven this point of view according to his capacity. (Deux Ouvrages 38)

Al-Farabi will present the same process again at other points of his treatise (36, 60, 62). The emphasis on this process of investigation suggests first that al-Farabi did not envision rhetoric as short-circuiting thought and examination. Indeed, “persuasion is not diminished by the fact that one perceives opposition to it” (ibid. 36). Instead, it is strengthened “when one has researched and has not found opposition or opposition has been refuted” (ibid. 40). Therefore, the listener plays a very important and active role in the rhetorical situation, exerting a search for opposition to any idea. This search is understood as something positive for persuasion.

The importance of the listener is also conspicuous in al-Farabi’s second part of the treatise, which is about the aspects that lead to persuasion. There are twelve procedures or aspects that cause persuasion: 1) the enthymeme and comparison, which I will consider later; 2) “the moral excellence of the speaker and the defect of his adversary” (70); 3) psychological influence over the listeners “to incline their hearts to adhere to the speaker and to consider as false what the adversary says” (72); 4) filling the listeners with enthusiasm and making them change their points of view to what is traditionally accepted; 5) presenting the topic as bigger, smaller, more beautiful or uglier than it is; 6) the written habits which should be either stressed if they are in tune with one’s claims or declared false if they work against them; 7) testimonies “by another man who inspires trust or by a

trustworthy group” (76); 8) the desire of the speaker because he will expect a benefit if he speaks the truth and fear a harm if his lie is discovered. Thus,

if we see someone persisting on his point of view and we promise him a benefit if he yields it and harm if he keeps it, we will think that he is truthful if he has not yielded his position. Similarly, if a man is threatened with great harm for making and keeping a position, if he keeps the position he is sincere. (78)

The ninth point al-Farabi briefly mentions are challenges. To this extent, he cites Galen who is said to have bet 10,000 dinars to whomever could show him that the beginning of the nerve was in the heart. Related to this point, is aspect number ten: “the oath of the speaker to back his affirmation” (78). The last two, and most probably least,²⁸ aspects are related to the canon of delivery: 11) “the facial expression of the speaker, his physiognomy, the attitude of his members and their aspect, or what he makes while he speaks” (ibid.); and 12) “the way of speaking, the voice and intonation that accompany the declaration” (79).

There are several ideas that should be noted about al-Farabi’s catalogue of persuasion devices. First, it merges together many of the aspects that Greek and Roman classical scholars had rigidly tried to separate and analyze separately. In this sense, his list combines not only technical and non-technical proofs, but also elements of logos, pathos and ethos, and elements of invention, style and delivery. Also, he emphasizes the importance of the listener again in his enumeration of the aspects that cause persuasion. This importance can be seen in his theory of the

²⁸ Al-Farabi implies there is a hierarchy of persuasion elements at the top of which is the enthymeme and the comparison (Cf. below). He does not, however, make any further specifications about the ranking of each element but the fact that he starts his enumeration with the enthymeme may be taken as a sign of the fact that the enumeration may indeed be presented in order of importance.

enthymeme., I argue that the audience is a major part of his conceptualization of this persuasion device.

The enthymeme, together with the comparison, goes “by far, before all the other persuasive genres” (80). According to al-Farabi, there is a hierarchy of persuasive elements and these two elements are “the first among the things that persuade.” Thus, their nature and dignity is superior by far and they are the elements by which the art of rhetoric gains its coherence. Also, the other ten features “are used as a help for the enthymemes and the comparisons” (ibid.). Accordingly, he will focus the second part of his treatise on the enthymeme, which precedes comparison because it is closer to the syllogism, demands more necessary conclusions as results, and serves as the foundations for comparisons, which are established through enthymemes (82). The enthymeme is defined as follows:

The enthymeme is an affirmation composed of two conjoint premisses which one uses omitting one of these two conjoint premisses. We call it enthymeme²⁹ because whoever uses it hides (yudmir) some of these premisses and he does not declare them; *he uses it in relation to what is to be found in the conscience of the listener which is supposed to know the premisses which the speaker has hidden.* (62) (my italics)

One can wonder whether this definition differs much from Aristotle’s notion of the enthymeme and I would argue that the answer is no. The crux is, however, that there are several interpretations of the Aristotelian enthymeme. In this sense, it

²⁹ *Damir*. It is related to the root “conscience” in Arabic. It means “hidden.”

seems that al-Farabi is close to Bitzer's reading of Aristotle.³⁰ Hence the importance of the audience and the conception of the enthymeme as a full -rather than truncated- syllogism, where one of the premisses is not cut off but hidden to be completed by the listener. Also, together with Bitzer, and in opposition to McBurney, al-Farabi will stress the possibility of reaching certainty through the enthymeme: "the enthymemes comprise what is syllogism in truth and what is syllogism only in appearance" (84). This adds to the discussion of point of view presented above positing rhetoric as an art that can lead to certainty.

The fact that enthymemes can reach valid knowledge as the logical syllogism is of relevance in the context of medieval Islamic rhetoric. Traditionally, it has been posited that al-Farabi is accounting for the validity of the Prophet Muhammad's rhetoric.³¹ I do not contest that. I do, however, think that al-Farabi's project is broader and we need to understand the controversy between Islamic jurisprudential scholars and logicians over the validity of *qiyas*. A small contextualization is in order. Islamic law (Sharia) is composed of two sacred elements: the Quran (book of revelation) and the Sunna (the traditions instituted by Muhammad). Both of these elements work to dictate how men should behave. Thus, for example, the Quran says that one should engage in daily prayers and the Sunna specifies how the prayer should be conducted. Nevertheless, the Quran and

³⁰ Bitzer understands the production of enthymemes as follows: "The speaker draws the premises for his proofs from propositions which members of his audience would supply if he were to proceed by question and answer." Thus, the successful construction of an enthymeme is a product of "the joint efforts of speaker and audience" Lloyd F. Bitzer, "Aristotle's Enthymeme Revisited," Quarterly Journal of Speech 45 (1959): 408.

³¹ Al-Farabi tries then "to provide for Muhammad's rhetoric. This inclusion (...) permits him to contend that some rhetorical propositions, such as those offered by Muhammad, might have the certitude attached to necessity" Charles E. Butterworth, "The Rhetorician and His Relationship to the Community: Three Accounts of Aristotle's Rhetoric," Islamic Theology and Philosophy, ed. Michael E. Marmura (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984) 115.

the Sunna together do not account for the whole range of human acts and it is at that point that Fiqh plays a role.

Fiqh interprets both the Quran and the Sunna and provides a guide whenever there is no regulation in either of them. To do that it has to deduce new law from previous one. This is a syllogistic process and consequently the major process of Fiqh is qiyas, which is the term al-Farabi uses to refer to the syllogism. Then, as Smirnov points out, there was a school in Islam that negated the ability of reason to gain new knowledge (437). Al-Farabi himself alludes to the “negators of the syllogism” (82). According to this school you cannot generate new valid information so syllogistic reasoning is ruled out.³² Al-Farabi defended the validity and integrity of the syllogism throughout his work. In his Book on Rhetoric he specifically defended the rhetorical syllogism. Thus, he did not only back the soundness of Muhammad’s rhetoric but also (as it was already introduced in chapter 3) the possibility of a flexible interpretation of Sharia and the soundness of Fiqh. To this extent, it should be noted that qiyas is not the only source of Fiqh; the second source is ijma (consensus). If we understand al-Farabi’s rhetoric within the frame of the controversy about Fiqh, it will be easier to grasp and contextualize not only his defense of the enthymeme (the rhetorical syllogism) but also his emphasis on the importance of the listener, community and common sense. Thus, his theory of the enthymeme can be understood as a defense of Fiqh and of a flexible approach to Sharia.

³² Aristotle establishes that the conclusion of a syllogism must be different from the premisses. The invalid leap that negators of the syllogism denounce is thus inlaid in the definition of deduction: “A deduction, then, is an argument in which certain things being supposed, something different from the suppositions result of necessity through them” Aristotle, Robin Smith and Aristotle, Topics, Books I and VIII, with Excerpts from Related Texts, Clarendon Aristotle Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Relation to Greek classical figures

Al-Farabi did not invent his theory of rhetoric out of the blue; he acknowledged his debt to both Plato and Aristotle.³³ I argue that analyzing the extent to which each of them influences al-Farabi can help us better understand his theory and context. Furthermore, it may contribute to counter the main trend in scholarly work about al-Farabi, which is centered around al-Farabi's politics and philosophy and posits him as a interpreter of Plato (Colmo; Mahdi; Morewedge; Strauss. Cf. Chapter one). This study adds the perspective of al-Farabi's rhetorical writing, which is nevertheless constructed upon the work of Aristotle. As it has been mentioned before, rhetoric for al-Farabi is one of the syllogistic arts and, as such, a part of logic. Al-Farabi thought of himself as a continuator and a promoter of Aristotelian logic.³⁴ In this sense his conceptualization of rhetoric as the art of persuasion and the structure of his treatise, which self-acknowledgedly follows Ishaq Ibn Hunayn's translation of Aristotle's Rhetoric, make him more of an Aristotelian figure than scholars usually claim.

Thus, the possibility of reaching certainty through the enthymeme moves al-Farabi away from what is traditionally understood to be Plato's stand (an idealist and positivist for whom philosophy was superior to rhetoric and other arts). It

³³ "These two sages are the fountainheads of philosophy, the originators of its beginnings and fundamentals, the fulfillers of its ends and branches. We depend upon them for what is minor and for what is major with respect to it" Al-Farabi, Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, trans. Muhsin Mahdi, Agora Editions (New York, N.Y.: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962) 126.

³⁴ "That which was taught [in logic] at that time was up to the end of the assertoric figures [of the syllogism]. But Abū Nasr al-Farabi says about himself that he studied with Yūhannā ibn Hailān up to the end of *Anal. Post (kitab al-burhan)*, The part [of the two *Analytics*] which comes after the assertoric figures (of the syllogism [i.e., which comes after *Anal. Pr.*, I, 7]) was called "the part which is not read" [i.e., in the lecture-curriculum] until [the time when] one read that; for it became standard [in logical study] afterwards. When the matter came to Muslim teachers one read from the assertoric figures as far as a man was able to read. And thus Abu Nasr [al-Farabi] says that he himself read [i.e., under a teacher] up to the end of *Anal. Post.*" Ibn Abi Usaibia, Uyun Al-Anba Fi Tabaqat Al-Tibba, August Müller ed. (Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers, 1882).

should be noted, however, that this need not be al-Farabi's understanding of Plato. Indeed, al-Farabi wrote a whole treatise on the harmonization of "the two sages: Plato the divine and Aristotle" to counter the claim that there is disagreement between the two ("Harmonization" 125). Thus, he for example analyzes the stance of Plato and Aristotle on the syllogism. According to Themistius and his school, Plato would only declare as necessary the conclusions of a syllogism where both premisses were necessary, while Aristotle accepted that the syllogism whose premisses are a mixture of necessary and contingent, with the major being necessary, the conclusion will be necessary too. Al-Farabi's response was to affirm that "there is no statement at all of Plato's in which he explicitly declares that conclusions such as these [Aristotle's] are either necessary or contingent" (138). Both Najjar and Fakhry ("Reconciliation") have probed this part of al-Farabi's corpus. They have suggested that al-Farabi's goal was to assure Islamic scholars that the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle were not antithetical to Islam³⁵ and with that goal he freely interpreted the Greek philosophers adapting their thought to the Islamic context.

Indeed, his response about the Platonic stance on the enthymeme may not be very accurate but it shows that al-Farabi did not understand the Plato / Aristotle dichotomy as an either-or situation but as a both-and one. As such, he would have likely perceived his treatise on rhetoric as a combination of both philosophers. On the one hand we have rhetoric as an art which mainly uses the enthymeme and comparison to persuade. On the other, he would posit a political use of the rhetoric

³⁵ In this sense, that al-Farabi's interpretation goes along the lines of Medieval interpretations of classical heritage in Europe that try to show the compatibility of classical thought with Christianity (Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas).

related to the figure of the Islamic ruler which he would most probably understand as Platonic. This Platonic inspiration can be seen even in the way he referred to the ruler: the “king in truth” (“Aphorisms” 37). I will argue, however, that this figure is more Isocratean than al-Farabi acknowledged.

Al-Farabi delineated his version of the *philosopher king* all across his work. In the previous chapter, I outlined his characterization, duties and attributes with a focus on his Islamic essence. I presented him as someone whose responsibility is to lead the community towards happiness through knowledge. I would now like to emphasize another aspect of this figure: how he should exercise his power:

He who possesses such a great power ought to possess the capacity of realizing the particular instances of it in nations and cities. There are two primary methods of realizing them: instruction and the formation of character. To instruct is to introduce the theoretical virtues in nations and cities. The formation of character is the method of introducing the moral virtues and practical arts in nations. Instruction proceeds by speech alone. The formation of character proceeds through habituating nations and citizens in doing the acts that issue from the practical states of character by arousing in them the resolution to do these acts; the states of character and the acts issuing from them should be as it were enraptured by them. The resolution to do a thing may be aroused by speech or by deed. (Philosophy 35)

Again, speech plays a preponderant role in the construction of a community. For al-Farabi, rhetoric is an art “of major usefulness ... that guides the community” (Deux Ouvrages 150-1). Furthermore, it should be noted that this

logos can be said to be of a specific nature: it is a *pedagogical logos*. Indeed, the ruler's role is that of an instructor. This instructor introduces national and citizen virtues. I have already pointed out in chapter two the value of community in Islam, a religion in which, unlike in Protestantism, individuality is not fostered.³⁶ Plato could have been a major influence in al-Farabi's ruler but it is not the Plato that Popper criticized in The Open Society. Popper's Plato created a closed society where criticism is not given any space. Nevertheless, as it was put forward in chapters two and three, the Islamic leader in al-Farabi is indeed exposed to criticism. Perhaps it is the Plato of the Republic who complained that education was not in the hands of the philosophers (606e1-5), though it has been suggested that "the political dimension of the philosophical teacher was totally lost on Neoplatonism" (Morewedge 68) and indeed one of the most common analysis of al-Farabi's political thought is that he presents a distorted, "un-Platonic interpretation of Plato ... For he presents a decidedly political Plato. In short, from a historical point of view, al-Farabi's Plato or Platonic politics had not existed earlier. It was al-Farabi's own creation or recreation" (Mahdi 36).

One solution to the puzzle could be to look for a different source. In this sense, Isocrates, the educator, provides us with an excellent match for al-Farabi's theory. On the one hand, he shared the Islamic sense of responsibility for which the ruler is to be held accountable (To Nicocles 4). On the other hand al-Farabi's pedagogical logos fits very well within Isocrates' frame of the educated city. Thus in his Antidosis, Isocrates posited education as the cornerstone of the Athenian

³⁶ Cf. Al-Farabi's conception of imagination in chapter 3. Hamlet could not have been inspired in an Islamic country.

fame and structure.³⁷ What is more, this education is to be a source of community.³⁸ His striving for a Pan-Hellenism would very well fit the Arabic situation. There is a parallelism in both situations: while “with an exalted patriotism always in mind, Isocrates, as a teacher, labored to perfect the minds and the characters of his fellow-citizens” (Neserius 314), the Prophet Muhammad had “laboriously assembled [a nation] from disparate loyalties and beliefs” (Peters 136). In both cases, al-Farabi’s and Isocrates’, this idea of a Pan-nation was in trouble and one can understand their rhetorics and their emphasis on the societal aspect of language as a response to their situation.

This interpretation of an Isocratean al-Farabi opens a new way in the study of Medieval Islamic Rhetoric, which as has been presented acknowledges only the legacy of Plato (or Neo-Platonism) and Aristotle. On the basis of such an influence questions arise (as the problem of a decidedly political Plato to which Mahdi referred in the cite above). I suggest that al-Farabi’s pedagogical logos is not fully accounted either on the basis of a Platonic/Aristotle approach to the relationship between the West and the Middle East. My study advances the study of Muir, who was the first (and only) scholar to hint in 2001 at a possible relationship between Isocrates and Medieval Islam. His focus was on politics and on al-Ghazali (1058-1111) and Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406), scholars posterior to al-Farabi. I argue that the influence of Isocrates can already be found in al-Farabi’s theory of a pedagogical logos and of a rhetoric, that presents education as a political goal to be achieved “by speech or deed.”

³⁷ “For you must not lose sight of the fact that Athens is looked upon as having become a school for the education of all able orators and teachers of oratory” (Antidosis, 265)

³⁸ “Like the sophists, he glorified rhetoric’s capacity to bring and hold people together” J. Poulakos, Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995) 113.

In conclusion, this chapter has analyzed al-Farabi's conception of rhetoric as a syllogistic art capable of attaining certainty where the values of the community and the role of the listener are heightened. I also analyzed the elements that create persuasion with a focus on al-Farabi's cornerstone: the enthymeme. A relation with the context was established that posited al-Farabi as a defender of syllogism and Fiqh. I also countered the traditional approach to al-Farabi as a Platonic scholar. Instead, I emphasized his Aristotelian influence and argued in favor of a relation to Isocrates which helps us better understand both the context and the rhetorical theory of our Islamic author. In the next chapter, I will not analyze the external but the internal relations between rhetoric and the other arts and fields of al-Farabi's thought.

CHAPTER V

The rhetoric and its friends

In the previous chapter I introduced rhetoric as one of the five syllogistic arts and probed the relationship between al-Farabi and Greek classical figures. In this chapter I will analyze first the relations within al-Farabi's corpus, i.e. between rhetoric and three other syllogistic arts: philosophy, dialectic, and poetics. Second, I will explore the relationship between rhetoric, politics and religion. My aim is to deepen and expand our understanding of al-Farabi's rhetoric by comparing and contrasting it with the other parts of his work.

Let us start with philosophy which is one of "the human things through which nations and citizens attain earthly happiness in this life and supreme happiness in the life beyond" (Philosophy 13). This goal is not exclusive of philosophy. Indeed, it permeates the whole of al-Farabi's corpus. Thus, all the other arts will share the final aim of achieving happiness ("theoretical virtues, deliberative virtues, moral virtues and practical arts").³⁹ The contribution of philosophy to that aim is, however, distinct and essential. As I will try to explain, philosophy is the main purveyor of wisdom which is related to virtuous action and happiness. Al-Farabi defines philosophical knowledge as follows:

When one acquires knowledge of the beings or receives instruction in them, if he perceives their ideas themselves with his intellect, and his assent to them is by means of certain demonstration, then the science that comprises these cognitions is philosophy. But if they are known by imagining them through similarities that imitate them, and assent to what is

³⁹ Apodeictics, sophistics, rhetoric and poetics.

imagined of them is caused by persuasive methods, then the ancients call what comprises this cognition religion. (Philosophy 44)

Thus, al-Farabi does not limit knowledge to the domain of philosophy. Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, the capacity to produce valid knowledge of other fields such as rhetoric or religion is accepted. Nevertheless, al-Farabi will distinguish knowledge of a philosophical nature from other types of knowledge and subsequently rank philosophical knowledge in a hierarchical position of precedence. Other types of knowledge are “an imitation of philosophy” (Philosophy 44). These other types of knowledge will follow philosophy (Letters 89). What is more, philosophy can serve as a touchstone against which we can measure them.

This relationship is complex and is sometimes reversed. In this sense, al-Farabi has a very realistic approach to philosophy and acknowledges that in many cases “philosophy has not reached yet maximal excellence through apodictic demonstration” (ibid.). In those cases, it can resort to rhetoric, dialectic or sophistry to test its opinions (ibid.). This point is also explained in his treatise on rhetoric with the assertion that “rhetoric has in common with the dialectic, and sophistry that, in all the three, one investigates and false points of views are unveiled” (Deux Ouvrages 62). It can therefore be concluded that while rhetoric and the other arts reach knowledge and discern false opinions, their intellectual power is inferior to that of philosophy.⁴⁰ Reaching knowledge is important for al-

⁴⁰ To this extent, Kemal notes how rhetorical ploys in al-Farabi “stand in need of a philosophical analysis to explain their use by clarifying their nature, validity and potential” Salim Kemal, The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes : The Aristotelian Reception (London ; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003) 9.

Farabi because of his conception of human behavior and happiness. Al-Farabi notes how philosophy determines virtuous behavior:

Practice is virtuous and correct only when a human being has become truly cognizant of the virtues that are truly virtues, become truly cognizant of the virtues that are presumed to be virtues yet are not like that ... This is a state that is to be attained or perfected except after becoming sophisticated.

("Aphorisms" 61)

In a most Socratic fashion, al-Farabi makes virtuous behavior dependent on knowledge. Once people know about what ought to be preferred and avoid what ought to be avoided, they will prefer and avoid accordingly. Thus, virtue is dependent upon knowledge. Also, Colmo has noted, happiness in al-Farabi is dependent upon virtue (2). Al-Farabi's quotation above also shows the fact that knowledge needs not be only about the virtues themselves but also about how the virtues are perceived. This ties very well with the importance of the audience that al-Farabi introduced in his rhetorical theory. We shall see it also ties very well with his theory of politics and language.

The elements that relate rhetoric, philosophy, and politics are again virtue and happiness. Political science investigates both of these concepts⁴¹ because neither of them can be pursued alone; they can only be reached in society:

It is not possible to reach the purpose of voluntary actions and dispositions [i.e. happiness], unless they are distributed among a very large association of people ... so that the groups in the association cooperate, through the

⁴¹ "Political science investigates happiness first of all ... Then it investigates the voluntary actions, ways of life, moral habits, states of characters, and dispositions" Al-Farabi, "Book of Religion," trans. Charles E. Butterworth, The Political Writings: Selected Aphorisms and Other Texts, ed. Charles E. Butterworth (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2001) 101.

actions and dispositions in each, to perfect the purpose of the whole association in the same way that the organs of a human being cooperate, through the capacities in each, to perfect the purpose of the whole body. ("Religion" 102)

In this sense, al-Farabi follows the steps of al-Kindi, who understood knowledge as a collective enterprise.⁴² Paredes Gandía has studied this aspect of al-Farabi's thought in his introduction to al-Farabi's Book of Letters. His conclusions suggest that it is communities and not individuals that require knowledge. Knowledge should be shared by the whole community. What is more, "this sharing of a common wisdom is the source of happiness, solidarity, and cooperation among the citizens" (28). Hence the interrelation between philosophy, politics and happiness: happiness can only be reached in the virtuous city. Next, I would like to highlight the central role that rhetoric plays in that triangle.

I have already alluded to the fact that rhetoricians are one of the cornerstones in al-Farabi's virtuous city. I related it to the figure of the ideal ruler, who should be a rhetorician, eloquent enough to explain himself to the community (Aphorisms 37). He should also persuade the citizens about "each and every one of the possible matters that are such as to be preferred or avoided" (Aphorisms 35). Now that al-Farabi's theories of knowledge and persuasion have been introduced, we can complement them. To that extent, it should be noted that knowledge is, using Paredes Gandía's term, a *collective enterprise* that should engage the whole of society. Thus, it should reach not only the cultural elite but all the citizens.

⁴² Paredes Gandía (26) notices how this idea of investigation as a shared partnership was already present in Aristotle but he contends that al-Farabi advanced Aristotle's idea positing that all races of all times should be part of this voyage: "He who looks for truth cares for nothing else but it, truth is not degraded nor loses its value due to whoever pronounces or transmits it" Al-Kindi and A. Ivry, Al-Kindi's Metaphysics (Albany: SUNY Press, 1974) 58.

In this context rhetoric is crucial because “Rhetoric is the best to persuade the common people about the things that they attend to, to the extent of the knowledge it has, and according to the premisses and principles common to everyone” (Letters 80). It should be noted that al-Farabi is not devaluing knowledge or rhetoric: rhetorical knowledge in al-Farabi is not faulty merchandise whose price needs to be put on sale. Rather, as Colmo suggests, knowledge in al-Farabi is a human good rather than a divine one. Therefore, it is defined in terms of and serves human happiness and as such it should reach everyone in the virtuous city (2).

Rulers should make sure knowledge reaches everyone and to that extent al-Farabi conceptualizes rhetoric first as an indispensable political tool which is integrated within the political structure of the virtuous city. It reflects the foundations of his theories of philosophy and politics through its definition as a syllogistic art capable of knowledge and its focus towards the listener. Thus al-Farabi’s corpus creates a coherent and cohesive whole where parts are interrelated and interdependent. This feature will differentiate him from the situation we have today as interpreted by Fatima Mernissi, who longs for an Islamic humanism in which philosophy and politics are not separate. I am arguing that such a world can not only be found in al-Farabi, it can also be expanded if we heed his integration of the five syllogistic arts.

Both the art of rhetoric and the art of poetry are syllogistic. The rhetorical syllogism (the enthymeme) was introduced in the previous chapter. Al-Farabi defines it and explains it explicitly. The situation is different with the poetic syllogism. As Deborah Black has argued, there is no textual proof that al-Farabi

ever conferred a specific and distinctive form (Black "Imaginative Syllogism").

Indeed, al-Farabi very loosely defines the poetic syllogism

The poetical statement is that which is neither demonstrative, nor dialectical, nor rhetorical, nor sophistical, and which is, despite this, reduced to one of the species of syllogism, or what is posterior to the syllogism. By 'what is posterior to it' I mean induction, example, physiognomy, and the like, among the things having the force of a syllogism. (Qawanin al-Shir 268, qtd. in Black "Imaginative syllogism" 252)

The definition is mainly in the negative though al-Farabi makes it clear that there is such thing as a poetical syllogism. This is of relevance because the logical status of poetics will not be inferior to the other arts. To this extent, many authors have noticed how important language is for the Islamic culture, especially for its leaders. The Prophet Muhammad was born in the Quraishi tribe, which was famous for the beauty of its Arabic dialect, and was raised by the Banu Saad, who, again, are reputed for their speech. Also, Muhammad will refer to himself as the most Arab in the sense that his language is the best cared for (Paredes Gandía 30). Following Muhammad, the ruler will also be expected to have both an excellent poetic and rhetoric ability.

There is a very close relationship between poetics and rhetoric. Al-Farabi conceives of rhetoric and dialectic as sister arts of language. He makes this point explicit in his theory about the specificity of language that relates to the philosophical fight between grammar (the art of right expression) and logic (the art of right thinking) over the control of the faculty of language. The Islamic bassoon

(al-Farabi) mediated between both sides and posited that logic rules over the faculty of language in general while grammar rules over the actual implementation of the faculty in every community. Logic would therefore relate to universal aspects of language while grammar would act in the domain of specific languages and communities. It is within this second domain of specificity that poetics and rhetoric are created (Letters 80).

Poetics is thus very closely related to rhetoric but there are also differences between them. In this sense, I presented in chapter three al-Farabi's distinction between the binding, cohesive power of rhetoric, which induces assent, as opposed to the separating force of the imagination, which makes the soul of the hearer to flee ("Aphorisms" 36). Also, in his Risalah on Logic, al-Farabi deepens on the differences between poetry and the other syllogistic arts (of which rhetoric is a part). First, he defines poetical discourse as that which "seeks to represent the object and suggest it in speech, as the art of sculpture represents different kinds of animals and other objects by bodily labours" (231). Then, he differentiates it from the other arts:

The relation of the art of poetry to the other syllogistic arts is as the relation of sculpture to the other practical arts, and as the relation of chess-playing to the skilful conduct of armies. Similarly those who represent with their bodies, limbs, and voices represent many things in what they do.

For al-Farabi, imaginative poetical discourse is an *imitation* of reality. Greek scholars had in fact the same conception (poetry as mimesis). As such, it is different from rhetoric insofar as it creates reality through the enthymeme. Nevertheless, the relationship between both rhetoric and poetry is very strong; so

strong that they sometimes interact. In this sense, as Kemal points out, poetry can get validity as a rhetorical ploy (9).

The last syllogistic art whose relationship to rhetoric I will discuss is dialectic. Its discourse is related to rhetoric: “Dialectical discourse seeks to overcome the interlocutor in the things which are known and notorious” (Al-Farabi and Dunlop 231). Thus, both rhetoric and dialectic act on the hearer and their points of view. This is in line with al-Farabi’s previous affirmation that rhetoric, dialectic and sophistry can be used to test opinions (Letters 89) because they investigate points of view discerning those that are false (Deux Ouvrages 62). The difference between both of them is that while dialectic strives for certainty, rhetoric can work both on the domain of certainty and on the one of possibility.

Another difference between rhetoric on the one hand and dialectic on the other is how dialectic functions. Al-Farabi notes that

If dialectic and sophistry are transferred to a nation in which there is a firmly established credo, both of them will be opposed to religion and will be scorned by the believers because their strength depends in the proof of something and in the refutation of that. When dialectic and sophistry begin to be applied to the ideas that have been firmly established among the followers of a religion, these will lose strength, and will be put in doubt. (Letters 92)

Again we encounter the investigative power of rhetoric, dialectic and sophistry. But there seems to be a difference between the two latter and the former in the sense that they can go counter the established beliefs in a community while rhetoric would work from them. Thus, its domain is circumscribed within the local

established beliefs. This contributes to a view of rhetoric as a binding bassoon that was introduced in al-Farabi's theory of politics. Nevertheless, the context-boundedness of rhetoric is not exclusive; all logical arts are to that extent a combination of form and meaning. As Kemal suggested in his discussion of the controversy between logic and grammar "where language deals with intelligible meanings, there it follows the rules of grammar and logic" (al-Farabi, qtd. in 15)

Finally, al-Farabi introduced another syllogistic art: sophistry, but he did not develop it as a treatise and it is only possible to find sparsely scattered information throughout his other works. Sophistry is attributed intellectual and discerning powers but one does not have enough information as to analyze any further the differences and similarities in relation to rhetoric. I have tried, however, to show the differences and similarities among rhetoric on the one hand and three other syllogistic arts (philosophy, poetics and dialectic) on the other. Something that all these arts have in common is their contribution to human happiness, which is al-Farabi's major goal. This search for happiness, relates them to religion. In the remainder of the chapter, I will examine the relationship between religion and the syllogistic arts with a focus on rhetoric.

Religion is defined by al-Farabi as "opinions and actions, determined and restricted with stipulations and prescribed for a community by their first ruler, who seeks to obtain through their practicing a specific purpose with respect to them or by means of them" ("Religion" 93). Two points should be noticed. First, the circumscription of religion to the sphere of opinions and actions ties it to the art of rhetoric: they both occupy themselves with the same material. Second, this material is related to humans: religion is not focused towards the divinity but

towards humans. As a consequence we have a picture of religion that shares much with rhetoric but there are differences too, especially the stress al-Farabi places on the first ruler. While rhetoric made the listener central, it seems that the central element in religion is the speaker, the first ruler. Nevertheless, the ruler loses neither the connection to the community nor the responsibility in front of them: “If the first ruler is virtuous and his rulership truly virtuous, then in what he prescribes he seeks only to obtain, for himself and for everyone under his rulership, the ultimate happiness that is truly happiness; and that religion will be virtuous religion” (ibid.).

The opposite of the virtuous ruler is the ignorant one. He will either pursue ignorant goods or will pursue them for himself only. This is relevant inasmuch as it suggests what scholarship about al-Farabi’s theory of religion has mainly focused on: the relationship between knowledge (philosophy) and religion. Also, knowledge presides over religion and in that sense it corroborates Colmo’s assertion that “al-Farabi makes philosophy, not revelation, the judge of truth and falsehood” (95). Within this frame, religion is, like rhetoric, at the service of knowledge: “the two parts of which religion consists are subordinate to philosophy” (Religion 97). In its turn, religious knowledge is dependent upon the individual: “Thus the determined opinions in the virtuous religion are either the truth or a likeness of the truth. In general, truth is what a human being ascertains, either by himself by means of primary knowledge, or by demonstration” (ibid.). This is another characteristic that relates rhetoric and religion because both share a judging element of the listener (Cf. chapter 5).

The importance of the context and the listener is central in both religion and rhetoric. This reminds us of the fact that knowledge does not exist in a *sterile-ized* vacuum: it breathes and sweats. I argue that it even loves. Gómez Nogales suggested that “love is the source and goal of knowledge” in al-Farabi (98). He cites the description al-Farabi made of the soul’s faculties where he put the heart as the principal organ due to the fact that it regulated the heat that all the other powers of the human body need to work properly. Al-Farabi equates love and happiness (happiness being the goal of the syllogistic arts): “the more something enjoys its own essence and the greater pleasure and happiness it feels about it the more it likes its essence and the greater is the pride it takes in it” (Perfect State 87). His study concludes that “none of the faculties can be deemed perfect if it is not accompanied by love.”⁴³

The triangular relationship love-religion-rhetoric is pertinent to my study because it shows that happiness is related to love, and love brings in the socio-personal element that rhetoric provides in its theory of the enthymeme. The focus on rhetoric on shared, communal knowledge stresses the bounding, bassoon-like power of rhetoric and as such it contributes not only to the creation of knowledge but also to the creation of love and a feeling of community. Opposed to this concrete and earthly love, we have a pan-Arab religious love which is the ultimate love to be reached in the afterlife. There is a distinction, then, with the more pragmatic rhetoric of love.

⁴³ “The reason for the nutritive power in man is no other than service to the body; also, external senses and imagination serve both the body and intellectual power” Al-farabi, qtd. in Salvador Gómez Nogales, La Política Como Única Ciencia Religiosa En Al-Farabi, Cuadernos Del Seminario De Estudios De Filosofía Y Pensamiento Islámicos (Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura, 1980) 99.

In conclusion, this chapter has analyzed the relationship between rhetoric on the one hand and three other syllogistic arts together with religion on the other. To this extent, rhetoric is related to philosophy in that the latter precedes the former. Rhetoric usually follows and is checked by philosophy, though this trend can be reversed. Then, rhetoric is related to poetics in that both arts pertain to the realm of the specific and the concrete rather than the universal. They however differ in the fact that rhetoric creates a communal reality while poetics imitates it with a focus on the individual. Finally, rhetoric is related to dialectic in that both act on the hearers and their points of view discerning valid from invalid positions. While dialectic works its discernment in the domain of certainty, rhetoric works both in certainty and possibility. Also, rhetoric is related to politics in that the former is an indispensable political tool of the virtuous city that facilitates the sharing of knowledge and community-building. The characteristics of rhetoric in al-Farabi that we presented in the previous chapter (rhetoric as a contextual, communal and knowledge-producing art) have been reinforced. We have also introduced a new element, the function of love in al-Farabi's corpus and its relation to happiness, which relates rhetoric and religion in their focus on the individual as a member of a community and in their subordination to philosophy.

CHAPTER VI

The rest is silence

I framed this study as an exploration of al-Farabi's theory of rhetoric. Throughout the previous chapters I have analyzed both the argument al-Farabi constructs and hinted at its implications. This chapter puts together al-Farabi's approach to rhetoric with a stronger focus on its implications. At the same time I position this study in relation to further research possibilities, not only suggesting directions but also reflecting on possible obstacles on the way.

My first research question targeted the context out of which al-Farabi's theory of rhetoric developed. To that extent, I presented the Abbasids. In opposition to Gutas' sympathetic portrayal of the leaders of the translation movement, I emphasized their efforts to create a closed society, a society where there is no space for dissent. In this sense, they resorted to Persian and Greek scholarship to quell the Umayyad cultural background. On the one hand, this had the positive side effect of introducing Greek classical learning to the Islamic world. On the other hand, the Abbasids only supported that interpretation of Persian and Greek knowledge that legitimized their ruling. Paraphrasing Gloucester in King Lear, *as flies to wanton boys* were any dissenters to the Abbasids. Following Mernissi, I suggested that rather than for sport, the Abbasids killed their opposition for fear of losing their power. What is more, the Abbasids not only killed their opponents, they also stigmatized them as external to the Islamic tradition. One of the movements that suffered this ostracism was the Mutazilah.

Throughout this study I have tried to present aspects of al-Farabi which relate him closely to the Mutazilah. I have especially focused on the third-way approach

from which the Mutazilites derive their name. Accordingly, I have defined al-Farabi as a bassoon, a great homogenizer who blended in his theory of rhetoric different stances and elements to create a third-way rhetoric. This merging is made explicit and clear in his catalog of persuasion devices, his harmonization of Plato and Aristotle, or his inclusive approach to an *Organon* that features both the poetics and the rhetoric. Similarly, al-Farabi's both-and rhetoric allows for certainty and possibility, for persuasion and opposition, for the individual and the community.

These three both-ands define a rhetoric which does not shun knowledge or reflection upon knowledge: rhetoric is a tool in the quest for and the spread of knowledge and in this sense the main aspect of al-Farabi's logos is its pedagogical nature. Rhetoric instructs civic and national virtues in the inhabitants of the city. It contributes decisively to the formation of a sense of community. Nevertheless, the community heralded by al-Farabi is not closed in the Popperian sense. In other words, it is not as Abbasid as it is Mutazilite -and therefore open. This openness can be seen, first, in al-Farabi's demand that persuasion allows space for opposition; secondly, in his flexible approach to the interpretation Sharia, which I presented as in line with the purest etymologically sense of "going to the source of water;" and, thirdly, in his blend of the individual and the community in his community-based but individually driven rhetoric. Such a theory of rhetoric calls for a reinterpretation of the influence Greek scholarship had on al-Farabi stressing the figure of Isocrates.

Structurally, rhetoric -as a syllogistic art- is subsumed in al-Farabi under logic. Philosophy stands in a hierarchically superior position to the other syllogistic arts

(rhetoric, dialectic, poetics and sophistry). In its turn, all knowledge is dependent upon love. Dante ended his Divine Comedy stating in Paradise that it is “love which moves the sun and the other stars,” a sentence that could have been uttered by al-Farabi, for whom love is equated to happiness, the ultimate goal of al-Farabi’s system. Rhetoric contributes to this end first with the creation of a community; second with a focus on the other; third with the allowance for a space of dissent in which no voice is silenced. The aim of rhetoric for al-Farabi is to convince rather than to persuade. In contrast, Jean Anouilh’s Antigone conceptualized tragedy as

The silence inside you when the roaring crowd acclaims the winner—so that you think of a film without a sound track, mouths agape and no sound coming out of them, a clamor that is not more than picture; and you, the victor, already vanquished, alone in the desert of your silence.

Al-Farabi’s rhetoric is closer to the bright Humanism of Dante’s Divine Comedy than to the bleak perspective of Jean Anouilh’s tragedy. A rhetoric whose intellectual and communal power offers a tool for the people, of the people, and by the people. Such a rhetoric would disquiet Claudius-like Abbasids and their successors, whose strategy was to impose upon it a scarlet F. I have tried to show that al-Farabi’s thought is not foreign to the Islamic tradition. Instead, it stands as a model for modern day Islamic scholars, who can turn to this theory of rhetoric in order to reflect towards a more open and brighter society which does not lose its Islamic essence. To this extent, al-Farabi provides us with a model of thought that matches Mernissi’s and Ramadan’s call for a Humanist Islamic society and culture.

The applicability of al-Farabi's thought in today's world shifts the focus of the study from the past to the present and on to the future. Accordingly, I will now present two future research possibilities that spring from this study. The first one leads to other Medieval Islamic scholars such as Avicenna and Averroes. One can well wonder whether al-Farabi's conception of rhetoric dies with al-Farabi. I suggest that the answer is negative. Avicenna, who is considered al-Farabi's "immediate spiritual disciple and successor" (Fakhry Al-Farabi, Founder 4), would be the most logical continuation of a research agenda on Medieval Islamic rhetoric.

Avicenna (980-1037) was born in Bukhara (Iran). From his autobiography, we learn that his father was "entrusted with the governing of a village in one of the royal estates of Bukhara" (17). As such, Avicenna was able to benefit from an excellent education that matched his *Wunderkind*-like thirst for knowledge. He also had access to the learned circle of Sultan Nuh ibn Mansur. This friendship with the ruling class created problems for him when the Turkish Qarakhids allied with the governor of Khorasan against Nuh ibn Mansur in 999. Due to the period's instability, he had to *forsake Bukhara* (Avicenna and Jauzajani 43) and live in several places of eastern and central Iran for the rest of his life.

Avicenna's theory of rhetoric is different from al-Farabi's. The former presents a theory closer to Aristotle than the latter. For example, there is a clearer distinction between artistic and non-artistic proofs and within artistic proofs:

And the proofs can be natural, not artificial, like witnesses and contracts; and some are non-natural artificial and these are rhetorical proofs. And rhetorical proofs take place because of three: the speaker's personality and

his appearance and the appearance of his enemy, and the alluring of the audience towards persuasion. And these two are external persuasives.

(Kitab Al-Khataba)

Nevertheless, there are many similarities between both approaches. Both circumscribe rhetoric as an art capable of reaching logical knowledge through the syllogism. Furthermore, Avicenna's theory of the rhetorical enthymeme is built both upon social instruction, knowledge, and intuitive elements:

the intelligible truths are acquired only when the middle term of a syllogism is obtained. This may be done in two ways: sometimes through intuition [divine spirit], which is an act of mind by which the mind itself immediately perceives the middle term ... but sometimes the middle term is acquired through instruction ... all knowledge can be reduced ultimately to certain intuitive principles. (Psychology 36)

In this way, Avicenna introduces a divine element into humans, for their intuition acts as a divine spark which relates them with the divinity. This divinity of man is Avicenna's focus and contribution to Medieval Islamic thought.

The dichotomy intuition / intellect is mirrored by the further subdivision of the rational soul into "a practical and a theoretical faculty, both of which are equivocally called intelligence" (Psychology 32). Avicenna describes the former as "the principle of movement of the human body, which urges it to individual actions characterized by deliberation and in accordance with purposive considerations. This faculty has certain correspondence with the animal faculties of appetite, imagination and estimation, and a certain dual character in itself" (ibid.). On the other hand, theoretical intelligence is the part that "forms the

ordinary and commonly accepted opinions concerning actions, as, for instance, that lies and tyranny are evil and other similar premises which, in books of logic, have been clearly distinguished from the purely rational ones” (ibid.). Avicenna finds again within the human soul a double nature: Intuitive and divine on the one hand (the theoretical faculty); earthly and pragmatic on the other (the practical one).

This is relevant in terms of his rhetorical theory because it humanistically endows man not only with divinity but also with self-sufficiency insofar as the process of *inventio* originates and relates to human affairs. As Avicenna proposes,

the form of all things contained in the active intelligence are imprinted on his soul either all at once or nearly so, not that he accepts them merely on authority but on account of their logical order which encompasses all the middle terms. *For beliefs accepted on authority concerning those things which are known only through their causes possess no rational certainty.*

This is a kind of prophetic inspiration, indeed its highest form and *the one most fitted to be called Divine Power; and it is the highest human faculty.*

(*Psychology* 37). my emphasis

Once again, Avicenna places within a characteristic related to man and his earthliness (intelligence) a divine element. At the same time, he also lays the foundations for the fact that the art of rhetoric as persuasion, as a syllogistic reasoning, is to be preferred over arguments *ex cathedra*.

This aspect can also be seen in prophets, who combine judgment and intuition -rationality and divinity. Indeed they are the paramount of eloquence insofar as

they are, in a Pentecost-like fashion, called by God to persuade their fellowmen to convert on the basis of their eloquence and not of their authority.

The Book which bears no falsehood before or behind it, the revelation of the Allwise and Allpowerful speaks in much the same sense: Call men unto the path of thy Lord [God instructs His prophet] –that is, the true religion- with wisdom –that is by way of proof – that is for those who can handle it – and with fair persuasion – that is, rhetoric, for those who cannot manage philosophic rigor; and engage them in argument with whatever is best.

(Avicenna Al-Shifa 2 qtd. in Goodman "Avicenna" 212)

Persuasion is a requisite for the prophet who, in turn, is the prototype of human divinity. Both elements are to be heeded. Indeed, one cannot separate the humanness from the divinity of the prophet and the law. In this sense, Avicenna comments that anyone who establishes rules and social regulations “must be in the position to *speak* to men, and to constrain them to accept the code; *he must therefore be a man*” (Theology 42, my emphasis). This concerns the prophet but also normal citizens.⁴⁴ In this way, men are made to share God’s divinity and are to function on their own creating law and regulation based on their society.

In this society, citizenship is enacted through speech and rhetoric. What is more, man is defined by eloquence, which can be seen in how the Koran describes God’s creation of man with the paratactic structure “He created man, He taught

⁴⁴ This is the word Avicenna uses. This word relates, again, Avicenna to Isocrates. For Isocrates and citizenship see L. Massey, "On the Origin of Citizenship in Education: Isocrates, Rhetoric, and Kairos," Journal of Public Affairs (1997), Takis Poulakos, Speaking for the Polis: Isocrates Rhetorical Education (Columbia, SC.: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), Takis Poulakos and David Depew, Isocrates and Civic Education (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

him eloquent speech” (The Quran 55.2-3), juxtaposing the creation of man and his eloquence.⁴⁵

Thus, I would not claim that Avicenna (nor al-Farabi) make theology subservient to rhetoric. Instead, they certainly establish eloquence as a very worthy art which is, to a certain extent, needed by religion; and which, again to a certain extent, validates it.⁴⁶ Thus the eloquence of the Koran is its hallmark of authenticity:

And if you are in doubt as to what we have revealed to our servant then produce a sura like it. (The Quran 2.21-23 qtd. in Makdisi 142)

Or do they say, ‘this man has forged it’? answer them: ‘bring then a sura [a Koranic verse] like it and call to your aid anyone who can besides God, if it be it you speak the truth. (The Quran 10.38-9, qtd. in Makdisi 142)

The aspects I have introduced above suggest that there are differences between al-Farabi and Avicenna -for example, the latter stresses more the divine-intuitive (Platonic?) side of man. But there seems to be as well enough material as to hypothesize a relation, whose exploration would further shape Medieval Islamic rhetoric. The figure of Averroes provides us with another step in the investigation.

Another fascinating area of study that could develop from this study is the influence of Greek classical scholars other than Plato and Aristotle. My hypothesis is that the Isocratean flavor that I found in al-Farabi can also be savored in other Medieval Islamic theories of rhetoric such as those of Avicenna or Averroes.

⁴⁵ To this respect, Razi claims that “[i]t is as though God performs the act of creating man only when He has taught him eloquence” In George Makdisi, The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West : With Special Reference to Scholasticism (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990) 143. It is also suggested that eloquence is “applied solely to God and to man as taught by God, [it] is not an attribute of any other creature, not even the angels” (143).

⁴⁶ “The notion of eloquence in Islam is not simply a literary notion; it is a basic religious doctrine.” Makdisi, Rise of Humanism 141.

Indeed, Avicenna's communal aspect of rhetoric and his focus on communal values that I have hinted at above resonate with an Isocratean echo. As in al-Farabi, politics and ethics are intrinsically related in Avicenna. This can be seen in the control the ideal ruler should exert over the city regarding virtues and vices: "Some citizens are negligent or spend extravagantly. This man [the ruler] should prevent this from happening. And he should be able to force them to work and prevent them from spending extra-money." (Khataba 35) We have here a paternalistic (pedagogical) public control over personal issues that may scare many scholars which is geared towards the betterment of society and the common wealth. Isocrates suggested a similar control in his *Aeropagiticus* when he claims that "laws and orators and private citizens must assimilate themselves to" the soul of the city (14). To which extent can an Isocratean presence be felt in Medieval Islam? Which is the channel that connected him with Islamic scholars? These questions present an exciting research possibility.

I do not claim, however, that these directions for further research are obstacle-free. In the remainder of the chapter I will expose some of the problems I have found in my own research. A relevant one is the fact that not all texts are extant. As an example, al-Farabi's grand commentary on the rhetoric of Aristotle is lost. This problem can easily be turned into an asset if we have faith in the possibility of finding new texts. In this sense, al-Farabi's Book of Rhetoric was found only sixty years ago. Also, the texts that we do have are not usually translated into English. In this study I have translated fragments into English from Spanish, Arabic, French, German and Latin because there were no English translations. Again, this need not be a problem. I have experienced this translation work as an opportunity

to improve my skills in other languages. Still, it is a factor one should take into account before going into the field.

Related to the problematic of language, there is the problematic of culture. To study Islamic theories of rhetoric, I had to learn about Islam and Islamic culture (Fiqh, Sharia, the Mutazilah, etc.) This is not a problem. Somewhat more problematic was to approach my study without ethnocentrism. Regarding this point, I have tried to adapt a reflective approach that guards against biases from my cultural background. I am not all too sure that I managed to escape that terministic screen -my cultural references are mainly western: Shakespeare, Dante, etc. In this sense, these references suggest to me that on the one hand, the East is not so far from the West; on the other hand, my status of outsider can give me an insight on Islam and Islamic culture that I would lack if I was part of it.

These directions and obstacles-that-can-turn-into-assets present a width of future research possibilities that I find exciting and enriching. Judging from my experience with this study, it promises thrill and fun for the scholar willing to embark in this voyage beyond the shores of Greece.

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