

HARVARD MIDDLE EASTERN MONOGRAPHS

*The Political Aspects of
Islamic Philosophy*

Essays in Honor of
Muhsin S. Mahdi

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Editor

But what in all this is al-Rāzī's actual position about the prophet Muhammad and Islam? This is a question that really cannot be answered, certainly not on the mere basis of his refusal to accept the historical argument of Abū Ḥātim. What is clear, on the other hand, is that in his philosophical doctrines, at least such as they are now discernible, there is nowhere a hint that he considered prophets to have a role in forming societies and laws that is not equally accessible to philosophers. If the rational sciences may be discovered by any man who possesses the proper amount of interest in them, and if this is all that humankind requires in order to live properly, God does not need to intervene in human history any more than He does in the historical activities of animals and plants. The idea that social organization has specific causes and that humans are, in part, separated from other types of creatures by both rational and political behavior was not considered by al-Rāzī. He may or may not have accepted that Muhammad was an inspired messenger of divine matters and the provider of an invaluable law for Muslims. It is certain, however, that he found no philosophical doctrine to explain specific, as opposed to general, religion or a particular communal law as distinct from the universal law of nature. In this sense, his creed and *madhhab*, as Abū Ḥātim repeatedly insisted, is philosophy and nothing more.

• THREE •

*The Theoretical and Practical
Dimensions of Happiness
as Portrayed in the
Political Treatises
of al-Fārābī*

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INTRODUCTION

Practical philosophy has been variously defined as knowledge that culminates in action, the investigation into what is human or subject to volition and art, and reasoning about contingent beings and events. Although these definitions are referred to in al-Fārābī's works, in his own name or attributed to others, he prefers to characterize practical philosophy in terms of its most significant theme, one implicit in the above definitions:

Practical philosophy is not what investigates everything subject to human control, in whatever manner or condition it occurs. After all, mathematics investigates many things that tend to be the product of voluntary action—for example, the science of music, the sciences of military strategy, and much of the contents of geometry, arithmetic, and the science of optics. Likewise, nat-

ural science investigates many things that result from art or volition. Yet not one of these sciences is part of political science. Rather, they are parts of theoretical philosophy, since they do not inquire into these things from the perspective of what is base or noble, nor from the perspective of what makes human beings happy or miserable when they do them. When, however, the objects of inquiry in these arts are taken up from the perspective of the human happiness or misery that results from doing them, they belong to practical philosophy.¹

Concern with happiness and misery, in other words, constitutes the most revealing measure of practical as against theoretical philosophy. Will and choice are also principles of practical philosophy.² However, they appear to be derivative principles, since "choice" means choosing happiness and the means to it.³ The ultimate end of practical philosophy according to al-Fārābī is not simply doing what is good, becoming good, or even doing what leads to happiness. The ultimate end is being happy as a result of conducting oneself in this manner.⁴

It is exceedingly difficult to determine with certainty al-Fārābī's philosophic understanding of the nature of happiness. The three alternative understandings of happiness that he appears

1. *Kitāb al-Jadal* (Book of Dialectic), in *al-Manṭiq 'inda al-Fārābī*, vol. 3, ed. Rafiq al-'Ajam (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1986), 69:10–18. References to this edition are followed by references to Bratislava University MS No. 231, TE 41. Thus, this passage is cited as *Jadal* 69:10–18/224r3–12.
2. Al-Fārābī, *Risālah Ṣuddira bihā al-Kitāb* (Introductory Treatise), ed. D. M. Dunlop *Islamic Quarterly* 3 (1957): 227:21–22. See also al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* (Book of Letters), ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1969), no. 14, 67:17–18.
3. *Jadal* 70:1–3/224r18–20.
4. *Jadal* 69:7–9/223v20–224r2. "Happiness" is the translation of *sa'ādah*, the Arabic equivalent of the Greek *eudaimonia*. It has sometimes been translated as "felicity" or "human flourishing" to distinguish it from popular, subjective notions of happiness. I use "happiness" and "flourishing" interchangeably to translate *sa'ādah*.

to have considered seriously are happiness as theoretical activity exclusively, as political activity exclusively, and as a combination of theoretical and political activity in which the theoretical and practical aspects are both part of the essence or defining structure of happiness. Happiness understood as theoretical activity exclusively can be consistent with a view of happiness that admits a plurality of human goals as long as the other goals are seen as desirable for the sake of theoretical activity. Thus, the moral and other practical virtues could be necessary for human happiness so conceived, but only insofar as they are instrumental and, therefore, subordinate to the rational virtues. Similarly, the view of happiness as exclusively practical could be consistent with viewing theoretical activity as necessary or desirable because of its utility for promoting practical excellence.

The understanding of happiness as comprehending both theoretical and practical activity (hereafter the "comprehensive" understanding of happiness) differs from either of the previous alternatives in that the theoretical and practical components of happiness are each constitutive of happiness, i.e., part of its essential nature. Thus, although theoretical excellence according to this understanding would still be acknowledged as being of a higher order than moral virtue or any other type of practical excellence, practical excellence could not be sacrificed without limit in the name of the higher ranking good. According to the comprehensive understanding of happiness, in other words, the specific human end would consist in a combination of excellences: to attain happiness one can never lose sight of its dual character.

As a consequence of the appearance in al-Fārābī's writings of the three alternative portraits of happiness enumerated above, commentators have reached conflicting interpretations of his understanding of the end of man. De Boer, Fakhry, Najjar, and Strauss take the view that for al-Fārābī man's highest perfection

is purely theoretical and that moral considerations are introduced in the name of this higher activity.⁵ De Boer explicitly subordinates moral virtues to theoretical activity.⁶ Fakhry, on the other hand, speaks of moral, intellectual, and artistic virtues as means to man's end,⁷ but does not appear to mean that all three are constitutive elements of happiness. Rather, since he sees ultimate happiness as attaining, or seeking to attain, a certain type of transcendent existence (which medieval Islamic philosophers often described in terms of human beings or the human soul or mind attaining the immateriality of certain rational forces or separate "intellects"),⁸ Fakhry sees all the virtues, including the intellectual virtues, as stages in the development of the ultimate human potential.

Other commentators have argued that al-Fārābī's emphasis on the political function of philosophy reflects his belief that the ultimate human good encompasses practical as well as theoretical perfection or even practical perfection first and foremost. Berman holds that for al-Fārābī the obligation to "imitate God" refers specifically to the task of founding an ideal political community, not to contemplation or a combination of contemplation and moral or political activity.⁹ Pines seems to concur,

5. T. J. de Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, trans. E. R. Jones (New York: Dover, 1967), 120–122, 124–126; Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 123; Fauzi Najjar, "Al-Fārābī on Political Science," *Muslim World* 48 (1958): 96, 100–102; Leo Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945), 2:366–371, 378–381.

6. De Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, 118–119.

7. Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 123–124.

8. For a discussion of happiness so conceived, see "The Alternative Portraits of Happiness" below.

9. Lawrence V. Berman, "The Political Interpretation of the Maxim: The Purpose of Philosophy Is the Imitation of God," *Studia Islamica* 15 (1961): 53–56.

maintaining that for al-Fārābī "philosophers are qua philosophers called upon, circumstances permitting, to play a central role in politics," although he also observes that the view sometimes attributed to al-Fārābī to the effect that the practical life is superior to the theoretical is probably inaccurate.¹⁰ Elsewhere, however, Pines observes that both the comprehensive and the exclusively theoretical portraits of happiness appear in al-Fārābī's writings, the latter on a number of occasions.¹¹

To evaluate these conflicting interpretations of al-Fārābī's philosophy, two types of evidence need to be considered. First are the passages in which al-Fārābī explicitly addresses the nature of happiness and develops either a purely theoretical, a purely practical, or a hybrid portrait of happiness, i.e., one that combines theoretical and practical features as part of the defining structure of happiness. These are the texts upon which the commentators cited above primarily rely. It will be useful, in addition, to examine passages devoted to related issues, in which one of the portraits of happiness is assumed or from which one of them necessarily follows. The purpose of turning to the latter texts is to ascertain whether or not one of the portraits of happiness is more consistent with the overall structure and purpose of al-Fārābī's larger philosophy. The former—i.e., those discussing the nature of happiness explicitly—are examined in the next section of this essay. Those bearing on the problem of happiness indirectly are explored in the remaining sections.

10. Shlomo Pines, "Translator's Introduction," in Maimonides: *The Guide of the Perplexed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), lxxxvi n. 50; see also lxxxi and note 39 below.

11. Shlomo Pines, "Philosophy," in *The Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 2: The Further Islamic Lands, Islamic Society and Civilization*, ed. P. M. Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 799–800.

THE ALTERNATIVE PORTRAITS OF HAPPINESS

Although the text of al-Fārābī's commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* has not survived, reports of its contents portray al-Fārābī as arguing in it that there is no happiness except political happiness (*al-sa'ādah al-madaniyyah*). According to Ibn Bājjah, al-Fārābī claimed in the commentary that there was no afterlife and no existence other than sensible existence, and that the only happiness is political happiness.¹² For Ibn Bājjah these statements do not necessarily represent al-Fārābī's mature or most philosophic beliefs; rather they reflect his first impressions, and they are not supported by demonstration. In contrast, Ibn Ṭufayl appears to take the statements as indicative of al-Fārābī's mature thought and, on that basis, he then vilifies his predecessor for having endorsed these and other doctrines that would undermine the religious belief that God will reward good men and punish wicked ones.¹³ However, Ibn Ṭufayl speaks only of al-Fārābī's statements about the afterlife, not of the additional claim, mentioned by Ibn Bājjah, that happiness is political in character.

No other work of al-Fārābī limits happiness to political hap-

12. See *Rasā'il Falsafiyyah li-Abī Bakr Ibn Bājjah*, *Nuṣūṣ Falsafiyyah ghair Manshūrah*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn al-'Alawī (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1983), 197. This passage is translated and analyzed by Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies in Mediaeval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979). Pines opines that al-Fārābī may have adopted such an "aggressive tone" in advancing this radically un-Islamic doctrine because he was the first Arab philosopher to adopt such a position.
13. Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, ed. Albert Nader (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1968), 21:21–22:3.

piness. In a passage in *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, he does seem to attribute the happiness of the inhabitants of the city to their political activities.¹⁴ However, it is clear from his speaking of happiness in the plural (*al-sa'ādāt*) in this passage that he is not necessarily focusing on happiness in the highest or best case. Moreover, the passage lacks restrictive language that would preclude activities other than political activities from contributing to the attainment of happiness.

Al-Fārābī depicts human happiness as identical to theoretical perfection in three works. In the course of a discussion of the human end in *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, he equates happiness with perfection, explained as the soul becoming so perfect that it no longer needs matter to subsist.¹⁵ Happiness thus consists in a person becoming and remaining a transcendent entity, i.e., one of the "separate substances," albeit lower than the separate substance referred to as the "agent intellect."¹⁶ Virtues and noble actions are good, according to this account, because they contribute to happiness, which is the good sought for its own sake. They are not good in and of themselves.¹⁷ Similarly, practical reason is said to serve theoretical reason, whereas theoretical reason serves nothing else; rather, it exists so that through

14. *Kitāb al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah (The Political Regime)*, ed. Fauzi Najjar (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1964), 81:14–16.
15. *Mabādi' Arā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah (Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City)*, ed. and trans. Richard Walzer, in *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 204:15–16. References to this edition are followed by references to that of Franz Dieterici, *Alfārābī's Abhandlung: Der Musterstaat* (reprint; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964). Thus, this passage is cited as *Madīnah* 201:15–16/46:7–8.
16. *Madīnah* 204:16–206:3/46:8–10. Or "active intellect" (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*; Greek, *nous poiētikos*). The concept of an agent or active intellect is normally traced to Aristotle's *De Anima* 430a10–15, although the expression *nous poiētikos* is at most implied there.
17. *Madīnah* 206:7–13/46:14–19.

it one can reach happiness.¹⁸ This passage thus contains the hallmarks of the portrait of happiness as essentially theoretical: the identification of happiness with the complete overcoming of corporeal existence and the subordination of the moral virtues and practical reason to the ultimate theoretical goal.¹⁹

Several passages in *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* can also be marshalled in support of the portrait of happiness as essentially theoretical. According to this work, the function of the agent intellect is to ensure that people reach the ultimate degree of perfection possible, namely, becoming a separate substance. This is the rank of the agent intellect, and its attainment is identified as the attainment of ultimate happiness.²⁰ When a person acquires this rank as a result of actualizing his intellect, his happiness is said to become perfect.²¹ Again, when the potential intelligibles and the potential intellect become actual, a person reaches ultimate happiness, characterized as the most excellent human perfection available.²² Here, as in *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, the goodness of everything but happiness is relative and derived from the goodness of the final end.²³

18. *Madīnah* 208:3–4/47:1–2.

19. The same description of happiness appears in *Risālah fī al-'Aql* (*Treatise on the Intellect*), al-Fārābī's treatise on the meaning of *intellect* and its characteristic activities, in a section devoted to Aristotle's use of the term *intellect* in *De Anima*, where the human intellect is said to overcome its corporeality through interacting with the agent intellect, thereby becoming substantial; see *Risālah fī al-'Aql*, ed. Maurice Bouyges, S.J. (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1938), 26:9–27:7, 31:3–5. Whereas this state of immateriality is called "ultimate happiness" and identified with the after-life here (31:6–9), the passage in *Madīnah* just discussed emphasizes the human origin of happiness: it is the result of certain voluntary actions, in particular, specific acts of the body and the mind (206:4–6/46:10–13), and thus clearly subordinates practical reason to theoretical reason.

20. *Siyāsah* 32:6–9.

21. *Siyāsah* 35:10–11.

22. *Siyāsah* 55:9–10.

23. *Siyāsah* 72:15–18.

The exclusively contemplative interpretation of happiness is also referred to in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*,²⁴ where it is attributed to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—probably the only instance in which al-Fārābī attributes to all three Greek philosophers a common belief. In this work as well, ultimate happiness is characterized in terms of, and equated with, final perfection and the absolute good.

In contrast to the preceding texts, portraits of happiness as composed of a combination of theoretical and practical perfection occur in several of al-Fārābī's works. His most famous elaboration of happiness defined in terms of practical as well as theoretical perfection occurs in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*. In fact, the entire work can be seen as a sustained defense of that point of view. The opening paragraph of the book states that "the things by means of which nations and citizens of cities attain earthly happiness in this life and supreme happiness in the life beyond" are the deliberative virtues, moral virtues, and practical arts along with the theoretical virtues.²⁵ In isolation, this assertion could form part of an argument for either exclusive view of happiness, depending on whether the first three attributes play an instrumental or a constitutive role in the attainment of happiness.²⁶ Although the matter is not free from doubt, the thrust

24. *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* (*Selected Aphorisms*), ed. Fauzi Najjar (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1971), no. 28, 45:6–46:16.

25. *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* (*The Attainment of Happiness*), ed. Ja'far Āl Yāsīn (Beirut: Al-Andalus, 1981), 49:4–7. References to Yāsīn's edition are followed by references to the anonymous edition done in Hyderabad, A.H. 1345. Thus, this passage is cited as *Sa'ādah* 49:4–7/2:2–5. For an in-depth analysis of this work, see Muhsin Mahdi, "Remarks on Alfarabi's *Attainment of Happiness*," in *Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science*, ed. George F. Hourani (Albany: SUNY Press, 1975).

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

of the book favors the latter interpretation, as I shall argue in the following discussion.

The first section of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* develops the doctrine that theoretical perfection entails practical as well as theoretical philosophy. As a consequence, knowledge of such things as the end of human existence and the way political communities should be ordered are said to come within the purview of theoretical perfection.²⁷ Theoretical perfection is thus more comprehensive than natural philosophy, or natural philosophy coupled with metaphysics. However, the inclusion of political and moral philosophy within the framework of theoretical perfection does not, in and of itself, necessitate that happiness encompass both theoretical and practical perfection or both the theoretical and practical virtues. In the second section of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, al-Fārābī argues that the highest deliberative excellence, the highest moral excellence, and the highest practical art are inseparable from theoretical excellence.²⁸ This passage is also inconclusive because the context in which their inseparability is asserted is the necessity of theoretical excellence for the operation of the practical virtues and arts in the most authoritative case,²⁹ i.e., when the objective is to provide for the well-being of cities or nations.³⁰ The argument of the second section

27. *Sa'ādah* 64:7–9/16:15–17; see *ibid.*, 63:4–64:7/15:16–16:15. Contrast Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.12.1143b19–20.

28. *Sa'ādah* 75:3–5/26:17–19.

29. *Sa'ādah* 74:17–20/26:11–13.

30. *Sa'ādah* 71:19–72:3/23:16–19. This appears to be a departure from the teaching of *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, on which the second part of *Sa'ādah* is largely based. After exploring whether and to what extent people need the virtues of the rational part of the soul in order to act virtuously, Aristotle declares that practical wisdom (or “prudence,” Greek *phronēsis*, Arabic *ta'aqqul*) and moral virtue in the full sense (*kuriōs*) are both indispensable and entail one another (VI.12–13). Wisdom, the virtue of the theoretical part of the rational soul, is said to be necessary simply

of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* thus assumes, but neither defends nor proves, the desirability of taking action on the basis of philosophic discoveries (and then concludes that in this case the three excellences and the highest practical art are inseparable). As a result, the section inquires into the best means to accomplish a goal whose worth has yet to be explored. In the third section of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, al-Fārābī examines the person who already possesses the practical virtues and arts in addition to theoretical excellence and then argues that such a person ought to acquire the ability to make others develop comparable traits.³¹ In this section of the book, as well, the self-sufficiency of theoretical excellence is not at issue.

It is not until the final section of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* that al-Fārābī addresses the question of whether or not it is desirable for an individual who possesses theoretical excellence to pursue the practical virtues and arts in addition.³² The section consists of an extended discourse on the distinction between true phi-

because it actualizes a part of the soul (VI.12.1144a1–3). Wisdom affects the operation of practical reason in that it is an end, perhaps the end, that practical reason seeks to secure (VI.13.1145a8–9). Wisdom does not appear to supply practical wisdom with any additional principles of practical reasoning. Aristotle furnishes a quartet of rational faculties concerned with primary knowledge in the realm of conduct, but wisdom is not among them (VI.11). The problem in al-Fārābī's Aristotelian source, then, is assessing the relative roles of practical wisdom and moral virtue as suppliers of practical principles. Given the focus of the discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, al-Fārābī's claim that only the possessor of philosophy can discover the means of realizing the goals uncovered by practical philosophy in concrete situations and the concomitant doctrine of the inseparability of the four kinds of theoretical and practical excellence must be seen as features of the distinctive and hence emphatic teaching of *Sa'ādah*.

31. *Sa'ādah* 77:17–78:1/29:7–10.

32. On the fourth part of *Sa'ādah*, see Mahdi, “Remarks on Alfarabi's *Attainment of Happiness*,” 58–66.

losophy and several types of spurious philosophy. The theoretical sciences are said to be defective philosophy (*falsafah nā-qīṣah*) when "their possessor does not have the faculty for exploiting them for the benefit of others."³³ The greater a person's power to make discoveries in the theoretical sciences intelligible and to bring those subject to human volition into existence in cities and nations to the extent of the inhabitants' abilities, the more perfect is that person's philosophy.³⁴ In contrast to the true philosopher,

The false³⁵ philosopher is he who acquires the theoretical sciences without achieving the utmost perfection so as to be able to introduce others to what he knows insofar as their capacity permits. The vain philosopher is he who learns the theoretical sciences, but without going any further and without being habituated to doing the acts considered virtuous by a certain religion or the generally accepted noble acts. Instead he follows his own inclination and appetites in everything, whatever they may happen to be. . . . As for the false philosopher, he is the one who is not yet aware of the purpose for which philosophy is pursued. He acquires the theoretical sciences, or only some portion thereof, and holds the opinion that the purpose of the measure he has acquired consists in certain kinds of happiness that are believed to be so or are considered by the multitude to be good things.³⁶

33. *Sa'ādah* (Mahdi) 89:9–10/39:9–10. Here and in what follows, the reference "Mahdi" in parentheses means that the quoted passage is taken from his translation; see *Attainment of Happiness in Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969). The Hyderabad line and page references are in the margins of Mahdi's translation.

34. *Sa'ādah* 89:10–17/39:11–16.

35. Literally, "the philosopher in vain," *al-faylasūf al-bāṭil*: "Something is in vain when it is not connected to the end for the sake of which it exists"; see *Jadal* 70:11–12/224v11–12.

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

So conceived, *philosopher*, *supreme ruler*, *king*, *lawgiver*, and *imam* are different expressions for the same idea.³⁷ Al-Fārābī does acknowledge that the expression *philosopher* stands for theoretical excellence first and foremost. Nonetheless he adds that, "if it be determined that the theoretical virtue [or excellence] reach its ultimate perfection in every respect, it follows necessarily that he must possess all the other faculties as well."³⁸

The teaching of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, then, is not merely that practical rational excellence and moral virtue are constitutive parts of human perfection in the highest case.³⁹ Al-Fārābī appears to maintain the more extreme thesis that these things are constitutive parts of philosophy itself. The most authoritative practical excellence for him is the one with the broadest scope: the excellence inherent in participation in the life of the community is superior to the excellence called forth in private life; and, of the practical virtues associated with communal life, those exercised in the political arena are the most authoritative or complete.⁴⁰ Since he sees moral and deliberative excellence as two subdivisions of practical virtue, the argument for including practical perfection in human happiness culminates in the doctrine that happiness presupposes the union of philosophy and kingship in a single person.

Several additional passages that contain the comprehensive portrait of happiness deserve notice both in their own right and because they occur in the three works previously cited as incorporating a portrait of happiness as essentially theoretical—*al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, and *Fuṣūl*

37. *Sa'ādah* 93:18–19/43:18–19.

38. *Sa'ādah* (Mahdi) 92:12–14/42:12–14.

39. As Leo Strauss notes, the identification of the philosopher with the king does not necessarily mean that philosophy and kingship are the same art; "Farabi's *Plato*," 367.

40. *Sa'ādah* 71:1–72:3/22:18–23:19.

Muntaza'ah. Toward the end of *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* the reader is told that theoretical philosophy is useful because it makes truly virtuous action possible. Virtuous action presupposes real virtue; and real virtue, in turn, presupposes a knowledge of real happiness.⁴¹ Real virtue is, of course, a byproduct of habituation.⁴² Habituation to virtue can, however, result from regularly obeying commands of parents or persons in authority as well as from acting in accordance with what one knows to be right. In the former case, a person's actions may be the actions of the real virtues without being really virtuous actions from the perspective of the philosopher, since a person who behaves properly in deference to authority behaves well by accident.

In addition to advancing the view that virtue, properly understood, is never simply imitative, this aphorism suggests that philosophy naturally culminates in action.⁴³ The aphorism can also be construed as alluding to the fact that the activity of contemplation itself is first engaged in without a philosophic understanding of the necessity of a contemplative life for the attainment of happiness. In other words, a person ordinarily

41. *Fuṣūl* no. 94, 95:14–96:8.

42. *Fuṣūl* no. 94, 95:17–96:2.

43. The suggestion that theoretical understanding is not self-sufficient is made repeatedly in al-Fārābī's summary of Aristotle's philosophy. See the concluding paragraph of *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs* (*The Philosophy of Aristotle*), ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dār Majallat Shi'r, 1961), 132:11–15: "And it has become evident that the knowledge that he [Aristotle] investigated at the outset just because he loved to do so, and inspected for the sake of explaining the truth about the above-mentioned pursuits, has turned out to be necessary for realizing the political activity for the sake of which man is made." See, however, Mahdi's notes to the Arabic and English editions concerning the textual basis for reading "political activity" and contrast 125:4–126:5. Here and in what follows, I cite from Mahdi's English translation of this work in Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*; page references to the Beirut edition are in the margins.

embarks on a life of inquiry because of a belief in the rightness of that way of life, but the belief has been adopted on the authority of others—typically teachers or peers who are especially trusted. The initial decision to philosophize is thus based on received opinion. Ultimately, only philosophic inquiry can validate the life of inquiry. Without an understanding of the nature of the human soul, its function and purpose, and the interaction of its parts, a person cannot know with certainty that the life of inquiry is the only life worth living.

The aphorism in question thus admits of two interpretations. Consistent with the comprehensive portrait of happiness—and more obviously suggested by the text literally construed—it seems to mean that the moral life as ordinarily understood becomes truly moral when virtue is grounded in knowledge. Alternatively, it may be interpreted as applying to moral activity in the global sense of the overall character of the way a person lives. According to the latter interpretation, not the moral virtues, but the philosophic or theoretical life as a way of life, would be the end. Further, if moral virtue refers to specific kinds of moral action, as contrasted with the overall character of a person's way of life, the aphorism appears to advance the view that happiness consists essentially in moral action and that theoretical activity is choiceworthy because it serves this goal. This would amount to a portrait of happiness that is essentially practical. However, the aphorism does not point unambiguously in this direction. At one point al-Fārābī speaks of a "level of theoretical knowledge through which man attains happiness."⁴⁴ Yet he also describes the person who has completed theoretical and practical philosophy as finally able to turn to the "practical part" and begin to act as he must in order to attain perfection.⁴⁵

44. *Fuṣūl* no. 94, 97:17–18.

45. *Fuṣūl* no. 94, 98:7–8.

This also implies that contemplation both makes possible and finds completion in action.

In a later aphorism, al-Fārābī asks the reader to consider two people. One has mastered the contents of all of Aristotle's books, theoretical and practical, and usually acts contrary to the prevailing morality. The second is completely ignorant of the sciences possessed by the first and always acts in accordance with the conventional view of what is good.⁴⁶ This second person, al-Fārābī informs the reader, is "closer to being a philosopher than the first" and "better able to possess the sciences the first possesses than the first is able to possess what the second possesses."⁴⁷ The contrast he draws between the moral novice and the immoral initiate might appear to undermine both the fundamentally theoretical and the fundamentally moral accounts of the philosophic life. However, he continues:

Philosophy at first sight and⁴⁸ in reality consists in a human being acquiring the theoretical sciences and in all his actions conforming to what is noble [*jamīl*] according to common opinion and in reality.⁴⁹

46. *Fuṣūl* no. 98, 100:14–18. At 100:19, the Chester Beatty Arabic manuscript reads *mukhālīfah* ("at variance with") for *muwāfiqah* ("in accordance with"), although the proper reading is added above the line. The medieval Hebrew translation has the erroneous reading (*maskimōth*). See D. M. Dunlop, *Al-Fārābī, Fuṣūl al-Madānī: Aphorisms of the Statesman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 208. On the basis of the erroneous reading, de Boer uses this aphorism to urge that al-Fārābī believes in the superiority of knowledge over moral action; see *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, 122.

47. *Fuṣūl* no. 98, 100:18–20.

48. Najjar has *fi al-ḥaqīqah*, without listing any variants; *Fuṣūl* no. 98, 100:20–21. Dunlop, *Al-Fārābī, Fuṣūl al-Madānī*, 170:2, has *wa fi al-ḥaqīqah*, without listing any variants, but this reading is preferable in light of the end of the aphorism.

49. *Fuṣūl* no. 98, 100:20–23.

According to this passage, then, philosophy consists in theoretical and moral excellence, with thought and action both being integral and constitutive elements of the whole.⁵⁰

The contrast in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* between the two versions of happiness helps to clarify al-Fārābī's respect for and apparent endorsement of conventional morality in several of his works. There is, he implies, a large degree of harmony, if not overlap, between conventional morals and the moral demands recognized as a result of theoretical investigation. Moreover, the habit of flaunting conventional morality could interfere with a person's ability to adopt the moral life dictated by theoretical considerations. A person habituated to the prevailing morals, on the other hand, will experience less difficulty in learning to conform to the dictates of reason.⁵¹

The comprehensive portrait of happiness is also suggested by al-Fārābī's discussion of prophecy in *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*. The person who has perfected theoretical and practical reason and has, in addition, attained prophecy (here equated with the ability to speak about unseen occurrences in the present and to predict events in the future) is said to possess "the most perfect level of humanity and the highest degree of happiness."⁵² The equation of prophecy with the highest degree of happiness precludes an exclusively theoretical view of happiness to the extent

50. The same thought is expressed in *Sa'ādah* 95:18–96:2/45:14–16. A little earlier in the same work, he distinguishes between the proper posture for a philosopher vis-à-vis the virtuous acts of the religion in which he was reared and the proper posture for him with respect to the generally accepted virtues and noble acts: The philosopher is instructed not to forsake the "generally accepted noble acts"; in contrast, he is advised not to forsake "all or almost all" of the virtuous acts of his religion (95:11–14/45:7–9). For *millah* as an equivalent to *madīnah*, see *Kitāb al-Millah* (*Book of Religion*), ed. Muhsin Mahdi, in *Kitāb al-Millah wa-Nuṣūṣ Ukhrā* (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1968), 30.

51. *Fuṣūl* no. 98, 101:1–7.

52. *Madīnah* 244:7–16/58:18–59:3.

that the operation of the prophet's practical reason involves the discovery of particular actions that should, for example, be chosen or avoided. Clearly the prophet's knowledge of unseen occurrences and future events, the source of which is the imaginative faculty, necessarily binds him to the material world. Thus, the fact that the prophet's theoretical understanding finds its completion in the operation of practical reason would seem to place the view that connects happiness to prophecy in opposition to the account of happiness as essentially contemplative. In short, the portrait drawn in *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* of a self-sufficient, transcendent happiness, beyond which there exists nothing greater to which a person can aspire,⁵³ is in this passage contrasted with, if not superseded by, the claims made on behalf of the philosopher-prophet.

Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah has a comparable passage. It focuses on revelation (*waḥy*), which follows from a person's union with the agent intellect and which gives rise to the power "to define things and actions that direct people toward happiness."⁵⁴ The expression "defining and directing actions toward happiness" appears repeatedly in other works of al-Fārābī as a description of the legislative product of a prophet's or a supreme ruler's perfection.⁵⁵ In *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, then, revelation appears to issue in action—specifically, in the creation of a political organism, whether a regime or its counterpart, a religious community (*millah*).⁵⁶ The passage is different from

53. *Madīnah* 204:15–206:10/46:7–16.

54. *Siyāsah* 79:15–17.

55. See *Millah* 43:3–4, 44:6–11; *Fuṣūl* 23:4–5; cf. *Madīnah* 246:1/59:4–5.

56. In *Fuṣūl*, nos. 52–53, human subjects are first excluded from wisdom and subsequently included within its purview. Aristotle feels the latter alternative is serious enough to warrant refutation. In fact, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.7, which is ostensibly devoted to a discussion of [theoretical] wisdom (*sophia*), is in reality occupied with the challenge of practical wisdom

the parallel passage in *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, however, in that the rank of the recipient of revelation is not expressed in terms of perfection or happiness, but in terms of the authoritativeness of the recipient's rule.⁵⁷ Although the people subject to this rule are said to be "virtuous, good, and happy,"⁵⁸ neither the supreme ruler nor the possessor of revelation is assessed in comparable terms. As far as the literal text goes, therefore, *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* lacks the conflicting accounts of human happiness present in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*. It is possible, in other words, that *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* equates happiness with some kind of private existence while it depicts revelation as enlarging the perfect person's sphere of competence in a way that does not necessarily enhance happiness.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE SCIENCES AND REASON

Since perfecting the theoretical intellect (*al-'aql al-naẓarī*) or the theoretical rational faculty (*al-quwwah al-nāṭiqah al-naẓariyyah*) is the human end according to the portrait of happiness as essentially theoretical, it is necessary to begin by determining the kind or kinds of knowledge this perfection includes. Traditionally, theoretical reason has been associated with theoretical science or theoretical philosophy. Al-Fārābī reproduces the traditional characterization in two works, where he defines theoretical reason as knowledge of beings that we cannot make or transform, as contrasted with practical reason, which is the

(*phronēsis*) to constitute the highest form of knowledge and, thus, to be entitled to the name *sophia*.

57. *Siyāsah* 80:3–4.

58. *Siyāsah* 80:5.

source of knowledge of objects and events that owe their existence to human volition.⁵⁹ If theoretical is understood in this way and happiness is identified with theoretical activity, the end of man would consist in mastering mathematics, physics, and metaphysics. The practical sciences, in contrast, would be pursued for the sake of the theoretical, i.e., to establish the type of society and moral character most conducive to the acquisition or development of the theoretical sciences. Equating the actualization of theoretical reason with the possession of the theoretical sciences goes hand in hand with the characterization of wisdom as the most excellent knowledge of the most excellent being.

Al-Fārābī qualifies the traditional division of the sciences and reason on a number of occasions. In the passage from *Kitāb al-Jadal* quoted at the beginning of this essay,⁶⁰ he rejects the identification of practical philosophy with what is subject to art or volition and proposes instead that practical philosophy be defined as the inquiry into subjects from the perspective of happiness and misery. In other words, not the subject matter, but the purpose of philosophic inquiry would be decisive for characterizing a particular investigation as theoretical or practical. As a consequence, some so-called theoretical sciences would form part of practical philosophy or political science when they are engaged in with a view to bringing about happiness or avoiding misery.⁶¹ Further, despite the fact that happiness depends for its existence on volition, at least in part,⁶² only the theoretical rational faculty can attain real knowledge

59. *Fuṣūl* no. 7, 29:8–14; *Siyāṣah* 33:4–5.

60. See also al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Burhān* (Book of Demonstration), ed. Majid Fakhry, in *al-Manṭiq 'inda al-Fārābī*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1987), 75:10–11/173v7–8.

61. *Jadal* 69:10–18/224r3–12. See also *Hurūf*, no. 15, 67:21–68:1.

62. *Siyāṣah* 72:13–73:18; *Madīnah* 206:4–5/46:10–11; *Fuṣūl* no. 74, 80:13–17.

of happiness.⁶³ In short, the formulation of the classification of the sciences in *Kitāb al-Jadal* has the effect of undermining the exact correspondence between theoretical knowledge and theoretical reason on the one hand and practical knowledge and practical reason on the other.

Like *Kitāb al-Jadal*, *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* abandons the traditional dichotomy between the theoretical and the practical.⁶⁴ Ordinarily, the ability to discern the means to bring about a given end is attributed to deliberation (*rawiyyah*), an aspect of practical reason.⁶⁵ Yet, according to *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, both human science (*al-'ilm al-insānī*)—defined as the science of the things useful for the attainment of happiness—and political science—defined as the science of the things useful for the attainment of happiness and made possible by political associations—are properly parts of what al-Fārābī calls “theoretical perfection” (*al-kamāl al-naẓarī*).⁶⁶ Theoretical perfection thus encompasses knowledge of happiness, the moral virtues, political associations, and other things whose existence depends on human volition.⁶⁷ As part of theoretical perfection, these subjects are not known in all their details: they are not known with all the accidents and states that necessarily accompany them when they exist at a specific time and in a specific place.⁶⁸ They are known as intelligible ideas (*ma'qūlāt*), that is, in terms of their essential features or underlying structure independent of

63. *Siyāṣah* 73:11–12; *Fuṣūl* no. 53, 62:2–5; see *Madīnah* 208:10/47:8.

64. For a discussion of this issue, see Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, xii–xxi.

65. *Siyāṣah* 33:6–7; *Madīnah* 208:11–12/47:9–10; and *Fuṣūl* no. 7, 29:15–30:2 and No. 39. See Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 136 n. 26(2) and the definition in the English translation of the reflective faculty (*al-quwwah al-fikriyyah*).

66. *Sa'ādah* 63:4–64:9/15:16–16:17.

67. *Sa'ādah* 64:7–9/16:15–17, 66:18–67:2/19:3–5, 91:14–15/41:12–13.

68. *Sa'ādah* 64:11–65:13/16:19–17:16.

the particular attributes they assume when they exist in concrete situations. In other words, the practical sciences partake of the theoretical character of inquiries into nonhuman things as long as they remain on a universal level.⁶⁹

This is also the opinion al-Fārābī attributes to Aristotle in *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*. According to his Aristotle, man can have two kinds of perception in connection with those intelligible ideas that have to do with beings capable of being brought into existence: one useful for bringing them into existence and "a kind of perception that exceeds the measure required and useful for their existence."⁷⁰ The former is an expression of practical intellect (*al-'aql al-'amalī*);⁷¹ the latter, an expression of theoretical intellect.⁷² In short, volition and action are relevant principles for differentiating among things to be studied and understood.⁷³ The classes thus created, however, cut across the traditional boundaries of theoretical and practical knowledge. To the extent that theoretical perfection includes both theoretical and practical or political philosophy, the identification of happiness with theoretical activity would have broader connotations than first appeared.

Al-Fārābī's understanding of the place of metaphysics among the sciences also warrants clarification. Although metaphysical inquiry may in some sense be the "highest" of the inquiries subsumed under theoretical perfection, it is not clear that the other inquiries exist for the sake of metaphysics. To be precise,

69. See Millāh 47:2; *Ḥurūf* no. 143, 151:18–152:1, no. 145, 153:2–3; also al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm*, ed. 'Uthmān Amīn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglī al-Miṣriyyah, 1968), 127:3–7.

70. *Aristūṭālīs* 123:17–21.

71. See *Fuṣūl* no. 38, 54:10–55:5, where the practical intellect is defined as the practical rational faculty that, based on experience and observation, grasps premises about things subject to human control.

72. *Aristūṭālīs* 124:1–4.

73. *Ḥurūf* no. 14, 67:16–18.

it is political philosophy, itself made up of human science and political science, that is not obviously subordinated to metaphysics. On two occasions when al-Fārābī sketches out the entire course of theoretical study, he depicts the study of metaphysics as being interrupted and the study of political philosophy taken up instead. The first time this occurs, the examinations undertaken by political philosophy are, in turn, interrupted, whereupon the metaphysical inquiry is continued; subsequently political inquiry is resumed.⁷⁴ It is difficult to discern the rationale for proceeding in this fashion.⁷⁵ For example, if one posits that the interruptions are intended to reveal a degree of reliance by each discipline on the findings of the other, it is difficult to confirm this hypothesis by isolating specific insights of one stage of either inquiry incorporated into the other inquiry that justify the interruption. Rather, al-Fārābī points out (1) that the study of the heavenly bodies and their motions (one of the last stages in the investigations of natural science) suggests the existence of incorporeal principles that make the supralunar sphere intelligible and (2) that the study of the rational animal (another of the last stages in the investigations of natural science) suggests the existence of incorporeal principles that make the sublunar sphere intelligible.⁷⁶ The latter incorporeal principles are not, however, equated with the former, nor is one kind derived from or presented as dependent on the other. Instead, the respective relationships between the two kinds of incorporeal principles and the natural realm associated with each are *likened* to one another.⁷⁷ Further, the

74. *Fuṣūl* no. 94, 97:6–98:7; *Sa'ādah* 59:18–63:13/12:14–16:5.

75. On the relationship between metaphysics and political science in Part 1 of *Sa'ādah*, see Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, xiv–xvi, xx–xxii.

76. *Sa'ādah* 59:18–60:17/12:14–13:10.

77. *Sa'ādah* 60:14–17/13:7–10.

two types of incorporeal principle have in common the same ultimate cause of being,⁷⁸ although the relationship to this prior principle each possesses may be unique.

Because the various intellectual principles and human perfections are only identified in a formal way in both *Fuṣūl Mun-taza'ah* and *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, the descriptions are extremely abstract and difficult to interpret. In *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, al-Fārābī assigns metaphysics the task of examining the ultimate foundations of political science and of "the practical art of politics" (*al-madanī min al-ṣinā'i' al-'amaliyyah*) in addition to the foundations of mathematics and natural science. He then calls these metaphysical inquiries the "culmination of theoretical science" (*'inda dhālika tatanāhā al-'ulūm al-naẓariyyah*).⁷⁹ This is obviously not a statement of the subordination of political inquiry to metaphysics. At the end of *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*, al-Fārābī attributes to metaphysics a similar task, with the explanation that the metaphysical inquiry is to be carried out for the sake of completing natural philosophy and political and human philosophy.⁸⁰ Such passages led Majid Fakhry to observe that for al-Fārābī metaphysics and politics should probably be seen as "two aspects of the same science, which might be indifferently described as the pursuit of truth insofar as it conduces to happiness, or the pursuit of happiness insofar as it conduces to truth."⁸¹

The relationship among the sciences is further complicated by indications in al-Fārābī's works that theoretical perfection may not be attainable even in the best case. The indications in question frequently occur in passages that discuss the ability of human reason to overcome material existence by becoming

78. *Sa'ādah* 62:12–15/15:5–8.

79. *Hurūf* no. 17, 69:18–21.

80. *Aristūṭālīs* 131:22–132:1.

81. Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 116–117.

completely transcendent or separate from matter, a condition typically described in terms of human reason's relationship to the agent intellect. Transcendence of this kind is usually seen as a precondition of man's ability to attain knowledge of the "separate substances," i.e., beings that are not bodies and do not inhere in bodies (and never have). As a consequence, transcendence of this kind would be a condition of attaining complete metaphysical knowledge and, thus, of attaining theoretical perfection. As commentators have long noted, al-Fārābī's writings contain conflicting accounts of the limits of human transcendence.

According to one passage in *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, when the rational faculty becomes intellect in act (*'aql bi-al-fi'l*), it becomes simultaneously the agent of intellection (*al-'āqil*), the object of intellection (*al-ma'qūl*), and the activity of intellection (*al-'aql*). It then achieves the rank (*yaṣīr fī rutbah*) of the agent intellect.⁸² However, the same passage concludes with the observation that the rational faculty achieves only "nearness" to the rank (*yaṣīr fī qurb min rutbah*) of the agent intellect.⁸³ When in the same work al-Fārābī describes the supreme ruler without qualification (*al-ra'īs al-awwal 'alā al-iṭlāq*), a figure equated in his writings with the highest human type, he attributes that ruler's intellectual prowess to the conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) of his soul with the agent intellect.⁸⁴ To be sure, *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* initially equates ultimate happiness with achieving the rank of the agent intellect,⁸⁵ possibly implying that mere "nearness" to that rank would comprise incomplete or imperfect happiness. At the same time, al-Fārābī also equates the achievement of "nearness" to the rank of the agent intellect with the rational

82. *Siyāsah* 35:4–11.

83. *Siyāsah* 36:1–3; see 55:6–7.

84. *Siyāsah* 79:8–11.

85. *Siyāsah* 32:6–7.

faculty becoming divine (*ilāhī*)⁸⁶ and describes the supreme ruler without qualification as having attained the sciences and cognitions in actuality (*al-ʿulūm wa al-maʿārif bi-al-fiʿl*).⁸⁷ Taken together these passages imply that complete transcendence of material existence is in principle possible for certain human beings, namely, those who have attained perfection through the actualization of their rational faculties. It is less clear if such transcendence constitutes immortality, whether on earth or in the next life.⁸⁸

The teachings of *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* are compatible with those of *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*. In a discussion of the operation of human reason and its passage from potentiality to actuality, al-Fārābī defines happiness as the human soul not needing matter to subsist, at which time the soul would become one of the separate substances. This condition is said to be "beneath" the rank of the agent intellect (*dūn rutbat al-ʿaql al-faʿāl*).⁸⁹ Although al-Fārābī never states whether happiness so conceived is in fact attainable,⁹⁰ an affirmative answer may be implied in a subsequent passage describing revelation and the

86. *Siyāsah* 36:4.

87. *Siyāsah* 79:3–4.

88. See the discussion of these passages in *Siyāsah* and the parallel passages in *Madīnah* in Davidson, "Alfarabi and Avicenna on the Active Intellect," *Viator*, 3 (1972): 142–144, and in Walzer, *Madīnah*, 409–410, 442–443. According to Davidson, the condition of being conjoined, although inferior, to the agent intellect, constitutes immortality for human beings, and this condition can occur before death. For a discussion of conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) and union (*ittiḥād*), see Alexander Altmann, "Ibn Bājja on Man's Ultimate Felicity," in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1965), 1:82–87.

89. *Madīnah* 204:15–206:3/46:7–10.

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

supreme ruler.⁹¹ In any event, consistent with the more restrained formulation in *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, the soul of the supreme ruler in *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is "as if united" with the agent intellect.⁹² Thus, both works appear to agree that theoretical perfection is available to the extent that human reason can transcend material existence, though the relationship between the transcendence of human reason and the agent intellect is described more cautiously in the former work.

Al-Fārābī apparently took a different position in his commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. As was noted above, according to the surviving reports of that work, al-Fārābī maintained that there was no life after death and no existence other than what is perceived by the senses.⁹³ This may imply that knowledge of transcendent entities is not available to man⁹⁴—in other words, that metaphysics is inherently incapable of completion and theoretical perfection is in principle beyond man's grasp.⁹⁵ Alternatively, the reported comments may signify

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

92. *Madīnah* 244:16/59:3–4. Reading *ka al-muttaḥidah* with Walzer and most manuscripts instead of *kāmilah muttaḥidah* with Dieterici, *Der Musterstaat*, 59.

93. See Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge," 82–83 (quoting from an unpublished work of Ibn Bājja) and Salomon Munk, *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe* (Paris: Vrin, 1955), 348–349.

94. See Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge," 83, 85; cf. Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Al-Farabi and Emanationism," in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. J. F. Wippel (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 23–24.

95. Based on Ibn Ṭufayl's report of al-Fārābī's commentary and Averroes'

a denial of the existence, as contrasted with the unknowability, of transcendent entities. So understood, al-Fārābī could have taken the position in the commentary that there are no beings except material beings and no objects of knowledge except these beings, what inheres in them, and explanatory principles. This understanding would be consistent with the denial of an after-life, but it also suggests that knowledge of what is, is within our grasp.

Parts of the account of metaphysical investigation in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* point in this direction.⁹⁶ In particular, al-Fārābī says only that the inquirer will grasp that the highest being⁹⁷ is that by which, from which, and for which the rest of the beings exist and that its relationship with the lower beings is completely without defect. In other words, he says the inquirer will grasp its nature as a cause, as contrasted with its nature simply.⁹⁸ However, because the objects of this investigation are repeatedly referred to as metaphysical "beings"⁹⁹ and the result characterized as knowledge of the beings through their ultimate causes,¹⁰⁰

comments in his Long Commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima* (but not the passage from Ibn Bājjah analyzed by Pines), Munk interprets al-Fārābī as intending to say that the acquisition of the theoretical sciences is possible, whereas man's becoming a separate substance is not possible; Munk, *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe*, 348 n. 4.

96. See *Sa'ādah* 60:5–61:11/13:1–14:4.

97. Al-Fārābī identifies the first principle as the divinity (*al-ilāh*) and the other principles as the divine principles (*al-mabādi' al-ilāhiyyah*); *Sa'ādah* 63:1–3/15:14–15.

98. See *Sa'ādah* 62:12–18/15:5–10.

99. *Sa'ādah* 62:4–17/14:17–15:10. Al-Fārābī refers to them as "beings" throughout his description of what the inquirer should investigate. Once the inquirer is presented as having understood this phase of the investigation (62:18/15:10), it is unclear whether al-Fārābī continues to refer to the metaphysical things as well as the lower order beings as "beings." At the end of the passage, he clearly refers to the former as "principles" rather than as beings (63:1–3/15:14–15).

100. *Sa'ādah* 62:21–63:1/15:13.

al-Fārābī's allusion to a philosophic descent from the peak of metaphysics back through the natural sciences gives the impression that the metaphysical entities can themselves be cognized to the extent necessary for metaphysical inquiry to be capable of completion. In the final part of *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, he reinforces the impression that the highest metaphysical inquiry can in principle produce substantive results by attributing to philosophy "an account of the ultimate principles . . . as they are perceived by the intellect," which is equated with the "essence of the first principle and the essences of the incorporeal principles."¹⁰¹ The parallel passage in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, which appears to be a summary of the account of metaphysical inquiry in *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, similarly suggests the knowability of the subject of metaphysics.¹⁰²

Kitāb al-Hurūf contains the most unambiguous statement concerning the limits of human knowledge. According to a passage describing the development of the arts and sciences, by Aristotle's time theoretical philosophy and universal practical philosophy had reached perfection, there remained nothing in them left to investigate, and they became an art to be learned and taught.¹⁰³ A parallel in one of al-Fārābī's commentaries on

101. *Sa'ādah* 90:21–22/40:18–41:1. The context is a comparison between religion and philosophy. It is therefore possible that the claims made on behalf of philosophy are exaggerated in order to portray philosophy as knowing what religion claims to know. On this passage, see Mahdi, "Remarks on Alfarabi's *Attainment of Happiness*," 52–53; *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, xiv–xv; and "Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Alfarabi's *Enumeration of the Sciences*," in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, ed. J. E. Murdoch and E. D. Sylla (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1975), 130.

102. *Fuṣūl* no. 94, 97:7–98:5. At 98:1–2, however, the first principle is clearly characterized as a being. At 98:4, the result of the metaphysical inquiry is described with the same phrase used in *Sa'ādah*.

103. *Hurūf* no. 143, 151:17–152:2; reading *wa al-'amaliyyah al-kullīyyah*, with Mahdi, for *wa al-'āmiyyah al-kullīyyah*.

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* repeats much of the account of the arts contained in *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*. However, it omits the assertion about the perfection of philosophy and implies that philosophy, or philosophizing, continued to be engaged in as an investigation after Aristotle's time.¹⁰⁴ Certainly the account of Aristotle's philosophy in *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs* lends support to the position that for al-Fārābī philosophy was still fundamentally the active *pursuit* of truth at the time of his Greek predecessor. Since the account of philosophy in *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* appears to be strongly influenced by the need for philosophy to present itself as a worthy competitor with religion for knowledge of metaphysical truths—indeed, the doctrine that religion is an imitation of philosophy requires philosophy to present itself as possessing such knowledge—it is possible that the claim made on behalf of philosophy in that work should not be accepted at face value.

To sum up, al-Fārābī's classifications of the sciences are distinctive in that he calls into question the traditional theoretical-practical distinction by expanding theoretical perfection to include portions of what is often referred to as the science of ethics and political science. He also qualifies the status of metaphysics as the supreme science by pointing out the ways in which it exists for the sake of the other sciences, by suggesting that there are limits to the ability of human reason to understand the objects of metaphysical inquiry, and by portraying the sci-

104. See *Kitāb al-Khaṭābah (Book of Rhetoric)*, in *Al-Fārābī, Deux Ouvrages Inédits sur la Rhétorique*, ed. J. Langhade and M. Grignaschi (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1971), 55:9–57:9. For example, people continued to use dialectic for training and sophistry for testing. The picture painted in *Ḥurūf* no. 151 may be prompted by al-Fārābī's observation about the potential destructiveness of dialectic and sophistry to the beliefs of ordinary adherents of religion. This suggests that the account of philosophy as complete in *Ḥurūf* may have been dictated by another practical consideration, namely, the need to banish these destructive logical arts from the city.

ence of man as a parallel inquiry with insight into the universe beyond nature. The larger effect of al-Fārābī's presentation is to stress the importance of human things or to counter the tendency to glorify nature and what is beyond nature at the expense of what is human. Thus, it appears that on the level of epistemology, al-Fārābī is attempting to combat the otherworldly tendencies of certain philosophical doctrines, just as in some of his works he criticizes the otherworldly tendencies of certain theological doctrines.¹⁰⁵

THE AUTONOMY OF PRACTICAL REASON

Even if theoretical perfection comes into being through the actualization of the theoretical intellect or theoretical reason, both parts of the rational faculty must be perfected for the actualization of human reason as such to occur. This doctrine is implied in *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, where on two occasions al-Fārābī appears to describe the agent intellect as interacting directly with both aspects of the rational faculty.¹⁰⁶ The doctrine is also implicit in *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* in his enumeration of the powers possessed by a person whose rational potential has reached the stage of being an "acquired intellect," since the

105. See *Madīnah* 314:12–316:5/80:14–81:2; also 316:6–318:13/81:2–82:1 and *Fuṣūl* no. 81.

106. *Madīnah* 218:11–16/50:15–20, 244:7–12/58:18–23. The thrust of this passage thus conflicts with the initial classification of the soul and the rational faculties, in which the theoretical-practical distinction was not made; see 164:13–15/34:22–23, 168:14–170:2/35:22–36:3. Note that the distinction is first introduced at 208:2–4/47:1–3. In light of the nearly identical classifications in both *Fuṣūl* no. 7, 29:5–30:2 and *Siyāsah* 32:15–33:15, it seems fair to say that in the initial classification of the soul in *Madīnah*, the theoretical-practical distinction is deliberately omitted.

result of the human intellect's last contact with the agent intellect is said to be the ability to determine and direct actions toward the attainment of happiness¹⁰⁷—an ability associated with practical reason.

To grasp the interaction between the theoretical and practical aspects of the rational faculty, it is necessary first to clarify the elements that, taken together, comprise the practical reasoning process: practical intellect, deliberation, and art.¹⁰⁸ Deliberation is the mental process involved in all reflection on the means to promote specific ends. Al-Fārābī evaluates deliberation along two dimensions—the effectiveness of the means it discovers in realizing the end sought after and the value of the end it seeks. When deliberation discovers the most effective means for bringing about a really good end, whether happiness itself or some condition or component of happiness, it is called prudence or practical wisdom.¹⁰⁹ When the end in view is not excellence, happiness, or a real good, the mental activity that discovers the most effective means to achieve the end is cleverness (*dahā*).¹¹⁰ Deliberation is thus the morally neutral core of the practical reasoning process.

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

107. *Siyāsah* 79:15–17 with 79:7–8.

108. See *Siyāsah* 33:3–4; *Fuṣūl* no. 7, 29:7, 29:14–30:2, no. 33, 50:7.

109. *Fuṣūl* no. 39, 55:6–9; see *Aql* 5:3–5, 7:5–8.

110. *Fuṣūl* no. 39, 55:10–56:1; see *Aql* 5:1–3. In *Millah* 61:3, this seems to be the faculty labelled *jūdah qarīḥah khabūthah*, i.e., “evil genius.” See also *Iḥṣā* 130:6, where al-Fārābī appears to use the term “experiential faculty” (*al-quwwah al-tajribiyyah*) to denote practical reason viewed without regard to the character of its goal. See *Fuṣūl* no. 93, 93:19–94:19.

from them, on the other.¹¹¹ The analogy is not precise for two reasons. First, deliberation does not necessarily make use of syllogistic reasoning. In particular, syllogistic reasoning, which accommodates a single middle term, is impossible whenever practical reasoning must take several factors into account simultaneously at each step of the reasoning process. Because practical reasoning is made up of branching, as opposed to linear, sequences of means-ends determinations, it is ordinarily characterized in terms of forming judgments (*taḥakkam*), while its theoretical counterpart takes place by means of demonstrating conclusions (*barhan*). Second, practical premises are not necessarily universal and invariable, as are their theoretical counterparts. They may be universal at one time and indeterminate or even completely invalid at another. Some practical principles may cover only a single or isolated instances.¹¹² The reason practical principles are not uniform and predictable is that they deal with the accidental and variable attributes that characterize individual objects and events when these have concrete existence. Accidental attributes are subject to frequent change, infrequent change, or anything in between; and they change as a result of occurrences and influences of a similarly limitless variety. Since beings and events of this kind are variable, and the conditions that cause them to vary cannot be classified exhaustively, the rules that describe their accidental, but necessary, characteristics suffer from a similar indeterminacy.¹¹³

There are, therefore, two generically distinct kinds of principles involved in practical reasoning about human things. One

111. *Aql* 10:2–4.

112. *Fuṣūl* no. 38, 54:13–55:2; *Sa'ādah* 65:19–66:5/18:5–11.

113. See *Sa'ādah* 65:16–67:8/18:2–19:10; *Fuṣūl* no. 92, 93:15–16; also *Millah* 49:9–50:3.

consists in cognitions about human things in their universal aspect—when they have one. For example, such cognitions include the idea or the essential properties and causes of justice as such, not a specific kind of justice; human happiness, understood in terms of the nature of the rational animal and not of a particular group of people or specific individuals; the organization and operation of political communities as such, without reference to particular governments; and moral virtue as a state of soul acquired through practices or education that can be discussed in general terms or in terms not dependent for their validity on particular traits considered virtuous by specific communities. This first genus of practical principles also includes cognitions of greater specificity than those just enumerated, which can nonetheless be properly classified as universal. For example, simple or pure types of regimes—e.g., aristocracy, democracy, and despotism—possess a universal character. Each of these can be examined in terms of its essence or defining structure, i.e., abstracted from the accidental characteristics that necessarily attach to concrete instances of actual governments.¹¹⁴ In short, these are the political or human insights available to the political philosopher through theoretical inquiry. They are the practical insights subsumed under theoretical perfection and grasped by the theoretical intellect. In contrast to these are the practical principles of the second type, those that account for the nonessential attributes and causes of practical things as they actually exist. Cognitions of this kind do not account for every last instance of a given phenomenon. They are limited to describing patterns of behavior exhibited by the observed instances. Examples of these practical principles are general rules that describe the ways in which different geographical locations, natural resources, population size, levels of technology, and the like alter the creation, operation, preservation, and even use-

114. *Fuṣūl* no. 91, 92:18–93:1.

fulness of human phenomena as understood in their universal aspect.¹¹⁵

The role played by knowledge of practical principles of this sort in the attainment of rational perfection is elusive and needs to be explored. According to al-Fārābī, a person deliberating about the means to achieve a particular goal relies ordinarily on generally accepted opinions held by people at large or on premises the person recognizes as a result of his own experience or observations.¹¹⁶ The principles used by people possessing practical wisdom or prudence, on the other hand, are exclusively of the latter variety.¹¹⁷ To put it another way, the excellent or best condition of the practical rational faculty depends on personal insight based on experience. Only when one is no longer speaking of practical *virtue* or *excellence* can the experience of others be substituted for one's own experience.

Al-Fārābī does not spell out the details of the process of reaching practical insights on the basis of experience. In *Kitāb al-Burhān*, he refers to it as a kind of inductive reasoning that is set in motion by a case-by-case review of particular observable objects or events. However, this mode of inductive reasoning differs from induction proper in that it reaches certain (and not merely probable) conclusions.¹¹⁸ Although he states in *Kitāb al-Burhān* that for purposes of the study of logic it is unnecessary to discuss where primary premises come from,¹¹⁹ elsewhere he explains experiential knowledge as knowledge that arises from the “practice” of an art, as contrasted with “book learning” or knowledge arrived at through syllogistic reasoning.¹²⁰ In *Kitāb*

115. *Fuṣūl* no. 92; *Sa'ādah* 18:13–20:3; see *Millah* 59:5–6.

116. *Fuṣūl* no. 46.

117. *Fuṣūl* no. 38; see *Aql* 9:5–10:2.

118. *Burhān* 24:17–25:3/139v9–16.

119. *Burhān* 25:6–9/140r1–4; see 24:15–17/139v6–9.

120. *Millah* 57:19–59:2; see *Burhān* 72:19–21/171v8–10. See also *Burhān*

al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr, al-Fārābī elaborates further on the experiential process.¹²¹ According to this work, after individual instances of a thing have become objects of sensation and imagination, and the intellect abstracts and combines such impressions, a natural faculty or power (*quwwah*) of the intellect forms a judgment based on what has been impressed on the mind (*dhihn*) in this fashion. This process differs from induction, which does not involve the intellect's specific activity of forming judgments in the manner described.¹²² Although al-Fārābī does not explain the process involved more concretely in this work, he notes that the intellect cannot perform this function at will¹²³ and that the number of sensible individual instances to be experienced before certainty is achieved can vary greatly—from a single exposure to a single object, on the one hand, to repeated exposures to multiple objects, on the other.¹²⁴ Thus his description of the experiential process here is consistent with the suggestion in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and elsewhere that there is a sense in which the practical intellect may never be fully actualized and additional practical principles will always remain to be discovered.¹²⁵

The portrait of happiness as essentially theoretical presupposes that the actualization of the practical intellect is desirable only when and to the extent that it contributes to the actuali-

71:14–72:11/170v15–171r18 and 74:3–75:24/172v7–174r7 on the role of experience in the arts.

121. *Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr* (*The Large Book on Music*), ed. Ghaṭṭās Khashab (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī li-al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 1967). Though the work is concerned with the art of music (to be precise, with the practical and theoretical arts of music), the passage referred to concerns the first principles of all arts, not just the musical arts.

122. *Mūsīqā* 92:9–96:7.

123. *Mūsīqā* 93:10–13.

124. *Mūsīqā* 94:9–95:1.

125. *Fuṣūl* no. 38, 55:3–5; see *Aql* 10:9–11:1, 6–9.

zation of the theoretical intellect. However, several passages in al-Fārābī's works point toward a more autonomous role for practical reason. First, al-Fārābī makes clear in *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* that a person can know what happiness is and fail to pursue it.¹²⁶ In the passages at issue, "knowledge" of happiness appears to be used in the technical sense of theoretical understanding.¹²⁷ Passages in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* also depict happiness as discovered in the last stages of philosophic inquiry, after logic and the theoretical sciences have been studied extensively, if not mastered in their entirety.¹²⁸ The statements in *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* are problematic for the account of happiness in terms of theoretical perfection because if (1) happiness is known only after the theoretical sciences are close to completion and (2) happiness consists in theoretical activity exclusively, it would be virtually impossible for (3) a person to know what happiness is and fail to pursue it, since the very activity that makes possible knowledge of what happiness is, is itself the activity that knowledge prescribes. Alternatively, if we were to posit that the theoretical sciences are close to completion but metaphysics is still incomplete when the theoretical character of happiness is discovered, the action dictated by knowledge of happiness would be something like the lifelong attempt to resolve those metaphysical questions still unanswered and, possibly, inherently incapable of definitive re-

126. *Siyāsah* 73:13–17, 74:9–12; *Madīnah* 208:13–210:1/47:11–15.

127. *Siyāsah* 73:11–13, 74:9–12; *Madīnah* 208:10–210:1/47:8–15. In the *Madīnah* passage, verbs from the root **l*m* are used both when happiness is known and made the end of action and when it is known but not made the end of action. In contrast, in *Siyāsah*, different verbs are used, possibly to suggest that the type of knowledge involved is different in the two cases. But see *Sa'ādah* 95:16–18/45:12–13, 96:10–15/46:6–10.

128. *Fuṣūl* no. 94, 97:12–98:8; *Sa'ādah* 63:4ff./15:16ff.

solution. In that case, the practical knowledge made possible by partial theoretical perfection would be knowledge of the need to devote oneself totally to metaphysical inquiry.

Although the last interpretation of the action dictated by philosophic insight into happiness cannot be dismissed, it is difficult to reconcile with al-Fārābī's repeated statements to the effect that *after* having discovered what happiness is, a person first deliberates to discover the means to attain happiness and then harnesses the appetitive, imaginative, and sense faculties to facilitate the attainment of this goal. This description seems too elaborate to refer to a process whereby one continues to engage in the activity one has already been engaging in successfully for the larger part of adult life, namely, theoretical inquiry. In short, if the action dictated by knowledge of human happiness is further metaphysical inquiry, a way of life qualitatively the same as the activity engaged in up to that point, al-Fārābī's description of the role played by appetite, imagination, sense perception, and practical reason would not seem to fit the actual undertaking at hand. His description suggests rather that the action dictated by knowledge of human happiness is qualitatively different from the activity previously engaged in and thus that human happiness consists in more than theoretical perfection. In other words, the inference from al-Fārābī's suggestions that not all action directed toward happiness is directed toward the pursuit of theoretical activity is that happiness consists in more than theoretical perfection and that practical reason is in some measure autonomous.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE AGENT INTELLECT

One feature of al-Fārābī's metaphysics as it is presented in *al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* that points in the direction of a com-

prehensive understanding of human happiness is the relationship he portrays between the character of perfection and the nature of the agent intellect. The most obvious import of human perfection conceived in terms of proximity to, or similarity with, the agent intellect is theoretical activity since the agent intellect is described in terms of sustained intellection having as its object the purest transcendent beings.¹²⁹ At the same time, the agent intellect is not a typical secondary cause. In addition to its purely contemplative activity, which parallels the activity of the other secondary causes, the agent intellect appears to be distinguished by its concern for human development. The agent intellect is said to "seek" (*fi'luh iltimās*) and "want" (*rām*) the ultimate perfection or transcendence of those in its sphere of influence;¹³⁰ and its efforts on behalf of humanity are repeatedly described as the agent intellect's purpose (*gharaḍ*).¹³¹ In contrast, the other secondary causes achieve their effects through an emanation that appears to operate out of mechanistic necessity. There is no sense in which they exist for the sake of their effects, whether on each other or on other beings.¹³² In this work, al-Fārābī thus separates the agency of the agent intellect from the agency of the remaining secondary causes by attributing a kind of intentionality to it.

There are indications in *al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* that for al-Fārābī, the fully actualized human intellect also has a twofold nature, part contemplative and part acting to perfect something external to it. Foremost among these is the similarity in the terminology he uses to describe the effect the agent intellect has on the human realm, on the one hand, and the effect the supreme ruler (i.e., the recipient of revelation) has on those subject

129. *Siyāṣah* 34:16.

130. *Siyāṣah* 32:6–7, 55:6–7.

131. *Siyāṣah* 73:2–4, 6, 8.

132. *Siyāṣah* 39:15–17, 41:13–14.

to his rule, on the other. The agent intellect takes the rational faculty, which is supplied by nature, and causes it to become intellect in act. In this way human happiness becomes perfect.¹³³ According to a parallel passage involving the supreme ruler, the actions determined by the supreme ruler and directed toward happiness strengthen the part of the soul innately disposed to happiness and cause it to become actual and perfect.¹³⁴ Again, the agent intellect seeks to enable the rational animal to reach ultimate happiness, defined as becoming a separate substance capable of subsisting without matter, and to stay in that condition forever.¹³⁵ Similarly, as a result of the actions prescribed by the supreme ruler, the part of the soul disposed to happiness ceases to need matter to subsist and will not perish when matter perishes.¹³⁶ There is, then, an analogy clearly suggested in *al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* between the activity of the supreme ruler and the operation of the agent intellect.

In sum, the doctrine of perfection as achieving, or almost achieving, the rank of the agent intellect; the portrait of the agent intellect as a provident force in the world; and the parallels between the terminology used to describe the concern for mankind displayed by the agent intellect and the counterpart terminology used to describe the actions of the supreme ruler all provide theoretical grounds for the comprehensive portrait of happiness that al-Fārābī sketches in more political, and possibly more rhetorical, contexts. The passages just discussed thus lend support to his assertion elsewhere that the ruler of the ideal political community obtains the highest human excellence, one that is available nowhere else.¹³⁷ They likewise provide a theo-

133. *Siyāṣah* 35:6, 10–11.

134. *Siyāṣah* 81:10–11.

135. *Siyāṣah* 32:6–9.

136. *Siyāṣah* 81:11–13.

137. *Fuṣūl* no. 89, 92:5–6.

retical basis for his claim that the happiness of the king of the cities of excellence is most perfect because he brings about the happiness of all the other citizens.¹³⁸

The preceding analysis is open to certain objections. First, complete transcendence of one's bodily existence, presupposed by the typical description of the contemplative ideal, and political or other practical activity appear to be mutually exclusive. According to *al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah* the agent intellect is said to engage in its disparate activities without possessing a dual nature as a result.¹³⁹ However, the manner in which it interacts with corporeal beings without sacrificing its transcendent character is mysterious, and al-Fārābī offers no express explanation. On one level, the explanation may be found in the circumstance that the aid provided by the agent intellect is confined to supplying or illuminating *intelligible ideas*; and it performs this function indirectly, according to certain of al-Fārābī's descriptions, by a process comparable to the light that makes vision possible.¹⁴⁰ In contrast, the supreme ruler contributes to the existence of happiness by discovering and communicating *beneficial actions* and *opinions*. The ruler may thus be forced to employ subrational faculties, especially imagination, to ensure that his advice or commands will be effective. At the very least, he will be required to take account in his reflections of the corporeal natures of those he seeks to guide. Thus, if theoretical perfection is understood in terms of transcendence, and practical perfection consists in the activity of the supreme ruler, the activities presupposed by practical perfection would seem to be incompatible with, and possibly to undermine, the activity comprising theoretical perfection.

Second, the rational part of the soul is presented in *al-Siyāṣah*

138. *Fuṣūl* no. 30.

139. *Siyāṣah* 32:9–10.

140. *Siyāṣah* 35:12–17.

al-Madaniyyah as completely self-contained when it has become actualized to the point of becoming, or almost becoming, a separate substance, i.e., its existence is confined to itself, without anything emanating to others.¹⁴¹ Once the rational soul is separated from the remaining psychic faculties, it can act as a cause only by virtue of serving as an end (*ghāyah*), not as an agent.¹⁴² In contrast to the situation with the first and secondary causes, then, the greater a person's intellectual perfection, the more self-contained the person is. For human beings, bliss (*jamāl, bahā', ghibṭah*) consists in intellection alone, whereas for the higher beings it consists in a combination of intellection and causing existence to emanate to others.¹⁴³ Thus, to the extent that ultimate happiness, according to *al-Siyāṣah al-Madaniyyah*, consists in becoming a separate substance or coming as close to pure incorporeality as possible,¹⁴⁴ it should follow that the end of man is a self-contained state of intellection. The argument of this passage in the metaphysical first half of the work thus supports the portrait of human happiness as essentially theoretical.

POLITICS AS METAPHOR

The sharpness of the antithesis between the alternative portraits of happiness is reduced, albeit not eliminated, by the unconventional meaning al-Fārābī bestows on such key concepts as the city, rule, and supreme ruler. If the understanding of happiness as a combination of theoretical and practical perfection were his final teaching, we would expect as a consequence that only

141. *Siyāṣah* 42:3–8.

142. *Siyāṣah* 42:10–13.

143. *Siyāṣah* 40:6–41:2, 41:13–14.

144. *Siyāṣah* 32:6–9, 35:7–11, 55:6–10.

the philosopher-king could be truly happy, since only a founder or a supreme ruler can be the agent or cause of the citizens' happiness. Yet al-Fārābī always stops short of saying precisely this.¹⁴⁵ In *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, he asserts that the supreme ruler, true king, or true philosopher is what he is even if no use is made of him by the community in which he resides, i.e., even if he does not found or govern a political community.¹⁴⁶ In other words, in these two books the initial emphasis on action as part of philosophy and of being human is not sustained; nor is governance finally presented as a necessary part of true philosophy or true kingship.

In both works, the shift comes as a complete surprise. In *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, the thesis has just been advanced that a philosopher who fails to use the theoretical sciences on behalf of other people or fails to try to share his discoveries with others in some fashion is a false philosopher. Similarly, immediately before the passage that discusses the result if no use is made of the philosopher in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah*, there is an aphorism asserting that man's first or moral perfection consists in doing the actions of the virtues and not merely in possessing the virtues.¹⁴⁷ Curiously, here the analogy of the doctor is appealed to in order

145. One possible exception is the passage in *Madīnah* (244:7–16/58:18–59:3) where he claims that the philosopher-king-prophet attains the highest degree of happiness. He does not, however, claim that only such a unique person reaches this degree of happiness or that no other degree of happiness is real happiness. Similarly, in *Fuṣūl* no. 30, the king of the city of excellence is said to be the most perfect in happiness of the city's inhabitants, but there is no indication that only he is truly happy or that he cannot be truly happy in any other setting. Elsewhere, he appears to make the city ruled by philosophers a condition of the attainment of happiness; see *Falsafat Aflāṭun (The Philosophy of Plato)*, ed. F. Rosenthal and R. Walzer (London: Warburg Institute, 1943), no. 32, 20:13–14. On this, see Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 379; also *Fuṣūl* no. 89, 92:5–6.

146. *Sa'ādah* 96:18–97:9/46:12–47:2 and *Fuṣūl* no. 32, 49:3–11.

147. *Fuṣūl* no. 28, 45:13–46:3.

to defend the necessity of action,¹⁴⁸ while in the later aphorism recourse to the doctor analogy supports the nonessential character of action for the ruling art.¹⁴⁹

In both books a pattern can be observed in the statements al-Fārābī makes about true and false philosophers. The true philosopher is repeatedly attributed with the actual possession of the theoretical sciences but with the faculty or capacity (*qudrah*) only to utilize that knowledge to help others.¹⁵⁰ It might seem, then, that al-Fārābī can be cleared of the charge of inconsistency if the practical component of philosophy or happiness is an expression of art and not of virtue.¹⁵¹ In the former case, it is a kind of understanding that is stressed; in the latter, the emphasis is on conduct. Militating against this solution is the fact that the practical arts, like the "practical virtues," are themselves products of action and habituation.¹⁵² Thus, it is not sufficient to say that the true philosopher's practical excellence consists in a power divorced from action.

At the same time, there is a sense in which art presupposes action for its genesis but not for its continuance. The political art might, then, be analogous to the art of writing in that, once established, it does not need to be exercised regularly to be possessed. If this is correct, then al-Fārābī's dictum equating philosophers and kings could mean that the general rules grasped by the practical intellect as a result of engaging in political activities are needed either to perfect practical reason, which is part of being human, or to enable the theoretical intellect to reach a full understanding of human things. Political

148. *Fuṣūl* no. 28, 46:4–5.

149. *Fuṣūl* no. 32, 49:6–10.

150. *Fuṣūl* no. 32, 49:3–4, 10–11; *Sa'ādah* 89:10–20/39:11–18, 92:4–6, 42:5–7.

151. See *Sa'ādah* 97:1–3/46:15–16; Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 156.

152. *Sa'ādah* 79:16/31:3.

experience would not, according to the latter view, be sought for its own sake, i.e., it would not be sought because the non-philosophic aspects of human potential are essential ingredients of human flourishing.

The reformulation of practical perfection in terms of an ability that can at any moment be realized appears at first to afford a position midway between the portrait of happiness as essentially theoretical and the comprehensive portrait. Initially, al-Fārābī seemed to expand the meaning of moral virtue from a fundamentally private activity to political excellence, i.e., the moral and deliberative virtues whose sphere of operation is the improvement of an entire community. Yet he also seemed to say that given the unwillingness of communities to acknowledge philosophy's authority to rule even in the best case—when the community's religion is itself based on philosophy¹⁵³—the philosopher needs to expend effort on nontheoretical pursuits only to the degree necessary for learning how to rule. Although actual rule and the demands of philosophy may be mutually exclusive, training to be a ruler and philosophic investigation need not be antithetical over the span of a lifetime. Al-Fārābī's reformulation of the comprehensive portrait of happiness, as elaborated here, would transform the philosopher's moral life into an exclusively selfish enterprise. One would learn how to make the world a better place to live in, without any expectation of bettering mankind, but in order to develop one's own human potential to the fullest. Thus, the level of al-Fārābī's works that, when taken literally, supports the contemplative portrait of happiness would be valid inasmuch as it indicates the predominantly intellectual, private, and selfish character of happiness in the best case. The level that, when taken literally, depicts the philosopher as ruler would also be valid as an indication of the

153. *Hurūf* no. 149, 155:1–14.

fact that the highest human potential extends beyond the perfection of theoretical reason.

This interpretation of the practical component of happiness accords with another feature of al-Fārābī's political philosophy—the conditional nature of the ideal political community or city of excellence. Were it the case that the actual founding or rule of an ideal political community is a condition of happiness, it would follow that the highest human end is impossible in any but the city of excellence and that the true philosopher must establish or govern such a city. In fact, however, the claim made in *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah* and *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* is only that people need to live and associate with others in order to achieve their best state, that is, that ultimate perfection or happiness is possible primarily within the confines of communal life.¹⁵⁴ Al-Fārābī never claims that happiness is possible only in the city or nation of excellence. Rather, the city of excellence is presented as unique because it is the only form of political association that has real happiness as its deliberate and immediate goal.¹⁵⁵ In other words, al-Fārābī's indications that happiness is possible in cities less than ideal accord with his characterization of true kingship in terms of an art or ability, since both imply that a city of excellence is not a necessary condition of happiness. Moreover, participation in imperfect forms of government may be all that developing a person's experiential faculty and practical reason require. The hypothesis that governance is a means of actualizing the practical intellect, therefore, could explain al-Fārābī's insistence that happiness presupposes political life but not necessarily the establishment of an ideal political order.

Consistent with this interpretation of the tension between the theoretical and the practical in al-Fārābī's writings are remarks

154. *Madīnah* 228:2–10/53:8–16, 230:3–7/54:1–5; *Siyāsah* 69:16–17.

155. *Madīnah* 230:7–8/54:5–7; see *Fuṣūl* no. 28, 46:10–11.

he makes in *Kitāb al-Burhān* about the varieties of art, the kind of knowledge available to each, and the ways one art can depend on or be otherwise related to another. According to that work, among the arts are pairs of theoretical and practical arts that are related (*mujānis*) in that they share the same subject but differ in method and in the type of knowledge obtained. Examples of such pairs are mathematical astronomy and the empirical study of the stars or, in the political realm, scientific politics (*al-siyāsah al-ilmīyyah*) and practical politics (*al-siyāsah al-amaliyyah*). One member of each pair is based on experience; the other, on reasoning (*qiyās*). Since neither discipline is self-sufficient, there is a reciprocal exchange of information that takes place between them.¹⁵⁶ By “practical politics” in *Kitāb al-Burhān*, al-Fārābī appears to mean the activity associated with practical reason in the political treatises, that is, the combination of the deliberative and productive faculties.

Two arts may be mutually supportive without losing their peculiar identities. In particular, al-Fārābī warns, one must be wary of confusing arts that are accidentally practical with those that are essentially practical, or the reverse. An art may be essentially theoretical, even though it makes use of judgments realized through experience and even though there exists a corresponding practical art that investigates the same subjects as a prelude to action.¹⁵⁷ The example given is natural science and medicine, the pair of related arts to which political science is most often compared. Finally, in *Kitāb al-Burhān* al-Fārābī indicates that political science, or practical philosophy, is thought to be both scientific and practical because its subject matter is will, choice, and custom, although in fact it is not essentially related to action.¹⁵⁸ The teaching of this work is thus

156. *Burhān* 71:16–72:11/170v17–171r18.

157. *Burhān* 74:20–24/173r7–13; *Mūsīqā* 89:5–12.

158. *Burhān* 74:25–75:2/173r14–16.

consistent with the view that political activity is necessary for philosophy because it is a source of the raw material with which the investigations of political philosophy have to deal. In this respect, the two arts of politics resemble other pairs of theoretical and practical arts where the practical art supplies the theoretical art with knowledge of what exists and the theoretical art ascertains the causes or grounds of the same objects.¹⁵⁹ This teaching is also harmonious with the teaching of *Kitāb al-Jadal*, which contains the most emphatic statement that happiness, and not will or action, is the ultimate principle of practical philosophy and political science.

At the same time, the reformulation of practical perfection in terms of ability does not resolve all the difficulties connected with al-Fārābī's understanding of happiness. To begin with, the idea of the true philosopher was said to encompass the idea of the imam. "Imam," in turn, connotes "the one whose example is followed and who is well received: that is, either his perfection is well received or his purpose is well received."¹⁶⁰ Essential to the idea of imam, in other words, is the ability to communicate persuasively, whether by words or deeds. If the idea of the imam forms part of the idea of the philosopher, therefore, it follows that widespread, popular hostility to the philosopher's mission would be inconsistent with the idea of the philosopher. Thus, the situation envisioned in *Fuṣūl Muntaza'ah* and *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, where no use is made of the philosopher, should not occur at all or should be the exception rather than the rule. The philosopher's practical excellence should include both the capacity to govern and the ability to ensure the exercise of that capacity.¹⁶¹ Thus, far from the philosopher's seclusion from politics being an article of faith, the *idea* of the philosopher

159. *Burhān* 75:10–22/173v7–174r4.

160. *Sa'ādah* (Mahdi) 93:8–9/43:9–10.

161. See *Sa'ādah* 77:17–19/29:7–10.

would seem to entail the ability to make members of a community willing to submit to the rule of philosophers. Given the specific meaning that al-Fārābī imparts to the idea of imam, in other words, the reader is forced to ask whether his statements about practical perfection are coherent—a question independent of the larger problem of the tension among the competing interpretations of happiness.

There are a number of passages, spread throughout al-Fārābī's political and other treatises, that ascribe a somewhat circumscribed but concrete practical activity to philosophers. According to *al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, the people governed by the rule of the supreme ruler, or true king, are virtuous, good, and happy, whether they live together in one community or separately in distant countries.¹⁶² The words used for governance and rule are *tadbīr* and *riyāsah*, expressions that ordinarily signify political rule. Yet the passage makes clear that rule of one person over another is possible when some or all the people involved live in geographically distinct places or in different centuries. Rule thus appears to be employed in a fashion that is contrary to ordinary usage. The obvious meaning of a governance that could transcend geographical or generational boundaries is the perpetuation of a religious or other doctrine through adherence by disciples in different lands and/or epochs. In either case, we can speak of an identifiable group of people whose lives are governed in important respects by a common set of laws or rules, even if they are governed politically by widely differing laws or rules. Ordinary usage would designate the latter political and the former apolitical governance. Al-Fārābī, it seems, has in this passage availed himself of political vocabulary in a seemingly apolitical context.¹⁶³

A passage in *Kitāb al-Jadal* helps clarify this idea:

162. *Siyāsah* 80:5–9.

163. The same borrowing occurs in *Iḥṣā'* 125:3–7, 127:12–13.

It is clear from the present [discussion] that in Aristotle's opinion the philosopher is the person who has attained the end of the two parts of philosophy. That is, philosophy has two parts, one theoretical¹⁶⁴ and one practical. The end of the theoretical is truth and knowledge simply. The end of the practical is choosing one thing and avoiding another. Human beings do not attain the end of the practical part through their own insights, but through knowledge of it that precedes or is simultaneous with action. On the other hand, when a person attains knowledge of it without acting, then that knowledge is in vain. (Something is in vain when it exists, but is not accompanied by the end for the sake of which it exists.) Just as the person who possesses theoretical knowledge will not be a philosopher by virtue of inquiry and investigation unless he attains the end for the sake of which inquiry and investigation exist—i.e., setting up demonstrations—so the person who possesses practical knowledge will not become a philosopher unless he, too, attains its end.¹⁶⁵

Knowledge and action are here unequivocally asserted to be partners in the specifically human enterprise. In fact, by speaking of "the [one] end of the two parts of philosophy," al-Fārābī indicates that the actions that should be chosen in the name of happiness are the "actions" of philosophy *per se*, theoretical as well as practical. He then appears to identify the action of philosophy with the construction of demonstrations. However, as it is used here, demonstration appears to follow and somehow complete philosophic investigation, without itself being the core of the investigative process.¹⁶⁶

Al-Fārābī's works contain several accounts of demonstration

164. Reading *al-naẓarī* with Ms. Teheran Malik No. 1583 (185v9) instead of *al-naẓar*, which appears in both the Hamidiyyah (101r) and Bratislava (224v8) manuscripts.

165. *Jadal* 70:7–14/224v6–15.

166. For a contrary view, based largely on al-Fārābī's *Falsafat Aflāṭun*, see Najjar, "Al-Fārābī on Political Science," 101–102.

used in a similar fashion, i.e., as supplementary to philosophic investigation proper. In *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* investigation and discovery are for the most part depicted in terms of an inductive ascent toward universal principles, while the deductive reasoning process is largely confined to ordering and extending discoveries arrived at inductively. According to al-Fārābī's introductory essay to his commentaries on Aristotle's logical works, the possessor of the philosophic art makes use of syllogisms for discourse with others as well as for discovering things when alone.¹⁶⁷ Demonstration understood as a mode of discourse is identified further in *Kitāb al-Hurūf* with the method of instructing the élite, in contrast to rhetoric and poetry, which are presented as the main methods for instructing the multitude.¹⁶⁸ In light of these indications, the passage from *Kitāb al-Jadal* quoted above could mean that the one end of the two parts of philosophy is some species of organizing knowledge or some kind of education, i.e., an effort to introduce others to philosophic discoveries through arguments of a certain kind.¹⁶⁹

167. *Risālah* 226:6–7.

168. *Hurūf* no. 143, 152:2–6.

169. See Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 384: "We may say that Farabi's Plato replaces Socrates' philosopher-king who rules openly in the perfect city by the secret kingship of the philosopher who lives privately as a member of an imperfect community. That kingship is exercised by means of an exoteric teaching which, while not too flagrantly contradicting the accepted opinions, undermines them in such a way as to guide the potential philosophers toward the truth." Although these sentences appear to be harmonious with the thesis advanced in the text, Strauss also contends that al-Fārābī uses the identification of philosophy with the royal art "as a pedagogic device for leading the reader toward the view that theoretical philosophy by itself, and nothing else, produces true happiness in this life"; see 370. In light of this contention, the sentences first quoted should not be read as including the philosopher's secret kingship within the philosopher's perfection or happiness—a view at variance with the thesis advanced here. See Pines, "Translator's Introduction," cxxi, for the ar-

Kitāb al-Hurūf appears to contain a more radical doctrine as well. The work maintains that the ruling practical art (*al-ṣinaʿah al-raʾīsah al-ʿamaliyyah*) is one of the parts of philosophy,¹⁷⁰ although it also gives the impression that the philosophers and the lawgivers are not identical.¹⁷¹ The general teaching of these sections is that the essence of leadership is the effort to transcend unexamined opinion, whether in a particular subject area or in relation to all knowledge.¹⁷² One explanation for the ambiguities in al-Fārābī's teachings about the conjunction of philosophy and rule and about the meaning of true happiness is that he understood leadership as a function of overcoming ignorance and not as a function of power or any other attribute of political office.¹⁷³ According to this understanding, not only should wisdom command the same authority as political office; rather, the holders of political office properly command authority only because, and to the extent that, they display the critical faculties and the impulse to truth of philosophers. In other words, philosophic activity is the archetype of governance and political rule is the metaphor.

Philosophic activity, however, must be understood with the special meaning conferred on it by al-Fārābī, i.e., as encompassing both private inquiry and the education of others by means of arguments of a certain kind. In *Tahṣīl al-Saʿādah*, al-Fārābī comes close to making explicit the rank order of the purely theoretical life and the life combining theoretical and practical

gument that Maimonides possibly went beyond Plato's view of the philosopher's regret in returning to the cave.

170. *Hurūf* no. 113, 133:18–19.

171. *Hurūf* no. 113, 134:11–13; see no. 144, 152:7–13.

172. *Hurūf* no. 111, 132:20–23, no. 113, 133:14–134:4.

173. See *Fuṣūl* no. 32, 49:12–50:4, where it is argued that being obeyed or honored by citizens, or having riches or power, is not part of the essence of kingship; however, because this may follow on kingship, it is thought to comprise it.

virtue. There, he distinguishes between the genuine élite and those who are members of the élite in a relative sense or by way of analogy only. There are only two genuinely superior human types: the supreme ruler and the person who possesses the science of intelligibles based on certain demonstrations. All other people belong to the multitude.¹⁷⁴ Given that al-Fārābī equates theoretical excellence with the sciences whose ultimate purpose is to make the beings and what is subsumed by them intelligible with certainty,¹⁷⁵ he thus singles out as genuinely superior human types both persons of wholly theoretical accomplishments and the supreme ruler, who combines theoretical and practical perfection.¹⁷⁶ Nonetheless, inasmuch as only the supreme ruler belongs to the élite of the élite (*akhaṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*),¹⁷⁷ in *Tahṣīl al-Saʿādah* al-Fārābī expresses a clear preference for the more expansive kind of perfection at the same time that he validates the possession of theoretical perfection in isolation as one of the two possible lives of excellence.¹⁷⁸

174. *Saʿādah* 87:17–88:2/38:5–6. Members of the multitude may, however, belong to the elite relative to a particular discipline or art; see 87:8–9/37:14–15.

175. *Saʿādah* 49:7–9/2:5–7.

176. The person possessing knowledge of the beings with certainty (or the science of intelligibles) probably possesses practical or political philosophy as well as theoretical philosophy, given al-Fārābī's description of "theoretical perfection" (*Saʿādah* 64:7–9/16:15–17). The perfect philosopher without qualification, in contrast, must both know the beings and be able to bring the things within human control into actual existence (*Saʿādah* 89:10–20/39:11–18).

177. *Saʿādah* 87:9–10/37:16.

178. This is also suggested by two hierarchies al-Fārābī describes in *Siyāṣah*—one comparing people's excellence in grasping intelligible ideas and the other comparing their excellence in the arts and the sciences. That is, in these passages he ranks people relative to the entire range of rational cognitions, primary and reasoned (*Siyāṣah* 75:4–76:2, 77:1–17). In both instances, he concludes that when two people are equal in the knowledge or faculties they possess, the one who can, in addition, benefit other

CONCLUSION

Although there are indications to the contrary, on balance it appears that al-Fārābī views governance, and not merely political philosophy or political science, as a constitutive part of happiness. This insight appears to be what underlies the Farabian dictum that *philosopher, king, supreme ruler, and prophet* comprise one idea. This interpretation of al-Fārābī's teaching makes sense of his assertion that the two parts of philosophy have one end, even though theoretical and practical philosophy are each presented as having a specific end. And it resolves the difficulty that one can know what happiness is and fail to do it, even though knowledge of what happiness is presupposes theoretical perfection, or most of it.

At the same time, al-Fārābī views the governance that is part of happiness as political in a special way. It is political in that it involves ordering the lives of others and not merely the individual philosopher's way of life. Practical perfection entails public as well as private virtues. At the same time, practical perfection does not necessarily entail governance in a territorial or temporal sense. Governance may mean ordering other people's opinions and actions so as to enable them to attain happiness to the extent possible, whether by means of a government ordered to excellence, a religion devoted to excellence, or an education aimed at promoting excellence in certain people. In the latter two cases, the philosopher can "rule" people who are subject to a variety of organized governments and even people

people or convey to them the person's own discoveries is superior to the one who merely possesses the knowledge or faculties without the corresponding ability to help others; see *Siyāṣah* 75:17–76:1 with 77:9–12 (reading *al-irshād* at 77:12, a variant for *al-istinbāt* noted by Najjar).

of future generations.¹⁷⁹ Al-Fārābī's suggestion that the philosopher's governance may not find its expression in organized government is, moreover, consistent with his teaching about the necessity of political communities for a life of excellence since he never makes the city of excellence a condition of the attainment of happiness.¹⁸⁰

Happiness understood as the coincidence of theoretical and practical perfection—i.e., as the combination of philosophy and governance—raises several difficulties for understanding al-Fārābī's philosophy. In particular, this understanding of happiness is incompatible with certain basic precepts of his thought. Foremost among these is the doctrine that happiness, or ultimate happiness, consists in becoming a separate substance.¹⁸¹ Such transcendence is defined as the soul's ability to dispense with material existence for its constitutive activities.¹⁸² Governance understood as determining people's opinions and actions so as to enable them to attain happiness would necessarily impose material constraints on the philosopher since the essence of the philosopher's practical judgments is to reason, in part, from the characteristics and consequences of people's corporeal natures. Thus, happiness viewed as pure transcendence of material existence would appear to preclude the possibility that happiness encompasses governance in addition to theoretical perfection.¹⁸³

179. See *Siyāṣah* 80:5–11 for nonterritorial, nontemporal rule.

180. He does, however, argue that political association, as contrasted with the city of excellence, is a precondition of survival and of the best life.

181. *Siyāṣah* 32:7–8; *Madīnah* 204:16–206:2/46:8–10.

182. *Siyāṣah* 32:8–9; *Madīnah* 204:15–16/46:7–8. See also *ʿAql* 31:11–32:1; *Fuṣūl* no. 28, 45:9–11.

183. *Madīnah* may avoid this dilemma by suggesting that human beings never attain the rank of the agent intellect; 206:2–3/46:10. Since the agent intellect is the least perfect secondary cause, the implication is that at their most perfect, human beings never achieve pure transcendence. De-

A second difficulty raised by the inclusive view of happiness stems from al-Fārābī's assertion that happiness is sought for its own sake.¹⁸⁴ If happiness is comprehensive, his assertion implies that theoretical and practical perfection are each sought for their own sake, with neither being sought for the sake of the other, or else that theoretical and practical perfection are names for two aspects of one reality. Otherwise, one must wonder how happiness can encompass a life devoted to both contemplation and governance and yet be characterized as the human end sought for its own sake. The resolution of this difficulty may depend on the reason those who have attained theoretical excellence seek to govern: in order to contribute to the betterment of mankind, to actualize their practical rational faculties as a component of actualizing the rational faculty as a whole, or to ensure that the rational substratum of the world will continue to be apprehended by future generations.

In sum, al-Fārābī's understanding of the nature of happiness must be viewed against the backdrop of his understanding of the meaning of theoretical perfection and practical perfection—the two fundamental human alternatives. He rejects the narrow interpretation of theoretical perfection as the possession of the theoretical sciences. Then, while expanding theoretical perfection to include practical philosophy or political science, he redefines practical philosophy by characterizing its inquiries in terms of the light they shed on happiness and misery, and the noble and the base, instead of confining it to an investigation of the contingent or the voluntary. He appears to be saying that because theoretical perfection is concerned with human as well as natural and metaphysical subjects and because knowledge of

spite this indication, a life devoted to the pursuit of pure transcendence would surely differ from one devoted to the pursuit of governance in addition to contemplation.

184. *Madīnah* 206:7–9/46:14–15; *Fuṣūl* no. 28, 46:5–7.

human things finds its completion in the realization of their best state, theoretical and practical perfection must together constitute the true human end. Moreover, in one work he appears to connect governance with revelation,¹⁸⁵ as if to say that the ability and willingness of the possessor of theoretical perfection to use practical wisdom on behalf of one's fellow men is the measure of divinity in the nature of mankind.

185. *Millah* 44:6–13.

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