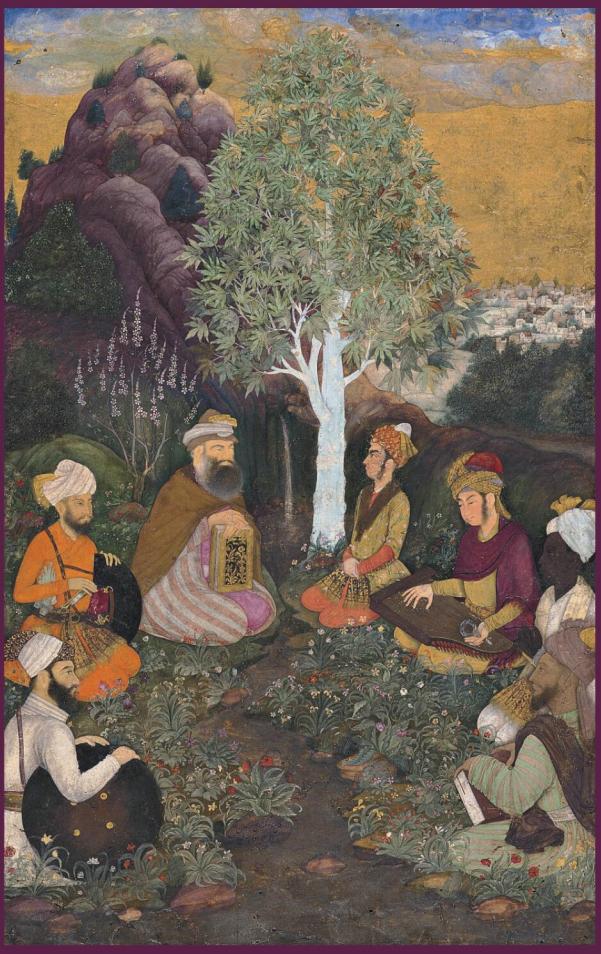
The Eudaimonist Ethics of al-Fārābī and Avicenna



BY

JANNE MATTILA

BRILL

ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE. *TEXTS AND STUDIES*

The Eudaimonist Ethics of al-Fārābī and Avicenna

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PART 2
Virtue

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Introduction

1 Aim of the Book

Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 950/1) and Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), known in the west by his Latinized name Avicenna, are arguably the two most influential authors of the classical period of Arabic philosophy.[1] Avicenna's status in the history of philosophy in the Islamic world is unparalleled to the extent that scholars today often divide it into pre-Avicennan and post-Avicennan periods. Al-Fārābī was a significant influence on Andalusian philosophers, notably Ibn Bājja (d. 1139), Averroes (Ibn Rushd; d. 1198), and Maimonides (Ibn Maymūn; d. 1204), but also on Avicenna's thought, and thus the Islamic east. Both authors addressed all areas of philosophy in their works but neither is known primarily as a moral philosopher. Avicenna's most famous contributions pertain to metaphysics and philosophical psychology. Al-Fārābī is known, in particular, for his logical and political writings, besides being an eminent authority in musical theory. All of this helps to explain the surprising fact that, despite their prominence, the ethical thought of neither author has received much scholarly attention. The present book is, therefore, the first monographic study on their ethics.

This lacuna in scholarship reflects a broader phenomenon of a relative lack of scholarly interest in Arabic philosophical ethics. This is perhaps the case due to its seemingly reductive nature in the sense that it is firmly based on classical philosophy. Thus, the ethics of Islamic theology (*kalām*), in particular, focusing on theodicy and the ontological and epistemological status of value concepts, has aroused more interest in scholars.[2] Even within Arabic phi-

1 In this book, I will employ the term 'Arabic philosophy' as shorthand for the philosophical tradition of the Islamic world that was primarily conveyed in Arabic. Thus, it is, in particular, not a reference to the ethnicity of the philosophers—neither al-Fārābī nor Avicenna was an Arab but al-Fārābī was probably of either Turkish or Persian origin (see Rudolph, "Al-Fārābī," 536–541) and Avicenna was Persian. The term is perhaps particularly pertinent to the early period with which this book is concerned since Arabic remained at this time the exclusive language of philosophy in the Islamic world, even if Avicenna also composed one of his major works in Persian. While Arabic retained its status as the primary language of philosophy until the contemporary period, after Avicenna, Persian became gradually more prevalent, as did later Turkish, Urdu, and other languages.

2 For overviews of *kalām* ethical theories, see Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics*; Shihadeh, "Theories of Ethical Value in Kalām." For important recent contributions to theological ethics, see, for example, Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*; Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics*.

losophy, the emphasis has been more in the Hellenic genre of philosophical therapeutics, and authors such as al-Kindī (d. after 870) and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925),[3] than the more traditionally structured virtue ethics. Consequently, there are no detailed studies on the ethical thought of even the most well-known philosophers, such as the trio of al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes, or Miskawayh (d. 1030) as the most influential moral philosopher for the posterity. This is not to say that there has been no research at all as important articles and book chapters have been written on the ethical thought of many philosophical authors, including al-Fārābī and Avicenna,[4] and ethical subjects have been approached from various tangential angles.

The principal aim of this book is precisely to present a systematic study of the ethical thought of al-Fārābī and Avicenna. This aim involves several claims that the book strives to make. The first claim is that neither author's ethical thought is, in fact, derivative of classical authors in any straightforward sense. While it is true that in their primary accounts of virtue, they draw on Aristotle and Plato, respectively, this represents only a superficial aspect of their ethical thought. In the end, both authors build their ethical theories on a complex combination of classical and Islamic influences where the result cannot be reduced to any of their predecessors. This is true especially when their virtue ethics is situated in the context of their holistic philosophical systems.

The second claim is that the ethical thought of these two authors cannot be adequately understood as abstracted from philosophical psychology, cosmology, and metaphysics, in particular. For the present book, this has the surprising result that many of its discussions will not be purely ethical but will also concern those aspects of theoretical philosophy on which the ethical concepts are ultimately founded. This intertwining of ethics with theoretical philosophy has the further consequence that the study of the ethics of al-Fārābī and Avicenna contributes to a better understanding of their philosophy in general. When set in its proper context, not only is ethics grounded in theoretical philosophy but also many aspects of theoretical philosophy may be viewed through an ethical prism.

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3 See, for example, Goodman, "The Epicurean Ethic of Muḥammad Ibn Zakariyâʾ ar-Râzî"; Druart, "Al-Kindi's Ethics"; Idem, "The Ethics of al-Razi"; Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 144–159; Idem, "Health in Arabic Ethical Works."

4 For overviews of ethical thought in the Islamic world, see Gutas, "Ethische Schriften im Islam"; Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam*; Adamson, "The Arabic Tradition"; Idem, "Ethics in Philosophy." As for studies on the ethics of al-Fārābī and Avicenna, see Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam*, 78–92; Druart, "Al-Farabi on the Practical and Speculative Aspects of Ethics"; Idem, "Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles"; McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 209–226.

The third claim is that the two authors indeed have an ethical theory. This might not be immediately clear for two main reasons. First, the low status of al-Fārābī and Avicenna as moral philosophers is not entirely unfounded since neither of them composed a major ethical work akin to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* or Miskawayh's *Refinement of Character Traits* (*Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*). Nevertheless, they did address ethical subjects in a great number of works, and when taken together, these discussions formulate an ethical theory. Second, their ethical writings do not necessarily appear to be internally coherent in all regards. The problem is that the two authors define virtue in both Aristotelian and Neoplatonic terms, that is, as moderation of and liberation from passions. The contradiction, moreover, concerns the two levels of the ethical theory: the upper level of explicit discussions of virtue, in most cases, suggests a theory of moderation, while the underlying level seems to demand that virtue should consist of the soul's separation from the body. My claim is that this tension between two contradictory ethical ideals is merely apparent and that the ethical theories of both authors are coherent.

The structure of this book follows from the three claims I want to make. First, since neither author composed a major ethical treatise, the ethical theory must be reconstructed from various works. In many cases, these treatises approach ethical themes tangentially in a non-ethical context. This means that I will not follow the order of the ethical writings that they did compose. Instead, the book is divided into two main parts devoted to happiness and virtue. These are divided further into chapters, which address the primary components of the two concepts. This might be problematic if it were to constrain the ethics of al-Fārābī and Avicenna to a conceptual framework that is not their own. As regards the primary division, this is not the case since both authors explicitly define ethics as a discipline with happiness and virtue as its two principal objects of study. As for the subdivision into chapters, I believe that it is justified as a plausible interpretation of the primary elements of their theories of happiness and virtue.

The subsequent sections of this introduction address the Greek sources of Arabic philosophical ethics and the explicit definitions of the subject matter of ethics made by the two authors. The division of the first part into chapters follows the idea that the Arabic concept of happiness is composed of successive layers. The first chapter addresses the preliminary definition of happiness as the final end of the human being. The second chapter presents the Aristotelian function argument as the first argument for identifying the final end with theoretical excellence. The third chapter is concerned with pleasure, which both provides a further argument for contemplative happiness and constitutes an affective component for the psychological state of happiness. The fourth and

fifth chapters deal with the definition of happiness with respect to its contents from a psychological and cosmological viewpoint, respectively, and the sixth chapter is concerned with the eschatological component of the concept of happiness. The division is based on my analysis of the constituent parts of happiness but is also justified by the way al-Fārābī, in particular, addresses distinct aspects of happiness in different contexts.

The second part on virtue builds on the notion of contemplative happiness established in the first part. Thus, the seventh chapter examines virtue from the viewpoint of its essentially instrumental relation to happiness. The eighth chapter addresses the explicit theory of virtue, which appears to contradict the notion of virtue presented in the previous chapter. The ninth chapter is concerned with the rational aspect of virtue, in particular, the role of moral deliberation and the epistemological status of morality. Finally, the tenth chapter concludes the book by arguing for the consistency of the ethical theories of al-Fārābī and Avicenna: the tension between the two contradictory ethical ideals is resolved when the ideas of moral progression and different constituencies for the application of virtue are introduced.

As regards the internal structure of the chapters, each chapter is introduced by the classical and often early Islamic background of the subject in question. This serves the purpose of giving the context in which al-Fārābī and Avicenna develop each aspect of their ethical theories and highlighting the diversity of their sources. The introductions are generic and their aim is, therefore, not to provide a meticulous philological study of the ethical sources that the two authors employ. It is certainly highly desirable that much more research on the Arabic transmission of Greek ethical sources and their adoption and adaptation by the first Arabic philosophers will be carried out in the future.

In each chapter, the introductory section is followed by subsequent sections on al-Fārābī and Avicenna. This is perhaps the most curious choice I have made concerning the book's structure. The approach of presenting the ethical thought of two philosophical authors in a single book might be questioned in itself. Beyond this, I, in effect, constrain their ethical theories to a single conceptual framework. This is the case even though the two authors composed very different works, which address ethical subjects in different manners. However, I believe that the approach makes sense for three reasons. First, in their explicit definitions of ethics, the two authors share an essentially identical conception of its subject matter. Second, I believe that the underlying structure of their ethical theories is, in fact, the same. This is the case in large part because Avicenna adopts the general contours of al-Fārābī's psychological, cosmological, and metaphysical theories, in which both authors ground their ethics.

Third, given their near unanimity in many respects, the thematic structure provides the benefit of highlighting the similarities and differences between the two authors as regards each of the constituent parts of their ethical systems. In many cases, it seems clear that Avicenna draws on al-Fārābī in his ethical thought, as he does in various areas of philosophy. However, it is also clear that Avicenna develops many aspects of ethics more systematically than his predecessor did. Obviously, it is also true that the two philosophers manifest significant differences as regards both their general approach to ethics and particular questions, and I have strived to indicate these in each of the chapters.

2 Classical Sources of Arabic Ethics

As is well-known, the genesis of the Arabic philosophical tradition in the ninth century took place in the midst of a comprehensive philosophical-scientific translation movement from Greek into Arabic.[5] Thus, Aristotle's works, Neoplatonic treatises, paraphrases of Plato's dialogues, late ancient commentaries, and treatises conveying many further authors and traditions formed the context in which early Arabic philosophers formulated their ideas. While the impact of a particular classical author or stream of thought varied between both authors and areas of philosophy, Arabic philosophical ethics, in general, gives the impression of employing a particularly syncretistic mix of classical authors.[6] It is possible to distinguish three major classical strands of ethical influence: 1) Aristotle, 2) Plato and Galen, and 3) Neoplatonism. Even if some Arabic philosophers were influenced by one of these strands more than another, most of them drew on an eclectic combination of classical sources in their ethical thought.[7] Thus, while al-Fārābī and Avicenna are self-identified Aristotelians, and Aristotle plays a prominent role in their ethical thought, they are far from being orthodox Aristotelians as moral philosophers. Instead, as I aim to show in this study, their ethical systems draw on classical sources in

5 For the translation movement in general, see Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*; Idem, "The Rebirth of Philosophy and the Translations into Arabic."

6 For the employment of classical sources in Arabic philosophical ethics in general, see, for example, Druart, "La philosophie morale arabe"; Adamson, "The Arabic Tradition"; Idem, "Ethics in Philosophy."

7 For an Arabic ethical treatise mixing Plato and Aristotle, attributed to a certain Nicolaus, see Lyons, "A Greek Ethical Treatise." For the combination of classical influences in Miskawayh, see Walzer, *Greek into Arabic*, 220–235; Endress, "Ancient Ethical Traditions."

a complex way, manifesting a tension between Aristotelian and Neoplatonic influences, in particular, while also drawing on Plato and Galen. I will discuss the specific ways in which these three strands of classical influences emerge in the ethical thought of al-Fārābī and Avicenna in the course of this study. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to first introduce each of them in more general terms.

3 Aristotle

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is undoubtedly the single most important classical work for the genesis of Arabic philosophical ethics.[8] The Arabic transmission of the treatise, however, appears to have been a surprisingly complex process.[9] An Arabic translation of the whole text survives only in a single manuscript preserved in Fez.[10] Ullmann has shown that this text is, in fact, an amalgam of two translations so that books I–IV were translated by Isḥāq Ibn Ḥunayn (d. 910/11) and books V–X possibly by Usṭāth (fl. first half of the 9th century).[11] Thus, the work was translated twice during the ninth century. In addition, there were at least three other texts that conveyed its ideas for Arabic readers. The *Summa Alexandrinorum* (*Ikhtiṣār al-iskandarāniyyīn*) is a paraphrase, later translated into Latin, which seems to depend on the translation of the Fez manuscript.[12] A second text reworked the themes related to virtue

8 The *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Magna Moralia*, in contrast, were either not translated into Arabic or their influence was minimal. For bibliographical knowledge in Arabic sources about these two works, see Badawi's introduction in Arisṭūṭālis, *Kitāb al-Akhlāq*, 12–17.

9 See Ullmann, *Die Nikomachische Ethik des Aristoteles in arabischer Übersetzung*; Akasoy, "The Arabic and Islamic Reception of the Nicomachean Ethics"; Ramón-Guerrero, "Recepción de la Ética Nicomaquea en el mundo árabe."

10 The most recent edition of the manuscript is Arisṭūṭālis, *The Arabic Version of the Nicomachean Ethics* by Akasoy and Fidora in 2005. The text should be used taking into account the corrections in Ullmann, *Die Nikomachische Ethik des Aristoteles in arabischer Übersetzung*. For the Fez manuscript, see also Arberry, "The Nicomachean Ethics in Arabic"; Dunlop, "The Nicomachean Ethics in Arabic, Books I–VI." Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, 252, mentions the translation and attributes it to Isḥāq Ibn Ḥunayn (d. 910/1). For the more eclectic ethical treatise also contained in the manuscript, see Lyons, "A Greek Ethical Treatise."

11 Ullmann, *Die Nikomachische Ethik des Aristoteles in arabischer Übersetzung*, vol. 2, 15–19.

12 Ibid, vol. 2, 72–122. The Arabic version has survived only in the form of fragments. The Latin text has been edited in Woerther, *La Summa Alexandrinorum*.

and vice. It was incorporated early on into the Arabic *Nicomachean Ethics* as an additional book between the sixth and seventh books, resulting in eleven books in the Arabic version.[13] The *Happiness and Its Attainment* (*Kitāb al-Saʿāda wa-l-isʿād*), whose traditional attribution to al-ʿĀmirī (d. 991) is disputed,[14] employed yet another translation or adaptation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,[15] as well as Porphyry's (d. ca. 305 CE) commentary on the work.[16]

Given the different channels of transmission, it is sometimes difficult to assess the level of familiarity that a specific author had with Aristotle's major ethical work. The first translation was apparently produced in al-Kindī's circle, and al-Kindī cites the work by name.[17] Despite this, his surviving ethical writings show little trace of Aristotelian influence.[18] Al-Fārābī is perhaps the first Arabic author clearly familiar with the text, and he famously wrote a commentary on at least a part of the work, which we no longer have.[19] Indeed, some of al-Fārābī's writings, such as the *Exhortation to the Way to Happiness* (*Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*), draw heavily on the first chapters of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[20] However, his *Philosophy of Aristotle* (*Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs*) puzzlingly omits to mention the work altogether, even if it does mention most of the other works in the Aristotelian curriculum. Ibn ʿAdī (d. 974), al-Fārābī's Christian pupil, draws on the *Nicomachean Ethics* in his *Purification of Character Traits* (*Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*).[21] Nevertheless, the bulk of the work can hardly

13 Ullmann, *Die Nikomachische Ethik des Aristoteles in arabischer Übersetzung*, vol. 2, 67–71. Ullmann believes the seventh book to have already formed part of the Greek manuscript translated by Usṭāth.

14 See Wakelnig, "Neoplatonic Developments," 267.

15 Ullmann, *Die Nikomachische Ethik des Aristoteles in arabischer Übersetzung*, vol. 1, 11; Ramón-Guerrero, "Recepción de la Ética Nicomaquea en el mundo árabe," 319.

16 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, 252, mentions that the translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is accompanied by Porphyry's commentary in twelve books. It is not clear whether there were twelve books in the Arabic translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Porphyry's commentary, or both of them combined. The last alternative would agree with the surviving Arabic translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in eleven books. In addition, the passage mentions a commentary by Themistius (d. ca. 388 CE).

17 Al-Kindī, "Fī kammiyyat kutub Arisṭūṭālīs," 369. Moreover, al-Kindī states that the work consists of eleven books.

18 Druart, "Al-Kindi's Ethics," 334–335; Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 145–146.

19 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, 263, states that al-Fārābī wrote a commentary on "a part of Aristotle's *Ethics*" (*tafsīr qiṭʿa min Kitāb al-Akhlāq li-Arisṭālīs*), which implies that he did not necessarily possess the entire work.

20 See the analysis of the relationship between the two works in Mallet's introduction and footnotes of al-Fārābī, "Le rappel de la voie à suivre pour parvenir au bonheur."

21 See Urvoy, *Traité d'éthique d'Abû Zakarìyyâ Yahyâ Ibn ʿAdi*, 21–23.

be characterized as Aristotelian. Avicenna mentions Aristotle's *Ethics* as the authority for ethics in his *Parts of the Intellectual Sciences* (*Aqsām al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya*).[22] Still, his ethical writings show surprisingly little direct influence of the work.

In contrast, passages in the *Happiness and Its Attainment* depend directly on the extant Arabic translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[23] Miskawayh's *Reformation of Character Traits* also manifests familiarity with the entire work, probably through the *Summa Alexandrinorum*.[24] Nevertheless, both works are also very eclectic in the way they employ Greek sources. In the Islamic west, some passages in Ibn Bājja's *Rule of the Solitary* (*Tadbīr al-mutawaḥḥid*) and the *Epistle of Farewell* (*Risālat al-Wadāʿ*) also employ a variant of the Aristotelian text, while Averroes composed a commentary of the entire treatise.[25] As a result, in many cases, it is evident that the authors had some access to the whole of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In other cases, it is not clear whether these philosophers, who followed Aristotle in most areas of philosophy, departed from Aristotle in their ethical thought for philosophical or historical reasons. That is, whether they chose to disregard some aspects of the *Nicomachean Ethics* or whether they did not have the entire work at their disposal.

Despite all this, it is clear that the *Nicomachean Ethics* played a decisive role in the ethical thought of many Arabic philosophical authors, whether directly or indirectly. Aristotle's discussion of the concept of happiness in book I, in particular, constitutes, as I will argue, the foundation for the Arabic philosophical concept of happiness. First, it provides a preliminary definition of happiness as the final and self-sufficient human end (1097a15–b21). Second, it presents the so-called function argument (1097b22–28) for the claim that the human end should be identified with the function that the human being has as a species. Aristotle is equally influential in the question of virtue. The definition of virtue as a mediate disposition and the moral and intellectual virtues discussed in books III–VI form the standard presentation of virtue for Arabic philosophers, alongside the Platonic cardinal virtues. The two were often fused together both in late antiquity and in Arabic philosophy. Many prominent themes of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, however, did not find an equally universal audience. Neither al-Fārābī nor Avicenna accords the themes of justice or friendship (discussed

22 Avicenna, "Aqsām al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya," 107.

23 For examples, see Pohl, "Die aristotelische Ethik im Kitāb al-Saʿāda wa-l-isʿād," 209–213.

24 See Dunlop's introduction in Arisṭūṭālis, *The Arabic Version of the Nicomachean Ethics*, 28–31.

25 The Latin translation of the commentary on the tenth book has been edited in Averroes, *Le plaisir, le bonheur, et l'acquisition des vertus*.

in books V and VIII–IX, respectively) any prominence in their ethical writings, whereas among Arabic authors Miskawayh, in particular, discusses both of these extensively.

As regards the overall ethical ideal transmitted by Aristotle's *Ethics*, practically all Arabic philosophers agreed with the intellectualist reading of happiness in the tenth book (1177a12–1178a14), whether they were familiar with it or not. Nevertheless, the work as a whole does not, in fact, convey an entirely intellectualist ethical outlook. Instead, the good life for Aristotle would seem to consist of all rational and subrational human activities as practiced in moderation.[26] Thus, the more starkly intellectualist ethical outlook adopted by most Arabic philosophers is not altogether Aristotelian. However, the Arabic Aristotelians could go beyond the *Ethics* to find support for an intellectualist ethical ideal in Aristotle. In the *Metaphysics*, the activity of the First Cause is identified with pure intellection, while *De anima* presents the human psychological faculties as a hierarchy with theoretical thought at its peak. As we will see, for al-Fārābī and Avicenna, these two works provide important arguments for identifying happiness with the excellence of theoretical thought.

4 Plato and Galen

The ethical influence of Plato and Galen, to a large extent, goes hand in hand, and thus it makes sense to discuss them together. Platonism had its most decisive impact on Arabic philosophy, in general, through its late ancient synthesis, but for ethical and political philosophy, in particular, Plato also had a crucial unmediated influence. The question of the transmission of the Platonic corpus into Arabic is a complex one and has not yet been sufficiently researched.[27] However, as in the case of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is clear that knowledge about Plato's dialogues was conveyed through various channels. Indirectly, Platonic material was transmitted in doxographies, gnomologies, and citations in various works.[28] As for the direct transmission, there is no certain evidence that

26 For the tension in Aristotle's ethical ideal, see, for example, Nagel, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia"; Cooper, "Contemplation and Happiness"; Dahl, "Contemplation and Eudaimonia in the Nicomachean Ethics."

27 See Rosenthal, "On the Knowledge of Plato's Philosophy in the Islamic World"; Idem, "On the Knowledge of Plato's Philosophy in the Islamic World: Addenda"; Walzer, "Platonism in Islamic Philosophy"; Klein-Franke, "Zur Überlieferung der platonischen Schriften im Islam"; Gutas, "Platon: Tradition arabe."

28 Gutas, "Platon: Tradition arabe," 862–863. A non-literary channel of transmission for Pla-

any Platonic dialogue was translated into Arabic in its entirety.[29] However, a significant number of them was rendered as paraphrases. Many of these, including the paraphrases of the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*, were authored by Galen.[30] Al-Fārābī's *Philosophy of Plato* (*Falsafat Aflāṭūn*), thus, discusses briefly no less than 32 of Plato's dialogues.[31]

Consequently, several Platonic dialogues influenced Arabic ethical thought in different ways, whether by direct or indirect means. Many Arabic authors, including Avicenna, founded their theory of virtue on the Platonic cardinal virtues and the underlying moral psychology as presented in the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*, as opposed to the Aristotelian account of moral virtues.[32] In these works, the general Platonic ethical ideal appears as the moderate one of the harmonious and ordered activity of the appetitive, spirited, and rational psychical powers under the guidance of reason. Transmitting the Platonic ideal of virtue in a different way, dialogues such as the *Crito*, *Phaedo*, and *Apology*, along with the gnomological collections of sayings, conveyed the idea of Socrates as a philosophical embodiment of virtue. This ideal appears, for example, in al-Kindī's Socratic treatises, where the life of Socrates is identified as one of rigorous asceticism.[33] Among Plato's dialogues, the *Phaedo* (cf. 67A–68B), in particular, *contra* the *Republic*, further contributed to this more ascetically inclined ethical ideal by identifying virtue with the soul's separation from the body.[34] Beyond this, the Platonic dialogues also played a role in two subjects intimately connected with Arabic philosophical ethics. For philosophical eschatology, the

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tonism through the Sabians of Ḥarrān has also been suggested. For a refutation of this thesis, see De Smet, "Le Platon arabe et les Sabéens"; Idem, "L'héritage de Platon et de Pythagore."

29 For Arabic citations of passages in the *Republic*, suggesting the possibility of a complete Arabic translation, see Baffioni, "Frammenti e testimonianze platoniche nelle Rasā'il degli Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'"; Reisman, "Plato's Republic in Arabic."

30 See Gutas, "Platon: Tradition arabe," 851–861, for a summary of Arabic knowledge about each of the dialogues.

31 The dialogues in the order that they are mentioned by al-Fārābī are *Alcibiades I*, *Theaetetus*, *Philebus*, *Protagoras*, *Meno*, *Euthyphro*, *Cratylus*, *Ion*, *Gorgias*, *Sophist*, *Parmenides*, *Alcibiades II*, *Hipparchus*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Symposium*, *Theages*, *Lovers*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Phaedrus*, *Crito*, *Apology of Socrates*, *Statesman*?, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Laws*, *Critias*, *Epinomis*, *Menexenus*, and *Letters*.

32 For an incomplete list of such authors, see Walzer, *Greek into Arabic*, 222.

33 See Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 146–149.

34 For Arabic knowledge about the *Phaedo*, see al-'Āmirī, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate*, 29–42; Biesterfeldt, "Phaedo arabus"; Gutas, "Platon: Tradition arabe," 854–855. For the essentially Platonic context of al-Kindī's ascetically inclined ethical ideal, see the overview of al-Kindī's ethics in Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 144–159.

Phaedo, in particular, transmitted the idea of philosophical paradise as eternal contemplative bliss of the human soul.[35] Since Aristotle's *Politics* was apparently never translated into Arabic in its entirety,[36] Plato's *Republic* became the most important classical source for Arabic political philosophy.

Galen (d. ca. 216 CE) is, of course, more famous as a physician, and his influence on Arabic medicine was paramount. However, within the sphere of ethics he was also an important philosophical influence.[37] Galen's ethical thought is essentially Platonic, the Platonic tripartition of the soul forming its psychological basis.[38] Two of his ethical treatises, *On Character Traits* (*Peri ēthōn*/*Fī al-akhlāq*), which survives only as an Arabic paraphrase, and *On Passions and Errors of the Soul* (*Peri diagnōseōs kai therapeias tōn en tē hekastou psukhē idiōn pathōn*/*Maqāla fī taʿarruf al-insān ʿuyūb nafsihi*), had a significant impact on Arabic moral philosophy. This is particularly apparent in the Arabic genre of ethical treatises that can be characterized as philosophical therapeutics in the sense that these treatises offer rather practical advice for curing vices and psychical affections.[39] *On Character Traits*, in particular, also influenced the more systematic ethical writings, including, as we will see, Avicenna's conception of virtue. As for Galen's general ethical ideal, it seems to waver between the moderation of the *Republic* and the asceticism of the *Phaedo*.[40] In *On Character Traits*, he, however, clearly inclines towards the intellectualist ethical ideal.[41]

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35 For al-ʿĀmirī's employment of the *Phaedo*'s eschatological myth in *al-Amad ʿalā al-abad* (chs. XVI–XVIII), see Rowson's introduction (30) and commentary (304–314) in al-ʿĀmirī, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate*.

36 For Arabic testimonies about the work, which suggest the existence of an Arabic paraphrase or a partial translation, see, however, Pines, "Aristotle's Politics in Arabic Philosophy."

37 See Strohmaier, "Die Ethik Galens und ihre Rezeption in der Welt des Islams."

38 For Galen's philosophical context, see, for example, Chiaradonna, "Galen and Middle Platonism" and Singer's introduction in Singer, *Galen: Psychological Writings*, 18–42. For his ethics, see Walzer, "New Light on Galen's Moral Philosophy"; Singer, *Galen: Psychological Writings*, 109–134.

39 For this genre and its Galenic background, see Druart, "La philosophie morale arabe"; Strohmaier, "Die Ethik Galens und ihre Rezeption in der Welt des Islams"; Adamson, "Health in Arabic Ethical Works." Druart (183) distinguishes between 1) popular and 2) systematic ethics, placing al-Kindī and al-Rāzī's (d. 925) *Spiritual Medicine* (*Kitāb al-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī*) in the first category and al-Rāzī's *Philosophical Life* (*Kitāb al-Sīrā al-falsafiyya*) and al-Fārābī in the second. Moreover, she identifies the former as Hellenistic emphasizing Galen's influence, in particular. Adamson, "Ethics in Philosophy," 110–112, situates the ethical writings of al-Kindī, al-Balkhī (d. 934), and al-Rāzī in the Galenic strand.

40 For the assessment that Galen does not take a clear stand between *metriopatheia* and *apatheia*, see Donini, "Psychology," 194; Singer, *Galen: Psychological Writings*, 22.

41 The relevant passage is cited in chapter 8.

In consequence, even though the Platonic notion of virtue in the *Republic* can be read as compatible with the Aristotelian ideal of moderation, the Arabic Plato and Galen both contributed to the intellectualist ethical ideal adopted by Arabic philosophers.

5 Neoplatonism

The interpretation of Plato's thought by Plotinus (d. 270 CE) and his late ancient followers made an even more significant impact on Arabic philosophy than Plato himself. Once again, the Arabic transmission history of Greek Neoplatonic texts is rather complicated.[42] As regards Plotinus, while he was virtually unknown in the Islamic world by name,[43] parts of books IV–VI of the *Enneads* were rendered freely into Arabic in the ninth century resulting in a hypothetical Arabic Plotinus source. All three known Arabic texts conveying Plotinus' philosophy are derived from this source.[44] The longest and most important of these is the *Theology of Aristotle* (*Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭūṭālīs*), which, moreover, exists as a shorter and a longer recension. While the name of Proclus (d. 485) was more familiar in the Islamic world, many of the Arabic texts transmitting his works were not attributed to him. In particular, among the surviving Arabic texts rendering parts of the *Elements of Theology*, one of them was attributed to the Aristotelian philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. ca. 200 CE) and another, *Book of the Pure Good* (*Kitāb al-Khayr al-maḥḍ*), which later acquired fame in the Latin world as the *Book of Causes* (*Liber de Causis*), to Aristotle.[45]

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42 See D'Ancona, "Greek into Arabic."

43 For Plotinus' anonymous yet highly influential status in the Islamic world, see Rosenthal, "Plotinus in Islam." While a few references to Plotinus have been traced in Arabic texts, none of these attribute any of the works conveying his thought in Arabic to Plotinus.

44 Most of the Arabic Plotinian texts are edited in Badawī, *Aflūṭīn ʿinda al-ʿarab*. Their English translations appear in the 1959 edition of the *Enneads* by Henry and Schwyzer as organized alongside the corresponding Greek passages. For the Arabic Plotinus in general, see, in particular, Aouad, "La Théologie d'Aristote et autres textes du Plotinus Arabus"; Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 5–26. As regards the three Plotinus sources, for the *Epistle on Divine Science* (*Risāla fī al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*), falsely attributed to al-Fārābī, see Aouad, "La Théologie d'Aristote et autres textes du Plotinus Arabus," 571–574; for the sayings attributed to the "Greek Sage" (*al-shaykh al-yūnānī*), see Rosenthal, "Ash-Shaykh al-Yūnānī and the Arabic Plotinus Source"; Aouad, "La Théologie d'Aristote et autres textes du Plotinus Arabus," 579–580; for the *Theology of Aristotle*, see Aouad, 544–570; Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*; D'Ancona, "The Theology Attributed to Aristotle."

45 For the Arabic transmission of Proclus, see, in particular, Endress, *Proclus Arabus*; Idem, "Proclus de Lycie"; Wakelnig, "Proclus, Arabic."

While many further Neoplatonic texts were translated into Arabic, those with distinctly ethical import include the commentaries on the *Golden Verses of Pythagoras* attributed to Iamblichus (d. ca. 320) and Proclus,[46] and, in particular, Porphyry's commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which survives in neither Greek nor Arabic.[47]

For Aristotelians like al-Fārābī and Avicenna, their adoption of Neoplatonic ideas was undoubtedly facilitated by the fact that two of the key metaphysical treatises in the Arabic Neoplatonic corpus were attributed to Aristotle, whether they accepted this attribution as authentic or not. The Arabic Plotinus and Proclus had the critical function of complementing Aristotle's relatively brief genuine discussion of philosophical theology in terms of the First Cause of motion in the cosmos, in book XII of the *Metaphysics*, with the Neoplatonic emanationist account of the gradual downwards progression of being from the first principle.[48] Even if the Arabic treatises conveying the thought of Plotinus and Proclus, for the most part, are not devoted to ethics, the cosmological ideas of descent and reascent of existence and the origin of the human soul in the intelligible world are, nevertheless, of utmost importance for Arabic philosophical ethics. This is because they provide the ontological grounds for identifying the human ethical end with intellection in the sense that it is identified with the soul's ascent towards purely intellectual existence. Moreover, along with the Platonic corpus, Neoplatonism contributes to a philosophical eschatology of the human soul's eternal contemplative bliss.[49] All of this provides a further argument for an intellectualist interpretation of happiness.

As for the more specific ethical stances conveyed by Arabic Neoplatonic sources, the Arabic Plotinus seems to be of prime importance. Plotinus devoted treatises of their own to virtue (*Enneads*, I.2) and happiness (*Enneads*, I.4).

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46 The two treatises have been edited in Iamblichus, *Neuplatonische Pythagorica in arabischem Gewande*; Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Proclus' Commentary on the Pythagorean Golden Verses*.

47 For this commentary, see Ullmann, *Die Nikomachische Ethik des Aristoteles in arabischer Übersetzung*, vol. 2, 63–66; Hugonnard-Roche, "Porphyre de Tyr: Commentaire sur l'Éthique." For citations preserved in the *Happiness and Its Attainment*, see Ghorab, "Greek Commentators on Aristotle."

48 In al-Fārābī's case, for the impact of Aristotelian metaphysics on the one hand and Neoplatonic emanationism on the other, see Druart, "Al-Farabi and Emanationism"; Idem, "Al-Fārābī, Emanation, and Metaphysics"; Reisman, "Al-Fārābī and the Philosophical Curriculum," 56–60.

49 See, for example, chapters XIV–XVIII of al-'Āmirī's *al-Amad 'alā al-abad*, and Rowson's commentary on these chapters (295–314), on the human soul's immortality, position between the sensible and intelligible worlds, and contemplative afterlife, which draw both on the Arabic *Phaedo* source and the Arabic Plotinus and Proclus.

In the latter, his position is that since the "true self" of the human being is the intellect, happiness should consist of the life of the intellect, while moral virtue and the Aristotelian external goods are of no intrinsic value.[50] The treatise is not included among the Arabic Plotinian texts, but the intellectualist ethical stance comes through also in the *Theology of Aristotle*. If Plotinian metaphysics and psychology are hardly ethically neutral in themselves, the anonymous Arabic redactor inserts ethical interpolations of his own.[51] Thus, he explicitly identifies intellectual activity with virtue and nobility and the sensory realm with vice and baseness. As for the former treatise, it develops a distinction between the "political" (*politikai*) and "purificatory" (*kathartikai*) grades of virtue, corresponding to the ideas of virtue as moderation in Plato's *Republic* versus virtue as the soul's freedom from bodily affections in the *Phaedo*. Plotinus' followers developed further the idea of an ethical progression proceeding through increasingly intellectualist grades of virtue.[52] Although it unclear what the precise Arabic sources for conveying this idea are, al-Fārābī's ethical thought can be read in a way that comes close to the Neoplatonic ideal of grades of virtue.[53] The Neoplatonic sources also convey a second kind of distinction, concerning the status of ethics in general, between pre-philosophical ethics, consisting of moral education that dispenses with rigorous philosophical arguments, and philosophical ethics founded on theoretical knowledge. Druart has argued that this distinction is essential for understanding the ethical thought of many Arabic philosophers, starting from al-Kindī.[54]

In sum, the Arabic mixture and transmission history of Greek ethical ideas is a highly complicated one. Thus, even if it is true that Arabic philosophical ethics depends on classical sources, it is not derivative of them in any simple way. It is rather as if the Arabic philosophers had a rich menu of ethical texts of Greek provenance at their disposal from which they, in most cases, picked in a rather eclectic manner. As regards the general ethical ideal conveyed by

50 For Plotinus' treatise on happiness, see, in particular, Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, 139–152.

51 Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 49–75.

52 Dillon, "Metriopatheia and Apatheia"; Idem, "Plotinus, Philo and Origen on the Grades of Virtue"; O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 40–49; Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators*, 337–344; Baltzly, "Pathways to Purification."

53 Mattila, "The Ethical Progression of the Philosopher in al-Rāzī and al-Fārābī."

54 Druart, "Al-Kindi's Ethics"; Idem, "Al-Razi (Rhazes) and Normative Ethics"; Idem, "Al-Farabi on the Practical and Speculative Aspects of Ethics"; Idem, "La philosophie morale arabe"; Idem, "Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles"; Idem, "The Ethics of al-Razi."

the main classical components of Arabic philosophical ethics, all of them contributed to the intellectualist reading of the human end to different extents. At the same time, they contain a tension between two distinct ethical ideals: one of moderation, represented by Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and another that is more intellectualist, represented by the *Phaedo* and Neoplatonism. In this book, I will argue that this tension is both present and ultimately resolved in the ethical thought of al-Fārābī and Avicenna.

6 Conception of Ethics

Before proceeding to the study of the ethical thought of al-Fārābī and Avicenna, it is worthwhile to see how they conceive the nature and aims of ethics. Arabic philosophers adopted from late antiquity a curricular scheme of philosophy where theoretical philosophy was divided into 1) logic, 2) physics, and 3) metaphysics, between which the mathematical *quadrivium* occupied variant positions.[55] In the Arabic curricular order, practical philosophy followed all parts of theoretical philosophy and thus concluded the study of philosophy. In its classical Aristotelian division, practical philosophy was divided further into 1) ethics, 2) economics, and 3) politics. The very first Muslim philosopher, al-Kindī, in *On the Quantity of Aristotle's Books* (*Fī kammiyyat kutub Arisṭūṭālīs*), justifies the final position of practical philosophy by the grounds that practical philosophy, which serves the practical end of becoming virtuous, represents the "fruit" (*thamara*) of the theoretical sciences.[56] This is apparently the case in the sense that knowledge about virtue should in some sense be grounded in theoretical knowledge. Both al-Fārābī and Avicenna share this general view about the position of practical philosophy as the crowning part of the philosophical curriculum.

Al-Fārābī presents his most complete account of the contents and order of the philosophical sciences in his curricular works, in particular, the *Enumeration of Sciences* (*Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*), but also in the first section of the *Attainment of Happiness* (*Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*).[57] In these treatises, the final part of philosophy is called the "political science" (*al-ʿilm al-madanī*) in the former and

55 For the late ancient curriculum of philosophy and its Arabic adoption, see Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy"; Idem, "The Cycle of Knowledge"; Hein, *Definition und Einteilung der Philosophie*; Westerink, *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*.

56 Al-Kindī, "Fī kammiyyat kutub Arisṭūṭālīs," 369, 384.

57 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, §§ 9–20, 55–64.

the "human science" (*al-ʿilm al-insānī*) or political science in the latter.[58] This science differs from all parts of theoretical philosophy in that it is concerned with human voluntary (*irādī*) acts, dispositions, and ends,[59] as opposed to the existents that are independent of human volition. Thus, political science, in general, investigates 1) happiness as the end of human actions, 2) virtues and vices, and 3) the political means by which 1) and 2) are realized.[60] In all this, happiness forms the central concept: it is the ultimate end for virtuous actions and dispositions on the one hand and virtuous political or religious governance on the other. Al-Fārābī does not, then, distinguish between ethics and political philosophy as clearly distinct sciences but both of them instead constitute a single "human science." Accordingly, al-Fārābī's view of philosophical ethics is highly political and, thus, agrees with the political context in which Aristotle situates ethics at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1179a33–1181b23).[61] Nevertheless, al-Fārābī explicitly distinguishes between an ethical and political part of the human science. The aim of the former is to 1) define happiness, 2) differentiate between true and presumed happiness, and 3) determine the voluntary actions and character traits that lead to happiness. The aim of the latter is to investigate the ideal polities that best realize happiness and virtue.[62]

In his curricular treatise, *Parts of the Intellectual Sciences*, Avicenna, first, makes a primary distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy.[63] The aim of the former is to gain "certain beliefs" (*al-iʿtiqād al-yaqīnī*) concerning the existents that are independent of human actions, whereas the aim of the latter is to attain "sound opinions" (*ṣiḥḥat raʾy*) about things related to human actions for the end of performing good actions. Following the classical tripartition, Avicenna then divides practical philosophy into ethics, economics, and political philosophy based on whether they operate at the level of an individual, a household, or a political association, respectively.[64] Finally,

58 Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*, v, 64–69; Idem, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, §§19–20, 63–64. In the former treatise, practical philosophy is followed by the Islamic sciences of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and rational theology (*kalām*), for which al-Fārābī accords the essentially political function of virtuous legislation and dialectical defense of the beliefs and laws in the virtuous community.

59 Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*, v, 64.

60 Ibid, 64–65.

61 For al-Fārābī's political reading of Aristotelian ethics, see Neria, "Al-Fārābī's Lost Commentary on the Ethics," 72–75.

62 Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*, v, 67.

63 Avicenna, "Aqsām al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya," 105.

64 Ibid, 107. Interestingly, Avicenna also wrote a treatise on economics, that is, household management (*tadbīr al-manzil*), translated in McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 224–237.

he defines ethics, in particular, as knowledge concerning the character traits (*akhlāq*) and actions that lead to happiness in this life and the next, where Aristotle's *Ethics* constitutes the authoritative work. In sum, al-Fārābī and Avicenna share a conception of philosophical ethics that may be characterized as eudaimonist, meaning that the central concern of ethics is happiness and its attainment.

Despite the clear distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy at a curricular level, for both authors, ethics is also intimately related to theoretical philosophy. In the *Attainment of Happiness*, al-Fārābī presents the curriculum of sciences as a gradual progression where one science leads to another. In particular, theoretical knowledge about the psychical and intellectual principles culminates in the question of the ultimate end of the human being,[65] introduced as a theoretical question preceding political philosophy. Druart has argued that for al-Fārābī, ethics consists of a theoretical and practical part, where the former, *contra* Aristotle, is a demonstrative science with a metaphysical basis.[66] Despite his presentation of practical philosophy as separate from theoretical philosophy, Avicenna in the *Parts of the Intellectual Sciences*, nevertheless, includes knowledge about the afterlife (*maʿād*), also dealing with the nature of worldly and otherworldly happiness, among the applied parts (*furūʿ*) of the metaphysical science.[67] Ethics proper is, then, apparently restricted to an inquiry concerning the means for attaining happiness.

This theoretically based conception of ethics manifests itself in practice in that both authors often address ethical themes in non-ethical contexts, while neither author composed a major ethical treatise. Consequently, the primary sources of this study are composed of a rather diverse collection of writings. For al-Fārābī, who elevates the concept of happiness to a central position in his philosophy, this includes many of his most well-known philosophical works. Among these, only the short treatise of *Exhortation to the Way to Happiness* is a primarily ethical work, while the *Selected Aphorisms* (*Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*) also contains explicitly ethical sections. Besides these, he addresses ethical themes in the trilogy of works consisting of the *Attainment of Happiness*, the *Philosophy of Plato*, and the *Philosophy of Aristotle*, where the first is devoted mainly to political philosophy and the last two to an exposition of the thought of the

65 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, §§ 15–16, 60–62.

66 Druart, "Al-Farabi on the Practical and Speculative Aspects of Ethics"; Idem, "Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles."

67 Avicenna, "Aqsām al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya," 114–116. Thus, the question of happiness pertains to the last section of metaphysics, which Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 288–296, has called the "metaphysics of the rational soul."

two classical authorities.[68] Finally, al-Fārābī discusses happiness and virtue in both theoretical and political contexts in many other works. These include, in particular, *On the Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City* (*Fī mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*), *Political Governance* (*al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*), and the *Book of Religion* (*Kitāb al-Milla*).

Avicenna has a reputation for having neglected ethics, and it is true that his ethical contributions are disappointingly meager when compared with those he made to other areas of philosophy.[69] Despite this, he does discuss ethical themes in many works. He situates his main discussions of happiness, in the context of the afterlife, at the end of the metaphysical parts of his two major compendiums, the *Healing* (*al-Shifāʾ*) and the *Pointers and Reminders* (*al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*). The corresponding section of the *Beginning and Return* (*al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*) also addresses happiness and pleasure in a more concise form. Beyond this, he also discusses ethical subjects in various other sections of the compendiums: value concepts in the metaphysical parts, virtue in both the metaphysical and psychological parts, and the epistemological status of moral propositions in the logical parts. Besides the compendic works, Avicenna wrote a series of shorter treatises addressing ethical subjects. These include the three treatises, the *Piety and Sin* (*Risālat al-Birr wa-l-ithm*), the *Science of Ethics* (*Risāla fī ʿilm al-akhlāq*), and the *Covenant* (*Risāla fī al-ʿahd*), that possibly have their origin in a more extensive book on practical philosophy that is now lost.[70] Many other epistles, such as the *Treatise on Love* (*Risāla fī al-ʿishq*) and the *Epistle of the Present* (*Risāla fī al-tuḥfa*), also complement the picture of his ethical views, while the *Treatise of Immolation on the Afterlife* (*al-Risāla al-aḍḥawiyya fī al-maʿād*) is important for the eschatological aspect of happiness. As a result, for both al-Fārābī and Avicenna, their ethical discussions are fragmented in a great number of works and even different sections of a single work. It is the aim of this study to reconstruct their ethical theories from this diverse collection of sources.

68 Reisman, "Al-Fārābī and the Philosophical Curriculum," 54, calls these three works the "historical and educational ethics trilogy."

69 Kaya, "Prophetic Legislation" reiterates the view of Avicenna's neglect of practical philosophy and suggests that the reason for this is that for Avicenna, Islamic law occupied the position of philosophical ethics.

70 See Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 94–96.

PART 1

Happiness

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CHAPTER 1

Final End

The two primary concepts of classical virtue ethics are happiness (*eudaimonia*) and virtue (*aretē*).[1] Virtues are psychical dispositions to act in a morally right way, while happiness is the ultimate good towards which a rational moral agent should order his activities. The two are related in that virtuous character traits and actions are valuable because they contribute to or perhaps even constitute happiness. Many scholars have noted that happiness, in fact, may be a poor translation for *eudaimonia* since it does not coincide with the contemporary understanding of happiness as a subjective feeling of contentment. While it may turn out that the ultimate human good is or at least involves pleasure or contentment, this is not the primary meaning of the concept. Aristotle identifies *eudaimonia* with "living well" (*to eu zēn*/*ḥusn al-ʿaysh*/*sīra*; 1095a18–20; 1098b20–21),[2] and good life might, then, be a more appropriate translation. Modern authors have sometimes preferred other alternatives, such as human flourishing, welfare, felicity, or bliss. I will comply with the common practice of translating *eudaimonia* and its Arabic equivalent of *saʿāda* as happiness. However, one should bear in mind that for Aristotle, al-Fārābī, and Avicenna, the concept refers to the good human life based on objective grounds rather than the subjective grounds of how a person feels about his life. That is, the fact that someone is completely satisfied with his life does not necessarily mean that he is happy in this sense.

The starting point of ethical inquiry for both al-Fārābī and Avicenna is precisely in this notion of happiness as the ultimate good of the human being. On this basis, the objective of ethics becomes to investigate, first, what the human good is, and, second, how it is attained. After giving his preliminary definition of *eudaimonia*, Aristotle proceeds to discuss virtues, justice, friendship, and pleasure as aspects of the good life, only to conclude in the tenth book (1177a12–1178a14) that *eudaimonia* should be identified primarily with theoretical activity. While this has puzzled scholars trying to decide whether the good

1 For expositions of the general structure of classical ethical theories, see Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*; Idem, "Virtue Ethics."

2 The Arabic translations of the ethical terms are from the Akasoy and Fidora edition of the single surviving manuscript of the Arabic *Nicomachean Ethics*. While this is probably not the text that al-Fārābī and Avicenna had at their disposal, it gives an idea of how the terms were translated into Arabic.

life for Aristotle consists of all these things or only contemplative activity, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, nevertheless, constitutes a coherent exposition of Aristotle's ethical thought starting and ending in the concept of *eudaimonia*. None of al-Fārābī's works, and even less so Avicenna's, offer comparable systematic expositions. Al-Fārābī addresses happiness more often in a psychological or political context than in a purely ethical context. Avicenna mostly relegates his discussions of happiness to a few short chapters at the end of metaphysics. Moreover, in contrast to many Arabic authors, such as Miskawayh, neither of them takes much notice of many of the aspects of the good life that Aristotle treats extensively. Still, both authors in their works offer a coherent exposition of what the human good is, even if it must in part be reconstructed from scattered passages in several treatises.

Like Aristotle in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, both al-Fārābī and Avicenna end up identifying the human good with the excellence of theoretical activity. In this, they are hardly alone, for as Altmann notes in his study of the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Bājja's concept of happiness, "there is a remarkable unanimity amongst the medieval philosophers of Islam and Judaism as to what constitutes man's ultimate felicity."[3] Practically all philosophers of the Arabic tradition adopt an intellectualist view of happiness, which Fakhry has called the contemplative ideal of Arabic philosophy.[4] However, al-Fārābī and Avicenna arrive at this conclusion through a very different road from that of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. While both authors employ the Aristotelian arguments of the human function and contemplative pleasure, ultimately, as I will argue, their view of contemplative happiness is based on psychology, metaphysics, and cosmology. The ethical question of the human end is inseparable from the theoretical questions about the nature of the human being and his place in the cosmos. Therefore, ethics cannot be wholly abstracted from theoretical philosophy. In consequence, the following discussion of happiness will also address psychology, noetics, metaphysics, and cosmology. This is in obvious contrast to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which mainly treats happiness as a purely ethical question.[5]

The idea of happiness in al-Fārābī and Avicenna may be perceived as formed of successive layers. The chapters of the first part follow this idea by proceeding gradually from the innermost layer towards the exterior. The first of these is

3 Altmann, "Ibn Bajja on Man's Ultimate Felicity," 47. For a brief review of Arabic eudaimonism, see also Rosenthal, "The Concept of Eudaimonia in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy."

4 Fakhry, "The Contemplative Ideal in Islamic Philosophy."

5 For the argument that Aristotle's ethics, nevertheless, has a metaphysical foundation, see Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*, 329–469.

the preliminary meaning of the concept. In the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's starting point is a thin concept of happiness, a preliminary analysis of the meaning of the concept before he fleshes it out with content. In other words, Aristotle merely presents a conceptual analysis of the term as understood not only by philosophers but people in general. There is no disagreement on this primary meaning; the dispute rather concerns what kind of life qualifies as happy. That is, whether the good life should be identified with the pursuit of pleasure, wealth, or esteem, for example, as the general populace tends to believe *contra* the philosophers (1095a17–26). Aristotle identifies *eudaimonia* in this primary sense with the highest good (*agathon*/*khayr*) for the human being (1097a15–26), which is to be distinguished from any Platonic metaphysical idea of the Good, the ethical relevance of which Aristotle rejects (1096a11–1097a14). Happiness as the highest good means that it is the end (*telos*/*ghāya*) towards which human activities should be directed. To qualify as the highest human good, happiness must fulfill the requirements of finality and self-sufficiency. It must be absolutely final (*teleios*/*kāmil*), or complete or perfect as both the Greek and Arabic may also be rendered, in the sense that it is the end of ends which is always chosen for its own sake and could not plausibly be chosen as an instrument for attaining yet a further end (1097a25–b6). Thus, pleasure, wealth, and esteem, for example, do not qualify, because even if they are often pursued for their own sakes, it is perfectly intuitive to think that they are sought for the sake of happiness, while it is not plausible to think that happiness is sought for their sakes. Second, the highest good must be self-sufficient (*autarkes*/*muktafin bi-nafsihi*) in the sense that nothing could be added to it to make it even more desirable (1097b6–21). Otherwise, that additional thing would have to be included in the highest good.

These short passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics* form the starting point for the concept of happiness in Arabic philosophy. All Arabic philosophers agree that there is a final end for human pursuits, that this end constitutes the human good, and that it is identical with the basic meaning of the concept of happiness. In contrast to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the starting point of the concept of happiness often remains implicit in Arabic ethical writings. Arabic philosophers rarely proceed systematically from the thin concept to argue for the identification of the thick concept with some concrete end or activity. That is, the thick concept of happiness identified with contemplative perfection often appears rather abruptly without previous analysis of its basic meaning. Nevertheless, both al-Fārābī and Avicenna explicitly reiterate the Aristotelian definition of the primary meaning of happiness in some of their treatises.

1 Al-Fārābī

Al-Fārābī provides his most detailed introduction to the concept of happiness at the beginning of his short ethical treatise, the *Exhortation to the way to Happiness*. Probably because it is an introductory work,[6] it is the only treatise where al-Fārābī starts with the core meaning of the concept without yet taking a stance on its content. The first part of the treatise relies on the first books of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to the point of almost constituting a paraphrase of parts of them.[7] Accordingly, the primary meaning that al-Fārābī attributes to the concept of happiness at the very beginning of the treatise is also entirely dependent on the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

> That happiness is a certain end (*ghāya mā*) that every human being desires (*yatashawwaquhā*), and that everyone that strives to attain it does so precisely because it is a certain perfection (*kamāl mā*), requires no explanation since it is so completely well-known (*fī ghāyat al-shuhra*). The human being desires every perfection and every end precisely because it is a certain good (*khayr mā*), which is necessarily something choice-worthy (*mu'thar*). Now, while the ends that are desired because they are goods and choice-worthy are many, happiness is the most appropriate (*ajdā*) of the preferred goods. Therefore, it is clear that happiness is the greatest in goodness among the goods, and that among the things people choose (*mu'tharāt*), it is the most perfect (*akmal*) and choice-worthy of all the ends towards which the human being strives.[8]

The passage reproduces the Aristotelian analysis of the concept of happiness, although in a very concise form. Like Aristotle, al-Fārābī identifies the terms good and end in the sense that for any given activity, its goodness and the end for the sake of which it is pursued are identical. These are further identified with perfection (*kamāl*), which is the term by which the Greek word *teleios* qualifying the finality of an end is rendered in Arabic. Thus, for example, the goodness or perfection of carpentry, or good or perfect woodwork, is the

6 For the *Exhortation* as an introductory work, see note 7 in the next chapter.

7 The relationship between the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Exhortation* is analyzed in the introduction and footnotes of al-Fārābī, "Le rappel de la voie à suivre pour parvenir au bonheur." For al-Fārābī's similarly paraphrastic commentaries on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*, see Lameer, *Al-Fārābī and Aristotelian Syllogistics*, 13–18.

8 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, § 1, 47–48 [translation cited with modifications from McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 104].

end for the sake of which carpenters practice their trade. All voluntary human actions are by nature end-directed. People choose them to fulfill their desire to attain a certain end, which is identical with the good or perfection of that particular activity. Human beings pursue different kinds of activities, which are directed towards multiple ends. Among all these ends, happiness is the highest in the sense that people, in general, consider it to be the most choice-worthy of them.

As for Aristotle, the two qualifications of finality and self-sufficiency follow on the identification of happiness with the highest good. Regarding the first qualification, al-Fārābī states that people pursue a given good or end either as a means to attaining a further end, for its own sake, or both.[9] As examples of instrumental ends, al-Fārābī provides exercise (*riyāḍa*) and taking medicine, both of which are chosen for the sake of health rather than for their own sakes. Interestingly, al-Fārābī presents not only leadership but also knowledge (*ʿilm*) as examples of the second class of ends, which may be pursued for both their own sakes and for the sake of a further end, such as wealth or pleasure. This seemingly goes against al-Fārābī's later arguments that it is precisely a certain kind of knowledge that constitutes the final end for the human being, although perhaps the reference here is to some form of practical knowledge. In any case, whatever its content, happiness as the highest good must be the final end in the sense that it is always chosen only for its own sake. In addition, it must also be self-sufficient in the sense that it lacks in nothing that could complement it:

> Since we deem it correct that, once we obtain happiness, we have absolutely no need thereafter to strive to obtain by means of it some other end, it is apparent that happiness is preferred for its own sake and never for the sake of something else. Consequently, it is clear that happiness is the most choice-worthy, the most perfect, and the greatest among all goods. We also deem it correct that, once we obtain happiness, we are in need of nothing to accompany it. Anything like this is most suitably considered sufficient in itself (*muktafin bi-nafsihi*). This statement is attested to by what all people believe and presume alone to be happiness. Some think that wealth is happiness; others think that the enjoyment of pleasures (*al-tamattuʿ bi-l-ladhdhāt*) is happiness; some think that power (*riyāsa*) is happiness; others think that knowledge is happiness; still others think that happiness resides in other things. But each one believes that what

9 Ibid, 48.

> he considers to be absolute happiness (*al-saʿāda ʿalā al-iṭlāq*) is the most choice-worthy, the greatest, and the most perfect good.[10]

In sum, like Aristotle, al-Fārābī affirms that the basic meaning of the concept of happiness, as it is generally understood, is the highest human good, which, when further analyzed, must fulfill the conditions of finality and self-sufficiency. Al-Fārābī passingly reproduces this preliminary definition of happiness also in the *Principles of the Opinions of the Virtuous City* and *Selected Aphorisms* in a highly concise form.[11] All of this may seem trivial and uninteresting, given that al-Fārābī, in effect, merely summarizes the Aristotelian analysis of the concept. However, the point I want to make here is only that al-Fārābī's basic understanding of the concept of happiness is firmly grounded in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This constitutes the core meaning of the concept, based on which al-Fārābī will later argue for its identification with some concrete activity. Nevertheless, even this primary definition of happiness contains an essential elaboration on Aristotle in the prominence that it accords to the concept of perfection (*kamāl*), which for al-Fārābī also carries a specific psychological and metaphysical meaning. In fact, all of the terms that al-Fārābī identifies with happiness—end, good, and perfection—are identical with each other also as metaphysical terms. Hence, even if the primary definition appears purely ethical, it will provide the basis for later filling the concept of happiness with psychological and metaphysical content.

2 Avicenna

Avicenna introduces the concept of happiness in his major works at the end of their metaphysical parts. None of these discussions starts with the definition of the core meaning of the concept. Nevertheless, Avicenna indicates elsewhere what his starting point is. In the *Epistle of the Present*, also known by the titles *On Happiness* (*Fī al-saʿāda*) and *Ten Arguments for the Substantiality of the Human Soul* (*al-Ḥujaj al-ʿashara fī jawhariyyat nafs al-insān*), Avicenna

10 Ibid, 48–49 [translation cited with modifications from McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 105].

11 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, § 6, 206; Idem, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 74, 80; § 94, 96. In the latter treatise, happiness is defined as "the end (*ghāya*) for which there is no further end behind it by means of which happiness is sought."

does begin by a definition of happiness.[12] Only a brief section of the treatise is, in fact, concerned with happiness. The rest addresses virtue ethics and, in particular, arguments for the substantiality of the human soul. The very beginning of the treatise still provides us with Avicenna's most explicit statement as regards the basic meaning of the concept of happiness:

> There is no greater good in itself (*maʿrūf ashadd fī nafsihi*) than being guided to the way towards happiness (*al-hidāya ilā al-saʿāda*), which is to stay eternally (*al-baqāʾ al-sarmadī*) in the proximity of Him to whom creation and command pertain, may He be blessed and exalted. For it is evident that the ways (towards an end) (*hidāyāt*) are related to each other in accordance with how the ends (*ghāyāt*) are related to each other. No end to which the human being devotes himself is better in itself (*afḍal bi-dhātihā*) than happiness, for it is the end for everything else. Whether (the end) is sought in accordance with what is good in reality (*ʿalā sanan al-khayriyya ʿalā al-ḥaqīqa*) or according to what is considered to be so (*ʿalā al-ḥisbān*), one pursues by it (*yuqṣad bihā*) happiness or a cause leading to happiness, whether it is real or presumed (*ḥisbānī*). For it is evident that among all these things, only happiness itself is sought for itself (*maṭlūb li-dhātihi*). For if you were to choose some other thing over it, then that other degree (*martaba*) and end would be happiness. But we stated that the first is happiness, and this is a contradiction since then the ends would be ordered infinitely, which is impossible. Therefore, it is clear that happiness in reality (*ʿalā al-ḥaqīqa*) is what is sought for itself and is choice-worthy for its own sake. It is evident that what is chosen for itself, while other things are chosen for its sake, is more excellent in the reality of its essence (*fī ḥaqīqat dhātihi*) than what is chosen for the sake of another and not for its own sake. It has, therefore, become clear that happiness is the most excellent pursuit (*saʿy*) that a living being may strive to attain.[13]

Avicenna's starting point here is eternal happiness in the afterlife, which paves the way for addressing the human soul's substantiality. That the human soul is a separate substance, in turn, is a precondition for its immortality, which is the main subject of the treatise. Despite this, the core argument of this introductory passage relates to happiness as the end of all human activities abstracted

12 See Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 481–482, for the treatise and its various alternative titles. Gutas considers the treatise authentic.

13 Avicenna, *Mutluluk ve Insan Nefsinin Cevher*, 1–2 [my translation].

from the content that may be ascribed to it in either this life or the next. All human actions are directed towards attaining an end. Unless there should be an infinite regression of ends, there must be a final end towards which all ends are ultimately directed. That final end is, by definition, happiness. If an end thought to be happiness were sought to attain a further end, then that end would have to be happiness instead. This is the basic meaning of the concept whether or not people correctly identify its content—in the subsequent passage, Avicenna states that people often wrongly presume happiness to consist in sensible pleasures or worldly power (*al-riyāsāt al-dunyawiyya*).[14] In sum, Avicenna understands the meaning of happiness in the sense of the final and self-sufficient end of human activities, which forms the starting point for inquiry in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Although, as we will see, Avicenna's ethical discussions generally depend surprisingly little on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, his understanding of the basic meaning of the concept, nevertheless, is ultimately derived from it.

14 Ibid, 2.

CHAPTER 2

Function Argument

Like practically all medieval Arabic philosophers, al-Fārābī and Avicenna agree that happiness as the final and self-sufficient human end must consist of the excellence of theoretical activity. The main argument is ultimately based on the famous "function argument" that Aristotle presents in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1097b22–28). The argument claims that insofar as things have their proper function (*ergon*/*fi'l*), their goodness or end lies in the excellent performance of that function. Thus, since the function of a flute player is to play the flute, his good or end as flute player consists in playing the flute well. The human being as a species must also possess its specific function, even if it is less immediately obvious what this should be. The question of happiness as the final human end, then, can be formulated as the problem of identifying the specifically human function: happiness must consist in the excellent performance of that function. Aristotle excludes subrational human activities as candidates because they are not specifically human but also pertain to plants and animals (1097b28–1098a13).[1] On this basis, he identifies happiness with the exercise of the human psychical faculties in accordance with reason (*kata logon*), which, in effect, means virtuous activity, that is, human excellence in the sense of rational control over the subrational activities (1098a12–17). In the tenth book, Aristotle, nevertheless, argues for a narrower definition where happiness is identified with the excellence of contemplation (*theōrein*/*ra'y*) (1177a12–1178a8), that is, theoretical virtue. In contrast, the life of practical virtue is happy only in a secondary sense (1178a9–23).[2]

Arabic philosophers, in general, opt for the more narrowly intellectualist definition of happiness. Thus, they pick up Aristotle's line of thought to maintain that the theoretical faculty is the specifically human function that defines the human being as a species and that the human end must consequently consist of the excellence of theoretical thought. Statements to this effect are

1 As noted in Nagel, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia," 255, the same argument should exclude rational activity as an exclusively human *ergon* because the human being shares it with gods.

2 For the tension between the comprehensive and intellectualist accounts of happiness, to which I will return later, see, for example, Nagel, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia"; Cooper, "Contemplation and Happiness"; Dahl, "Contemplation and Eudaimonia in the Nicomachean Ethics."

common in Arabic philosophy,[3] and, in most cases, they are not formulated in particularly original or interesting ways. Al-Fārābī, however, presents in some of his introductory works an elaborate formulation of the function argument, which is highly interesting, in particular, because it shows how he transposes the Aristotelian argument to the context of theoretical philosophy.[4] As we will see later, for both al-Fārābī and Avicenna, their philosophical system as a whole, in effect, constitutes an elaborate argument that establishes the human function based on the human psychological constitution as well as cosmology and metaphysics. Consequently, the question of happiness is no longer a purely ethical subject but is resolved mainly by theoretical philosophy.

1 Al-Fārābī

If al-Fārābī had the complete *Nicomachean Ethics* at his disposal, the structure of both of his works seemingly devoted to the question of happiness, the *Exhortation* and the *Attainment of Happiness*, is somewhat surprising. As regards the former treatise, parts of it draw on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, while other parts are completely independent of it. The general structure of the *Exhortation* consists of three primary parts devoted to happiness, moral virtue, and theoretical virtue, which, along general lines, corresponds to that of the first six books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, excluding the fifth book on justice.[5] The first two parts are relatively faithful to parts of the first three books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, while al-Fārābī's lengthy discussion of pleasure also draws on the seventh and tenth books. The third part in principle corresponds to the sixth book on intellectual virtues. However, instead of discussing prudence and theoretical wisdom, al-Fārābī presents the curriculum of philosophical sciences accompanied by a lengthy elaboration on the nature of logic, none of which has a parallel in the strictly ethical context of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The eighth and ninth books on friendship as part of the good life are also excluded entirely, as is the tenth book arguing for the identification of happiness with theoretical activity.

3 See, for example, Adamson, "The Arabic Tradition," 65.

4 Reisman, "Al-Fārābī and the Philosophical Curriculum," 54, classifies as introductory all the works on which the following discussion is based: the *Exhortation to the Way to Happiness* and the trilogy of the *Attainment of Happiness*, the *Philosophy of Plato*, and the *Philosophy of Aristotle*.

5 See Mallet's analysis in al-Fārābī, "Le rappel de la voie à suivre pour parvenir au bonheur," 114, 118–119.

All of this could be explained by al-Fārābī's possibly incomplete knowledge of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[6] The treatise, however, also serves a different purpose for al-Fārābī: the *Exhortation* is an introductory or pre-philosophical treatise meant to precede the study of logic as the first discipline within the philosophical curriculum,[7] which is why a discussion of logic concludes it.[8] Thus, al-Fārābī does not intend it to be a complete exposition of either ethics in general or happiness in particular. Rather, as the title suggests, the purpose of the treatise is to exhort (*tanbīh*) the reader to adopt the way towards happiness, which al-Fārābī identifies with the study of philosophy. To claim that the way to happiness is identical with philosophy is perhaps in itself a persuasive argument for an intellectualist understanding of happiness. Since the treatise precedes both logic and all other parts of philosophy, however, it cannot prove the case for contemplative happiness by relying on either logical arguments or philosophical concepts defined elsewhere. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, of course, emphasizes that ethics is not a precise science in the sense of the theoretical sciences (1094b11–27), and the nature of the human good or the way towards it cannot, therefore, be shown by demonstrative means. As we will see, for al-Fārābī, however, the theoretical part of ethics is of demonstrative nature.

The *Exhortation* does not, then, form a coherent argument from the basic concept of happiness to its identification with theoretical activity. However, in some passing remarks, al-Fārābī, nevertheless, employs the function argument to argue for an intellectualist understanding of happiness:

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6 Al-Fārābī's treatise may be compared with later Arabic ethical treatises drawing on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, such as Miskawayh's highly influential *Purification of Character Traits*, in particular. In contrast to al-Fārābī, Miskawayh follows the themes of the *Nicomachean Ethics* fairly closely, devoting separate discussions to justice and friendship, both of which al-Fārābī omits.

7 Mahdi, "Al-Muqaddima," 19–28; Druart, "Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles," 410–412; al-Fārābī, "Le rappel de la voie à suivre pour parvenir au bonheur," 114. In contrast, Grignaschi, "Les traductions latines," 52, note 61; Khalīfāt, "Muqaddima Naqdiyya," 26, follow Steinschneider, *Alfarabi* (*Alpharabius*), 61–62, in classifying the work as an introduction to politics. This contradicts the explicit reference to logic at the end of the treatise and the fact that political philosophy for al-Fārābī constitutes the final part of the philosophical curriculum.

8 The treatise ends with a discussion of the study of the universal features of grammar as an introduction to logic, corresponding to Porphyry's *Eisagōgē* as the beginning of the late ancient curriculum. Thus, it contains an explicit exhortation (237) for the student to follow it by studying one of al-Fārābī's treatises dealing with that subject. While Dunlop has edited three further short treatises of this nature, the work in question is probably the *Book of the Utterances Employed in Logic* (*Kitāb al-Alfāẓ al-mustaʿmala fī al-manṭiq*).

> Since some of the goods (*khayrāt*) that the human being has are more specific to him than others, and since the good most specific to the human being is the human intellect (*ʿaql al-insān*)—given that the thing that makes a human being a human being is intellect—and since that which the discipline of logic provides the human being is the (correct practice of the) human intellect, this discipline provides the human being the virtue most specific to him.[9]

This is a very concisely formulated function argument in the specific context of persuading the reader to adopt the study of logic: the intellect is what makes the human being a human being; therefore, the highest human good is the excellence of theoretical thought. The study of logic, accordingly, constitutes the indispensable starting point for the specifically human virtue, and hence the first step toward happiness.

When compared with the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the content of the *Attainment of Happiness* is as puzzling at first glance as that of the *Exhortation*. Al-Fārābī starts by stating that happiness is attained in cities (*mudun*) and nations (*umam*) through four things: theoretical virtues (*al-faḍāʾil al-naẓariyya*), deliberative virtues (*al-faḍāʾil al-fikriyya*), moral virtues (*al-faḍāʾil al-khulqiyya*), and practical arts (*al-ṣināʿāt al-ʿamaliyya*).[10] The work itself consists of a lengthy discussion of the curriculum of philosophical sciences proceeding gradually from effects to causes, followed by an account of moral and deliberative virtues, in particular, as regards their actualization in a political context. The treatise neither defines happiness nor argues for its intellectualist content, even if it assumes it implicitly in identifying the way to happiness with philosophy. Again, this may be explained by the end served by the treatise: as the introductory statement indicates, the epistle is meant as one of political philosophy. That is, its subject matter is the realization of happiness in a political community. Moreover, it is not an entirely independent work but rather forms the first part of a trilogy followed by the *Philosophy of Plato* and the *Philosophy of Aristotle*.[11] Both of these works revolve around the question of happiness. In

9 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, § 18, 78 [translation cited from McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 118].

10 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, § 1, 49.

11 Hence, the *Attainment of Happiness* (§§ 65–66, 97–98; translation cited with modifications from Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 49–50) is concluded by the statement: "The philosophy that answers to this description was handed down to us by the Greeks, from Plato and Aristotle. But neither of them gave us the philosophy without giving us also an account of the ways to it and of the ways to re-establish it when it becomes extinct. We shall begin by expounding first the philosophy of Plato, and we will

consequence, the trilogy as a whole does provide an argument for the intellectualist understanding of happiness assumed implicitly in the *Attainment*. Somewhat surprisingly, then, al-Fārābī's most elaborate argument for contemplative happiness can be found in the two treatises supposedly summarizing the thought of Plato and Aristotle.

Al-Fārābī's summaries of Platonic dialogues in the *Philosophy of Plato* are very concise and largely betray his incomplete knowledge about Plato's writings.[12] For the present purpose, what is interesting is not so much whether al-Fārābī offers a plausible interpretation of Plato's philosophy but that he presents the entirety of Plato's writings as a gradually evolving quest to discover the final end of the human being. At the beginning of the treatise, al-Fārābī claims that the starting point of Plato's philosophical pursuits, in the *Alcibiades*,[13] was to identify the particular human end that constitutes the final end or perfection for the human being:

> First Plato investigated (*faḥaṣa*) the perfection (*kamāl*) of the human being insofar as he is a human being—which of the things that the human being possesses and by which he is delighted (*yaṣīr bihā maghbūṭan*) is

order his philosophy (*nurattib*) one part after the other until we reach its end. We shall do the same with the philosophy presented to us by Aristotle, beginning with the first part of his philosophy. Thereby we will show that in what they presented, their goal (*gharaḍ*) is the same and that they intended to offer one and the same philosophy."

12 It is possible that al-Fārābī was not directly familiar with most of Plato's dialogues even in the form of paraphrases but instead follows a ready-made summary. In the words of Rosenthal, "On the Knowledge of Plato's Philosophy in the Islamic World," 410–411: "One is very strongly tempted to assume that he never came across a true Platonic dialogue, no matter in what language."

13 Al-Fārābī's identification of the first Platonic dialogue appears to be founded on a late ancient precedent in that the Platonists of late antiquity considered the *First Alcibiades* to be the appropriate starting point for the study of Platonic dialogues. Thus, in Porphyry's ordering, the first treatise of Plotinus' *Enneads*, *On What is the Living Being and What is the Human Being* (*Peri tou ti to zō'on kai tis ho anthrōpos*), which identifies the true self of the human being with the intellect, corresponds to *Alcibiades*. Although the Arabic rendering of the *Alcibiades* has not survived, al-Fārābī perhaps considered its subject matter in similar terms, as he ascribes to it the alternative title *Book of the Human Being* (*Kitāb al-Insān*). Iamblichus and Proclus interpret the dialogue to deal with the subject of self-knowledge and, similarly, place it as the first within the cycle of Platonic dialogues. Apart from the shared starting point, al-Fārābī's presentation appears entirely independent of the late ancient reading of Platonic dialogues in both the order and the central meaning ascribed to them. For the position of the *Alcibiades* within the late ancient Platonic curriculum, see O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 62–65; van den Berg, "Proclus and Iamblichus on Moral Education," 274–276.

> it—for every existing thing has a certain perfection. Thus, he investigated whether the perfection for the human being consists only in his having unimpaired bodily organs, a beautiful face, and smooth skin; or whether it also consists in his having a distinguished ancestry and tribe, or having a large tribe and many friends and lovers; or whether it also consists in his being wealthy; or being glorified and exalted, ruling over a group or a city in which his command is enforced and which submits to his wishes. Is it sufficient for the human being in order to attain happiness, which is the utmost thing by which the human being is perfected (*al-aqṣā mā yakmul bihi al-insān*), to possess some or all of these things? It became evident to him as he investigated these things that either none of them are happiness at all but are only believed to be happiness, or they are not themselves sufficient for the human being to attain happiness without having something else in addition to them or some of them. Then he investigated what this other thing must be. It became evident to him that this other thing, whose attainment is the attainment of happiness, is a certain knowledge (*ʿilm mā*) and a certain way of life (*sīra mā*).[14]

The quest of al-Fārābī's Plato concerns the discovery of the perfection specific to the human being. The question is set up in a way that implicitly assumes the Aristotelian function argument: there is some specific characteristic or a group of characteristics that defines the human being, and his highest end should be identified with the activity corresponding to that characteristic. According to al-Fārābī, Plato does not find this end in bodily health and beauty, noble origin, friends and lovers, wealth, social esteem, or power, or even their combination. Instead, he concludes that happiness must be identified with knowledge and a certain way of life. Al-Fārābī's Plato next proceeds, in the *Theaetetus*, to investigate what kind of knowledge constitutes happiness. He finds out it is the knowledge of all the substances (*jawhar*) of existents, that is, metaphysical knowledge, and that such knowledge constitutes the utmost end (*ghāya*) and perfection (*kamāl*) for the human being.[15] In the *Philebus*, al-Fārābī's Plato further investigates "true happiness" (*al-saʿāda allatī hiya bi-l-ḥaqīqa saʿāda*) in order to conclude that it is attained by a virtuous way of life (*sīra fāḍila*).[16] In al-Fārābī's presentation, the rest of the Platonic dialogues explore different aspects of knowledge and virtue, the disciplines and crafts by which they may

14 Al-Fārābī, *Alfarabius de Platonis philosophia*, 3 [translation cited with modifications from Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 53].

15 Ibid, 4.

16 Ibid.

be attained, and, in particular, their realization in a political community. For al-Fārābī, then, all aspects of Plato's philosophy are motivated by the initial question concerning happiness as the ultimate end of the human being. In the *Theages*, Plato concludes that the theoretical knowledge leading to happiness is provided by philosophy and that the practical discipline, which provides the way of life conducive to happiness, is the kingly or political discipline (*al-ṣināʿa al-malikiyya*/*madaniyya*).[17] This concords with the focus of the *Attainment of Happiness*, which presents the way to happiness as the curriculum of philosophical sciences and the political means by which theoretical and moral virtues can be realized in a human society.

In sum, in the *Philosophy of Plato*, al-Fārābī claims that one part of Plato's dialogues may be read as gradually presenting the case for the identification of the human end with knowledge and virtue, while the other part establishes the way by which they may be attained. Since al-Fārābī does not really present any arguments why this should be the case, the *Philosophy of Plato* may perhaps be considered an argument by the authority of Plato for the identification of happiness with theoretical knowledge and moral virtue.

In contrast, al-Fārābī's *Philosophy of Aristotle*, in essence, constitutes an elaborate argument for the contemplative nature of happiness based on the human function. The presentation of the treatise follows the standard curricular order of Aristotelian works up to the physical works, but both the *Metaphysics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* are omitted at the end. This is surprising since al-Fārābī had access to complete Arabic translations of most of Aristotle's works, and his other writings attest to his knowledge of both of the omitted treatises. Thus, it is possible that the work as we have is either incomplete[18] or represents an early treatise written when al-Fārābī's knowledge of Aristotle was still incomplete. Yet, the work as a whole forms a coherent unit within which all of Aristotle's thought is viewed through the ethical prism of the question of happiness.

The beginning of the *Philosophy of Aristotle* is not formally related to any specific Aristotelian work, and it certainly bears no resemblance to the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[19] In any case, for al-Fārābī's Aristotle also, the starting point of his philosophical inquiries is the question of the human end: "Aristotle views

17 Ibid, 12–13.

18 Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 146–148, argues that the treatise is indeed complete.

19 Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 144, note 2, suggests Aristotle's lost exoteric works as an inspiration but there is no evidence that they were known in the Arabic tradition. Al-Fārābī's argument, however, bears some resemblance to the beginning of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1.1–2), which starts by the statement: "All human beings by

human perfection as Plato views it and more (*yarā kamāl al-insān mā yarāhu Aflāṭūn wa-akthar*). However, because the perfection of the human being is not self-evident (*bayyin min qibal nafsihi*) or easy to explain by a demonstration leading to certainty, he saw it fit to start from a position (*mawḍiʿ*) anterior to that from which Plato had started."[20] It is unclear what the phrases "more than Plato" and an "anterior position" mean here, and I will return to them later. While the difficulty of applying a demonstrative methodology to an ethical inquiry is reminiscent of Aristotle's position that ethics is an imprecise science, as we will see, al-Fārābī's *Philosophy Aristotle* will, in fact, claim that knowledge about human perfection can and must have a demonstrative basis.

The argument of al-Fārābī's Aristotle starts by identifying two classes of ends pursued by human beings. First, human beings by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ mundhu awwal al-amr*) seek and consider desirable and good (*khayrāt mutashawwaqa*) four kinds of things related to bodily well-being: 1) bodily health (*salāmat al-abdān*), 2) soundness of senses (*salāmat al-ḥawāss*), 3) soundness of discernment (*tamyīz*) to distinguish what leads to 1) and 2), and 4) soundness of the capacity to realize 1) and 2).[21] As a second class of ends, the human being also seeks to understand the causes behind sensible things and his observations of earth, heaven, and himself, which neither pertain nor contribute to the first class of human ends.[22] Even though such knowledge does not benefit bodily well-being, and serves no instrumental purpose for any other end either, the human being, nevertheless, finds pleasure in it and believes himself to be improved by attaining it.[23] Accordingly, al-Fārābī's Aristotle finds out that the knowledge desired by humans is divided into two kinds: practical knowledge that contributes to bodily well-being and theoretical knowledge that constitutes its own end and serves no instrumental purpose.[24]

Next, al-Fārābī's Aristotle observes that human beings do not employ even their senses only for what serves an instrumental purpose for their bodily well-being but also for other things, such as hearing enjoyable fables or viewing statues or beautiful sceneries.[25] After an interlude on practical and theoretical

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nature (*phusei*) desire knowledge." After this, Aristotle introduces a distinction between knowledge related to sensation with instrumental value and non-instrumental knowledge concerning the causes of sensible things.

20 Al-Fārābī, *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs*, 59 [translation cited with modifications from Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 71].

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid, 60.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid, 60–61.

25 Ibid, 61–62.

knowledge, al-Fārābī's Aristotle introduces the problem of ordering the different kinds of ends towards which all the human activities are directed. A human being cannot discover and pursue what is beneficial (*nāfiʿ*) to him unless he first knows the end for the sake of which he pursues it.[26] The four kinds of things related to bodily well-being introduced at the beginning undoubtedly constitute ends for human pursuits, but how should they be ordered with respect to each other. Is one of them the final end, while the others are instrumental?[27] Is, for example, the soundness of senses sought for the sake of bodily health or is bodily health perhaps the end for sensation? Yet, we sometimes employ both for the sake of the other so that they seem to be ordered in a circular manner. Al-Fārābī's Aristotle, therefore, introduces the possibility that neither of these is the final end:

> In addition, the awareness (*wuqūf*) of the human being that he finds himself by nature (*fuṭirat ʿalayhi*) to consider the health of the body and of the senses the end also requires an argument (*ḥujja*). For the human being is one of those existents that is not given its perfection at the outset. He is rather one of those given only the most deficient (*anqaṣ*) of its perfections, as well as the principles by which he may, either by nature or by will and volition, strive toward perfection. Perhaps the health of the body and senses given to him might be similar to what is given to him in childhood and youth. To confine himself to the health of the body and the soundness of the senses might be similar to confining himself to childhood and youth. The soundness of the body might be preparatory (*mūṭiʾa*) to another end. Moreover, perhaps the soundness of the senses is a principle that should be employed to strive toward the end for which the health of the body was made to prepare the human being.[28]

Now al-Fārābī's Aristotle finally arrives at the crux of the function argument, which he approaches by presenting a series of questions. If the human end is related to the soundness of the body and its capacities, is the most perfect realization of humanity (*al-akmal fī al-insāniyya*) and that which is most specific to the human being (*al-akhaṣṣ bi-l-insān*) to pursue such ends to the extent that is necessary for bodily health and the soundness of bodily faculties? Or should one instead pursue them to the greatest extent possible, perhaps by occupy-

26 Ibid, 63.
27 Ibid, 63–64.
28 Ibid, 64 [my translation].

ing oneself wholly with seeking sensible desires?[29] However, since the human being by nature also possesses a desire to understand the causes of sensible things, is this desire, then, also proper to the human being or something excessive that does not pertain to the human being at all?[30] Or is this what is truly human (*al-insānī fī al-ḥaqīqa*), since it is specific to the human being, whereas he shares the four ends related to bodily well-being with other animals?[31] Moreover, if the desire to know such things were not properly human, why would human beings be naturally endowed with the desire to know these things? Perhaps this knowledge is, then, human, or perhaps such knowledge makes him more perfect in his humanity.[32] Moreover, if the end of the human being is bodily and he, like other animals, can attain it by nature, why does he possess volition at all?[33]

All these questions only make sense with the function argument as their premise: there is a single activity that defines the human being as a species, and the final human end is determined in terms of this function. Even though al-Fārābī's presentation of Aristotle so far bears no resemblance to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is still ultimately motivated by the function argument contained in it. At this point, however, al-Fārābī transfers the discussion into a metaphysical sphere alien to the ethical inquiry of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. First, he identifies the question of the human end or perfection with that of the human substance (*jawhar*):[34] is it the health of the body and the senses that makes a human being a substance (*yatajawhar bihi*), even though he shares these with other animals, or is it only something that prepares him for that which makes him a substance?[35] Is it, then, rather the case that pursuing his desire to know the causes of things is what renders a human being a substance?

29 Ibid, 64–65.

30 Ibid, 65.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid, 65–66.

33 Ibid, 66–67.

34 In Aristotelian metaphysics, substance (*ousia*/*jawhar*) is primarily defined as that which exists by itself, such as a particular horse. Everything else is an accident (*sumbebēkos*/*ʿaraḍ*) that subsides in a substance, such as the blackness of that horse. In a secondary sense, substance refers to the substantial kind, the essence of the individual thing that makes it an individual of that kind, such as its horseness. Al-Fārābī here employs the term in the second sense to ask what the particular property that determines the human essence, that is, the *differentia* that defines the human species by distinguishing it from other animal species, is. This he identifies with Aristotle's original question concerning the human function.

35 Al-Fārābī, *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs*, 67.

So far, al-Fārābī makes Aristotle only pose questions without giving any answers. This is, then, what al-Fārābī must mean by his initial statement that human perfection for Aristotle is not self-evident and that he, therefore, started from an "anterior position" with respect to Plato: for al-Fārābī's Aristotle knowledge about the human end is not possible at this point of the philosophical inquiry. At the outset, it is only clear that the human being naturally pursues different kinds of ends, while it is not clear which one constitutes his final end. The problem of the final end is a metaphysical one that concerns the human substance: what is the human substance and what is its ultimate perfection?[36] However, knowledge about the human substance can only be acquired through an inquiry concerning the four kinds of Aristotelian causes explaining the existence of the human being.[37] Consequently, the question of the final human end becomes primarily one of physical and metaphysical inquiry:

> Aristotle explained that the function (*fiʿl*) that is the human function could only be known after one knows the purpose (*gharaḍ*) for the sake of which the human being is given a place in the world (*ruttiba al-insān fī al-ʿālam*) so that he is a part thereof, and through him the totality of the world is perfected. Similarly, it is not possible to know the function of the weaver or the shoemaker or any other part of the city without knowing the purpose for the sake of which each one of them is given a place (*ruttiba*) in the city and the measure of their utility. It is also impossible to know his purpose without knowing the purpose of the whole of which he is a part and his place (*rutba*) within the whole and among all the parts of the whole. Similarly, one does not know the substance of the finger and its function, or the substance and purpose of the hand, and its place among all the organs of the body without knowing beforehand the ultimate purpose of the entire body. For the purpose of every part of the whole is either a part of the total purpose of the whole or else useful and necessary for realizing the ultimate purpose of the whole. Thus, if the human being is a part of the world, and if we wish to understand his purpose, function, benefit, and place, first we have to know the purpose of the whole world so that it becomes clear what the purpose of the human being is and also that the human being has to be a part of the world because his purpose is necessary for realizing the ultimate purpose of the world. Therefore, it is necessary, if we wish to know the thing that we must strive for, that we

36 Ibid, 68.
37 Ibid.

> know the purpose of the human being and human perfection for the sake of which we ought to strive. Because of this, we must know the purpose of the totality of the world. We cannot know that without knowing all the parts of the world and their principles by knowing the *what*, *how*, *from what*, and *for what* of the whole world as well as of every one of the parts that make up the world.[38]

The passage invokes the examples of artisans and bodily organs given by Aristotle in his function argument to support the idea that the human being as a species also must possess its specific function. Otherwise, the argument of the passage diverts from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which on the contrary claims that metaphysics is irrelevant for ethical inquiry, even if Aristotle's starting point fits in well with his overall teleological outlook that ascribes end-directedness to nature in general.[39] Al-Fārābī claims that the human function, and, therefore, the human end, can only be known when the human being is positioned within the cosmos as a whole. Knowledge about the human function requires knowledge about the purpose of the cosmos and all of its parts, based on which it is possible to determine the purpose of the human being as its constituent part. This, in essence, means all theoretical knowledge: physical knowledge about the human being and the constitution of the material and celestial worlds, as well as metaphysical knowledge about the ultimate causes of all existents. One may, therefore, call al-Fārābī's argument a Platonized function argument.[40] That is, as for Aristotle, the question of happiness relates to the specifically human function, but, in contrast to Aristotle, the human function can only be determined based on theoretical knowledge about the human being and his place within the cosmos. As a result, al-Fārābī transfers the question of happiness from the sphere of practical philosophy to that of theoretical philosophy.

In what follows, al-Fārābī presents the entirety of Aristotle's philosophy as aiming to establish the human end. Al-Fārābī's Aristotle first concludes that the human being is composed of two parts, one existing by nature and another by volition (*irāda*), which necessitates two kinds of inquiries: physical science and human or voluntary science (*al-ʿilm al-insānī*/*irādī*).[41] Since Aristotle's

38 Ibid, 68–69 [my translation].

39 See, for example, Irwin, "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics," which interprets Aristotle's ethical starting point of the final good and the human function by means of his conception of the human form and essence being by nature directed towards an end.

40 See Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 132, for this interpretation.

41 Al-Fārābī, *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs*, 69–70.

aim is certain knowledge, a logical science investigating the structure of scientific knowledge and demonstrative and non-demonstrative arguments also becomes necessary.[42] Al-Fārābī then presents Aristotle's logical and physical works as a gradual progression of knowledge ending up in the discovery of the psychical principle that animates all living beings, and finally the intellect that is present only in the human being.[43] His investigation of the intellect reveals that it is the theoretical part of the intellect that constitutes the human substance and that its activity is the final end to which the ends of the rest of the human activities are subordinated.[44] Aristotle's philosophy is finally concluded in the investigation of voluntary human acts and supraphysical principles, the last of which introduces the science of metaphysics.[45] Thus, al-Fārābī's Aristotle has now resolved his original question concerning the final human end:

> It has become evident from the preceding that investigation (*faḥṣ*) and reflection (*naẓar*) of the intelligibles that cannot be utilized for the soundness of bodies and senses is necessary; and that an understanding of the causes of visible things, which the soul desired, is more human than that knowledge that was construed to be necessary knowledge. It has become evident that that necessary knowledge is for the sake of this understanding; and that the knowledge that we previously supposed as excellent is not, but is merely necessary for the human being to become a substance or for him to reach his final perfection. 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 acquiring the intellect for the sake of which the human being is made. The knowledge after that is investigated for two purposes: first, to render perfect the human intellect for the sake of which the human being is made and, second, to perfect our defective natural science for we do not possess (*lam yakun maʿanā*) the metaphysical science.[46]

Human beings desire by nature abstract theoretical knowledge because theoretical intellect constitutes the human essence or substance. The original problem concerning the ordering of human ends is, therefore, resolved: theoretical

42 Ibid, 70–71.
43 Ibid, 72–122.
44 Ibid, 122–126.
45 Ibid, 127–132.
46 Ibid, 133–134 [my translation].

thought is the function that defines the human being, and its excellence is the final and self-sufficient end to which all other ends are subordinated. Thus, the treatise forms a coherent whole from positing the initial problem to its resolution at the end. Obviously, this is hardly a plausible historical interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy, and we are still left with various unanswered questions concerning the treatise.[47] However, what mainly interests us is that al-Fārābī understands all of Aristotle's philosophy to have the function argument as its premise in the sense that the culmination of theoretical philosophy is to demonstrate what the human function and its perfection consist of. This has two consequences for al-Fārābī's philosophy in general. First, happiness is the central question that relates not only to ethical and political philosophy but also to various branches of theoretical philosophy. Second, the question of happiness is for al-Fārābī a theoretical question, while ethical and political philosophy are concerned with the means for its realization. As we will see in the next chapter, in al-Fārābī's case, this means that the content of happiness is, in the end, defined not in ethical but in psychological and metaphysical terms.

2 Avicenna

Avicenna does not make happiness the central focus of his philosophy in the way al-Fārābī does, let alone claim that it was the overall aim of Aristotle's philosophical investigations. In his two major philosophical compendiums, the *Healing* and the *Pointers and Reminders*, Avicenna introduces the subject of happiness only at the end of their final metaphysical parts. In these works, the discussion of happiness forms part of an overall presentation of his philosophical system. When Avicenna finally turns his attention to happiness, he has already established the nature of happiness in the preceding physical and metaphysical parts. In psychology, he has shown that the human essence is the theoretical intellect and determined that human perfection is identical with the perfection of theoretical thought. In metaphysics, he has defined the good as the object of desire and claimed that all existents desire the perfection of existence specific to their kind,[48] which makes the human good the perfection of existence of the human kind. These together constitute proof for identifying

47 These concern, in particular, the question of why, despite the ethical focus of the treatise, al-Fārābī omits the *Nicomachean Ethics* and only passingly mentions the *Metaphysics*. Does this mean that al-Fārābī at the time possessed neither treatise, which could perhaps explain the final puzzling claim that we do not possess a metaphysical science?

48 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, VIII.6, § 3, 284.

happiness as the human good with the perfection of theoretical thought. Avicenna's psychology and metaphysics, then, form a kind of function argument in the sense that metaphysics establishes the human good as the perfection specific to the human species and psychology shows what human perfection is. All of this is just another way of saying that Avicenna's concept of happiness is founded on his psychology and metaphysics. I will discuss the ways in which Avicenna derives the concept of happiness from theoretical philosophy in detail in the subsequent chapters. Before that, we should turn to a second argument based on the concept of pleasure, which both al-Fārābī and Avicenna present in support of the notion of contemplative happiness.

CHAPTER 3

Pleasure

Even though the classical and medieval concept of happiness is not primarily defined in subjective affective terms, the concepts of pleasure and happiness are intimately related. The classical philosophers since Plato discussed the degree to which pleasure should be involved in the good human life.[1] All the classical sources of Arabic philosophical ethics, Plato, Aristotle, Galen, and the Neoplatonists, represent an anti-hedonistic ethical stance to different extents. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the rejection of the pursuit of sensible pleasures as the human end is a persisting theme in Arabic philosophy. Yet, Plato, Aristotle, and even the Neoplatonists, nevertheless, incorporated pleasure into a happy life.

Plato and Aristotle offered two different physiological-psychological explanations of pleasure, both of which lived on in the Arabic tradition. The Platonic definition of pleasure as a restoration of the natural state, where the paradigmatic example is pleasure resulting from quenching one's thirst, was adopted, for example, by the philosophical group of the Brethren of Purity (9th–10th cent.; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ) in their 30th epistle devoted to pleasure.[2] Aristotle rejected the Platonic definition and gave his account in books VII and X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle defines pleasure as the supervenient effect of an "unimpeded activity," that is, the perfect activity of a psychological faculty, such as the perfect hearing of beautiful sounds.[3] The definition results in

1 For a general account of pleasure in classical philosophy, see van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*.

2 Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, III (30), 52–83. For the Platonic account of pleasure, which varies considerably between dialogues, see van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 7–43. The source for Arabic philosophers is probably the *Timaeus*, in which Plato defines pleasure as a return to the natural state (64c–d). In the Arabic translation of Galen's epitome of the *Timaeus* (Jālīnūs, *Galeni compendium Timaei*, 19), pleasant (*ladhīdh*) is defined as "a complete and instantaneous return to the natural state" (*al-rujūʿ jumlatan fī dafʿa ilā al-ḥāl al-ṭabīʿiyya*). For the Platonic theory of pleasure in Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925), see Adamson, "Platonic Pleasures in Epicurus and al-Rāzī." Adamson argues against Goodman's interpretation of al-Rāzī as an Epicurean hedonist, presented in Goodman, "The Epicurean Ethic of Muḥammad Ibn Zakariyâʾ Ar-Râzî"; Idem, "How Epicurean Was Rāzī?" For Miskawayh, who follows the Platonic account of pleasure in one treatise and the Aristotelian in another, see Adamson, "Miskawayh on Pleasure."

3 For the two accounts of pleasure in NE, VII and X, see van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 43–78. Although the definition of pleasure in book VII (1153a14–15) as the "unimpeded activ-

a hierarchy of pleasures conditional on the perfection of the activity: the more perfect the activity, the more intense the pleasure.[4] Since theoretical thought is the most perfect of all activities, unimpeded contemplation must result in the greatest possible pleasure. Thus, the highest instance of pleasure is that enjoyed by God contemplating Himself, where the activity and its subject and object are entirely perfect. In the *Metaphysics* (XII.7, 1072b13–26), Aristotle affirms this to be a pleasure that even humans may intermittently enjoy. As a result, even though pleasure is not the goal of theoretical activity, it just happens to be the case that the contemplative life is the most choice-worthy alternative also because it is the most pleasant life.[5]

The Arabic Neoplatonic sources both reinforce and modify the Aristotelian conception of pleasure. In his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as quoted in the *Happiness and Its Attainment*, Porphyry summarizes the Aristotelian position concerning the relationship between happiness and pleasure: "Pleasure is the completion (*nihāya*) of the natural, unimpeded (*allatī lā ʿā'iq fīhā*) activities of the living being so that it is connected (*maqrūna*) with happiness, existing as long as it exists (*mawjūda bi-wujūdihā*), but it is not itself happiness."[6] In the commentary on this passage, Porphyry emphasizes the Aristotelian point that even though pleasure occurs together with the human end, it is not itself the end: "Pleasure is like the completion in degree (*ka-l-nihāya fī al-martaba*) because it occurs last, but it is not perfect (*kāmila*), because we do not stop there, but we search for something further."[7] Beyond this, the Arabic Platonic and Neoplatonic sources introduce an eschatological aspect to the subject of pleasure. I will address eschatology in chapter 6. However, it should be stated here that the fact that for Plato and the Neoplatonists, in contrast to Aristotle, the rational soul is an immortal substance reinforces the hedonistic argument for contemplative happiness: pleasures related to the intellect are not better than sensible pleasures only because they are more intense but also

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ity of a disposition in its natural state (*energeia tēs kata phusin hekseōs … anempodiston*)" appears to identify pleasure with the activity itself, and hence amount to hedonism, in book X (1174b32–33), pleasure is identified as something additional that "perfects the activity … as a supervening perfection (*teleioi de tēn energeian … hōs epigignomenon ti telos*/*tammamat al-ladhdha al-fiʿl … ka-tamām mā yaṣīr fīhi min baʿd*)." Both van Riel and Shields, "The Metaphysics of Pleasure in Nicomachean Ethics X," interpret the two accounts as ultimately compatible, explaining the difference by the distinct emphasis required by the context.

4 See van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 58–61.

5 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 1177a22–27.

6 Ghorab, "Greek Commentators on Aristotle," 78.

7 Ibid.

because they are eternal. In the *Theology of Aristotle*, the Arabic paraphrase of Plotinus' *Enneads*, the sensible and true pleasures, related to the bodily faculties and the intellect, respectively, are contrasted, for example, in the following passage: "[a person immersed in the sensible world] does not realize that he has removed himself from the pleasure that is a true pleasure (*ladhdha ḥaqq*), since he has chosen the transient pleasure (*ladhdha dāthira*) that has no permanence or constancy."[8]

Al-Fārābī and Avicenna both adopt the Aristotelian definition of pleasure in a slightly modified form, as well as the consequent view of a hierarchy of pleasures. Thus, not only is the contemplative life not devoid of pleasure but it also happens to be the most pleasant kind of life. The Aristotelian claim that intellectual activity is the most pleasant human activity, therefore, represents an essential argument for identifying happiness with theoretical activity. Since both authors also think that the human soul, or at least the intellect as its highest part, is immortal, the eschatological aspect of the possibility of eternal contemplative bliss forms an essential part of their argument. Beyond this, their accounts of pleasure also constitute the first layer of the psychological content of happiness.

1 Al-Fārābī

Pleasure is arguably not as integral a part of al-Fārābī's account of happiness as it will be for Avicenna. Al-Fārābī discusses pleasure in four different contexts, anti-hedonism, character formation, God's self-contemplation, and the afterlife, but he does not clearly connect it with happiness. His account of pleasure is essentially Aristotelian: he defines pleasure in Aristotelian terms, and the second of the above perspectives draws on the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the third on the *Metaphysics*. Although pleasures for al-Fārābī form a hierarchy with contemplative pleasure at the peak, he does not explicitly employ it as an argument for contemplative happiness. Nevertheless, when the four different perspectives are combined, they certainly make a case for the superiority of the contemplative life even on hedonistic grounds.

8 Pseudo-Aristotle, "Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālīs," VII.49, 91. The passage renders *Enneads*, IV.8.8 but the term "true pleasure" is added by the Arabic editor. See van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 94–120, for Plotinus' account of pleasure, in particular, (112–114) the distinction, inspired by the Stoics, between pleasure as an affection (*pathos*) related to the irrational soul and joy (*khara*) or "pure pleasure" (*hēdonē katharē*) as a special kind of non-affective 'pleasure' of the intellect.

The general tone of al-Fārābī's ethics is not particularly ascetic, but, like practically all Arabic philosophers, he rejects the hedonistic identification of the human end with sensible pleasures. In his political works, he identifies appetitive pleasures as one class of false human ends that people mistakenly believe to constitute happiness. Within the classification of political formations loosely based on Plato's *Republic*, the ignorant cities (*al-madīna al-jāhiliyya*) are those whose inhabitants identify happiness with some false human end or another. Among them, the "city of depravity and baseness" (*madīnat al-khissa wa-l-suqūṭ*) is that where happiness is believed to consist of the enjoyment of all kinds of sensible pleasures (*al-ladhdha min al-maḥsūs*), in particular, the pleasures of food, drink, and sex, and fun and play (*al-hazl wa-l-laʿb*) are preferred as the highest activity.[9] In the *Political Governance*, al-Fārābī adds that among his contemporaries, the appetitive faculty, the psychological basis for the pleasures of the senses, is especially predominant among Bedouins and Turks, who are fond of women, in particular.[10] In addition, al-Fārābī's concise summary of the *Symposium*, known as *On Pleasure* (*Fī al-ladhdha*) in the *Philosophy of Plato*, introduces a distinction between the "true pleasure" (*al-ladhdha allatī hiya fī al-ḥaqīqa ladhdha*) and what is considered pleasure by most people and sought by the hedonists (*aṣḥāb al-ladhdha*).[11] Among these, only the first class forms part of the happy life. However, the Platonic duality of pleasures is not the basis on which al-Fārābī builds in his other works.

Elsewhere, al-Fārābī's starting point is a modified Aristotelian definition of pleasure. In the *Philosophy of Aristotle*, he defines the pleasant (*ladhīdh*) as "perceiving in the most excellent manner the most excellent object of perception (*mudrik afḍal idrāk idrākan afḍal*)."[12] This is not a literal rendition of the Aristotelian definition of pleasure as a supervenient effect of an unimpeded activity. However, it amounts to something similar reformulated in terms of perception: pleasure is the result of the perfect act of perception of the perfect object of perception.[13] As for Aristotle, pleasure is the result of a perfect activity, but it is also something additional to that activity insofar as it is defined in

9 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 15, §§16–17, 254–256.

10 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 103.

11 Al-Fārābī, *Alfarabius de Platonis philosophia*, 12. For the illusory and true pleasures in Plato, see van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 14–17. However, Plato mainly formulates the distinction in the *Republic* and the *Philebus* rather than the *Symposium*.

12 Al-Fārābī, *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs*, 61.

13 See also al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 46, for a similar definition in the context of the divine pleasure of self-contemplation.

terms of perception of that activity. This is the standard formulation of the Aristotelian definition of pleasure in the Arabic tradition, which will be adopted by Avicenna, among others.[14]

Al-Fārābī's definition of pleasure has two consequences for its ethical value. First, the fact that pleasure follows from perfect perception and a perfect object of perception means that pleasure in itself is a good. Second, since the intensity of pleasure is conditional on the excellence of its two constituent parts, the act of perception and its object, the higher pleasures are both more intense and more valuable than the lower ones. Al-Fārābī formulates this principle explicitly in the *Philosophy Aristotle*: "The more complete (*atqan*) his perception of the object, the more perfect (*akmal*) his pleasure. The more excellent and perfect in himself the human being who perceives, the more complete (*atamm*) and perfect his pleasure in perceiving it."[15] Consequently, pleasures form a hierarchy based on the perfection of the act of perception and the object that is perceived. Since intellection is the most perfect activity and the intelligible forms are the most perfect objects of perception, perfect intellection must also result in the greatest amount of pleasure. In the *Philosophy of Aristotle*, al-Fārābī states that causal knowledge about the world brings about pleasure that is directly proportional to the excellence of one's understanding and the objects of one's knowledge: "Yet, when the human being understands any of these things, he finds pleasure (*ladhdha*) and joy (*faraḥ*) in it. The firmer and nearer to certainty his knowledge, the greater his rejoicing (*surūr*) and his pleasure in what he understands (*yaqif ʿalayhi*). The more perfect in its existence (*akmal wujūdan*) the object he perceives and understands, the greater his joy and pleasure in his perceiving it."[16]

This principle of a hierarchy of pleasures is elaborated further in the *Exhortation to the Way to Happiness*, where it provides a more secure basis for the refutation of hedonism:

> We say that it is easy for us to perform the bad (*qabīḥ*) action because of the pleasure we experience in doing it, whereas when we acquire the good (*jamīl*), it seems to us to bring us pain (*adhan*). This is because we assume that pleasure is the goal (*ghāya*) of every action, so we seek this alone

14 In the case of Miskawayh, Adamson, "Miskawayh on Pleasure," 211, suggests that the introduction of the additional element of perception to the Aristotelian definition of pleasure is a residue of the Platonic account in which pleasure results from the perception of the restoration of a natural state.

15 Al-Fārābī, *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*, 61.

16 Ibid, 60.

> in everything we do. Now, pleasures include some that result from sense perception, like the pleasures consequential to something heard, seen, touched, or smelled, and others that are consequential to understanding (*maʃhūm*), like the pleasures resulting from leadership, power (*tasalluṭ*), domination, and knowledge. We always seek (*nataḥarrā*) more the pleasures consequential to what is sensed, and we suppose that they are the goal of life and that the perfection of life (*kamāl al-ʿaysh*) comes from our indulging in them from the beginning of our existence. Moreover, these pleasures include those that are a means to necessary things, whether for us or for the world. Nourishment, whereby we stay alive, is necessary for us, whereas reproduction is necessary for the world. Because of this, we suppose that they are the goal of life, and we suppose that they are happiness. In addition to this, the objects of our senses constitute what is best known to us since we perceive them most strongly and can attain them most readily. Through investigation and reflection, however, it has become clear that they divert us from most good things (*khayrāt*) and withhold us from the greatest means of attaining happiness. For when we see that a sensible pleasure makes us relinquish a good action, we are inclined to eschew the noble, whereas when a human being becomes strong enough to forsake these pleasures or partake of them in an appropriate measure (*bi-qadr*), he has approached the praiseworthy character traits (*akhlāq*).[17]

The context of the passage is pleasure and pain as a means to character formation, to which I will return in the context of virtue. What concerns us now is the doctrine of pleasure itself and its relation to happiness. First, the Aristotelian theory of pleasure provides al-Fārābī an argument against any simple form of hedonism, understood in the sense of equating the highest human end with the pursuit of immediate sensible pleasures. Al-Fārābī agrees that it is natural for us to equate the human end with sensible pleasures. This is because these are the most familiar, immediate, and intense pleasures that we know and because they result from activities that are necessary for our survival, such as eating and sex. Upon rational reflection, however, we understand that sensible pleasures not only do not constitute the human end but also hinder its attainment. This is because the pursuit of sensible pleasures often prevents us from pursuing the actions that are genuinely virtuous or good and contribute to our attaining the real human end.

17 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, §13, 67–68 [translation cited with modifications from McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 113].

Second, the passage introduces a novel classification of pleasures into sensible (*maḥsūs*) and conceptual (*maʃhūm*). This classification is based on the Platonic tripartition of the soul, where the first class is related to pleasures of the appetitive soul and the second to the pleasures resulting from the irascible and rational parts of the soul. Al-Fārābī does not explicitly say that pleasures related to the motivational ends of the irascible and rational parts, such as power and knowledge, are better or more intense than bodily pleasures. However, this should follow from his definition of pleasure, in which a higher activity produces more pleasure. Therefore, our initial supposition that sense pleasures are the highest kind of pleasure is mistaken and is due to the fact that we are not yet familiar with the higher forms of pleasure.

To support this, al-Fārābī introduces a kind of hedonistic calculus where each action is evaluated based on the pain and pleasure it will cause in the long run.[18] The pleasure and pain brought about by human actions are either immediate (*ʿājila*) or postponed (*ʿāqiba*). While sensible pleasures are usually immediate, their immoderate pursuit may later result in pain or distress that overweighs the initial pleasure. Similarly, while virtuous actions may initially be painful, they may later bring about greater pleasure than the initial pain. Again, al-Fārābī's point is mainly related to pain and pleasure in character formation, and by postponed pain, he in part means religious sanctions (*sharīʿa*) aiming for the instilment of virtue in people. However, this seems to be also a more general point concerning the nature of sensible and non-sensible pleasures. Since the former are immediate, we are inclined to pursue them. However, by rational reflection, we realize that by eschewing them for the sake of higher activities, we may ultimately derive more pleasure. This is true, in any case, when the eschatological aspect is introduced: virtuous actions will ultimately result in eternal pleasure and the pursuit of sensible pleasures, for al-Fārābī at least, in either non-existence or eternal pain.

Al-Fārābī's hierarchy of pleasures is completed by the parallel passages of the *Virtuous City* and the *Political Governance*, drawing on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, XII.7, which discuss the divine pleasure of God intellecting His essence:

> Now, since pleasure, happiness, delight, and joy result all the more by perceiving the most beautiful by means of the most accurate perception, and since the First is the most beautiful absolutely and the most splendid and most adorned and His perception of Himself is the most accurate perception and perfect knowledge, the pleasure that the First enjoys is a pleasure

18 Ibid, § 14, 68–69.

> the real nature of which we cannot understand and the massive extent of which we cannot grasp but by reference and in relation to the minuscule pleasure we have when we suppose that we have perceived what we take to be most beautiful and splendid by means of some accurate act of perception, whether that be through sense perception, imagination, or through intellectual knowledge (*ʿilm ʿaqlī*). Since in this state, we experience a pleasure that we suppose surpasses all others in extent, and we experience the ultimate degree of joy in ourselves as a result, then to compare His knowledge and perception of what is most perfect and beautiful to our knowledge and perception of what is most perfect and most splendid, is to compare His delight, pleasure, and joy in Himself to the pleasure, delight, and joy we have in ourselves. But since there is no way to relate our perception to His perception, nor our knowledge to His knowledge—though if there is some relation, it is minuscule—there is, then, no way to relate our pleasure, delight, and joy in ourselves to that of the First. Even if there is some relation, it is minuscule; for how could there be any relation between what is a small part and something the extent of which is infinite in time, between something deficient in so many ways and something of the utmost perfection?[19]

Since God's self-contemplation involves both the perfect act and the perfect object of perception, that is, perfect intellection of the divine essence, the intensity of the resulting pleasure must be the greatest possible. Humans may experience a minuscule variant of this pleasure in the most perfect act of perception possible for the human being. Although al-Fārābī does not say it here, the greatest possible human pleasure should thereby result from intellection, which when brought to perfection may mirror at least slightly God's contemplative activity. The ultimate pinnacle of human pleasure is the one that the perfected human souls experience in al-Fārābī's philosophical paradise, once they come to contemplate their own perfected intellectual essence.[20]

When the distinct parts of al-Fārābī's account of pleasure are combined, as for Aristotle, the pleasure involved in the contemplative life emerges as an important argument for identifying happiness with intellectual activity. The consequence of the definition of pleasure in terms of the excellence of percep-

19 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 30, 46–47 [translation cited with modifications from McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 90]. For a parallel passage, see al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 1, § 14, 84–86.

20 For contemplative pleasure in the afterlife, see chapter 6.

tion is that intellectual pleasure must be the most intense of all pleasures, given that intellection is the most perfect kind of perception. Our initial impression that sensible pleasures are the strongest pleasures, therefore, must be mistaken. However, even if Aristotle also concedes that the intellect might be immortal, for al-Fārābī, the argument of pleasure is more integrally connected with pleasure in the afterlife. It is ultimately the fact that the theoretical life will lead to eternal contemplative bliss that tilts the hedonistic calculus from sensible to intellectual pleasures. Al-Fārābī's hedonistic argument remains somewhat implicit in his writings, and his account of the hierarchy of pleasures, in general, is not fully developed. Avicenna elaborates on both of these aspects to present a more systematic account of pleasure.

2 Avicenna

Avicenna discusses pleasure in several works, most notably in the final metaphysical parts of his two major philosophical summas, the *Healing* and the *Pointers and Reminders*, as well as in the *Beginning and Return*. These constitute three parallel discussions formulated in very similar terms, in which Avicenna approaches pleasure from two main perspectives: divine self-contemplation and happiness. Whether influenced by al-Fārābī or the Aristotelian tradition in general, Avicenna also builds a hierarchy of pleasures on an Aristotelian definition of pleasure. In contrast to al-Fārābī, however, Avicenna in all three works formulates his discussions of happiness explicitly in terms of pleasure, which makes the relationship between pleasure and happiness much more intimate than was the case for al-Fārābī. Consequently, the superiority of intellectual pleasure becomes Avicenna's most important explicit argument for contemplative happiness, which at the same time constitutes Avicenna's most elaborate argument against simplistic hedonism identifying happiness with sensible pleasures. In further contrast, Avicenna introduces all of his discussions of happiness with the question of the afterlife, which means that his hedonistic argument for intellectual happiness is at the outset founded on the fact that the soul's intellectual pleasure is not only more intense but eternal. Nevertheless, as the following discussion will show, Avicenna's intention is not to address happiness only as an otherworldly state but to present an argument that shows that contemplative happiness is the most pleasant state in both lives.

In the *Pointers and Reminders*, Avicenna begins the eight *namaṭ* concerned with happiness and pleasure with a rhetorical argument against identifying pleasure and happiness with immediate sensible pleasures:

The common people have assumed that the strong and high pleasures are the sensible pleasures, while other pleasures are weak, all of them unreal imaginations (*khayālāt ghayr ḥaqīqiyya*). It may be possible to remind (*yunabbih*) those among these people who possess discernment (*tamyīz*): are not the most pleasant things in this class that you describe sex, food, and other things of this kind? Still, you know that someone capable of a victory (*ghalaba*), even in an insignificant thing, such as chess or backgammon, may refuse the food or sex that is offered to him for the sake of the estimative (*wahmiyya*) pleasure of the victory. Sometimes food and sex are offered to someone seeking temperance and control over the health of his body (*al-riyāsa maʿa ṣiḥḥat jismihi*) accompanied by modesty (*fī ṣuḥbat ḥashmihi*). Yet, he withdraws his hand from both in order to guard his modesty. Therefore, in this case, the guarding of modesty is inevitably more choice-worthy (*āthar*) and pleasant than sex and food. If generous (*kirām*) people are presented with the opportunity to take pleasure in giving to others what they need, they choose it over taking pleasure in the competing object of an animal desire (*bi-mushtahā ḥayawānī mutanāfis fīhi*), and in doing this, choose others over themselves, hastening to offer to them what they need. Similarly, the magnanimous (*kabīr al-nafs*)[21] think little of hunger and thirst when protecting their honor, and despise fear of death and sudden destruction in the face of the battle of the combatants. Many times, they rush towards danger for the sake of the pleasure they anticipate from praise, even after their death, as if the praise could reach them once they are dead. It has become clear, then, that the internal (*bāṭina*) pleasures are higher than the sensible pleasures. Moreover, this does not only concern the rational beings (*ʿāqil*) but also the speechless (*ʿujm*) animals, for some of the hunting dogs hunt even when hungry and preserve their prey for their master and even carry it to him. The nursing animals choose their offspring over themselves and often expose themselves to greater dangers in protecting them than they would to protect themselves. If the internal pleasures are greater than the external, even when not intellectual, what do you presume of the intellec-

21 For the virtue of magnanimity (*megalopsukhia*/*kibar al-nafs*), or "greatness of soul," see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.3, 1123a35–1125a35. Aristotle defines a magnanimous person as "one who thinks himself being worthy of great things and, in reality, is so" (*ho megalōn hauton aksiōn aksios ōn*/*alladhī yuʾahhil nafsahu li-l-umūr al-ʿaẓīma wa-huwa li-dhālika ahl*) and states his primary concern to be with honor. For a recent study of the adoption of this virtue in the Islamic world, see Vasalou, *Virtues of Greatness in the Arabic Tradition*.

> tual pleasures? Therefore, we must not listen to someone who says: 'If we reach a state in which we do not eat, drink, or have sex, what kind of happiness will that be for us?' He who says this must be told in answer: 'O you miserable person! Perhaps the state of the angels and what is above them is more pleasant, delightful, and enjoyable (*anʿam*) than the state of the animals. Indeed, how could there even be a relation between the two so that they might be compared?'[22]

The rhetorical question at the end of the passage is clearly a reprimand to those who consider Avicenna's philosophical paradise of the unembodied soul's eternal contemplative bliss to be no match for the very physical pleasures that the Quran promises in paradise. Still, even if Avicenna's focus is on the afterlife, the point of the argument is directed against simple forms of hedonism in general. It is a rhetorical argument in the sense that Avicenna does not yet base it on a definition of pleasure, which he will introduce shortly after. Instead, he appeals to the everyday observations that we have of pleasure as motivating the actions of human beings and even non-human animals. The point of the argument is that while we often believe sensible pleasures to be the highest, and even only, kind of pleasure, our experiences show that both human beings and animals often choose other things over sensible pleasures. What is remarkable about this passage is that Avicenna makes pleasure the motivating cause for the pursuit of the non-sensible ends of victory, virtue, altruism, and honor. It is not only the case that humans often choose other ends over sensible pleasures because they consider them more valuable but they also believe that they will result in more pleasure. The crux of the argument, then, practically identifies the human end with pleasure to the extent of making Avicenna a hedonist: people are not mistaken in believing that the ultimate end of human activities is pleasure but only in identifying which activity results in the most intense pleasure.

The argument implicitly assumes a hierarchy of psychical activities based on Avicenna's faculty psychology, and thereby introduces the actual argument for contemplative happiness. In all three works, this argument employs an Aristotelian definition of pleasure, for which Avicenna offers his perhaps most elaborate formulation in the *Beginning and Return*:

> Pleasure results from perception, not the attainment of perfection (*ḥuṣūl al-kamāl*), for pleasure is a perception of what is suitable (*idrāk al-mulāʾim*). Sensible pleasure is to perceive what is suitable among the sen-

22 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.1–2, 7–10 [my translation].

> sibles (*idrāk al-mulāʾim al-ḥissī*), and it must occur suddenly. This is because the senses sense what is different (*yuḥiss bi-l-khilāf*) and do not sense what is similar to the sensing organ in quality. When the sensible quality is established (*istaqarra*) in the sensing organ, its arrival at the organ is no longer sensed. Therefore, sensation occurs only before the quality is established, and sensible pleasure is to sense a sudden occurrence of what is suitable. As for the sensible suitable things that arrive, exist, and are not sensed, there occurs no pleasure. Similarly, for domination (*ghalaba*), when it is present (*waqaʿat*) but not sensed, no pleasure occurs. Those who believed that sensible pleasure is a return to the natural state (*al-rujūʿ ilā al-ḥāl al-ṭabīʿiyya*) were mistaken. Once it is attained, there occurs no pleasure. For this return is not pleasure but the cause in some things for bringing about pleasure. Pleasure is a perception of that return insofar as the return is suitable. In sum, sensible pleasure is a sensation of what is suitable, and similarly for every pleasure. The suitable for each thing is the good that is proper to it (*al-khayr alladhī yakhuṣṣuhu*), and the good that is proper to the thing is its perfection (*kamāluhu*), which is its actuality, not its potentiality.[23]

First, towards the end of the passage, Avicenna explicitly refutes the definition of pleasure as a return to the natural state, perhaps against some of his contemporaries advocating the Platonic theory. It is erroneous because the return is not the cause of pleasure as such but only applies to a subset of sensible pleasures, such as the paradigmatic case of quenching thirst. Second, although Avicenna formulates his definition of pleasure in slightly different terms, it comes very close to the one presented by al-Fārābī. As for al-Fārābī, pleasure is the function of two variables: an act of perception and an object of perception. As regards the latter, a given psychical activity results in pleasure when the perceived object is "suitable" for the psychical faculty in question.[24] At the end of the passage, and more elaborately in the two other works, Avicenna specifies further that suitability means perfection or actuality of a particular psychical activity.[25] As for the former component, the fact that perception is a necessary

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23 Avicenna, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.14, 110 [my translation]. See also similar definitions of pleasure in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 4, 348; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.3, 11.

24 The definition is repeated in a previous passage in the context of divine pleasure (*al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, I.12, 18): "For pleasure is nothing but the perception of the suitable insofar as it is suitable" (*inna al-ladhdha laysat illā idrāk al-mulāʾim min jihat mā huwa mulāʾim*).

25 In *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 4, 348, Avicenna equates pleasure to the good

condition for pleasure means that even when a psychical activity is perfected but, for some reason, it is not perceived, no pleasure will come about. This is an essential qualification because it will provide Avicenna with the theoretical grounds for explaining why we do not always seem to experience contemplative pleasure. The theory also explains in physiological-psychological terms the immediacy of sensible pleasures: the sense organs perceive sensible qualities, such as colors, sounds, or tastes, as momentary transformations in a sense organ once it receives a sensible quality. Therefore, the resulting pleasure is instantaneous and quick to subside once the perception of the sensible quality subsides. In addition, if a sense organ receives identical sensible qualities for a prolonged period, it no longer perceives them as intensely, and, therefore, the resulting pleasure will also be feebler. This provides a causal explanation for the distinction between the 'quick' pleasures caused by physical sensations and the 'slow' pleasures resulting from inner faculties and the intellect. This is relevant for Avicenna's argument since it explains why we tend to prefer the external to the internal pleasures.

As for Aristotle and al-Fārābī, the first consequence of this theory is that pleasure in itself is a good. Pleasure follows when we perceive the optimal functioning of some psychical activity or another, and, therefore, it confirms the correctness of that activity. For each psychical faculty, there are proper goods or perfections that result in pleasure once the attainment of that perfection is perceived. Thus, for example, the pleasure of the appetitive power (*shahwa*) results from perceiving a suitable sensible quality (*kayfiyya maḥsūsa*) of one of the five senses, such as due to having sex or enjoying delicious food. The pleasure of the irascible faculty results from victory (*ẓafar*), domination (*ghalaba*), or revenge, the pleasure of estimation (*wahm*) from hope (*rajā'*), and the pleasure of memory from agreeable recollections.[26] The pleasure of the theoretical intellect is conditional on the perception of truth and that of the practical intellect on good (*jamīl*) actions, or perhaps also on receiving praise and esteem (*karāma*).[27]

(*khayr*) of a particular life activity and states that pleasure consists of an "awareness" (*shu'ūr*) of the agreeability (*muwāfaqa*) or suitability (*mulā'ama*) of the state attained. Next, he identifies the agreeable with the attainment of "perfection in act" (*al-kamāl bi-l-fi'l*) of a particular life function. In *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.3, 11, he defines pleasure as "perception and attainment (*nayl*) of what for the perceiver (*'inda al-mudrik*) is a perfection and a good insofar as it is such."

26 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, VIII.7, § 18, 298; IX.7, § 4, 348; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, IX.7, 14; Idem, *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād*, I.12, 18. For the pleasures related to estimation, see also Black, "Estimation (Wahm) in Avicenna," 25–27.

27 These last two candidates are suggested in *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, IX.7, 14.

The second consequence is that the intensity of pleasure is directly proportional to the excellence of both the act of perception and its object.[28] Avicenna's discussion of pleasure and happiness occurs in all three works towards the end of their final metaphysical parts. At this point, he has already established in the psychological part that the psychical faculties form an ascending hierarchy of excellence and perfection from the simple life activities of nourishment and reproduction, present even in plants, up to rational thought, present only in the human being. In the present context, Avicenna only has to spell out what consequences this has for pleasure: if a psychological faculty is more perfect and complete (*atamm*) in its activity, and more enduring (*adwam*) and accessible (*awṣal ilayhi*/*aḥṣal lahu*) for its subject, and if its perception is also stronger (*ashadd idrākan*), then the resulting pleasure will also be more intense (*ablagh*) and abundant (*awfar*).[29] Intellectual apprehension of an intelligible form, that is, a universal concept, is stronger (*aqwā*) and more enduring than sense perception of a sensible form for two reasons. First, the intelligible object is unchanging and universal. Second, in the intellectual act of perception, the intellect perceives the intelligible essence (*kunh*) in itself and "unites with it becoming in some manner (*ʿalā wajh mā*) identical with it."[30] Since both of the components involved are qualitatively higher than in sense perception, the pleasure resulting from pure intellection has to be greater, to the extent that "there is no relation (*nisba*) between the two."[31]

Again, the hierarchy of pleasures culminates in the pure pleasure experienced by God, or the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*) in Avicennan terminology, contemplating His perfect intelligible essence in a perfect act of intellection:

> For the Necessary Existent, who is ultimate perfection, beauty, and splendor, and who intellects Himself in that ultimate perfection, splendor, and beauty by a complete act of intellection (*bi-tamām al-taʿaqqul*) in which the intellectual apprehender and the intelligible are as if one in reality (*ʿalā annahumā wāḥid bi-l-ḥaqīqa*), His self (*dhātuhu*) is for His self the greatest lover and beloved, and the greatest subject and object of pleasure

28 See, for example, Ibid, VIII.9, 25: "It is well-known that the relation (*nisba*) of one pleasure to another is the relation of an object of perception to an object of perception (*nisbat al-mudrak ilā al-mudrak*) and of perception to perception."

29 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 5, 348.

30 Ibid, VIII.7, § 18, 298; IX.7, § 4, 350–351; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, I.12, 18; III.14, 112; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.9, 24–25.

31 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, VIII.7, § 18, 298.

> (*lādhdh*/*multadhdh*) … For the First is the best perceiver by the best act of perception of the best object of perception, and, hence, He is the best subject and object of pleasure. This is something with which nothing can be compared (*lā qiyās ilayhi*). We do not have other names for these concepts (*maʿānin*), and he who finds them repugnant can make use of others.[32]

So far, all of this appears to be merely a more elaborate and systematic presentation of the argument that was already present in al-Fārābī, even if somewhat implicitly. In contrast to both Aristotle and al-Fārābī, however, Avicenna goes on to show that his theory of pleasure also accounts for the intuitive implausibility of the superiority of intellectual pleasure. That is, even for those of us familiar with intellectual pleasures, the claim that intellectual pleasures are always more intense than physical pleasures does not seem to be supported by experience. Avicenna's first explanation for this was given already by al-Fārābī implicitly. However, Avicenna states it in much clearer terms: people tend to prefer physical to intellectual pleasures because they have never experienced the latter. If someone has never experienced a particular pleasure, he cannot know what that pleasure feels like nor develop a desire for it, even if he knows theoretically that a psychical perfection and the resulting pleasure must exist for this activity.[33] The position of most human beings with respect to intellectual pleasures is, then, like that of the impotent towards sexual pleasures, or of the deaf towards the pleasures of music and the blind towards visual beauty.[34] All of them know theoretically that such pleasures must exist, but since they have never experienced them, they cannot understand what they feel like and, therefore, do not develop a desire for them. Consequently, Avicenna concludes rather brutally, the rational person should not presume that "every pleasure is like the pleasure that donkey has in its belly and its thighs."[35]

Avicenna's second point is novel and takes advantage of the fact that pleasure is conditional not only on the presence of the perfection of a psychical activity itself but also on that it must be correctly perceived as such by the subject who experiences it. The perfection of a psychical activity, or even its perception by the corresponding faculty, does not necessarily result in the feeling of pleasure if some impediment (*māniʿ*) or distraction (*shughl*) obstructs

32 Ibid, VIII.7, § 16, 297 [translation by Marmura with modifications]. See also *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, I.12, 18.

33 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 6, 349; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.8, 19–20.

34 Ibid.

35 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 7, 349.

its accurate perception.[36] In such a case, a psychical faculty may even desire and take pleasure in what is contrary to its perfection. Avicenna employs an example from among the physical pleasures: a sick person does not take pleasure in sweets.[37] This is not due to a deficiency in the sensible object or the psychical activity, since sweetness is a suitable sensible quality for the faculty of taste, and tasting sweet things, therefore, represents a perfect activity for that faculty. Instead, it is due to a deficiency in the act of perception: the disease prevents the tasting faculty from accurately perceiving the suitability of the sensible quality and, therefore, obstructs the pleasure that should normally result. Again, this is true not only of human beings but of all animals: an animal, due to some impediment, may sometimes have no desire for the food that it usually enjoys.[38]

The same principle applies to intellectual pleasure: perfect theoretical thought does not necessarily result in pleasure if there is something that obstructs us from correctly perceiving it as the perfection of the theoretical faculty. As it happens, the human soul's embodied state presents a constant impediment for us to be adequately aware of our intellectual perfection. The body both distracts the rational soul from desiring its proper perfection in the first place and, if the intellectual faculty were to attain its perfection, from correctly perceiving it as perfection and, therefore, experiencing the corresponding pleasure.[39] In this world, the human rational soul is, then, like a sick animal whose appetite for what is good for it has been distorted by a disease. Once the obstruction of the body disappears, however, the human soul will experience unimaginable pleasure:

> If the intellectual faculty had brought the soul to a degree a perfection by which it is enabled, when it separates from the body, to achieve that complete perfection that is appropriate for it to attain, it would be like a benumbed person who is made to taste the most delicious food and exposed to the most appetizing state but who does not feel this, but who then has the numbness removed, experiencing as a result momentous pleasure all at once. This pleasure would not be of the same genus as sensible and animal pleasure at all, but a pleasure that is similar to the good

36 Ibid, VIII.7, §17, 298; IX.7, §8–9, 349–350; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.5–6, 17–18; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.14, 111.

37 Ibid.

38 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.10–11, 26–28.

39 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, VIII.7, §17, 298; IX.7, §14, 351; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.14, 111.

> state (*al-ḥāl al-ṭayyiba*) that belongs to the pure and living (celestial) substances. It is more sublime and noble than every other pleasure.[40]

Nevertheless, we may still experience intellectual pleasures to a limited extent even in this life. Since the body is what obstructs intellectual pleasure, the extent of intellectual pleasure is conditional mainly on the human being's ability to free his desires from being directed towards physical pleasures.[41] To support his argument, Avicenna suggests that if you were contemplating a difficult problem (*ta'ammalta ʿawīṣan*), and you were suddenly distracted with a physical desire, you would choose to continue with your reflections, if you are of "noble soul" (*karīm al-nafs*).[42] Avicenna, however, portrays the extent of contemplative pleasure that is possible for the embodied soul in strikingly different terms in different works. In the *Beginning and Return*, Avicenna explains that even if we may gain some such pleasure, it is weak due to the influence of the body.[43] In the *Healing*, he similarly states that when freed from our bodily desires, we may experience some feeble image of the ultimate contemplative pleasure when we solve theoretical problems. However, its relation to the true contemplative pleasure is still far even from the relation that the pleasure of smelling delicious food has to the pleasure of tasting it.[44] In the *Pointers and Reminders*, however, Avicenna claims that the human being may attain a "considerable degree" (*ḥaẓẓan wāfiran*) of intellectual pleasures to the extent that it may "overpower him and distract him from everything else."[45] Since this latter passage concerns the alleged mystical aspects of Avicenna's thought, I will return to it in chapter 5.

In sum, Avicenna constructs a systematic hedonistic argument for identifying happiness with theoretical activity based on the claim that intellectual pleasure is the most intense and most enduring kind of pleasure, even if most of us only rarely experience it in this world. Since Avicenna introduces all of his discussions of happiness with the question of the afterlife, his primary motivation is clearly to show that the contemplative life of the unembodied soul is the most pleasant, and thereby to support his philosophical interpretation of paradise against a literal interpretation of the Quran. Even taking this into account, Avicenna still comes very close to being a hedonist: happiness is pleasure, and

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40 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, §17, 352 [translation by Marmura with modifications].

41 Ibid, IX.7, §14–15, 351; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, vol. 4, VIII.15, 33.

42 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, §15, 351.

43 Avicenna, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.14, 112–113.

44 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, §14, 351.

45 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.15, 33.

because the highest and most enduring pleasure is intellectual pleasure, happiness is intellectual pleasure. However, Avicenna is not a hedonist because the human good or happiness and the pleasure that results from it remain distinct. In the *Pointers and Reminders*, Avicenna states explicitly that the truth is the only intrinsically valuable human end, and even contemplative pleasure may turn out to be a distraction if it is sought for its own sake.[46] Nevertheless, the result may appear slightly paradoxical. Avicenna's main argument for identifying the human end with a specific activity is the amount of pleasure that it produces but yet he insists that the end itself is not pleasure. However, this is only the case when Avicenna's discussions of pleasure and happiness are taken out of the context of his overall philosophy. As it turns out, for Avicenna, as for al-Fārābī, the contemplative nature of happiness is determined by objective theoretical grounds, while pleasure is something that follows as a consequence.

46 Ibid, IX.18, 94–95.

CHAPTER 4

Theoretical Perfection

So far, we have seen that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* provides the basis, first, for a preliminary definition of happiness as the final end and, second, the arguments for contemplative happiness based on the human function and pleasure. However, neither al-Fārābī nor Avicenna adopts his definition of happiness with regard to its content directly from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. While Aristotle defines happiness in ethical terms as virtuous psychical activity,[1] al-Fārābī and Avicenna define it in psychological terms as the perfection of the theoretical intellect. The question of happiness is not entirely independent of psychology for Aristotle either: the function argument and the definition of happiness as a certain kind of psychical activity clearly must ultimately be founded on knowledge about human nature, that is, psychological knowledge.[2] Moreover, in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle does end up identifying happiness with contemplative activity. Nevertheless, it still seems to be the case that for Aristotle, the human good is primarily an ethical question to be formulated in ethical terms, whereas for al-Fārābī and Avicenna, it is transferred to the sphere of theoretical philosophy.

This is a logical consequence of the Platonized function argument discussed above: if knowledge about the final human end requires identifying the specifically human function, and identifying the human function is based on theoretical knowledge about the human being and his place in the cosmos, then it should be the task of theoretical rather than practical philosophy to find out what the final human end is. In al-Fārābī's *Philosophy of Aristotle*, as we have seen, and similarly in the *Attainment of Happiness*,[3] it is through psychological and cosmological inquiry that the human end is first discovered, once it is found out that the existence of an intellectual principle is necessary to account for the nature of the reality. Although al-Fārābī in the *Enu-*

1 See, for example, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 1102a5–6, where Aristotle defines happiness as "a certain activity of the soul in conformity with complete virtue" (*psukhēs energeia tis kat' aretēn teleian*/*fi'l li-l-nafs bi-ḥasab al-faḍīla al-kāmila*).

2 See *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 1102a18–1103a4, for Aristotle's emphasis that a "politician" (*politikos*/*ṣāḥib tadbīr al-mudun*) must be familiar with the soul, just as a physician must be familiar with the body, followed by a general sketch of the human psychical faculties. The discussion of intellectual virtues in chapter VI also involves faculty psychology.

3 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-sa'āda*, § 15, 60–61.

meration of Sciences does assign the question of happiness to the "human science" or political philosophy,[4] in the *Virtuous City* he introduces the definition of happiness in the psychological section, following cosmology and preceding political philosophy. Political philosophy, then, emerges more as a follow-up of theoretical philosophy where the focus of the inquiry is on the ethical and political means by which happiness is attained. In a somewhat similar vein, Avicenna makes the question of happiness into an epilogue of metaphysics, which he states to be the "fruit" (*thamara*) of physics and metaphysics.[5]

It is also possible to approach the transition from ethics to theoretical philosophy from a more philological point of view. From this perspective, the term perfection (*kamāl*/*istikmāl*), which both al-Fārābī and Avicenna employ to define happiness, is of primary importance. As we have seen, al-Fārābī and Avicenna use the term perfection as a synonym for good or end in their preliminary definitions of happiness. In these contexts, its meaning is non-theoretical in the sense that it does not yet carry any psychological or metaphysical meaning. This use of the term is supported by the Arabic translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where *kamāl* renders *teleiotēs* in the sense of finality, attributed to the kind of end that qualifies as happiness. However, the fact that the term also has a technical meaning in psychology and metaphysics facilitates transforming the question of happiness into a purely theoretical one. Since many Arabic philosophers read the *Nicomachean Ethics* together with Porphyry's commentary, this transition was perhaps influenced by Porphyry's Platonizing reading of the work. Porphyry, as quoted in the *Happiness and Its Attainment*, defines happiness as follows:

> Happiness consists of the human being perfecting his form (*istikmāl al-insān ṣūratahu*). The perfection (*kamāl*) of the human being, insofar as he is a human being, lies in his voluntary actions, while his perfection, insofar as he is an angel and an intellect, lies in contemplation (*naẓar*). Each of these perfections is complete (*tāmm*) in each context (*mawḍūʿ*), but when one is compared to the other, human perfection (*al-kamāl al-insī*) is deficient.[6]

4 Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*, v, 64.

5 In Avicenna, "Aqsām al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya," 114–116, the "science of the afterlife" (*ʿilm al-maʿād*), dealing with happiness and the afterlife, is given as one of the "branches" (*farʿ*) of metaphysics.

6 Ghorab, "Greek Commentators on Aristotle," 79 [my translation].

Porphyry defines happiness as the human form's perfection, which he identifies primarily with the perfection of contemplative activity and secondarily with the perfection of voluntary actions, that is, with intellectual and moral virtues, respectively. This definition, of course, agrees with Aristotle's understanding of happiness in book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The difference concerns its formulation by means of the theoretical terms form and perfection. Since Porphyry's commentary is lost, it is impossible to say to what extent his Neoplatonic commentary influenced the Arabic philosophers' understanding of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, based on this passage alone, it seems entirely possible that Porphyry had a major impact on how Arabic philosophers framed the question of happiness.

Given the theoretical content of the term perfection, the Arabic definition of happiness is connected with the complex Greek and Arabic conceptual history of this term. First, perfection is a psychological concept that renders *entelekheia*, a technical term usually identified with actuality (*energeia*/*fiʿl*), coined by Aristotle to define physical change (*kinēsis*) and, more importantly for the present subject, the soul (*psukhē*).[7] In *De anima*, Aristotle introduces a division into a first and second entelechy to distinguish between the capability to perform a particular function and exercising that capability, such as possessing the skill of writing versus the act of writing.[8] Aristotle makes use of this distinction to define the soul as the "first *entelekheia* of a natural body possessed of organs" (412b2–6), or the "first *entelekheia* of a natural body which has life in potentiality" (412a27–28). This means that the soul, as the first actuality of the body, is what gives an organic body its capabilities for the various life activities. In contrast, the second entelechy refers to the actual exercise of these activities. Although occasionally transliterated as *anṭalāshiyā*, most commonly the term was translated into Arabic with various terms denoting perfection (*tamām*/*kamāl*/*istikmāl*). In their psychological writings, then, the Arabic philosophers denote by the first and second perfections the disposition for life activities versus the actual exercise of these life activities.

Second, perfection carries a metaphysical meaning, which is partly entangled with the former psychological sense. In this context, perfection renders *teleiotēs* to which the Greek Neoplatonists accorded a metaphysical sense related to efficient and final causality.[9] The term was thus related to the Neoplatonic hierarchical cosmology—the gradual descent of being from the first principle

7 For a conceptual history of the term in Avicenna and the preceding Greek and Arabic traditions, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*.

8 See Wisnovsky, 23–24.

9 Ibid, 61–98.

downwards and its counterpart, the desire of each being to revert to its cause. In this context, perfection means superiority within the cosmic hierarchy, where the more perfect being is both the efficient cause of the existence (*to einai*) of a lower being and its final cause in the sense of the well-being (*to eu einai*) peculiar to its species, towards which it strives to revert. Since Aristotle's Greek commentators from early on identified entelechy with *teleiotēs*, the psychological and metaphysical meanings of the word were fused even before the genesis of the Arabic philosophical tradition.

In the Arabic tradition, the Neoplatonic identification of the terms was ingrained in the Arabic translations of Aristotle: both *entelekheia* and *teleiotēs* were translated as perfection (*tamām*/*kamāl*/*istikmāl*). Beyond this, *telos* as the final cause was also rendered as *tamām* in Usṭāth's translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which both al-Fārābī and Avicenna employed. In contrast, Isḥāq Ibn Ḥunayn's later translation made a more careful distinction in rendering the final cause as "goal" or "end" (*ghāya*).[10] When al-Fārābī and Avicenna, then, speak of perfection even in a psychological context, the term carries with it not only the meaning of *entelekheia* in *De anima* but also the later Neoplatonic metaphysical connotations of *teleiotēs*, including the identification of perfection with final causality. The distinction between the first and second perfection thereby applies to cosmos as a whole in the sense of the Neoplatonic distinction between merely existing (*einai*) and existing well (*to eu einai*). Here, the former refers to the existence that any being has due to its particular species form and the latter to the fully actualized existence peculiar to its species. When applied to the human being, the first perfection means that one possesses the capabilities for perception, intellection, and other activities that the human being has due to the human form, while the second perfection means that one fully realizes the potential contained in the form of humanity, or lives well as a human being. The second perfection is, then, the final cause of the human being, the *telos* or ultimate end for the sake of which he exists.

As a result, the definition of happiness in terms of perfection becomes rooted in not only faculty psychology but also metaphysics and cosmology. If the second perfection of the human being is the final cause of his existence, clearly, it also corresponds to the preliminary definition of happiness as the final and self-sufficient end of all human activities. In this context, human

10 Wisnovsky 2003, 99–112, discusses in detail the translation choices made by translators in distinct stages of the translation movement. Thus, Isḥāq Ibn Ḥunayn, as one of the most refined translators, renders *entelekheia* by *kamāl*/*istikmāl*, *teleiotēs* by *tamām*, and *telos* by *ghāya*.

happiness becomes just a special case within the cosmos as a whole, which constitutes a normative hierarchy of existents, all of which are directed towards their final causes. Consequently, psychology, physics, and cosmology come to constitute a lengthy function argument. Cosmology and physics show that all existents are by their nature directed upwards in order to fully actualize the potential inherent in their species forms and determine the position that the human being possesses as a part of the cosmic hierarchy of existents. Psychology identifies the second perfection or final cause specific to the human species. Theoretical sciences as a whole thereby determine what the human function is. The resulting definition of happiness as regards its contents contains a psychological and cosmological component. In this chapter, I will start with the metaphysical and psychological concept of perfection and then proceed to the psychological state that al-Fārābī and Avicenna ascribe to happiness. In the next chapter, we will see how the definition of happiness in terms of perfection results in a further layer where its content is identified with the upwards progression of existence.

1 Al-Fārābī

Al-Fārābī defines happiness with regard to its content in three of his works: the *Virtuous City*, the *Political Governance*, and the *Treatise on the Intellect* (*Risāla fī al-ʿaql*). None of the three treatises contains a genuinely ethical discussion. The former two treatises consist of a theoretical and political part: the concepts of happiness and virtue (*faḍīla*) are first introduced and defined in the former and the latter part is concerned with the means by which happiness is realized in a political community.[11] In the *Virtuous City*, the identification of happiness with a specific psychological state seems rather abrupt, since the discussion of the concept of happiness is limited to defining it as the "good sought for its own sake" (*al-khayr al-maṭlūb li-dhātihi*). Al-Fārābī, how-

11 The two works have a parallel theoretical-political structure but their theoretical parts approach their subject matter from different perspectives. In the *Virtuous City*, al-Fārābī gives a detailed account of the cosmological hierarchy proceeding from the first principle downwards and then of the sublunar world from the elements upwards. Rudolph, "Reflections on al-Fārābī's *Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*," suggests that contemporary theological treatises influence its thematic structure. In the *Political Governance*, also known as the *Principles of Existents* (*Mabādiʾ al-mawjūdāt*), the presentation is arranged in accordance with the general aim of giving an account of the six primary principles of existents: First Cause, separate intellects, active intellect, soul, form, and matter.

ever, gives no reasons for why the perfection of the intellect and the human good should be identical. The bizarreness of this procedure could be explained in part by the general nature of these two works that present the principal theoretical doctrines dogmatically without providing arguments to support them.[12] This still does not explain why al-Fārābī introduces the concept of happiness in the psychological section. However, we have seen that al-Fārābī both defines the concept of happiness and offers arguments for identifying it with theoretical activity in the introductory works of the *Exhortation to the Way to Happiness* and the *Philosophy of Aristotle*. In the latter treatise, al-Fārābī, moreover, states that knowledge of the human function is founded on theoretical knowledge about the human being and his place within the cosmos. Al-Fārābī's theoretical works arguably provide precisely this: a cosmological and psychological account based on which the content of happiness may be determined.

In the *Virtuous City*, al-Fārābī first gives an account of the First and the supralunar beings and then of the bodily organs and psychical faculties.[13] On this basis, he proceeds to identify happiness with the second perfection of the theoretical intellect.[14] In the *Political Governance*, where the focus of the first part is more exclusively metaphysical, al-Fārābī introduces the concept of happiness in a metaphysical or cosmological rather than a psychological con-

12 Scholars have offered various explanations for the dogmatic nature of the two treatises. In Mahdi's (*Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, 8–11) influential Straussian interpretation, the *Virtuous City* is an exoteric or popular work. This means that the emanationist cosmology that it conveys should be understood as a 'political cosmology,' which justifies the political model presented in the latter part of the treatise, rather than as representing al-Fārābī's actual beliefs. For similar views, see also Galston, "A Re-Examination of al-Fārābī's Neoplatonism"; Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge." I concur with the opposite interpretation, argued, for example, in Druart, "Al-Farabi and Emanationism," where the two works represent al-Fārābī's genuine philosophical views. See also Rudolph, "Reflections on al-Fārābī's *Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*," for the plausible suggestion that the word 'principles' (*mabādiʾ*) in the work's full title, *On the Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*, in itself indicates the philosophical nature of the work. The purpose of this work is, then, to present the philosophical principles on which the religious opinions of the virtuous city should be founded. A central tenet of al-Fārābī's conception of the relationship between religion and philosophy is that religious beliefs should be derived from demonstratively true philosophical doctrines. Therefore, the aim of the treatise is not to argue for their veracity, which al-Fārābī has supposedly done elsewhere, but to present in a dogmatic manner the philosophical doctrines that form the basis for religious legislation.

13 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, chs. 10–14, 164–226. In *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, §§ 4–7, 32–33, the faculties are listed concisely without introducing the concept of happiness.

14 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, § 5, 204–206.

text.[15] In both works, however, the psychological and metaphysical aspects of happiness are intertwined in the concept of perfection, which carries both a psychological and metaphysical meaning.

As regards the metaphysical meaning, in the theoretical parts of the *Virtuous City* and the *Political Governance*, as elsewhere,[16] al-Fārābī applies the opposite terms perfection (*kamāl*) and deficiency (*naqṣ*) to existence (*wujūd*) in general. Perfection corresponds to causal priority (*taqaddum*), self-sufficiency, and actuality (*fiʿl*), whereas deficiency corresponds to causal posteriority (*taʾakhkhur*), dependence, potentiality (*quwwa*), and non-existence (*ʿadam*).[17] Al-Fārābī, furthermore, consistently equates perfection to excellence or virtue (*faḍīla*), which means that the metaphysical term has normative content at the outset.[18] As the uncaused First Cause of all other existents and a fully actual intellect intellecting His essence, the First (*al-awwal*) represents the most perfect and excellent existence: He is free of any kind of deficiency in the sense of non-existence, potentiality, or causal dependence.[19] The rest of the existents emanate (*fayḍ*) from the First by the intermediacy of the secondary causes, which constitute a gradually descending hierarchy of degrees (*marātib*) of perfection and excellence of existence.[20] The cosmic intellects and souls involve deficiency since they, unlike the First, are not self-sufficient but require something external to themselves, both in the sense of being caused and requiring an object of contemplation besides their essence to complete their existence.[21] At the bottom end of deficiency lies the prime matter (*al-mādda al-ūlā*), which is pure potentiality and has existence only through a form inhering in it.[22]

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15 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 3, 35.

16 For other works, cf. al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, 23, 27, 30, 34; Idem, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, §§ 71–74, 79–81.

17 For the Greek and Arabic philological and philosophical background for al-Fārābī's identification of the Aristotelian actuality-potentiality couple with the Neoplatonic perfection-deficiency distinction, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, 108–112.

18 The derivatives of the roots *k-m-l* and *f-ḍ-l* are employed synonymously innumerable times. See, for example, al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 6, § 2, 112–114; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 33, 49.

19 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 1, § 1, 56–58; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 21, 42–43; § 26, 45.

20 See, for example, al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 2, § 2, 94–96.

21 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 6, § 5, 116; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, §§ 17–19, 39–41.

22 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 6, § 1, 112; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 16, 38–39; § 49, 58–59.

The distinction between the first and the second, or in al-Fārābī's case ultimate (*akhīr*),[23] perfection applies equally to the metaphysical level, although, for al-Fārābī, it only really concerns the sublunar existents.[24] Al-Fārābī presents the contrast between the first and ultimate perfections as one between potentiality and actuality, first, in the sense of the first and second entelechy of *De anima*, that is, as possessing a capability versus exercising a capability, such as possessing the faculty of vision versus actually seeing, or a writer resting versus a writer performing the act of writing.[25] Since the supralunar existents are always in the state of actuality, that is, all the activity that pertains to their substances issues from them at all times, they only have an ultimate perfection.[26] In contrast, the fact that the sublunar existents are compounds of a form bound to actuality and matter bound to potentiality entails a deficiency that prevents them from constantly being in their state of actuality. Hence, they are sometimes in their state of first perfection and at other times in their state of ultimate perfection.[27] The goal (*maqṣūd*) of their existence, however,

23 Al-Fārābī's choice of terminology suggests the influence of Themistius, who speaks of first and ultimate (*hustatē*) *entelekheia*. See Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, 52, 109.

24 See Ibid, 109–112, for the difference between how al-Fārābī versus the Greek Neoplatonists understand the terms. For Proclus, the distinction is between a thing's perfection viewed in itself versus as a cause of something else. Although al-Fārābī also employs the criterion of causation to distinguish between the two perfections, he employs it in the sense of a thing actually producing versus actually not producing its effects. The result is, *contra* Proclus, that the eternal supralunar causes, which necessarily bring about their effects at all times, only have a second perfection.

25 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 58, 65: "For all these [possible existents], once they are in a state of existence (*bi-ḥāl min al-wujūd*) in which that thing which can issue from them (*sha'nuhā … an yakūn ʿanhā*) issues from them without anything in themselves opposing it (*min ghayr ʿā'iq min dhawātihā*), their state of existence is in their **ultimate perfection**. An example of this is the state of vision when it sees. When they are in a state of existence in which that which can issue from them does not issue from them, without their being moved to an existence more excellent than what they have now, then that state is their **first perfection**. An example of this is the relation between the sleeping writer in terms of writing and his state when awake, or like the relation between his state with regard to writing when he is exhausted and resting and his state when he is actually writing. Whenever something is in its **ultimate perfection**, and that thing is such that a given action can issue from it (*mimmā sha'nuhu an yaṣdur ʿanhu fiʿl*), its action is not delayed and comes out of it instantaneously. The action of something in its **ultimate perfection** is delayed only by something external to itself (*bi-ʿā'iq min khārij dhātihi*), like, for instance, sunlight being blocked from something hidden by a wall." The example of sleeping versus being awake draws on Aristotle, *De anima*, II.1, 412a23–27.

26 Ibid.

27 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 16, 38–39; § 60, 66.

is for them to be in their state of ultimate perfection, that is, to produce the activity that pertains to their substance.[28]

Al-Fārābī, however, also employs these terms in the further sense of a permanent transformation in the state of existence of a substance, which goes beyond the distinction between possessing and exercising a capability. In this sense, the first perfection refers to a deficient state of existence that a given thing has at the beginning of its existence and the ultimate perfection to the most perfect or excellent state of existence that it strives to attain.[29] The supralunar existents are again distinguished from the sublunar existents: the former possess their most perfect state of existence at the outset and the latter develop gradually towards their most perfect state of existence.[30] Here also, the distinction can be characterized as one between potentiality and actuality, but now in the sense that the first perfection refers to the minimal existence that a thing has due to its species form and the ultimate perfection to actualizing the potential inherent in that form. That is, a thing only becomes "substantialized" (*yatajawhar bihi*),[31] or truly becomes the substance that its form entails, through attaining its ultimate perfection. It is, then, in the nature of the sublunar existents forever to move towards their form. The two senses presumably converge in that only when something reaches its ultimate perfection in the second sense can it be in its state of ultimate perfection in the first sense. In other words, any given being can only fully produce the activity pertaining to its substance once it becomes that substance.

The ultimate perfection, understood as the most excellent state of existence of a particular species, is, then, the goal or final cause of the existence of all beings,[32] both in the sense of their becoming the substance that they should be and in producing the activity proper to that substance. Thus, in the *Virtuous City*, it is obvious, even before al-Fārābī reaches the human being, that the end of the human species also must be the ultimate perfection through which the human form is actualized. It is through this perfection that the human being attains his substantiality and produces the properly human activity, and it, therefore, constitutes the most excellent state of human existence. However, it might still be less than obvious why this end should be identi-

28 Ibid.

29 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 4, § 2, 106; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 41, 54–55.

30 Ibid.

31 See, for example, al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 41, 54.

32 See, for example, al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 29, 46; Idem, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-sa'āda*, § 49, 81.

fied exclusively with theoretical activity among all the human activities. All of al-Fārābī's human psychical faculties, the nutritive (*al-quwwa al-ghādhiya*), sensitive (*ḥāssa*), appetitive (*nuzūʿiyya*), imaginative (*mutakhayyila*), and rational (*nāṭiqa*), have an ultimate perfection,[33] but only that of the theoretical part of the rational faculty is identified with the ultimate perfection of the human being. In the *Virtuous City*, this follows from the fact that the human faculties, like all reality, constitute a ranked hierarchy, where all the other faculties exist for the sake of the highest human faculty of theoretical intellect.[34] Therefore, while the rest of the faculties exist in order to serve the body or another psychical faculty, only the theoretical intellect serves no further end but its activity. Hence, the activity of the theoretical intellect must be the self-sufficient and final end of all human activity.[35] Consequently, al-Fārābī, in contrast to both Aristotle before him and Avicenna after him, but in line with Plotinus,[36] identifies the human substance with only the theoretical intellect.[37] This, of course, means that the ultimate perfection of the human being also must be related to that faculty.

Now we finally arrive at al-Fārābī's definition of happiness in terms of its content. In the chapter of the *Virtuous City* devoted to the human rational faculty, al-Fārābī, first, explains the process by which the potentiality for intelligible knowledge that the human being has by nature is transformed into actual intelligible knowledge. This includes the necessity for the existence of an active intellect (*al-ʿaql al-faʿʿāl*) external to the human soul that brings the human intellect from potentiality to actuality.[38] After this, al-Fārābī identifies the first

33 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 14, § 1, 210; § 9, 224. For al-Fārābī's division of the psychical faculties following Alexander of Aphrodisias' interpretation of Aristotle, see Walzer's commentary in the edition (382–383).

34 Ibid, ch. 10, § 5, 168–170; § 9, 174. The faculties constitute an ascending hierarchy where the lower serve as "matter" for the higher until the rational faculty is reached, which serves no further faculty but acts instead as the "form" for the other faculties.

35 Ibid, ch. 13, § 7, 206–208. As we have seen, al-Fārābī offers a more detailed version of this argument in the *Philosophy of Aristotle*.

36 See the first treatise of Plotinus' *Enneads*, entitled *On What is the Living Being and What is the Human Being* (*Peri tou ti to zō'on kai tis ho anthrōpos*).

37 See, for example, al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 11, 35. As we have seen, in the *Philosophy of Aristotle*, al-Fārābī presented this as a problem: does the activity proper to the human substance consist of theoretical activity or of the activities the human being shares with other animals? That it must consist of one or the other, as opposed to a compound of both, is assumed implicitly.

38 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, §§ 1–4, 196–204. The passages in §§ 1–2 would, then, correspond to *De anima* III.4–5, although the distinction between corporeal and separate intelligibles and the identification of the active intellect with a transcendent entity perhaps imply a Neoplatonic reading.

perfection (*al-istikmāl al-awwal*)[39] of the human being with the initial stage in which only the first intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-uwal*), that is, the first intellectual principles common to all human beings of sound mind, are present,[40] and then states that the human being should employ these to attain his ultimate perfection, which al-Fārābī identifies with happiness. Happiness is, then, defined as follows:

> Happiness means that the human soul reaches a degree of perfection in existence where it is in no need of matter in its subsistence since it becomes one of the incorporeal things and of the immaterial substances and remains in that state continuously and forever. But its rank is beneath the rank of the active intellect.[41]

The definition of happiness in terms of immateriality seems surprising in the context of a discussion of human reason,[42] and I will return to this shortly. Al-Fārābī completes his account of the stages of human intellectual development in the political part of the *Virtuous City*.[43] In al-Fārābī's technical terminology,

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39 It is noteworthy that al-Fārābī renders perfection here with *istikmāl*, as opposed to *kamāl*, which he usually prefers. The two terms are obviously of the same root and seem to be interchangeable for al-Fārābī. However, one could speculate that the variance is due to the metaphysical versus psychological sources he uses—Isḥāq's translation of *De anima* probably rendered *entelekheia* as *istikmāl* and Alexander's *On the Intellect* (*Risāla fī al-ʿaql ʿalā raʾy Arisṭūṭālīs*) employed *istakmala* (see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, 104–107, 116). It must also be noted that even though al-Fārābī employs the first perfection in the *De anima* sense of a capability, he does not define the soul as the first perfection of a body—in fact, he never defines the soul at all, at least in the *Virtuous City*. Instead, each faculty has a first and ultimate perfection, while those of the theoretical intellect are also the first and ultimate perfection of the human being.

40 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, §5, 204–206. For al-Fārābī's first intelligibles, see Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 51–53; Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 209–237.

41 Ibid [translation by Walzer with modifications].

42 Al-Fārābī gives a similar definition of happiness in terms of immateriality in *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, §3, 32, where the immediate context is the active intellect: "The function of the active intellect is to watch over the rational animal and endeavor to have him reach the highest level of perfection that the human being can reach, namely, ultimate happiness, which is for the human being to arrive at the level of the active intellect. The way this occurs is by attaining separation from bodies, without needing anything below (whether it be body or matter or accident) in order to subsist and by remaining in that state of perfection forever." See also the definition of happiness in *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, §24, 31, where the context is also the active intellect.

43 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 15, §§8–9, 240–242. For al-Fārābī's stages of the human intellect, see Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 48–53. Al-Fārābī gives

the ultimate perfection corresponds to the final state of the human intellect, the "acquired intellect" (*al-ʿaql al-mustafād*). At this stage, "the potential intellect has acquired all the intelligibles, become an actual intellect (*ʿaqlan bi-l-fiʿl*) and an actual intelligible (*maʿqūlan bi-l-fiʿl*) so that that which is thought becomes identical in it with that which thinks (*ṣāra al-maʿqūl minhu huwa alladhī yaʿqil*)."[44] The identity of the subject and object of intellection is a consequence of the theoretical intellect becoming actual—when the forms are abstracted from matter, the intelligible forms are forms within the intellect and its intellecting them means becoming those forms.[45] Insofar as the incorporeal substances are intellects that contain all the intelligibles, intellect their intelligible essences, and are always in a state of actuality, saying that the human

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a more detailed account of the stages in *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, §§10–16, 12–20. The three stages are 1) the "material" or "potential intellect" (*al-ʿaql al-hayūlānī*/*munfaʿil*), which is the inborn disposition (*hayʾa*) for thought present in all human beings, 2) the "actual (passive) intellect" (*al-ʿaql al-munfaʿil bi-l-fiʿl*), which is the disposition actualized by the active intellect resulting in the first intelligibles, and 3) the "acquired intellect." The first perfection, then, coincides with the second stage, somewhat confusingly called the "actual intellect," rather than with the pure potentiality of the first stage, as one might expect.

44 Ibid, 242. Al-Fārābī employs similar terms to describe the state where the human "happiness is perfected" (*kamulat saʿādatuhu*) in *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, §11, 35: "Once the rational faculty becomes an actual intellect, that intellect (which is now actual) comes to resemble the separate things by intellecting itself as actually an intellect, and what is intellected of it is the very thing that is intellecting, at which point it is a substance that intellects by virtue of being intelligible, which in turn is due to the fact that it is intellecting. At that point, the thing that intellects, the thing that is intellected, and the act of intellecting is one and the same thing."

45 See al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, §13, 15–16: "When the intelligibles that it extracts from matter come to be in the intellect, those intelligibles become actual intelligibles, having been potential intelligibles before they were extracted. Once extracted, they become actual intelligibles by virtue of becoming forms for that intellect, and it is precisely by those things that are now actually intelligibles that the intellect becomes an actual intellect. Their being actual intelligibles and its being an actual intellect is, then, one and the same thing. What we mean when we say that it intellects is nothing other than that the intelligibles become forms for it in the sense that it itself becomes those forms. Thus, what is meant by the intellect's actually intellecting, being an actual intellect, and being an actual intelligible, is one and the same thing and is used for one and the same account." The identity of the subject and object of intellection is both an Aristotelian and Neoplatonic doctrine, cf. Aristotle, *De anima*, III.4, 430a4–5: "For in the case of things without matter that which thinks (*noʾoun*) and that which is thought (*noʾoumenon*) are the same." For Aristotle, as for al-Fārābī, the theoretical intellect is the only psychical faculty that does not operate by means of a bodily organ but is rather an immaterial disposition to become any object of thought. For the identity of the subject and object of intellection in Plotinus, see *Enneads*, V.9.5.

being becomes like the immaterial intellects amounts to the same thing, that is, that the theoretical intellect reaches its complete state of actuality.

What exactly does al-Fārābī mean when he says that the human soul becomes like the incorporeal intellects also in the sense that it dispenses with matter for its subsistence? Clearly, the human soul will attain incorporeality in the afterlife. However, this is not exclusively what al-Fārābī means. In various works, al-Fārābī states that the human soul attains separation from matter because the intellect has reached actuality[46] and immortality because it has reached immateriality.[47] In passages of the *Epistle on the Intellect* and the *Selected Aphorisms*, it becomes clear that what al-Fārābī means is that the theoretical intellect, which for al-Fārābī constitutes the human substance, attains immateriality in the sense that it dispenses with the bodily faculties of sensation and imagination.[48] That is, since the theoretical intellect has gained all intelligible knowledge, it no longer needs to resort to the faculties necessary for abstracting the universal concepts. Instead, as for the separate intellects, intellection now takes place wholly within the theoretical intellect itself. This, for al-Fārābī, means that the human substance and its activity have become identical or close to identical.[49] Therefore, happiness constitutes the most perfect human state also by the criterion that the human being, by becoming independent of materiality in this sense, attains an ontologically prior and more self-sufficient state of existence.

Since al-Fārābī defines happiness as complete intelligible knowledge and perfect intellection, it seems that not very many people will ever attain happiness. Al-Fārābī, in fact, agrees—in his political philosophy, he ascribes the state of acquired intellect to the "first leader" (*al-raʾīs al-awwal*),[50] the Platonic philosopher-king or the Islamic philosopher-prophet, who due to the perfection of his intellectual and practical faculties is best qualified to govern al-Fārābī's philosophical utopia. For any species of existents, the ultimate perfection refers to the most perfect existence of that species, which is the goal that all existents within that species should strive to attain. To attain complete happiness, then, means to attain the most perfect existence possible for the human species.[51] However, this does not mean that happiness would be beyond

46 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 15, § 8, 242; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 81.
47 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 16, § 2, 262; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 81.
48 Al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, § 24, 31–32; Idem, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 81, 86–87.
49 Al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, § 24, 31; Idem, *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs*, 125.
50 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 15, § 8, 240–242.
51 See al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 15, § 11, 244; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 42, 55.

the reach of the majority of humankind—on the contrary, al-Fārābī states that all people of sound mind, that is, all those who have acquired the first intelligibles, are capable of attaining happiness.[52] Rather, al-Fārābī's view is that there are qualitatively and quantitatively different degrees of happiness.[53] The central question of al-Fārābī's political philosophy, or perhaps rather philosophy of religion, is how non-philosophers may attain happiness. Insofar as the religion in which they are brought up is based on philosophical knowledge, the general populace may attain at least a degree of contemplative happiness by conceiving the images of philosophical doctrines through their imaginative faculties.[54]

The result of all of this is that al-Fārābī's ethics as a whole is metaphysically founded. Value concepts have a metaphysical foundation because existence itself constitutes a normative hierarchy. The hierarchy of existence is a hierarchy of excellence, and the question of human happiness becomes one of identifying the highest possible degree of excellence that the human being can attain within it. For the most part, al-Fārābī does not employ the term good (*khayr*) in a metaphysical sense,[55] as Avicenna will. Al-Fārābī rather states that happiness constitutes the "absolute good" (*al-khayr ʿalā al-iṭlāq*), while the virtuous actions and psychical dispositions that lead to happiness are good in a secondary, instrumental, sense.[56] As for the metaphysical good, all existence is good because it derives its existence from the First. In contrast, evil (*sharr*) has no metaphysical existence but only voluntary existence in the actions and psychical dispositions that are antithetical to the voluntary goods of virtue and happiness.[57] Nevertheless, the human good must derive its goodness from a metaphysical sense of the good since it is good precisely because it is the ontologically highest, and hence the most excellent, state of human existence. Thus, among all the human states, it comes closest to the good of the immaterial substances and the First at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of goodness. As in the case

52 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 74–75.

53 Ibid, 81.

54 For precise lists of doctrinal views necessary for happiness, see al-Fārābī, "Kitāb al-Milla," § 2, 44–45; Idem, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 61, 70–71; Idem, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 17, § 1, 276–278; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 84–85. For the epistemic relation between philosophical knowledge and its imaginal representations in a religion, see Lameer, *Al-Fārābī and Aristotelian Syllogistics*, 259–289.

55 Thus, neither the *Virtuous City* nor the *Political Governance* applies the term 'good' to the First. Al-Fārābī does, however, use the term 'beautiful' (*jamīl*). This presumably renders Greek *kalos*, which, in turn, carries the double meaning of both beautiful and good. It is also the term *jamīl* that al-Fārābī employs for good actions and psychical dispositions (cf. *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, § 6, 206).

56 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, § 6, 206; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 72.

57 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 74, 80–81.

of the account of pleasure, Avicenna will formulate the metaphysical basis of goodness more explicitly than al-Fārābī.

2 Avicenna

Avicenna insulates his discussions of happiness from theoretical philosophy more than al-Fārābī does in the sense that, in the *Healing* and the *Pointers*, he introduces the question of happiness as a separate subject in the last chapters of the metaphysical part. Avicenna is, nevertheless, very explicit that the subject of happiness should be based on theoretical philosophy. In the introduction of the *Beginning and Return*, Avicenna promises to present the "fruits" (*thamara*) of the sciences of metaphysics and physics: theological knowledge of the first principle and the order of existents as the culmination of the metaphysical science, and knowledge of the eternity (*baqā'*) and the afterlife (*maʿād*) of the human soul as the culmination of the physical science.[58] Given the reliance of the concept of happiness on theoretical philosophy, it is fitting that Avicenna chooses to discuss happiness within the final sections of the metaphysical parts of his summas. Dimitri Gutas has called this last part of Avicenna's metaphysics, discussing divine providence, revelation, prophecy, and happiness and the afterlife, the "metaphysics of the rational soul,"[59] because the subject matter that for Avicenna binds them together is the human soul and its relations to the supralunar celestial beings. The immediate context for the question of happiness, then, is the natural theology of the first principle and the hierarchy of existents that emanates from Him,[60] although the discussion itself is founded mainly on psychology.

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58 Avicenna, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, I.1, 1. Avicenna's primary concern in the question of happiness is to offer a philosophical explanation for the human soul's afterlife. However, for Avicenna, the questions of the afterlife and happiness as the good human life in this world are inseparable.

59 Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 288–296.

60 See Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, I.5, 22, where Avicenna explains the order in which one should study the metaphysical science. The questions concerning the human soul's rank within the cosmic hierarchy, and the human soul's afterlife and happiness, follow natural theology as the last part of metaphysics: "We will then explain how all things revert to Him and the manner in which He is for them both an efficient principle and a perfecting principle. We will discuss what the state of the human soul would be when the relation between it and nature is severed and what its rank of existence would be. In the course of discussing all this, we will indicate the high estate of prophecy, the obligation of obeying it, and the fact that it proceeds necessarily from God. We will also indicate

Since Avicenna also defines happiness in terms of perfection, an appropriate starting point is again to analyze the metaphysical, psychological, and ethical aspects of happiness through the concept of perfection. As for al-Fārābī, at the background is a synthesis between perfection (*kamāl*) in the *De anima* sense of entelechy and its Neoplatonic metaphysical meaning, which Avicenna, however, develops more elaborately and systematically.[61] Avicenna's understanding of perfection in a metaphysical sense is largely akin to that of al-Fārābī—he equates perfection to existence and actuality (*fi'l*), while deficiency (*nuqṣān*) is equal to non-existence (*'adam*) and potentiality (*quwwa*).[62] For the sublunar hylomorphic existents, actuality relates to their form and potentiality to their matter[63] so that the perfection of a given thing is to actualize the existence corresponding to its form. Both form and perfection are connected with final causality in that the perfection of a thing, that is, actualizing the existence corresponding to its form, constitutes the final cause or end (*ghāya*/*al-'illa al-ghā'iyya*/*al-'illa al-tamāmiyya*) for the sake of which it exists.[64]

Avicenna discusses the meaning of good and evil repeatedly in a metaphysical context,[65] and thereby founds the value concepts on a metaphysical basis more explicitly than al-Fārābī. Following Aristotle,[66] Avicenna states that there is no Platonic form of the Good. That is, there is no univocal meaning for the good concerning all things in general but only as concerns each particular thing or class of things.[67] Nevertheless, Avicenna provides a generic definition of the good as "that which everything desires" (*mā yatashawwaquhu kull shay'*), which, when applied to a particular class of existents, results in the particular good for that particular kind. Since everything desires its existence or "per-

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the character traits and actions which, together with wisdom, are needed by the human soul for attaining the otherworldly happiness, and we will describe the different kinds of happiness" [translation by Marmura with modifications].

61 See, in particular, Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, 113–141.

62 See, for example, Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IV.2, § 31, 142.

63 Avicenna, *The Physics of The Healing*, I.2, § 4, 14; Idem, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, II.4, § 20, 70.

64 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, VI.5, §§ 37–38, 230–231. The subject of treatise VI.5 is the final cause. Avicenna subsumes efficient and formal causality under final causality in the sense that final causes are "causes of causes" (*'ilal al-'ilal*), ontologically prior even if temporally posterior, to other kinds of causes. For Avicenna's understanding of final causality, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, 161–195.

65 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IV.2, § 31, 142; VI.5, §§ 37–48, 230–234; VII.1, § 11, 239; VII.3, § 25, 256; VIII.3, § 1, 270; VIII.6, §§ 2–4, 283–284; IX.2, §§ 12–15, 312–314; IX.3, §§ 10–11, 321; IX.6, §§ 2–25, 340–347.

66 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096a11–1097a14.

67 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, VII.1, § 11, 239.

fection of existence" (*kamāl al-wujūd*), the good in relation to each thing is its perfection, or "that by which its existence is completed" (*mā yatimm bihi wujūduhu*).[68] The good with regard to any class of things, then, is its perfection or actuality of existence.[69] This, in turn, is identical with the final cause that it strives to attain.[70] Consequently, like al-Fārābī, Avicenna, in the end, identifies the good (*khayr*) with perfection and actuality and the evil (*sharr*) with deficiency and potentiality,[71] the latter of which is merely an absence of goodness, which has no independent existence.[72]

As a result, as for al-Fārābī, the beings that exist form a gradually descending hierarchy in terms of their perfection of existence. Since perfection is identified with goodness, this obviously also constitutes a hierarchy of goodness. Avicenna's first principle, the Necessary Existent, is "pure perfection" (*kamāl maḥḍ*) and "pure goodness" (*khayr maḥḍ*) because He involves no deficiency whatsoever, in the sense of non-existence or potentiality, due to the fact that His existence is necessary by virtue of His very essence.[73] The Necessary Exis-

68 Ibid, VIII.6, §§ 2–3, 283–284.

69 For the identification of the good with actuality, see Ibid, IV.2, § 31, 142.

70 Whether the good and the final cause or end (*ghāya*) are one and the same thing is posed as a question in Ibid, VI.5, § 2, 220, and answered in affirmative in Ibid, VI.5, § 37–38, 230–231.

71 Ibid, VIII.6, § 3, 284.

72 See Ibid, IV.2, § 31, 142, and, in particular, chapter IX.6 (339 ff.) on providence and the problem of evil. For the ontological status of evil in Avicenna, see also Steel, "Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas on Evil."

73 Ibid, VIII.6, §§ 2–3, 283–284. Like al-Fārābī, Avicenna employs the term God (*Allāh*) extremely rarely in his philosophical writings and prefers instead the technical term "Necessary Existent," as opposed to the "First" employed by al-Fārābī, which Avicenna also uses at times. At the background of the term is Avicenna's famous proof of God's existence through the modal terms possible (*mumkin*) and necessary (*wājib*). The proof aims to show that since the existence of each thing, when regarded in itself, is either contingent, that is, it could equally exist or not exist, or necessary, that is, it could not *not* exist, the existence of contingent things must eventually lead to something whose existence is necessary due to itself rather than due to a cause outside itself. Strictly speaking, this, however, is not a proof for God's existence but only for the existence of something uncaused—as Adamson points out ("From the Necessary Existent to God," 171), even an atheist could accept that the existence of something, such as the universe itself, has no cause. Avicenna is, of course, aware of this and tries to show separately that the existence of the Necessary Existent entails further that the properties usually applied to God, such as goodness and perfection, with which we are concerned here, should be attributed to the Necessary Existent. For Avicenna's proof of the Necessary Existent, see Marmura, "Avicenna's Proof from Contingency for God's Existence"; Mayer, "Ibn Sīnā's 'Burhān al-Ṣiddīqīn.'" For the project of expanding the Necessary Existent to the monotheistic God, see Adamson, "From the Necessary Existent to God."

tent is also good by the additional ground that He bestows existence and perfection to all other things, even if strictly speaking this, for Avicenna, should contribute neither to His perfection nor goodness insofar as these are defined in terms of existence and actuality rather than causality.[74] Every other existing thing involves some degree of deficiency and evil because, even if its existence is necessary by virtue of the cause to which it owns its existence, in itself its existence is only possible. Its essence, therefore, entails the possibility of nonexistence, that is, deficiency and evil.[75] When the criteria of perfection and actuality of existence are applied to the possible existents, the result is a hierarchy of perfection and actuality, and hence goodness, of existence descend-

74 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, VIII.6, § 4, 284. For a parallel passage, in which the Arabic Plotinus identifies the First as the "pure good" by the double grounds of the goodness of His essence and His overflowing of goodness to the lower existents, see the passage attributed to al-Shaykh al-Yūnānī in Rosenthal, "Ash-Shaykh al-Yūnānī and the Arabic Plotinus Source," vol. 21, § 6, 484. Because He is the cause of all existence, the Necessary Existent is also "above completeness" (*fawqa al-tamām*) (*The Metaphysics of The Healing*, VIII.6, § 1, 283), but this means a slightly different thing. Even though both *tamām* and *kamāl* were employed to render *entelekheia*/*teleiotēs* to Arabic, and both are often translated as perfection (cf. Marmura's translation in Ibid, 283), the two terms are not entirely synonymous for Avicenna. Avicenna devotes chapter IV.3 of the metaphysics of the *Healing* to the concept of "completeness" (*tamām*). The primary meaning of complete is for Avicenna related to enumerable things (IV.3, § 1, 143)—a set composed of a determined amount of things is complete, when none of those things remain outside it—and by extension to other kinds of things. For a thing to be complete, then, means that it does not lack anything and, therefore, has no need for anything outside itself (Ibid, §§ 1–6, 143–145). When applied to existence, complete is either that which has within itself everything that it needs for its existence to be perfect (*yakmul bihi wujūduhu*) or that which also fulfills the additional condition that its existence pertains to it alone and to no other thing besides it (Ibid, § 8, 145). The Necessary Existent is complete by both grounds as He is completely self-sufficient in His existence, due to the necessity of His existence, and is the only representative of His genus of existence. In addition, He is "above completeness" (*fawqa al-tamām*) because He has an "excess of existence" (*al-wujūd al-za'id*), which is the cause of the existence of all other beings but does not contribute to His completeness (Ibid, § 9, 145). Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 2, § 1, 90, already emphasizes that the self-sufficiency of the First entails that the fact that the rest of existence emanates from Him does not add to His perfection. Avicenna agrees concerning the completeness of the Necessary Existent, and by consequence presumably also with regard to His perfection and goodness. In *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, VIII.6, § 4, 284, Avicenna gives the Necessary Existent's being the cause of all existence as a sort of extra ground for His goodness, introduced by the less than affirmative phrase "Good may also be said of that which …" (*qad yuqāl ayḍan khayr li-mā*), while the primary ground resides in the perfection of His essence. For the view that the creative activity does not contribute to the Necessary Existent's perfection, see also *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, III.6.1–6, 118–129.

75 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, VIII.6, § 3, 284.

ing from the Necessary Existent through the separate intellects, celestial souls, and celestial bodies all the way down to prime matter (*mādda*).[76] In another sense, however, all existence is good since it is a necessary consequence of the essence of the Pure Good. Avicenna, therefore, consistently applies the expression "order of the good" (*niẓām al-khayr*) to the entire hierarchy of existence emanating from the first principle.[77]

The way Avicenna employs the term perfection in a psychological context is more faithful to Aristotle's *De anima* than was the case for al-Fārābī. Hence, whereas for al-Fārābī, the distinction between the first and second perfection is a uniform metaphysical distinction, Avicenna only introduces it in the *De anima* part of the *Healing*.[78] He understands it in a roughly Aristotelian sense as a distinction between a capability and the actual use of the capability, such as, between the shape of the sword and the act of cutting.[79] At the same time, like al-Fārābī, Avicenna also understands it as not only a conceptual but also a temporal distinction: the first perfection is what pertains to a particular species initially—it is that which makes a thing a member of that particular species—while the second perfection consists of the activities that come to be later because of the first perfection.[80] Hence, following Aristotle, Avicenna defines the soul as the "first perfection of a natural organic body that performs the activities of life."[81] The second perfection consists of realizing these life activ-

76 Ibid, X.1, §§1–2, 358–359.

77 See, for example, Ibid, IX.6, §1, 339.

78 However, Avicenna employs the distinction in slightly different ways in different works. See Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, 120–127.

79 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, I.1, 11.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid, 12. While the definition is Aristotelian, Avicenna understands perfection in a way that allows him, *contra* Aristotle, to uphold the separability of the whole soul with respect to the body, and hence its immortality (see Sebti, *Avicenne: l'âme humaine*, 15–19; Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, 127–141). In *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, I.5, 39–40, Avicenna also defines each of the three Aristotelian parts of the soul—vegetative, animal, and human—as a first perfection of the body with regard to the faculties related to that part. Avicenna, however, states (40) that properly, the term (first) perfection should only be used to define the soul rather than a faculty within the soul. In contrast to al-Fārābī, then, for whom each faculty had a first and ultimate perfection, Avicenna, at least in the *Healing*, does not apply the concepts of first and second perfection to each individual faculty. Instead, each faculty has a perfection, which is its perfection in actuality (*kamāl bi-l-fi'l*) (cf. Ibid, IX.7, §4, 348), which would correspond to what al-Fārābī means by an ultimate perfection of a psychical faculty. The faculty of theoretical intellect, moreover, has a disposition (*isti'dād*) identified with potentiality, which is the stage of material intellect, and perfection, identified with actuality, which is the stage of acquired intellect (*Avicenna's De anima*, V.1, 209).

ities, such as the "acts of discernment, deliberation, sensation, and motion" in the case of the human being.[82] In contrast to al-Fārābī, then, all the human activities constitute the second perfection of the human soul. This is consistent with the fact that Avicenna, unlike al-Fārābī, does not identify the human substance only with the intellect but understands it to be a unified substance composed of all of its faculties.[83]

Even in his psychological writings, Avicenna, nevertheless, makes it clear that the final human end is related exclusively to the theoretical intellect and that the perfection of the human substance is identical with the perfection of that faculty exclusively. In chapter V.1 of the psychological part of the *Healing*, Avicenna states that the characteristic most specific to the human being (*akhaṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ bi-l-insān*) is the activity of the theoretical intellect, which is the "conception of universal intelligible meanings abstracted from matter" (*taṣawwur al-maʿānī al-kulliyya al-ʿaqliyya al-mujarrada ʿan al-mādda*).[84] The "substance of the human soul" (*jawhar al-nafs al-insāniyya*), therefore, attains its perfection (*yastakmil nawʿan min al-istikmāl bi-dhātihi*) through the theoretical faculty.[85] In chapter I.5, Avicenna presents his account of the theoretical intellect's development from potentiality to actuality with regard to abstract thought. This culminates in the unqualified actuality of the "acquired intellect" (*al-ʿaql al-mustafād*), where the "intelligible form (*al-ṣūra al-maʿqūla*) is present in it, and the intellect is actually reviewing it (*yuṭāliʿuhā bi-l-fiʿl*) so that it intellects it (*yaʿqiluhā*) and intellects that it is actually intellecting it."[86] When

82 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, I.1, 11.

83 Ibid, V.1, 208; V.7, 250–262. For Avicenna's conception of the soul, see Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 83–102; Druart, "The Human Soul's Individuation"; Sebti, *Avicenne: l'âme humaine*; McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 89–148; Alpina, *Subject, Definition, Activity*.

84 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, V.1, 206.

85 Ibid, 208. See also Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 2, III.10, 388: "And among its [the human soul's] faculties is that which it possesses for its need to perfect its substance (*takmīl jawharihā*) by becoming an actual intellect."

86 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, I.5, 48–50. For Avicenna's stages of the intellect, see Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 83–94. There are, first, three stages of potentiality with regard to thinking: 1) "material intellect" (*ʿaql hayūlānī*), the purely potential disposition (*istiʿdād*) for thought that every human being has from birth, 2) "habitual intellect" (*ʿaql bi-l-malaka*), where the human being possesses the "first intelligibles" (*al-maʿqūlāt al-ūlā*), that is, the primary principles (*muqaddimāt*) that enable thinking, and 3) "actual intellect" (*ʿaql bi-l-fiʿl*), where he has further derived the secondary concepts and propositions from the first principles but is not actually thinking them, although he may do so whenever he wishes. Stage 3), then, already represents fully developed abstract thought, while the distinction between it and stage 4) of the "acquired intellect" (*al-ʿaql al-mustafād*) is between potentiality and actuality in the sense of pos-

a human being attains this state, "the animal genus and the human species as its part have become complete (*yatimm*), and thereby the human faculty has become like (*tashabbahat*) the first principles of all existence."[87] Like al-Fārābī, Avicenna understands the human psychical faculties to form a hierarchy, where all the faculties serve the "ultimate goal" (*al-ghāya al-quṣwā*) of the acquired intellect—the practical intellect serves the theoretical intellect, the faculty of estimation (*wahm*) the practical intellect, and so forth until the faculties of the vegetative soul.[88]

The state of acquired intellect, then, is the final cause of the human species for the sake of which all the human psychical faculties exist. It fulfills the metaphysical criterion of perfection as it represents the complete actuality of specifically human existence. It is also the ontologically highest form of human existence by the criteria of self-sufficiency and incorporeality. As for al-Fārābī, the perfection of the human intellect entails self-sufficiency and incorporeality in the specific sense that the perfected human intellect no longer needs to resort to the bodily faculties of sensation and imagination but these now rather distract it from the contemplative activity.[89] When Avicenna, like al-Fārābī, says that upon attaining its actuality, the human faculty becomes like the first principles, by which he means the separate intellects, he presumably means that it resembles them both in its state of actuality and its incorporeality and self-sufficiency.[90] That is, it becomes an incorporeal intellect, which subsists by means of its own essence and requires nothing outside of itself for the perfection of its existence.[91]

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sessing the fully developed capability for thinking and actually exercising it. The human goal is identified with stage 4) because actuality is better than potentiality. *Contra* both Aristotle and al-Fārābī, Avicenna states that the notion that the subject and object of thinking are identical is absurd (Ibid, V.6, 239–241; *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, VII.7–8, 267–269). Nevertheless, he affirms the self-reflectiveness that the thinker has of his act of thinking. For the primacy of self-awareness in Avicenna's psychology in general, see Kaukua, *Self-awareness in Islamic Philosophy*.

87 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, I.5, 50.

88 Ibid, 50–51.

89 Ibid, V.3, 222–223.

90 These are interrelated since only the immaterial intellects can always be in a state of actuality. Obviously, this is not possible for human souls in their embodied state, and, therefore, the ultimate goal will be fully realized in the afterlife.

91 Avicenna (Ibid, 222) at this point employs the expression of the rational soul "returning to itself/its essence" (*raja'a ilā dhātihi*), inspired by the Arabic Plotinus (cf. Pseudo-Aristotle, "Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālīs," I.21, 22, corresponding to Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.8.1). The reference is mainly to contemplative activity—insofar as the theoretical intellect has acquired all the intelligible forms, it no longer needs to resort to sensation, imagination, and other

In the *Healing*, Avicenna first introduces the concept of happiness only in chapter IX.7 of the metaphysical part. At this point, the nature of happiness has, however, already been established by psychology and metaphysics. Since happiness is the highest good or final end for the human being and the good is equal to the perfection of existence and human perfection to the actuality of theoretical thought, happiness must consist of the actuality of theoretical thought. In chapter IX.7, and the corresponding sections of other works, Avicenna, therefore, only needs to state more explicitly what the human end is from the perspective of the question of happiness. Each faculty has a perfection and a good that pertains to it, which is its state of actuality,[92] and the perfection of the theoretical intellect is the highest perfection and good with respect to the human being. I have already discussed these writings in the context of pleasure. In fact, the main novelty that these discussions introduce to the human end is precisely the argument that theoretical perfection best qualifies as happiness also because it is the most pleasant human state. However, as I have shown, the nature of happiness is for Avicenna founded on objective theoretical grounds, while the fact that it is also pleasant is something additional to the grounds by which it is defined.

We now finally arrive at Avicenna's explicit definition of happiness as regards its content. In chapter IX.7 of the metaphysical part of the *Healing*, Avicenna defines the perfection of the theoretical intellect, and, therefore, happiness, as follows:

> The perfection proper to the rational soul consists in its becoming an intellectual world (*ʿālam ʿaqlī*) in which there is impressed the form of the whole (*murtasaman fīhā ṣūrat al-kull*), the order in the whole that is intellectually apprehended (*al-niẓām al-maʿqūl fī al-kull*), and the good that emanates on the whole, beginning with the principle of the whole and proceeding then to the noble, spiritual, absolute substances, then to the substances that in some manner are connected to bodies, then to the high bodies with their configurations (*hayʾāt*) and powers, and so on until it completes within itself the structure of existence in its entirety (*tastawfī fī nafsihā hayʾat al-wujūd kulluhu*). It thus becomes transformed into an intelligible world (*ʿālam maʿqūl*) that parallels the existing world in its entirety, viewing (*mushāhida*) that which is Absolute Beneficence

bodily faculties. Thus, it is self-sufficient in this sense. The human substance as a whole still depends on bodily faculties for its survival as long as it is in a body.

92 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 4, 348.

> (*al-ḥusn al-muṭlaq*), Absolute Good (*al-khayr al-muṭlaq*), and true Absolute Beauty, becoming united with it (*muttaḥida bihi*), imprinted with its image and form (*muntaqisha bi-mithālihi wa-hay'atihi*), affiliated with it (*munkhariṭa fī salakihi*), and becoming of its substance (*ṣā'ira min jawharihi*).[93]

First, it is evident that this definition depends on the cosmological account Avicenna provided in the preceding sections of the *Healing*: the human theoretical perfection consists of an intellectual comprehension of the hierarchy of existents from the first principle downwards. Second, the definition initially seems quite different from that of al-Fārābī. Its content is, however, more or less identical with Avicenna's psychological concept of the acquired, or fully actualized, intellect, and, therefore, also with al-Fārābī's definition of happiness. The actuality of the theoretical intellect means possessing complete intelligible knowledge of the order of existence—the first principle, separate intellects, celestial souls, celestial bodies, and the material world—which constitutes the cosmos.[94] To be precise, since perfection is a state of actuality, it is not only knowledge that one possesses, but contemplative activity, which in the passage is reflected in that the rational soul "views" (*mushāhida*) the Absolute Good and Beauty. However, since the terms "absolute good" and "absolute beauty" refer to the Necessary Existent, the pinnacle of theoretical knowledge for Avicenna becomes witnessing the Necessary Existent in the sense of intellectually comprehending Him.[95] From this perspective, however, the fact that the latter part of the passage also suggests that human perfection involves some kind of union with the Necessary Existent is problematic, and I will return to it in the next chapter.

Furthermore, the passage has a distinctly Neoplatonic flavor. It is reminiscent of passages in the Arabic Plotinus depicting the human soul contemplat-

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93 Ibid, IX.7, § 11, 350 [translation by Marmura with modifications].

94 In other formulations of the rational soul's perfection, in *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, VIII.7, §§ 17–18, 298, it is identified with becoming an "intellectual world in actuality" (*'ālam 'aqlī bi-l-fi'l*). In *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād*, III.14, 109, it is defined as becoming "an intellect free from matter and its concomitants" (*'aqlan mujarradan 'an al-mādda wa-'an lawāḥiqihā*), in Ibid, III.14, 110, as becoming an "intellectual world" (*'ālam 'aqlī*), and in Ibid, III.14, 111, as intellectual conception (*ta'aqqul*) of the Pure Good, including His essence (*ta'aqqul dhātihi*), and the order of existents. In *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.9, 22–23, the rational soul's perfection is identified with intellectual conception of the First Truth (*al-ḥaqq al-awwal*) and the rest of existents through which the intellectual substance (*al-jawhar al-'aqlī*) becomes actual.

95 See also Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, IX.5, 68–73.

ing the beauty of the higher intelligible world of which the sensible world is but an image (*mithāl*).[96] In his commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*, Avicenna employs the expression "true vision" (*mushāhada ḥaqqa*) in the sense of contemplation of intelligible, versus sensible, existence.[97] The expression "intellectual/intelligible world" (*ʿālam ʿaqlī/maʿqūl*) also seems to be of Neoplatonic provenance.[98] Avicenna employs the expression "intellectual world" (*ʿālam ʿaqlī*) for the goal of the rational soul also in the *Beginning and Return*. He explains there that this means that the rational soul embraces the intelligible forms of all existents, which goal Avicenna further identifies with the actuality of the intellect and the stage of the acquired intellect.[99] The rational soul, then, becomes an intellectual or intelligible "world" corresponding to the sensible world in the way that the separate intellects are such worlds because they contain the intelligible forms that are the archetypes of sensible forms.[100]

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96 Cf. Pseudo-Aristotle, "Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālīs," VIII.112–117, 110–111, corresponding to Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.1.4. In itself, identifying happiness with an intellectual understanding of the first principles of existence is in line with Aristotle (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 1177a12–18). It is rather the semi-mystical language of the contemplative experience that draws on Arabic Plotinus.

97 Avicenna, "Tafsīr Kitāb 'Uthūlūjiyā,'" VIII, 71. I will return to Avicenna's understanding of the term *mushāhada* in the next chapter.

98 Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.9.9, where Plotinus applies the expression "intelligible universe" (*kosmos noētos*) to the Intellect as the archetype of the sensible world. In his commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle* ("Tafsīr Kitāb 'Uthūlūjiyā,'" VIII, 70), Avicenna uses the expression "world of the intellect" (*ʿālam al-ʿaql*). The expressions *ʿālam ʿaqlī/maʿqūl* could be vocalized as *ʿālim*, with the meaning "intellectual/intelligible knower," which would also not be entirely out of place in this context. However, the Plotinian parallel and the explication of the expression in the *Beginning and Return* make it clear that the first alternative is correct.

99 Avicenna, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.5, 97, 99–100. The passage from the *Healing* quoted above gives the impression that the perfection of the rational soul consists mainly of its conception of the supralunar existents, which as the causes and principles of the sublunar world would imply an understanding of the sublunar world also. In the *Beginning and Return*, Avicenna is clear, however, that to become an intellectual world means conceiving the intelligible forms of all existents, both the forms immanent in matter that the intellect abstracts from sensible forms and the forms that are immaterial to begin with, that is, the separate intellects.

100 Ibid. See also the explication of the term world in Ibid, III.8, 103 [my translation]: "The proper thing for this rational faculty is to become a world, for worlds (*ʿawālim*) are what they are through their forms (*bi-ṣuwarihā*). The rational faculty takes the form of every sensible and intelligible thing, and then they are arranged (*tarattaba*) in it from the beginning (*al-badʾ al-awwal*) through the intellects that are the proximate angels and souls that are the subsequent angels until the heavens and elements and the form of the whole and its nature (*hayʾat al-kull wa-ṭābīʿatihi*). Then it becomes an intellectual world illuminated by the light of the active intellect, eternal in its essence."

In other words, to become an intellectual world means to become like the separate intellects in the sense of embracing the intelligible forms of all existents. This is, in essence, what it means for the human theoretical faculty to attain its actuality and the stage of acquired intellect.

As for al-Fārābī, the complete actuality of the human intellect in the sense of acquiring the totality of intelligible forms seems an implausibly high threshold for attaining happiness. In a later passage, Avicenna explicitly addresses the question of precisely how much intelligible knowledge is required to attain happiness, and states that the question can only be answered in approximate terms. However, Avicenna "believes" (*aẓunn*) that happiness requires demonstrative and certain knowledge about 1) the separate principles, 2) the final causes of universal motions, 3) the constitution (*hay'a*) of the cosmos and the relations of its parts to each other, 4) the order of existence from the first principle until the lowest existents, and 5) the divine providence, unity, and simplicity, as well as the relations of existents to the First.[101] Setting the minimum prerequisite of happiness at theological and cosmological knowledge about the First and the general principles of supralunar and sublunar existents perhaps lowers the barrier from the complete knowledge of all intelligible forms, but it still restricts happiness only to philosophers. However, as for al-Fārābī, Avicenna's prophetology both extends happiness to non-philosophers and explains the relation prevailing between philosophical knowledge and religious beliefs: it is the prophet's task to convey his philosophical knowledge to the general populace by translating it into religious similes that they can understand.[102]

In consequence, Avicenna's conception of happiness with regard to its contents is founded entirely on theoretical philosophy. In his metaphysical works, Avicenna defines the good as the object of desire and the object of desire as the perfection of existence with regard to a particular class of existents. Therefore, the perfection or actuality of existence and goodness are synonymous metaphysical terms. In his psychological works, Avicenna shows that the function specific to the human being is theoretical thought and that the perfection of the theoretical intellect constitutes the end for all of the other human psychical activities. Consequently, the human perfection or good is identical with the perfection of theoretical thought. Finally, in his explicit discussions of happiness, Avicenna adds the argument of pleasure and defines the psychologi-

101 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 19, 353–354. See also Avicenna, "Risāla fī maʿrifat al-nafs al-nāṭiqa," 190–191.

102 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, X.2, §§ 4–6, 365–366.

cal state of happiness as rational understanding of the hierarchy of existents, which is ultimately identical with the actuality of the theoretical intellect. Consequently, Avicenna, in his philosophical summas, such as the *Healing*, in particular, presents a complete argument for the identification of happiness with theoretical perfection, even if the argument is scattered between various parts of these treatises.

CHAPTER 5

Ascent

Since al-Fārābī and Avicenna relate human happiness to the incorporeal intellects, the concept also has a cosmological aspect. Thus, happiness as human perfection constitutes the human soul's ascent in the sense that it rises to the level of, or even comes to form a part of, an ontologically higher reality. In Neoplatonic thought, the human soul's ascent reflects a cosmic principle, the upward progression (*epistrophē*) of existents reverting to their source. As such, it forms a counterpart for the downwards procession where existence eternally and necessarily flows (*fayḍ*) from the first principle through grades of gradually less perfect existence eventually culminating in the non-being of matter. In this context, the human end represents the human soul's return to the intelligible world of its origin or, for Plotinus, even up to the first principle of existence. The idea of symmetry of descent and reascent of existence was conveyed, in particular, by the *Theology of Aristotle*, rendering books IV–VI of Plotinus' *Enneads*, along with the other treatises that constitute the Arabic Plotinus and Proclus. For the Arabic philosophers, these complement the genuinely Aristotelian theology of the First Cause as a self-intellecting intellect and the first cause of motion in the cosmos.[1] Some Arabic philosophers, such as the Brethren of Purity, adopted a roughly Plotinian cosmology of the three primary ontological realities of God, Intellect, and Soul, the ideas of descent and reascent of existence, and even the idea of the ascent taking place through progressive reincarnations of the particular souls.[2]

Neither al-Fārābī nor Avicenna embraces the Plotinian cosmology of the *Theology of Aristotle*, and their philosophical theology and cosmology cannot be characterized as Neoplatonic in any straightforward sense.[3] Al-Fārābī's cosmological system, which Avicenna adopts in a modified form, consists of

1 For the Aristotelian and Plotinian elements in Arabic philosophical theology, see Adamson, "Philosophical Theology." For the transformation of Plotinus' One transcending existence into the pure being and first cause of the *Theology of Aristotle*, see Taylor, "Aquinas, the Plotiniana Arabica," 223–228.

2 For an overview of the emanationist cosmology and the soul's ascent in the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, see Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, 49–84, 205–226, 383–403.

3 In al-Fārābī's case, the degree of his Neoplatonism is related to the 'Straussian question' of whether his metaphysical writings can be taken at face value in the first place. For the view that al-Fārābī consciously complements the theology of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which he found lacking, with the emanationism of the *Theology of Aristotle*, see Druart, "Al-Fārābī, Ema-

Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, and Ptolemaic elements.[4] The first principle is an Aristotelian self-intellecting intellect whose effect on the sublunar world of generation and corruption is mediated by the eternal, ensouled celestial bodies and incorporeal intellects.[5] Both, however, also understand God's creative process in Neoplatonic terms as an eternal and necessary process of overflowing of existence from a more perfect to less perfect being, where the procession from intellect to soul to body is reproduced at the level of each of Ptolemy's celestial spheres. The result is a vertical series of celestial bodies, souls, and intellects culminating in the tenth and last incorporeal intellect that governs our world composed of the four elements.[6] However, for the subject at hand, what is important is that both al-Fārābī and Avicenna understand the cosmos to constitute a downwards procession of existence from the first principle through the secondary causes down to prime matter.

Given the peculiar cosmology of al-Fārābī and Avicenna, if the human soul's ascent mirrors the descent of existence, the symmetry must take a form that

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nation, and Metaphysics." For an assessment of the extent of Neoplatonism in both al-Fārābī and Avicenna, see Ivry, "An Evaluation of the Neoplatonic Elements in Al-Fârâbî's and Ibn Sînâ's Metaphysics."

4 For a recent interpretation of al-Fārābī's cosmology as an adaptation of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic elements within the Ptolemaic astronomy current during his time, see Janos, *Method, Structure, and Development in al-Fārābi's Cosmology*. For a study of Avicenna's cosmology, see Janos, "Moving the Orbs."

5 Whether the planetary spheres have souls remains somewhat ambiguous in Aristotle. However, the separate intellects of al-Fārābī and Avicenna correspond to the unmoving movers that Aristotle posits for each celestial sphere in *Metaphysics*, XII.8. The idea that the Aristotelian universe involves ensouled astral bodies that act as mediators between the First Cause and the sublunar world is conveyed to Arabic philosophers, in particular, through Alexander of Aphrodisias, in treatises such as *On the Principles of the Whole according to Aristotle* (*Fī mabādiʾ al-kull bi-ḥasab raʾy Arisṭāṭālīs*) and *On Providence* (*Peri pronoias*/*Fī al-ʿināya*). For Alexander's cosmology and its influence on Arabic philosophy, see Fazzo and Wiesner, "Alexander of Aphrodisias in the Kindī-Circle"; Genequand, *Alexander of Aphrodisias on the Cosmos*.

6 To be accurate, Avicenna does not commit to precisely ten separate intellects, as shown in Janos, "Moving the Orbs." Like Aristotle's unmoved movers (*Metaphysics*, XII.8), the separate intellects are the final causes for the motion of the astral bodies, the astral souls being the efficient causes, and their number should therefore correspond to the number of celestial movements. Since each planet has more than one kind of movement, Aristotle suggests that the number of spheres, and hence unmoved movers, is 55 (Ibid, 1074a10–12). Avicenna allows (*al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, I, 47, 67–68) that their number may be either ten, corresponding to the nine celestial spheres and the sublunar world, or "close to 50," or even some larger unidentified number (*Réfutation de l'astrologie*, 38), in case separate intellects must also be posited for the epicyclical movements that in the Ptolemaic model are needed to account for the observed movements of the planets.

is different from Plotinus. We have already seen that both al-Fārābī and Avicenna relate the human ethical end to the separate intellects. Hence, it is the ontological level of these intellects, in particular, the final agent or active intellect (*nous poiētikos*/*al-ʿaql al-faʿʿāl*), that constitutes the ultimate stage for the human soul's ascent. The Arabic philosophers identify this last separate intellect with the active principle that Aristotle in *De anima*, III.5 posits as necessary to convey the human potentiality for thinking into actual thinking, just as light actualizes the potentiality for seeing.[7] For Avicenna, the agent intellect as the last separate intellect is also the cause of the existence of the sublunar world, including the human soul, and Avicenna explicitly relates the human soul's ascent to an idea of cosmic symmetry. Al-Fārābī, however, relegates the creation of the sublunar world to the celestial spheres. While he recognizes the upwards progression as a general principle, there is no symmetry in the sense that the human soul would return to its source.[8]

For both al-Fārābī and Avicenna, attaining human perfection, nevertheless, represents an ontological change in the human soul's existence, through which it becomes assimilated to the higher level of existence of the incorporeal intellects transcending the material world. This introduces the question of whether the human end should be understood as mystical.[9] The answer

7 For the classical and medieval Arabic interpretations of this notoriously tricky passage (430a10–19), see Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 13–29. Aristotle does not explicate whether the active principle is internal or external to the human soul, but, like the Arabic philosophers, various classical authors understood it to be an entity that transcends the human soul. In most cases, it was located higher within the hierarchy of existence, such as in the First Cause for Alexander of Aphrodisias or in the cosmic Intellect for Plotinus.

8 See Marquet, "Descente et remontée chez Fârâbî," for a comparison of the descent and ascent in al-Fārābī and the Brethren of Purity.

9 Scholars have less frequently ascribed mysticism to al-Fārābī, although, for a few examples, see Madkour, *La place d'al-Fârâbi dans l'école philosophique musulmane*, 143–144, 185–190; Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 16–17; Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, 223–225. In contrast, in the case of Avicenna, there is an extended scholarly debate on his mysticism. The debate focuses on whether he in some works, such as the mostly lost *Easterners* (*al-Mashriqiyyūn*), the last sections of the *Pointers and Reminders*, and the allegorical stories, presents a mystical doctrine different from the one he gives in his Peripatetic works, such as the *Healing*. For formulations of a mystical 'Oriental' philosophy in Avicenna, see Corbin, *Avicenne et le Récit visionnaire*; Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, 185–196. For refutations, see Pines, "La 'Philosophie orientale' d'Avicenne"; Gutas, "Avicenna's Eastern ('Oriental') Philosophy." For formulations of Avicenna's philosophy in general as mystical, that is, without positing two separate philosophical systems, see Gardet, *La pensée religieuse d'Avicenne*, 143–196; Idem, "The Logic of Emanationism and Ṣūfism in the Philosophy of Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Part I"; Idem, "The Logic of Emanationism and Ṣūfism in the Philosophy of Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Part II"; Elkaisy-Friemuth, *God and Humans in Islamic Thought*, 102–116.

seems to depend on what is meant by mysticism. If by a mystical state one understands an awareness or knowledge that transcends rational thought and is attained through a union with God, then neither al-Fārābī nor Avicenna is a mystic. For Plotinus, the human soul can ascend up to the One that transcends rationality,[10] while for both al-Fārābī and Avicenna, the First is an intellect, and hence there is no ontological level of existence beyond reason. If a mystical state is understood as not necessarily suprarational but as one where the human being becomes assimilated with the divine and thereby attains knowledge that transcends ordinary knowledge, the question becomes more complicated. Even for Aristotle, the human contemplative end is divine (*theios*) since contemplation is the activity of the First Cause.[11] However, Aristotle could hardly be called a mystic, as there is no notion of a union of the human self with the First Cause. The idea is rather that the human being becomes somewhat like the First Cause by means of the ordinary process of perfecting his theoretical faculty. On the other hand, even the separate intellects, to which al-Fārābī at least restricts the ascent, are divine in a secondary sense since both al-Fārābī and Avicenna identify them with the Quranic angels.[12] The question of mysticism for al-Fārābī and Avicenna, then, seems to concern the relationship that the human soul has with the transcendent intellect. If this relation involves a union of the two entities, and the human being as a result gains an awareness of the reality that transcends sensible and demonstrative knowledge, then the human end can be characterized as mystical.

1 Al-Fārābī

As regards the idea of descent and reascent of existence, we have seen that al-Fārābī understands the cosmos to form a hierarchy of existents of gradu-

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For refutations of Avicenna's mysticism, see Gutas, "Intellect Without Limits"; Janssens, "Ibn Sīnā: A Philosophical Mysticism."

10 It is debatable in what sense, if any, even Plotinus should be called a mystic. As argued in Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, 213–230; Idem, "Back to the Mysticism of Plotinus," Plotinus represents mysticism in a 'theistic,' as opposed to a 'monistic,' sense. That is, the ultimate end for the human soul is to attain a union with the One, which results in an awareness of the reality that transcends the intelligible forms but is not pantheistic in that the human soul would lose its separate identity.

11 Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 7, 1177b27–1178a1; Idem, *Metaphysics*, XII, 7, 1072b14–31.

12 See, for example, al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 2, 32; Avicenna, *al-Mabda' wa-l-maʿād*, III.8, 103.

ally descending perfection, for which happiness as the soul's reascent should presumably form a counterpart. The cosmos is created through an eternal and necessary process of emanation (*fayḍ*), where the First's intellection of His essence produces the first separate intellect as a by-product,[13] the first intellect's intellection of the First and of itself produces the second intellect and the first sphere, respectively, and so on until the ninth intellect, which produces the final tenth intellect, identified with the active intellect of Aristotle's *De anima*, III.5, and the sphere of the moon.[14] If the activity of the tenth intellect were to be symmetrical with the rest of the separate intellects, it should be the cause of the existence of the matter and forms, including the human form, that constitute our sublunar world. Surprisingly, this is not what al-Fārābī proposes, and what he does propose, moreover, varies from one treatise to another.[15] In the *Virtuous City* and the *Political Governance*, the cause of both the matter and forms of the sublunar world is located at the revolving spheres.[16] The active intellect's providential activity with regard to the sublunar world, in turn, is restricted to the actualization of human thought.[17] In the *Treatise on the Intellect*, al-Fārābī states that the celestial spheres are the causes of the prime matter, while the active intellect is the cause of the forms as well as of human intellection.[18] The origin of the human soul, in the sense of the species form of humanity, then, is in the supernal world. However, al-Fārābī remains undecided whether it is located in the spheres or the active intellect. Nowhere in

13 That is, creation is not a separate act but the necessary consequence of the First's activity. Creation cannot be the end of the contemplative activity for either the First or the separate intellects, since, if this were the case, an ontologically lower being would constitute a final cause for their existence. See al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 2, § 1, 90–94; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, §§ 31–32, 47–48.

14 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 3, §§ 1–10, 100–104; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 2, 31–32. Al-Fārābī identifies the tenth intellect with the active intellect in *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, § 2, 202.

15 For the various accounts, see Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 44–70.

16 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 8, §§ 1–5, 134–144; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, §§ 42–44, 55–56; § 51–56, 60–64.

17 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, § 2, 202; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 3, 32; § 42, 55. This also seems to be the doctrine presented in *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs*, § 49, 103; § 57, 105; §§ 98–99, 128–130. There is, however, an interesting addition: al-Fārābī states (129–130) that particular souls come from previous plants, animals, and humans, while the question of whether the origin of the species form of humanity, donkeyness, and so forth is in the celestial bodies and souls or the active intellect should be answered by metaphysics, which is not covered in the treatise. This would seem to mean that the individual souls, in any case, are not emanated from the celestial region.

18 Al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, §§ 25–26, 32–35.

his writings, however, is there any sense of the individual souls descending to the sublunar world—in the *Philosophy of Aristotle*, al-Fārābī, on the contrary, indicates a strictly sublunar origin for the individual souls.[19]

With regard to the ascent, al-Fārābī is more explicit in identifying the human end with the human soul reaching the level of existence of the active intellect, although it will always remain somewhat short of it.[20] In cosmological terms, this means that the human stage of the acquired intellect and the transcendent being of active intellect lie immediately next to each other in the hierarchy of being—the active intellect is the lowest and the most deficient of the supralunar separate intellects, while the acquired intellect is the highest and the most perfect of existents in the sublunar world.[21] Since al-Fārābī sees the vertical chain of being as one of final causality, if the acquired intellect is the final cause of the human being, then the active intellect is the final cause of the acquired intellect. That is, the end for the sake of which the human being seeks to perfect his intellect is to become as close as possible to the active intellect.[22] Beyond this, given the vertical chain of final causality, the active intellect is ultimately the final cause of the sublunar world as a whole—plants exist for the sake of animals, animals for the sake of the human being, and the human being for the sake of becoming one of the incorporeal substances.[23] The spheres and the active intellect together exercise providential governance over the sublunar world—the aim of the latter is to bring the forms inhering in matter gradually closer to immateriality, culminating in the pure immateriality of the acquired intellect.[24] Al-Fārābī, then, clearly sees human perfection to form part of a cosmic ascent, where the existence that descends down to the prime matter reverts to the level of the immaterial substances.

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19 See note 17.

20 Thus, according to the *Virtuous City* (*On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, § 5, 204–206), upon reaching its perfection, the human soul joins the conglomerate (*jumla*) of "separate substances" (*al-jawāhir al-mufāriqa*) but remains below the active intellect in "rank" (*rutba*). In *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, § 22, 27, al-Fārābī states that the acquired intellect and the active intellect pertain to the same species (*nawʿ*) and that happiness consists in becoming the "closest thing possible" (*aqrab shayʾ*) to the active intellect (Ibid, § 24, 31). Only in *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 3, 32; § 11, 35, does al-Fārābī state that the human being may reach the rank of the active intellect but even there it is later qualified by the word "proximity" (*qurb*) (Ibid, § 12, 36).

21 See, for example, al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, §§ 19–20, 23–25.

22 This is stated most clearly in al-Fārābī, *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs*, § 98, 128–129.

23 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, §§ 62–63, 67–68; Idem, *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, § 19, 23–24.

24 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 24, 31; § 42, 55.

Thus, it is evident that al-Fārābī does pick up the Neoplatonic theme of a cosmic symmetry between the procession and reversion of existence—existence descends from the First down to the lowest level of what can possibly exist and then reverts up to immateriality.[25] The structure of the first part of the *Virtuous City* may be interpreted to reflect this theme. It first depicts the downward progression of existence from the First to prime matter and then the upwards progression of the sublunar world from the elements to the acquired intellect. It is equally clear that the theme takes a very different form from Plotinus, for example. There is no soul or intellect of the world in al-Fārābī's system to which the human soul's ascent could be related, nor is there any idea that the human soul should return to its original intelligible existence from which it was alienated due to the body. Al-Fārābī, moreover, never says that the particular souls would descend into matter. Even if the human form may have its origin in the supralunar region, since the active intellect seems to be the cause of only the intellection, but not of the existence, of the human soul, the idea of the soul's return to its origin is absent.

What exactly is the rank of the active intellect, and what does it mean to attain a state that at least closely resembles it? The active intellect is one of the separate intellects, all of which are incorporeal substances that are always in their state of actuality. We have already seen that the perfected human intellect resembles all of the separate intellects in that it attains a state of actuality and incorporeality with regard to its intellection. However, in the *Political Governance*, al-Fārābī attributes a lower degree of existence to the active intellect than that of the nine separate intellects related to astral spheres.[26] This must be mainly due to its inability to produce a further planetary sphere or a separate intellect, and that its providential activity, therefore, is directed towards the material world. In the *Virtuous City*, al-Fārābī describes the contemplative activity of the active intellect as identical with that of the rest of the separate intellects: it contemplates the First and its own essence.[27] In the *Political Governance*, however, it is distinct from the rest of the separate intellects. Besides the First and itself, it also has all the separate intellects as its object of contemplation.[28] The human state of acquired intellect, then, seems to resemble the active intellect in that its contemplative activity is directed to not only the First and its own essence but also the separate intellects.

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25 For a concise and explicit exposition of the descent and return, see al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, § 19, 23–24.

26 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madanīyya*, § 1, 31.

27 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 3, § 10, 104.

28 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madanīyya*, § 11, 34.

In what sense, then, does the acquired intellect remain below the active intellect? There seem to be at least three such aspects. First, its contemplative activity is not causal in that it would produce an effect separate from itself.[29] Second, its contemplative activity is not directed only towards what is above it but also to the intelligible forms abstracted from matter below it.[30] Third, its order of intellection is reverse to that of the active intellect, which intellects the First and the separate intellects in descending order of perfection of existence. In contrast, we must ascend from the less perfect towards the more perfect existents, that is, from effects to causes.[31]

Finally, as regards mysticism, it does not seem to be possible to interpret the human end as understood by al-Fārābī as mystical in any sense of the word. First, mystical or ecstatic language is entirely absent in al-Fārābī, even if contemplative happiness does involve the affective aspect of pleasure discussed in chapter 3. Second, al-Fārābī never depicts the contemplation of the First as the culmination of the human contemplative activity, as Avicenna will, although human intellectual activity certainly must result in some kind of intellectual understanding of the First. Third, the final stage of the human soul's ascent is, in any case, restricted to the level of the active intellect. The active intellect is divine in a secondary sense, and al-Fārābī does state that the human being by perfecting his intellect becomes divine (*ilāhī*).[32] However, what al-Fārābī means by this is that the human intellect becomes like the divine incorporeal intellects in the sense that its activity is purely contemplative. Al-Fārābī also states that when it reaches the stage of acquired intellect, the human soul becomes "as if united" (*ka-l-muttaḥida*),[33] or attains a connection (*ittiṣāl*) with,[34] the active intellect, or that the active intellect descends (*ḥalla fīhi*) to it.[35] However, the context is a philosophical explanation of prophetic revela-

29 Ibid, § 20, 42.

30 Ibid.

31 Al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, § 22, 27–28.

32 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 12, 36. Otherwise, the theme of divinization of the human being is not prevalent in al-Fārābī. In al-Fārābī, "Risāla fī-mā yanbaghī," 13, his short prolegomena to Aristotelian philosophy, al-Fārābī picks up the definition of philosophy as "becoming like God as much as is possible for the human being" (*al-tashabbuh bi-l-khāliq bi-qadr mā fī ṭāqat al-insān*). The maxim goes back to Plato (*Theaetetus*, 176b; *Republic*, x, 613B) and was topical in late ancient Platonism (see Hein, *Definition und Einteilung der Philosophie*, 99–100, 116). As shown in Gutas, "Starting Point of Philosophical Studies," the treatise is a faithful adaptation of Alexandrian introductions to Aristotle's philosophy rather than a genuinely original work by al-Fārābī.

33 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 15, § 11, 244.

34 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 79.

35 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 15, § 9, 244.

tion, and even here, the separation between the two entities is maintained. As we have seen, the acquired and active intellects are contiguous but separate for al-Fārābī, and the former is lower on the ontological scale of existence. The knowledge attained through the contact with the active intellect is not mystical in any sense of the word but rather entails an entirely rational understanding of the cosmos and its primary principles as the culmination of the program for scientific knowledge presented in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*.[36]

2 Avicenna

Since Avicenna adopts al-Fārābī's cosmological system as the basis of his own, the main contours of the descent and reascent of existence are very similar. However, Avicenna relates the human soul's ascent to a cosmic reversion of existence more explicitly, and the downwards and upwards progressions now become genuinely symmetrical. In Avicenna's cosmological system, the multiplicity of the cosmos proceeds gradually from the completely simple first principle through an eternal and necessary process of emanation (*ṣudūr*/*fayḍān*). The Necessary Existent's thinking of Himself brings about the first separate intellect. The three aspects of thought of each separate intellect, of the Necessary Existent, of itself as existing necessarily due to its cause, and of itself as existing possibly in itself, are the causes of a further intellect, the soul of a sphere, and the body of a sphere, respectively.[37] The final separate intellect is again identified with Aristotle's active intellect,[38] the creative activity of which for Avicenna is analogous to the separate intellects producing an astral sphere. It is the cause of the matter, in cooperation with the celestial spheres, and forms of the sublunar world, besides being the cause of the actual human thought.[39]

36 See al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, § 22, 27–29.

37 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing, IX.4*; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, VI.29–41, 185–229. For Avicenna's emanationist cosmology, see, in particular, Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 74–83. Besides the fact that Avicenna distinguishes three, as opposed to two, aspects of thought connected with his modal ontology, the major difference with respect to al-Fārābī is that Avicenna, in his metaphysical writings, presents a detailed argument for his cosmological system as a solution to the problem of how the multiplicity of the celestial and earthly existents that we observe can have its origin in the unity of the first principle.

38 See, for example, Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.3, § 23, 325–326.

39 Ibid, IX.5; Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, VI.42, 231–240.

Moreover, each particular soul comes to existence as an emanation from the active intellect when a bodily constitution capable of receiving it is formed.[40]

In partial contrast to al-Fārābī, however, for Avicenna, the idea of a cosmic symmetry of the downwards and upwards progression of existence is an important theme that he explicitly highlights in many works. The counterpart of the descent of existence from the Necessary Existent down to matter is the ascent of existence in the sublunar world from matter through the four elements, minerals, plants, animals, and the human being until the acquired intellect.[41] The purpose of the *Beginning and Return* as a whole is to present the symmetry of the two directions of existence. For Avicenna, the sublunar world is perfected through human activity, and the human ethical end thereby becomes explicitly connected with the cosmic reversion of existence.[42] The two directions are also symmetrical: the active intellect is the cause and guardian of both the sublunar world as a whole and the human soul, in particular. Thus, human perfection represents the return of both the sublunar world and the human soul back to their origin among the separate incorporeal intellects.

Beyond this, Avicenna relates the human end to cosmic reversion in the further sense that it forms part of the vertical chain of causality within which a being is both the efficient and final cause of the being immediately below it.[43] Each separate intellect is the efficient cause of the existence of an astral soul-body composite, while it is also the final cause of its movement. For every astral body, its circular movement is due to its desire (*tashawwuq*) to imitate (*iqtidāʾ*) or become like (*tashabbuh*) the First. Its particular movement is due to its desire to become like the intellect to which it owns its existence. To "become like" should here be understood as becoming as perfect as possible as a result of intellectual apprehension (*taʿaqqul*) of the perfection of the desired object's essence.[44] Avicenna states that the relation of the astral bodies to their par-

40 See, for example, Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, V.3, 223–227. For the origination of the human soul, see, in particular, Marmura, "Some Questions Regarding Avicenna's Theory of the Temporal Origination of the Human Rational Soul." Avicenna often attributes the emanation to the "separate causes" (*al-ʿilal al-mufāriqa*), that is, the separate intellects in general. However, the causal activity of the higher intellects is mediated by the lower ones. The immediate cause should, therefore, be located in the active intellect, whose creative activity is directed towards the sublunar world (see Ibid, 122, note 2).

41 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, X.1, §§1–2, 358–359; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, VII.1, 241–242; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.1, 91.

42 Avicenna, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.5, 99–100.

43 For the application of the Neoplatonic principle of reversion to Avicennan causality in general, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, 135–137.

44 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.2–3; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhat*, vol. 3, VI.10–13, 134–148; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.44–45, 58–62. Upwards reversion in this

ticular intellects is like our relation to the active intellect,[45] and the human contemplative end would thereby seem to be analogous to that of the spheres. This means that the efficient cause of our existence, the active intellect, is also the final cause of our existence—our end is to become as much like it as possible through attaining our respective perfection.

What does it mean for the human being to become like the active intellect? Unlike al-Fārābī in the *Political Governance*, Avicenna does not make a categorical distinction between the active intellect and the rest of the separate intellects, all of which are fully actual active intellects.[46] The likeness with the active intellect would, then, seem to mean that the stage of acquired intellect is like all the separate intellects. In the psychological part of the *Healing*, Avicenna, in fact, identifies this stage with "becoming like (*tashabbahat*) the first principles of existence."[47] As discussed above, this presumably means that the human intellect becomes like the separate intellects in the actuality and incorporeality of its intellectual activity and in its conception of the intelligible order of existence. However, it seems clear that likeness does not mean identity. The ontological rank of the acquired intellect must remain below the active intellect due to Avicenna's metaphysical principle that the effect always remains below its cause.[48] For the astral souls, the perpetuity of celestial motion implies that their object of desire is an entity that transcends them and remains beyond their reach,[49] and, similarly, the human soul will always fall short of attaining its object of desire in this life.[50] This is obvious because the rational soul cannot fully become a separate intellect in its embodied state. It could, however, also be taken to mean that the quality of the contemplative activity itself is inferior in some sense, as was the case for al-Fārābī. Perhaps the human intellect always remains below the separate intellects in that the latter conceive the intelligible forms in an undistinguished manner by contemplating their own essence, whereas for the human intellect thinking is always propositional.[51] Again, as

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sense is not only a Neoplatonic notion but also Aristotelian in the sense of Aristotle's immovable movers as the final cause of the movement of the spheres. To this, the *Principles of the Whole* attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias, in particular, adds the ideas of imitation and upwards reversion.

45 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.3, § 21, 325.

46 See Avicenna, *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād*, III.5, 98.

47 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, I.5, 50.

48 See, for example, Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.4, § 18, 333.

49 Ibid, IX.2, § 15, 313–314.

50 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, IX.18, 40–45.

51 See Adamson, "Non-Discursive Thought in Avicenna's Commentary on the Theology of Aristotle," for the distinction between discursive (*fikr*) and non-discursive thought in

for al-Fārābī, the human intellect clearly remains below the separate intellects also in that its contemplative activity does not result in the creation of further existence.

If the upwards reversion were to be entirely analogous to the celestial souls, the human soul should desire to imitate not only the separate intellect, which is its immediate cause, but also the first principle. In the *Metaphysics* of the *Healing*, Avicenna, in fact, does state that happiness consists in "drawing close to the First Truth" (*muqārabat al-ḥaqq al-awwal*).[52] Since Avicenna's first principle is an intellect, the perfection of the theoretical intellect implies relative likeness with the First in an obvious way, as it does even for Aristotle. Avicenna, however, explicates that the celestial beings' imitation of the First means that they "remain at the highest degree of perfection that belongs to a thing permanently."[53] That is, the imitation of the First means striving to perpetuate the perfection of one's essence. In the *Treatise on Love*, as well, Avicenna identifies the human end with becoming like (*tashabbuh*) or attaining proximity (*qurb*) to the Absolute Good (*al-khayr al-muṭlaq*).[54] Moreover, he states that the goal for both celestial and human souls is to reach their perfections as self-subsisting intellectual substances (*ṣuwar ʿaqliyya qāʾima bi-dhawātihā*).[55] For the morally and intellectually perfected human soul, in any case, this will lead to eternal existence upon the demise of its body. It seems, then, that the human rational soul imitates the First by striving to attain eternal life as an actualized intellect.

The final aspect of the soul's ontological transformation concerns the question of whether Avicenna's understanding of the human end is mystical. The relevant parts of Avicenna's philosophical system are very much like al-Fārābī's. Therefore, much of what was said concerning al-Fārābī also applies to Avicenna. For Avicenna specifically, the answer to the question seems to revolve around two features of his thought: 1) the precise nature of the relationship between the human and active intellects and 2) his epistemology. As regards the former feature, based on the above discussion, it seems clear that Avicenna understands the human end in terms of upwards reversion towards the sep-

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Avicenna in analogy with the distinction between *dianoia* and *noēsis* in Plotinus. See also Gutas, "Intuition and Thinking"; Idem, "Intellect Without Limits," for the syllogistical structure of all thinking for Avicenna. This is true even of intuition (*ḥads*), which for Avicenna means instantaneous grasping of an intelligible form dispensing with prior research and syllogistic arguments.

52 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 3, 348.

53 Ibid, IX.2, § 17, 314.

54 Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-ʿishq," 20–21.

55 Ibid, 21.

arate intellects, which falls short of identity at least as long as the rational soul remains embodied. Based on Avicenna's ontology alone, the effect should always remain below its cause, and, as we have seen, Avicenna consistently describes the relation as imitation or likeness rather than as one of identity or assimilation.

Avicenna's epistemology, however, implies some kind of contact between the human theoretical faculty and the transcendent active intellect. It is only by the agency of the active intellect that the human potentiality for thinking can become actualized in the first place.[56] Avicenna characterizes the relation between the two intellects as a "conjunction" or "connection" (*ittiṣāl*),[57] and explicitly denies that the active intellect could become united with the human intellect.[58] Conjunction in this sense is not a mystical state resulting in suprarational knowledge but the precondition without which any kind of human thought is impossible. The perfection of the human theoretical faculty as complete intelligible knowledge involves an optimal disposition for establishing a contact (*malakat al-ittiṣāl*) with the active intellect,[59] where the intelligible forms are stored, but even then, the human intellect does not become united with the active intellect.

If the human soul's relation with the active intellect seems non-mystical, what about its relation with the Necessary Existent itself? We have seen that the human soul emulates the First in seeking to perpetuate the perfection of its essence. However, there does not seem to be a possibility for a direct vision of,

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56 The question of Avicenna's view on the roles of the human versus the active intellect in abstract thought has been a subject of scholarly debate. According to the traditional line of interpretation, the human abstractive activity merely prepares the human intellect to receive the emanation of the intelligible forms from the active intellect. This view is represented in, for example, Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 15; Nuseibeh, "Al-ʿAql al-qudsi"; Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 83–94; Black, "Avicenna on the Ontological and Epistemic Status of Fictional Beings," 445–446. Recently, there has been increasing support for the view that it is the human faculty itself that gradually abstracts (*tajrīd*) the intelligible forms from sense objects. In this reading, the role of the active intellect is limited to the emanation of an 'intellectual light' that enables the human abstractive process. For this view, see Gutas, "Intuition and Thinking," 30–31; McGinnis, "Making Abstraction Less Abstract"; Hasse, "Avicenna's Epistemological Optimism." The two interpretations could be characterized as a Neoplatonic versus an Aristotelian reading of Avicenna's epistemology.

57 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, V.5, 235–236; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 2, III.13–14, 400–402;

58 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, VII.9, 270–271; Idem, "Al-Taʿlīqāt," 92–93. One of Avicenna's arguments against a union ("Al-Taʿlīqāt," 93) is that, if there was one, the human being should learn all intelligible concepts at once rather than gradually.

59 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, VII.2, 244.

let alone a union with, the First in Avicenna's ontology and epistemology. Nevertheless, in the passage of the *Metaphysics* of the *Healing* quoted above, Avicenna ascribes to the perfection of the theoretical intellect a state where it "witnesses" (*mushāhida*) the Absolute Good (*al-khayr al-muṭlaq*), becomes "united with it" (*muttaḥida bihi*), "imprinted with its image and form" (*muntaqisha bi-mithālihi wa-hay'atihi*), "affiliated with it" (*munkhariṭa fī salakihi*), and "comes to be of its substance" (*ṣā'ira min jawharihi*).[60] The notion of a "vision" (*mushāhada*) of the First is attested to in Avicenna's other works, and I will return to it shortly. What is more remarkable, however, is that Avicenna's major Peripatetic treatise, as opposed to one of the treatises often characterized as mystical, seems to identify the human end with some form of divine union.

The first thing to note is that the beginning of the passage agrees with Avicenna's other writings in identifying the rational soul's perfection with complete intelligible knowledge of the first principle and the derived reality, whereas the latter problematic part is not present in other works.[61] If Avicenna really believed in the possibility of a divine union, one would think that he would have reiterated the doctrine in the *Pointers*, in particular, given the work's inclination to employ mystically inspired language. In the parallel passage of the *Pointers*, Avicenna states that the "perfection of the intellectual substance" means, first, that the "clarity of the First Truth is represented in it (*tatamaththal fīhi*) to the extent that it is capable of attaining from Him the beauty pertaining to Him" and, second, that the hierarchy of derived existence is similarly represented in the human intellect.[62] As we have seen, the passage in the *Healing* also states that it is the image (*mithāl*) of the Absolute Good that is imprinted in the human rational soul, which in itself is contradictory with the suggestion of a divine union at the end of the passage.[63]

Avicenna must mean in both passages that the essence of the First is reflected in the perfected human intellect in the sense that the human being acquires entirely rational knowledge of the first principle. Thus, the end of the passage in the *Healing* should be attributed to a careless formulation—it is perhaps the higher world of intellects that the human soul unites with

60 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 11, 350. The passage is quoted in full in the previous chapter.

61 Except for Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, III, 328, where the passage of the *Healing* is repeated in an identical form.

62 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhat*, vol. 4, VIII.9, 2.

63 The contradiction is noted in Michot, *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne*, 99–100; Janssens, "Ibn Sīnā: A Philosophical Mysticism," 43.

and comes to share the substance of.[64] Avicenna does, however, say in other works that the First somehow reveals knowledge concerning His intelligible essence directly, that is, without the intermediacy of the separate intellects, to the perfected human intellect.[65] The contemplative activity of the separate intellects is directed towards the First and their own essence, and, as we have seen, the perfected human intellect becomes a separate intellect at least in a qualified sense. Some kind of direct manifestation of intelligible knowledge of the essence of the first principle, then, seems to be a consequence of the human intellect's transformation into a pure intellect.

Avicenna, furthermore, relates the notion of a "vision" or "witnessing" (*mushāhada*) of the First to the human end both in the passage in the *Healing* discussed above and in the *Pointers*.[66] The term certainly seems to imply direct awareness or experience beyond ordinary rational knowledge, especially since Avicenna speaks of an ineffable state that cannot be expressed by means of language.[67] However, as Gutas has shown, even here, the reference is not to mystical knowledge in the sense of direct cognition that transcends the intellect—in the *Discussions* (*al-Mubāḥathāt*), Avicenna explicitly states that such a vision is logically structured.[68] In a passage of the commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*, Avicenna defines the "true vision" (*al-mushāhada al-ḥaqqa*) as a pure form of intellection of the intelligible forms by the fully actualized theoretical faculty.[69] In other passages, it becomes apparent that it is the experience

64 Cf. Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 19, 354: "It seems that the human being will not free himself from this world and its connections unless he has firmly established his relation with that [celestial] world."

65 See Adamson, "Non-Discursive Thought in Avicenna's Commentary on the Theology of Aristotle," 105–110. In addition to the passages quoted by Adamson ("Tafsīr Kitāb 'Uthūlūjiyā,'" II, 52, 53; IV, 58; V, 60), the idea is also present in "Risāla fī al-'ishq," 22, where receiving the manifestation (*tajalliyya*) of the First's essence "according to the most perfect manner possible" is identified with "what the Sufis call a union (*ittiḥād*)." The reference in Avicenna's commentary on book XII of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* ("Sharḥ Kitāb Ḥarf al-Lām," 27), quoted in Janssens, "Ibn Sīnā: A Philosophical Mysticism," 41, to a "conjunction with the First Truth becoming present to us" (*yaẓhar lanā ittiṣāl bi-l-ḥaqq al-awwal*), is presumably also to the direct manifestation of the divine essence in the human intellect.

66 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, IX.20, 100.

67 Ibid.

68 Gutas, "Intellect Without Limits," 363–370. The passages in question (*al-Mubāḥathāt*, §§ 597–598, 199; § 726, 247–248) are quoted in Gutas, 367–368.

69 Avicenna, "Tafsīr Kitāb 'Uthūlūjiyā,'" VIII, 71: "It is that in which one turns (*yakūn al-iltifāt fīhā*) [emending *yakūn* for *lā yakūn*] towards the true forms (*al-ṣuwar al-ḥaqqa*) without needing to consider (*mulāḥaẓa*) that which they produce (*mā yuntijuhā*) or what comes to be from them (*yakūn 'anhu*). This occurs once the faculty is completed and perfected, for then it witnesses (*tushāhid*) the true genus (*al-jins al-ḥaqq*) by the faculty that it has

of contemplating either the First or the intelligible reality in general that is ineffable in two different ways. First, since for Avicenna, the intelligible forms themselves cannot be stored in the human theoretical faculty, sensible images (*mithāl*) of them are reproduced in the faculty of imagination (*khayāl*). Intellectual vision is distinguished from ordinary intellectual cognition in that it is accompanied by the bodily faculties of imagination and estimation (*wahm*). This would make the experience mystical in the sense that the beauty of the intelligible world is conveyed through sensible images.[70]

Second, intellection for Avicenna involves an affective aspect, which I have already discussed. In another passage of the commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*, Avicenna distinguishes intellectual perception (*idrāk*) from the "true vision" (*mushāhada ḥaqqa*): the latter follows from the former when "one's aspiration (*himma*) turns in contemplation (*yanẓur*) towards the True One and is cut off from every preoccupation and impediment until along with perception there comes about an awareness of the thing perceived as something appropriate and pleasant (*shuʿūr bi-l-mudrak min ḥayth al-mudrak al-munāsib al-ladhīdh*) … not as a thing only perceived and as intelligible but rather insofar as it is beloved in its substance (*min ḥaythu huwa ʿashīq fī jawharihi*)."[71] We have seen that for Avicenna, pleasure consists of an awareness or a perception of a perfect or suitable activity. In the case of intellection, that awareness, and consequently the pleasure, may be hindered by the body even when the perfection is present.[72] Thus, the vision of the First differs from an intellectual understanding in that, when all bodily preoccupations are removed, the act of

(*bi-l-quwwa allatī lahā*) without further action (*dūna ʿamal akthar*), which he [= pseudo-Aristotle] calls arousal (*nuhūḍ*). It is like renouncing (*iʿrāḍ*) this world and its distractions (*shawāghil*) and turning towards the world of the truth (*ʿālam al-ḥaqq*). For this arousal is not needed when it is separate (*mujarrada*)." I take this passage to mean that Avicenna here accords the "vision" (*mushāhada*) the relatively mundane meaning that, once the theoretical intellect is perfected and it no longer needs to abstract the intelligible forms from sensible forms, it perceives the intelligible forms themselves, as opposed to their manifestations in sensible objects. The original Plotinian passage (see 71, note 1), which Avicenna is explicating here to fit into his philosophical system, presumably involves the doctrine of reincarnation, so that the "arousal" (*nuhūḍ*) needed to perceive the intellectual world in the human soul's embodied state is contrasted with its effortlessness before the soul was embodied. Avicenna, of course, rejects the Plotinian doctrines of the soul's pre-existence and the undescended human intellect.

70 Avicenna, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, §§ 597–598, 199; § 726, 247–248. In addition, the vision involves intimacy (*alf*) between the theoretical faculty and the object of intellection.

71 Avicenna, "Tafsīr Kitāb 'Uthūlūjiyā,'" 1, 44. The passage is quoted in full in Gutas, "Intellect Without Limits," 365–366.

72 See the discussion in chapter 3.

contemplating the First is accompanied by the emotions of pleasure and love.[73] In both aspects of the "vision," however, the cognition itself is entirely rational. The special nature of the contemplative experience is explained by the collaboration of other Avicennan faculties, none of which implies the possibility of a mystical epistemology or ontology.

The human end as understood by Avicenna is, therefore, mystical neither in the sense that the human soul would become united with the active intellect or the first principle nor in the sense that it would involve suprarational mystical knowledge. Nevertheless, although Avicenna's doctrine of happiness is very close to al-Fārābī's, it is evident that Avicenna incorporates mystical overtones into his depiction of happiness in a way that al-Fārābī does not. The difference seems mainly to be one of language and perspective—Avicenna's use of mystical terminology in some of his works serves the purpose of highlighting the experiential aspect of the soul's contemplative ascent.[74] In doing this, Avicenna resorts to both Neoplatonic and Sufi motifs. Regarding the first motif, we have seen that Avicenna picks up, presumably from the *Theology of Aristotle*, the Neoplatonic theme of the human soul's reascent to the intelligible world and the contemplation of its beauty. Among Avicenna's shorter works, the *Treatise on Love* focuses on the theme of the human soul's desire for and love of the First and the intelligible world. The treatise, therefore, has a distinctly Neoplatonic flavor.[75] Doctrinally, Avicenna is in this respect still as far from Plotinus as al-Fārābī was: since he denies the Plotinian doctrines of the soul's pre-existence and the undescended human intellect, the human soul in no sense returns to an intelligible existence of which it previously would have formed a part.

As regards Sufi mysticism, it is undeniable that Avicenna, in the ninth and tenth parts (*namaṭ*) of the *Pointers*, resorts to Sufi terminology in portraying

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73 In "Risāla fī al-ʿishq," 4, Avicenna defines love (*ʿishq*) as 1) the principle of desire (*mabdaʾ al-nuzūʿ*) towards the good when it is absent and 2) desire to be united with the good (*alṭaʾaḥḥud bihi*) when it is present. As a metaphysical principle, love (*ʿishq*) is closely related to desire (*shawq*). The object of both is the good or perfection of an existent (cf. *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.2, §12, 312), the ultimate object of love (*maʿshūq*) being the First. Both terms also operate as general principles explaining the upwards reversion of existents.

74 This has been suggested in, for example, Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna*, 160–165; Gutas, "Intellect Without Limits," 363. Contemplative perfection, of course, has an affective aspect for al-Fārābī as well. He merely makes little effort to describe what it feels like to contemplate the First or the intelligible reality.

75 For a short analysis of the background of this treatise, see the introduction and commentary in Fackenheim, "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina."

the human soul's gradual ascent towards contemplative perfection.[76] Thus, he speaks of the "knower's" (*ʿārif*) progressive spiritual "stations" (*maqāma*),[77] gradually increasing "moments" (*waqt*) of ecstatic experience,[78] and the ultimate stage of "arrival" (*wuṣūl*) where he "abandons himself (*yaghīb ʿan nafsihi*) and notices the side of sanctity (*jināb al-quds*) only, and if he notices himself he does so inasmuch he notices the truth."[79] All of these are Sufi technical terms denoting the gradual spiritual progression of a mystic towards the ultimate objective of losing his personal self in the ultimate reality of God. However, when the content that Avicenna assigns to these concepts is analyzed, it is clear that he does not subscribe to the Sufi doctrines themselves but merely reformulates his philosophical doctrine in Sufi terms.[80] That is, what Avicenna in the *Pointers* calls arrival is not annihilation (*fanāʾ*) of the self in God but conjunction with the active intellect where the separate identity of the human soul is preserved. While such a state sounds extraordinary in itself, it is not mystical either in the Plotinian or in the Sufi sense. The mode of cognition is still rational and there is no fusion of the human and divine identities. Avicenna's aim, then, appears to be to reformulate the same rationalistic doctrine of the human end that he presents in the *Healing* and elsewhere in abstract terms by Sufi concepts. Perhaps he wants to show that, even in affective terms, the way of the philosopher does not fall short of the increasingly popular way of the Sufi mystic. While the affective aspect of contemplative happiness was doctrinally present in both Aristotle and al-Fārābī, Avicenna goes much further to describe what it feels like to actually experience it.

76 Unlike other parts of the *Pointers*, the ninth *namaṭ* has no parallel in the *Healing*.

77 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, IX.1, 47.

78 Ibid, IX.9, 86.

79 Ibid, IX.17, 92.

80 The 'Sufi' part of the *Pointers* has most recently been analyzed with this aim in mind in Janssens, "Ibn Sīnā: A Philosophical Mysticism." See also Gutas, "Intuition and Thinking."

CHAPTER 6

Afterlife

The final layer of the concept of happiness for al-Fārābī and Avicenna is its eschatological component. Both authors identify happiness with the human soul's perfected state in not only this life but also the next. Thus, happiness becomes a philosophical explication of the human soul's afterlife. Obviously, the Arabic concept of happiness here drifts even further from its origins in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* since Aristotle has no doctrine of the afterlife. However, to the extent that al-Fārābī limits the human soul's immortality to the intellect, he still more or less conforms to the Aristotelian tradition, unlike Avicenna for whom the soul as a whole is an immortal substance.[1] The Platonic and Neoplatonic sources, such as Plato's *Phaedo* and the Arabic Plotinus, did, however, convey to the Arabic philosophers a philosophical explanation of the afterlife.

Given the importance of paradise and hell in the Abrahamic religions, the question of the afterlife is not only a philosophical question but also very much a religious one. The primary motivation for al-Fārābī and Avicenna in this question appears to be to provide a philosophical explanation for Islamic eschatology, which is consistent with their overall philosophy. Thus, their philosophical eschatology is perhaps best explained as a reinterpretation of the Quranic account of paradise and hell drawing on the conceptual framework of Platonism.

As for the Platonic background, Plato's dialogues of the *Gorgias*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic* present three mythical accounts portraying distinct eschatological fates for different classes of human souls. In the last two dialogues, the eschatology is connected with the doctrine of reincarnation with the upshot

1 For Aristotle, the faculties operating through bodily organs cannot subsist except in a body. As for the intellect, Aristotle states, first, that due to its immateriality, it might be separable and hence immortal (*De anima*, II.2, 413b25–29) and, second, that the active, but not the passive, aspect of the intellect is immortal (Ibid, III.5, 430a14–25). For the Arabic philosophers, the active aspect is, of course, a transcendent substance outside the human soul. The latter statement does not, therefore, help establishing the immortality of any part of the human soul. As suggested in Chroust, "Eudemus or on the Soul," in the early dialogue of *Eudemus*, Aristotle possibly even advocated personal immortality of the Platonic kind. Still, at least Aristotle's surviving writings do not present a doctrine of the afterlife. Whether he believed even in impersonal immortality of the intellect has been debated since antiquity.

that virtuous souls will be rewarded and vicious souls punished in the afterlife.[2] Among these, the *Phaedo* account appears to have been the most influential in the Arabic context.[3] Equally influential is the Neoplatonic reading of Plato's eschatological myths, where the punishment consists of an incarnation to a further body and the reward of liberation from the cycle of reincarnations and ascent to the spiritual world. A passage of the Arabic Plotinus attributes three distinct fates in the afterlife to the three classes of ignorant (*jāhila*), vicious (*al-ʿāmila bi-l-sharr*), and virtuous (*al-ʿāmila bi-l-khayr*) souls, culminating eventually in further reincarnations in the case of the first two and ascent to the higher world in the case of the last group.[4] The Arabic Plotinus also conveys the general ideas of the soul's immortality, the purified soul's afterlife as a return to the intelligible world, and the necessity of further purification for the souls attached to corporeal pleasures.[5]

Among Arabic philosophers, al-Kindī thus explains Plato's view to be that the purified souls will after death return to the "world of divinity" (*ʿālam al-rubūbiyya*) beyond the spheres. The souls attached to materiality and sensible desires will first join the spheres and then gradually purify themselves of the bodily vestiges in order to ascend towards the world beyond the spheres.[6] Al-ʿĀmirī distinguishes four classes of souls with respect to knowledge and virtue, of which the virtuous will ascend to the higher world, while the fates of the other three groups remain unspecified.[7] Both al-Kindī and al-ʿĀmirī, however, also advocate the possibility of a bodily resurrection, even if this seems to

2 See Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement." The question of how Plato's myths should be interpreted is a subject of scholarly debate. However, even if they are taken as literal descriptions of the soul's afterlife, the three accounts differ considerably from each other. The *Gorgias* (523a–527d) does not introduce the notion of reincarnation but souls are judged once and for all to be sent either to the Isles of the Blessed or Tartarus. In the *Phaedo* (107c–108c, 112e–115a), the most vicious are punished with eternity in Tartarus and the most virtuous with eternal incorporeal bliss, while the rest proceed to further reincarnations. In the *Republic* (614b–621b), heaven and hell represent only a temporary reward and punishment. Even the most virtuous and vicious souls will eventually return to the eternal cycle of reincarnations.

3 See Biesterfeldt, "Phaedo arabus," and al-ʿĀmirī's employment of the myth in *al-Amad ʿalā al-Abad*, chs. XVI–XVIII, as well as Rowson's introduction and commentary concerning al-ʿĀmirī's *Phaedo* source (*A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate*, 29–42, 304–314).

4 See the passage attributed to al-Shaykh al-Yūnānī in Rosenthal, "Ash-Shaykh al-Yūnānī and the Arabic Plotinus Source," vol. 24, 50.

5 Pseudo-Aristotle, "Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālīs," I.11–16, 20–21, corresponding to *Enneads*, IV.7.14.

6 Al-Kindī, "Al-Qawl fī al-nafs," 277–278 [translated in Adamson and Pormann, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, 116–117]. This is not necessarily al-Kindī's view of the afterlife, however, as he is supposedly paraphrasing the views of Aristotle and Plato on the soul in this short treatise.

7 Al-ʿĀmirī, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate*, ch. XVIII, 154–160.

contradict their otherwise Platonic eschatology.[8] The Brethren of Purity interpret paradise and hell as allegories of the soul's ascent to the spiritual world versus remaining in the material world,[9] connected with the necessity of the soul's purification through progressive bodily reincarnations.[10] Both al-Fārābī and Avicenna reject the doctrine of reincarnation,[11] however, and consequently cannot directly adopt the Platonic theory of the vicious souls' eschatological fates. What they do pick up from the Platonic tradition is the idea that the three classes of ignorant, vicious, and virtuous souls each face distinct eschatological fates and that the ultimate bliss in the afterlife consists of the human soul's ascent to the purely contemplative existence of the intelligible world.

As for the Islamic background, the central tenets of Islamic eschatology may be summarized as follows: on the judgment day, the world will come to an end, the human being will be resurrected in his bodily form, and he will either be rewarded for his faith and good actions by the eternal bliss of paradise or punished for his unbelief and bad actions by the eternal torment of hell.[12] Ideally, a philosophical account of the specifically Islamic, or at least Abrahamic, eschatology would include the three elements that come forth clearly in the Quran: 1) judgment day, 2) resurrection of the body, and 3) reward and punishment. As for the first, both al-Fārābī and Avicenna, unlike some previous and contemporary Muslim philosophers,[13] subscribe to an Aristotelian temporally infinite universe, and consequently substitute the temporal judgment for a continuous and eternal judgment. The second aspect was interpreted allegorically by most philosophers,[14] as well as Ismāʿīlī theologians,[15] as it is in evident con-

8 Al-Kindī, "Fī kammiyyat kutub Arisṭūṭālīs," 373–375; al-ʿĀmirī, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate*, chs. XIX–XX, 162–176.

9 Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *On Astronomia*, 84–95; Idem, *On the Natural Sciences*, 149–151; Idem, *On Companionship and Belief*, 8–14.

10 See, for example, Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect, Part III*, 228–229. For the passages supporting the Ikhwān's belief in transmigration, see Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, 383–392.

11 For Avicenna's rebuttal of the doctrine of transmigration, see, for example, Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, V.4, 222–223. See also Druart, "The Human Soul's Individuation," 264–265.

12 For a general account of Islamic eschatology, see, for example, Chittick, "Muslim Eschatology."

13 Among early Muslim philosophers, al-Kindī, the Brethren of Purity, and al-ʿĀmirī, among others, opt for a temporally finite universe consonant with the Islamic doctrines of creation in time and the temporal end of the world on the judgment day.

14 However, al-ʿĀmirī's *al-Amad ʿalā al-abad*, devoted entirely to the question of the afterlife (see, in particular, chs. XVIII–XIX), retains the possibility of a corporeal afterlife despite al-ʿĀmirī's Platonic inclinations.

15 See Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, 134–142; al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*, VII.13, 505–548.

tradiction with the cosmology of a lower material and a higher spiritual world, and its ethical implications of the soul's ascent as liberation from materiality. Al-Fārābī, accordingly, makes no effort to include it in his account, whereas Avicenna does, although by resorting to the Platonic theme of the soul's ascent to the spheres. Both authors preserve the third, and arguably most essential, aspect of Islamic eschatology, that the life of a human being in this life should determine his life in the other world. For this, the Platonic account of the souls' different fates in the afterlife provides the starting point, even if the precise solutions are their own.

For the present purpose, more important than the particulars of the accounts of al-Fārābī and Avicenna on the afterlife are the implications for their concept of happiness and general ethical outlook. The first question regarding the relationship between happiness and the afterlife in an ethical context is to what extent al-Fārābī and Avicenna understand the human ethical goal to be otherworldly. The problem is that both authors employ the term happiness ambiguously in reference to both worldly and otherworldly existence. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to see where the human end as perfect contemplative activity in this life ends and the afterlife as an incorporeal spiritual substance begins. However, it is clear that neither author views the doctrines of happiness as the good human life and the afterlife as the perfect post-bodily life as entirely different subjects. Rather, the latter is both conditional on and contiguous with the former in the sense that happiness in this world is a necessary condition for happiness in the afterlife. The contemplative happiness in this life, therefore, is completed in the purely incorporeal existence of the next life. In this sense, both authors view the human ethical end as having an ultimately, although not entirely, otherworldly orientation. This is particularly clear for Avicenna, who introduces all his discussions on happiness with the question of the afterlife. This implies that his primary interest is in the afterlife rather than exploring what the good life is in this world might be like. Nevertheless, for both authors, happiness in this life and the next are also distinct subjects as both provide a separate account for the human soul's eschatological condition.

The second question concerns the difference between worldly and otherworldly happiness. There is, of course, the obvious difference that in the afterlife the human soul will have no body. Both authors deny the relevance of the Islamic doctrine of bodily resurrection for the perfected human soul, even if Avicenna does offer a rationalistic explanation for how the bodily afterlife described in the Quran might still be possible. Consequently, given that for both authors, the fully actualized contemplative activity is somehow conditional on the rational soul obtaining relative independence of the body, contemplative

happiness will become fully realized once the soul is separated from the body altogether. This should have significant consequences for the human soul's contemplative experience.

1 Al-Fārābī

Al-Fārābī offers his account of the afterlife towards the end of the political parts of the *Virtuous City* and the *Political Governance*.[16] Al-Fārābī's objective here appears to be to provide a philosophical explanation for the Quranic idea of the afterlife in a way that remains consistent with his psychological and cosmological doctrines. As regards the central tenets of Islamic eschatology, unlike Avicenna, he makes no effort to salvage the doctrine of bodily resurrection, which, in any case, is in blatant contradiction with his psychological and ethical outlook. Nevertheless, he strives to maintain some kind of personal accountability of the human being for both his faith and actions, while he also renounces the doctrine of reincarnation involved in the Platonic accounts of the afterlife. Al-Fārābī's solution involves the same three classes of ignorant, vicious, and virtuous souls present in the Arabic Plotinus, although the particulars of their eschatological fates are very different. Since al-Fārābī rejects reincarnation, for the separated souls to experience different fates, the souls must be individuated in some way even after they are separated from the body. Hence, al-Fārābī introduces the additional premise that the soul will retain a particularizing disposition (*hay'a*) in the afterlife, which it gained due to the influence of the particular bodily mixture to which it was attached.[17] Because of these dispositions, the human souls will experience qualitatively and quantitatively different afterlives,[18] where the souls retain at least a class individuality in that they will join other souls corresponding to their particular degree of perfection.[19]

The first class consists of the ignorant souls that will vanish into non-existence upon the death of their bodies. This is the logical consequence of the fact

16 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 16, 258–276; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 81–82. For an overview of al-Fārābī's account of the afterlife, see Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 56–58.

17 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 16, § 3, 262–264.

18 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 16, § 5, 266–268; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 81. In the *Virtuous City*, al-Fārābī states that happiness in the afterlife differs also in kind (*naw'*) besides quantity and quality.

19 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 16, § 4, 264.

that al-Fārābī makes immortality conditional on the perfection of the theoretical intellect.[20] The vicious but intellectually perfected souls retain a disposition of attachment to sensual pleasures. Once the senses and the body dissolve, they will suffer from the contrary draw of their desires that will grow eternally due to other similar souls joining them.[21] This is, of course, al-Fārābī's allegorical explanation of hell. In al-Fārābī's philosophical paradise, the virtuous and intellectually perfected souls join (*ittaṣala*) other souls of their kind and contemplate both their intelligible essences and the essences of other similar souls that join them.[22] The more souls will join, the more pleasure (*iltidhādh*) they will feel since they will contemplate (*taʿqil*) a higher number of perfect essences similar to themselves. Given that the number of such souls is infinite in a temporally infinite universe, the pleasure of the perfected souls will also increase infinitely.

Nevertheless, it appears to be the case that al-Fārābī is only partly successful in saving both the accountability of the human being for his faith and actions and his philosophical consistency. Al-Fārābī wants to claim that the human souls will experience different fates, besides existence and nonexistence, due to the choices they made in their bodily lives. Since he, however, simultaneously denies reincarnation, he has to presume that the human soul will retain at least some degree of individuality that accounts for that difference, even though the soul's individuality in this life was due to the body. So far, al-Fārābī has related immortality solely to the intellect, while the human ethical end consists of discarding all the bodily accidents and faculties that make the human being a separate individual. In the context of the afterlife, al-Fārābī admits that the human soul will lose all bodily accidents and affections together with the body,[23] but still maintains that it will retain some kind of individuating dispositions it inherited from its bodily life.

The suffering of the vicious souls due to the contrary pull of sensible and intellectual desires may be the most challenging part to account for based on al-Fārābī's doctrine of the soul. Only the intellect is supposed to survive the body, while sensible desires pertain to the bodily faculties that should vanish with the body. As it happens, al-Fārābī only introduces this idea in the *Virtuous City*. In contrast, in the *Political Governance*, he gives only two alternatives for

20 Ibid, § 7, 270–272; al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 82–83.
21 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 16, § 8, 272–274.
22 Ibid, § 4, 264–266; al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 82.
23 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 16, § 3, 262; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 81–82.

the afterlife: complete extinction or eternal contemplative bliss. Therefore, it seems that al-Fārābī, in fact, is not entirely convinced that his solution for the punishment of the immoral souls is consistent with his psychology.

Davidson finds al-Fārābī's account of the afterlife so unconvincing that he believes him to be dissimulating.[24] That is, al-Fārābī provides an *ad hoc* philosophical account of Islamic eschatology to assuage potential critics. The problem is that what al-Fārābī says concerning the afterlife does not seem to be supported by what he says elsewhere. Al-Fārābī does not mention that the perfected human soul would retain particularizing dispositions when he discusses human psychology. Instead, the idea is suddenly introduced in the context of the afterlife. Nevertheless, it does not seem necessary to question al-Fārābī's sincerity. It is clear that he is genuinely interested in providing rational explanations for fundamental Islamic doctrines, such as prophecy,[25] and the belief in reward and punishment in the afterlife is an essential doctrine in Islam. In any case, al-Fārābī's solution is hardly orthodox from the perspective of Muslim religious scholars. Moreover, the relationship between religion and philosophy is an important theme in al-Fārābī's political philosophy. An essential part of it is the idea that symbolic knowledge by means of the imaginative faculty presents an alternative route to happiness and immortality for non-philosophers. If this is the case, there must be qualitatively different kinds of afterlife. In consequence, the souls that attain immortality must be differentiated somehow. Thus, the contradiction is perhaps between al-Fārābī's theoretical and political philosophy. In other words, his political philosophy requires that the human soul retains individual dispositions in the afterlife, whereas his philosophical psychology does not explain how this could be possible.

To what extent should al-Fārābī's ethical outlook, then, be considered otherworldly? In mainly political contexts, al-Fārābī makes a distinction between happiness in this life and the next, both of which constitute the goal for virtuous governance.[26] Al-Fārābī shows remarkably little interest in explaining what the purely worldly happiness is like, although it appears to consist of bodily well-being, that is, of the so-called Aristotelian external goods.[27] Happiness in the afterlife, in turn, consists of the purely contemplative happiness. Moreover, al-Fārābī states that the worldly and otherworldly happiness are contiguous with each other in the sense that the former is a prerequisite for the

24 Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 57.

25 See Walzer, "Al-Fārābī's Theory of Prophecy and Divination."

26 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, § 1, 49; Idem, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 89, 92; Idem, "Kitāb al-Milla," § 14, 54; § 27, 66.

27 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 28, 45–46; § 89, 92; Idem, "Kitāb al-Milla," § 14, 54.

latter,[28] where the first is identified with the potentiality of the first perfection and the latter with the actuality of the ultimate perfection.[29] However, in various passages, al-Fārābī also says that happiness and the afterlife (*al-ḥayāt al-ākhira*/*akhīra*) are identical states.[30] Both refer to the human soul's perfected state where it becomes a separate substance and dispenses with bodily faculties for its subsistence.

Based on this, one could claim that al-Fārābī's ethical outlook is moderate and otherworldly at the same time: happiness consisting of bodily well-being is a valid and necessary end in this life that contributes to the ultimate end of purely contemplative existence in the next life. As a result, contemplative happiness is possible only in the next life, whereas in this world, happiness consists of the well-being related to the body and its faculties. Some passages in the political part of the *Virtuous City* further support this interpretation. Al-Fārābī there attributes to the false views of the "erring cities" (*al-mudun al-ḍālla*) the wholly otherworldly ethical outlook in which happiness and virtue are identified exclusively with the afterlife, whereas the sensible world and the initial sensible state of the human being are contrary to true human existence.[31]

Thus, it is clear that al-Fārābī's ethical outlook is not otherworldly in the sense that the sensible world is alien to the human being and the human ethical end equals liberation from the material world. However, based on the analysis of al-Fārābī's concept of happiness so far, it is equally clear that it cannot be the case that he identifies worldly happiness entirely with bodily well-being. We have seen that al-Fārābī argues that the ethical end of the human being cannot be identified with his bodily well-being. It is also the case that the human soul's immortality is conditional on its substantiality, which requires that the theoretical intellect gains independence of the body. It is because it has become independent of matter that the human intellect "is not destroyed by the destruction of matter since it no longer needs matter for its subsistence or existence."[32] Insofar as contemplative perfection constitutes the precondition for the possibility of an afterlife, it obviously cannot be relegated only to the afterlife.

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28 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 89, 92.

29 Ibid, § 28, 45–46.

30 Al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, § 24, 31–32; Idem, "Kitāb al-Milla," § 11, 52.

31 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 19, §§ 1–9, 314–328. See also Ibid, ch. 18, § 12, 304–308, where the otherworldly ethical outlook is presented as trickery to persuade citizens to abandon worldly goods in the expectation of supposed rewards and feared punishments in the afterlife.

32 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 81.

The apparent contradiction is explained by the ambiguous and counterintuitive way in which al-Fārābī employs the term afterlife. In the *Aphorisms*, al-Fārābī explicitly states that the meaning of the afterlife is for the theoretical intellect to be separated from the body in the sense that it no longer needs to employ the body and its faculties as its instrument. This is the case regardless of whether "that body is living in that it is nourished and sense perceptive, or whether the faculty by which it is nourished and perceives has already been abolished."[33] Thus, the afterlife and contemplative happiness are identical states for al-Fārābī in the sense that both can be attained while the human soul is still in the body. When al-Fārābī states that worldly happiness is a prerequisite for otherworldly happiness, what he means, then, is that the kind of perfection or happiness the human being attains with regard to his body, and sense perception, in particular, is not antithetical to the ultimate perfection or happiness as concerns intellection. On the contrary, the former is necessary for the latter. For al-Fārābī, this seems to mean first and foremost that while sense perception and imagination are necessary for abstracting the universal concepts, the ultimate goal of pure thought dispenses with both of these bodily faculties. Perfection with respect to intellection is, nevertheless, a necessary precondition for the human soul's immortality. It is clearly the latter perfection that for al-Fārābī forms the only true ethical end for the human being, whereas the former only has instrumental value.

The result of all this is that both worldly and otherworldly happiness are contemplative in content for al-Fārābī and that contemplative happiness in this life constitutes a precondition for contemplative happiness in the afterlife. This raises the further question of in what sense are the two forms of happiness different. That is, how will the psychological state of the perfected human soul change once it becomes separated from the body? Although al-Fārābī claims that human perfection consists of perfect contemplative activity in both cases, he, nevertheless, accords it different contents: in his psychological writings, al-Fārābī relates happiness to likeness with the separate intellects whose activity consists of eternal contemplation of their own essence and the essence of the First. In the context of the afterlife, however, he defines happiness in terms of the perfected human soul's contemplation of its own essence and of other similar essences.

It is not clear how this should constitute a progression from a less perfect to a more perfect psychological state, even though supposedly the absence of the

33 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 81, 86–87.

body should somehow contribute to the contemplative experience. As regards the afterlife, this means, first, that although the perfected human intellect in some sense will join other similar intellects, it will also retain a degree of individuality if the essences of itself and other intellects are to be separate objects of contemplation. Second, it also remains separate from the active intellect, and apparently inferior to all the separate intellects, in the sense that its contemplative activity is directed towards itself only but not the First. It seems, then, that the otherworldly happiness is merely the perfected version of the contemplative happiness of this life—in the absence of an obstructing body, the activity of the perfected human soul will be the uninterrupted and eternal contemplation of itself, and through itself of the intelligible forms. The result is contemplative pleasure that is immensely superior to what is possible in this life.

However, even if the virtuous and vicious souls were distinct due to some individuating dispositions, it is not clear in what sense the perfected human essences are supposed to be differentiated from each other if all of them are fully actual intellects with identical intelligible content. It is equally unclear how the contemplation of an infinitely increasing number of essences should increase the value or pleasure of the contemplative activity. Perhaps the logical conclusion of al-Fārābī's psychology and ontology of the soul would be an impersonal afterlife in which all the perfect intellects join each other and possibly the active intellect once there is nothing to individuate them. Therefore, it appears that al-Fārābī, for probably genuine religious reasons, wants to give a philosophical account of personal immortality that his mainly Aristotelian psychological theory fails to justify.

There remains the final caveat of whether al-Fārābī believed in an afterlife at all. Al-Fārābī's commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* has not survived, but, two centuries later, several Andalusian philosophers claimed that al-Fārābī in that commentary denied the possibility of the afterlife altogether.[34] Ibn Bājja cites second-hand reports attesting to al-Fārābī's denial of immortality, with which he disagrees himself.[35] Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185), first, observes the discrepancies between al-Fārābī's works, discussed above, concerning whether or not the

34 For the Andalusian accounts on the commentary, see, in particular, Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge"; Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 70–73.

35 Ibn Bājja, "La 'Carta de Adiós,'" § 2, 17. See also the two passages translated in Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge," 82–83, which claim further that for al-Fārābī, the only kind of happiness possible for the human being is "political happiness." However, Ibn Bājjā again denies that this claim would represent al-Fārābī's true views.

non-virtuous souls are immortal. He then states that al-Fārābī in the commentary further contradicts all of his other works by stating that "human happiness" (*al-saʿāda al-insāniyya*) is restricted to this life only and that anything beyond that consists of "ravings and fables of the old people" (*hadhayān wa-khurāfāt al-ʿajāʾiz*).[36] Averroes reports, first, that al-Fārābī limits human perfection only to theoretical knowledge, while he denies the possibility of the human intellect's conjunction with a separate intellect or becoming a separate substance, and thereby its attaining immortality, as "old people's fables," because all beings that are generated in time by necessity also perish at some point.[37] In another work, Averroes reports that al-Fārābī in his commentary "appears to have denied" (*videtur negare*) the possibility of the human intellect's conjunction with the active intellect or that the human end could consist of anything beyond theoretical perfection (*perfectio speculativa*) but Ibn Bājja explained that al-Fārābī, on the contrary, affirmed that the conjunction is possible and that it constitutes the human end.[38] Thus, Averroes holds the stronger view that al-Fārābī rejects both the possibility of the human intellect's conjunction with the separate intellects and its becoming an incorporeal substance, and thus the possibility of human immortality.

First, the less than affirmative statements suggest that all of the three Andalusian philosophers probably relied on second-hand reports, while none of them had access to al-Fārābī's commentary. Second, since we do not have it either, all comments regarding the work are necessarily speculative. However, Berman and Neria have salvaged from Hebrew manuscripts an introduction and two fragments that they believe go back to al-Fārābī's commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[39] None of these passages directly addresses the question of the afterlife. Instead, they affirm that 1) Aristotle's investigation in the *Nicomachean Ethics* concerns the political good[40] and 2) Aristotle discards the idea

36 Ibn Ṭufayl, *Hayy Ben Yaqdhân*, 13–14.

37 Averroes, *The Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction*, 85 [English translation; p. 108 of the Hebrew text]. The Arabic original is lost but the treatise survives in a Hebrew translation. For a similar statement, see Averroes, *Drei Abhandlungen über die Conjunction*, 45–47, 54 [German translation; pp. 10, 13 in the Hebrew text].

38 Averroes, *Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De Anima Libros*, 433. The work survives only in Latin translation.

39 Berman, "Ibn Rushd's Middle Commentary," provides the Hebrew text (303–335) and an English translation (306–311) of the introduction, and Neria, "Al-Fārābī's Lost Commentary on the Ethics," the Hebrew text (95–99) and an English translation (86–95) of the two fragments.

40 This is stated both in the introduction (Berman, "Ibn Rushd's Middle Commentary," 306–308) and the second fragment (Neria, "Al-Fārābī's Lost Commentary on the Ethics," 92–93).

that a metaphysical good in any sense, such as the form of the Good, God, or a transcendent intellect, could be relevant for the question of the political good.[41] Regarding the first thesis, it agrees with both Aristotle's emphasis on the political context of ethics at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1179a33–1181b23) and with al-Fārābī's choice to discuss ethics in a mainly political context. As for the second thesis, it would seem to contradict the view that for al-Fārābī, happiness consists of the conjunction of the human intellect with the active intellect. However, since we do not have the rest of the text, we cannot assess the fragment in its context. This passage alone could also be read as being consonant with what al-Fārābī says in his other works. Al-Fārābī does not endorse the Platonic idea of the form of the Good, nor does he ever explicitly derive the human good from a metaphysical good in the sense of the First or the separate intellects.

Third, even if we were to agree that the Andalusian philosophers accurately represent what al-Fārābī said in his commentary, would that change our overall assessment of al-Fārābī's concept of happiness? If al-Fārābī denied both the possibility of the human afterlife and conjunction with the active intellect in his commentary, this would contradict what he says in all of his surviving works. According to the Straussian line of interpretation, al-Fārābī's commentaries represent his real views, which he conceals in his popular writings due to religious pressure. However, if we reject the Straussian premise that al-Fārābī is dissimulating, why should we place al-Fārābī's commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which we do not have, over all of al-Fārābī's texts that we do have and which more or less agree with each other? Moreover, since the controversial text is a commentary, it could express what al-Fārābī holds to be Aristotle's views rather than al-Fārābī's views. Nor, in the absence of a chronology of al-Fārābī's works, do we know whether it would have represented his final view on the subject. The Andalusian evidence perhaps indicates that al-Fārābī vacillated on the question of the compatibility of the human soul's immortality with Aristotelian psychology, which his surviving works also suggest to a certain extent. However, based on the textual evidence alone, the most plausible conclusion is that the account of happiness and the afterlife presented above represents al-Fārābī's genuine views.

41 Neria, "Al-Fārābī's Lost Commentary on the Ethics," 87–95, in particular, 93–95.

2 Avicenna

Avicenna presents his doctrine of the afterlife in various works, of which the present discussion will focus on the metaphysical parts of the *Healing*, the *Pointers*, and the *Beginning and Return*, as well as a separate treatise devoted entirely to the subject, the *Treatise of Immolation on the Afterlife*.[42] Several preliminary observations can be made when Avicenna's account of the afterlife is compared with that of al-Fārābī. First, as for al-Fārābī, there are distinct categories of souls with different eschatological fates, which are partly similar to and partly different from al-Fārābī's. Second, since for Avicenna the whole human soul is an immortal substance individuated at its birth, explaining personal immortality is not as much of a problem as it was for al-Fārābī. Third, all of Avicenna's discussions on happiness are introduced by the question of the afterlife, and the questions of the soul's immortality and the afterlife, therefore, seem to be of essential importance for him. Fourth, Avicenna makes much more of an effort to harmonize his theory with Islamic eschatology. This is especially evident in the fact that he takes bodily resurrection seriously as a philosophical problem.

Avicenna's most extensive treatment of the afterlife is the *Treatise of Immolation*. Only the final chapter of this treatise is dedicated to Avicenna's account of the afterlife. In the rest of the work, Avicenna provides a doxographic review of religious and philosophical views on the afterlife, refutes false views, in particular, the doctrines of reincarnation and bodily resurrection, and establishes the premise on which his account is founded: the substantiality and immortality of the human soul as a whole. As for the doxographic part, the *Treatise of Immolation* differs from Avicenna's more abstract discussions of the afterlife in that he explicitly engages with concrete religious beliefs of Christianity and Islam, in particular, and affirms the superior rationality of Islam over rival religions. At the same time, like most philosophers, he interprets the Quranic descriptions of sensual bliss and misery in the afterlife as allegorical tales aimed at non-philosophers. Thus, the treatise clearly shows that the context in which Avicenna approaches the question of the afterlife is both religious and philosophical—he wants to provide a philosophical explanation of the Islamic view of the afterlife but in terms of the philosophical tradition

42 See, in particular, Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, §§16–18, 352–353; §23–25, 355–356; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, VII.24–25, 307–310; vol. 4, VIII.11–17, 27–39; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.14–15, 109, 111–115; Idem, *Epistola sulla vita futura*, VII, 200–226. For Avicenna's views on the afterlife, see also Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 109–116; Stroumsa, "'True Felicity'."

with which he is engaged. As for the philosophical premise of his account, for Avicenna, the human soul as a whole is an immortal and separate substance, which is individuated at birth by the body that receives it.[43] Despite being a separate substance, a particular soul is connected with a particular body, which for Avicenna makes both reincarnation and bodily resurrection impossible.[44] In contrast to al-Fārābī, the consequence of his ontology of the soul is that all human souls are immortal and will retain their individuality in the afterlife.

As for al-Fārābī, the kind of afterlife a soul will have is the consequence of the intellectual and moral dispositions (*haya'a*) it attained during its bodily existence. However, Avicenna's eschatological classification is considerably more complex. Regarding the intellectual aspect, for Avicenna, the key criterion is whether the human soul has acquired sufficient theoretical knowledge to develop a desire (*tashawwuq*) for the perfection of its essence, that is, its theoretical perfection.[45] Based on this criterion, there emerge three categories of souls with respect to their theoretical faculty: 1) perfect, 2) sufficiently developed, and 3) ignorant souls, of which the last class is unaware of the intellectual nature of the perfection of its essence. Since intellectual perfection is not a precondition for the soul's immortality, even the ignorant souls, in contrast to al-Fārābī, will have an afterlife.[46] The moral dispositions result in a polarity of

43 Besides the *Treatise of Immolation*, Avicenna establishes the substantiality of the human soul in, for example, *Avicenna's De anima*, V.2, and its immortality in Ibid, V.4. See also Druart, "The Human Soul's Individuation"; Marmura, "Some Questions Regarding Avicenna's Theory of the Temporal Origination of the Human Rational Soul."

44 Avicenna, *Epistola sulla vita futura*, I, 40–66; II, 98–139. Avicenna argues against reincarnation also in a number of his psychological writings, cf. *Avicenna's De anima*, V.4.

45 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, §18, 352–353; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.13, 30–31. See also the discussion of the desire for contemplative pleasure in chapter 3.

46 In *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, VII.25, 309–310, however, Avicenna states both that one should not listen to those who delimit the ignorant (*jāhil*) outside salvation (*najāt*) and that a "certain kind of ignorance" (*ḍarb min al-jahl*) leads to "eternal perdition" (*al-halāk al-sarmad*). Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 115, suggests that Avicenna might perhaps agree, after all, with al-Fārābī on that the ignorant souls perish into nothingness, although, as Davidson admits, this would contradict Avicenna's rigorous proofs for the soul's immortality. In any case, Avicenna explicitly states (cf. *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād*, III.15, 114), perhaps against al-Fārābī, that since all rational souls are immortal, so must be the ignorant souls. In *Epistola sulla vita futura*, 13, Avicenna attributes the belief in the mortality of the "absolutely deficient souls" (*al-nufūs al-nāqiṣa 'alā al-iṭlāq*) to the doctrine (*madhhab*) of Alexander of Aphrodisias and then declares it to be false and not to represent Aristotle's position. For Avicenna's reasoning in support of his reading of Aristotle, see Davidson, 108–109. I take, then, the "eternal perdition"

a) virtuous and b) vicious souls, which is superimposed on the former tripartition. The result is six or seven, instead of al-Fārābī's two or three, categories of souls with respect to their afterlife.

The morally and intellectually perfect souls will be rewarded with complete happiness in the afterlife. The other categories either experience a lesser form of happiness or are punished with torment and misery. The souls surpassing a minimum degree of intellectual knowledge will be rewarded with a lesser degree of contemplative bliss.[47] The souls that are aware of their perfection, but due to the distraction of the body, do not pursue it, will be subjected to torment once they in their disembodied state become fully conscious of their essence and its perfection.[48] This torment will last eternally because the intellectual desire pertains to the essence of the rational soul, and without a body, the rational soul will no longer have the means, that is, the sensitive and imaginative faculties, to realize that desire. As for al-Fārābī, the bodily dispositions contrary to the soul's essence will torment the vicious souls. In contrast to al-Fārābī, however, since these dispositions are accidental to the soul's substance, they will gradually subside, and the soul will eventually enjoy its corresponding happiness.[49] Avicenna's philosophical paradise and hell for the virtuous and vicious souls, then, resemble those of al-Fārābī. In some treatises, Avicenna also adopts al-Fārābī's view that the otherworldly happiness or misery of each soul is augmented by other souls of the same genus attaching (*ittaṣala*) to it.[50] Avicenna, however, also diverges from al-Fārābī in essential respects. First, he introduces the additional category of souls that do not realize their intellectual potential, and attributes eternal torment only to this class of souls. Second, he equates the consequence of moral deficiency with a philosophical purgatory in which the souls are purified of their sins.[51]

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attributed to a "certain kind of ignorance" to refer to the eternal punishment of the not entirely ignorant souls, to which I will return shortly.

47 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, VII.24, 308; Idem, *Epistola sulla vita futura*, VII, 213.

48 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 16, 352; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.13, 30–31; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.14, 113; Idem, *Epistola sulla vita futura*, VII, 211, 213.

49 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 23, 355; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.11–12, 27–29; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.14, 113; Idem, *Epistola sulla vita futura*, VII, 209.

50 Avicenna, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.15, 115; Idem, *Epistola sulla vita futura*, VII, 215. In the latter, Avicenna attributes the view to a "certain scholar" (*baʿḍ al-ʿulamāʾ*), who is undoubtedly al-Fārābī.

51 In *Epistola sulla vita futura*, VII, 209, Avicenna refers to this state as *barzakh*, which is close to the Catholic notion of purgatory. Avicenna's solution is probably inspired by the Pla-

For al-Fārābī, the ignorant souls perish with the body, whereas Avicenna shows some hesitance in explaining their fate. The ignorant (*bulh*/*jāhila*) souls, due to no fault of their own, never gained a desire for the perfection of their essence, and hence could be justly punished only for their moral, but not their intellectual, failings. In the *Healing*, Avicenna first states that the ignorant virtuous soul will attain "some kind of rest" (*nawʿmin al-rāḥa*), while the vicious soul will be greatly tormented by its bodily dispositions as it no longer possesses the bodily instruments to fulfill its desires.[52] After that, he, however, in the *Healing* and several other works, offers an alternative explanation, in which the ignorant soul experiences the very bodily bliss or torment it was promised in the revelation through its imaginative faculty, which employs a celestial sphere as its bodily instrument.[53] Through its celestial connection, such a soul may even be perfected to the extent that it eventually reaches the contemplative happiness related to the theoretical faculty.[54] Avicenna is here probably inspired by the Platonic tradition—among Arabic philosophers, the general idea of the celestial spheres as a means to the souls' gradual purification is present, for example, in al-Kindī, who attributes it to Plato.[55]

Avicenna, however, employs the theory for a specific purpose—to offer a rational explanation for the Quranic eschatology of sensual pleasures and

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tonic account, in which the bodily reincarnations constitute a 'purgatory' through which the soul is gradually purified of its defects. The *Treatise of Immolation* (I, 39; VII, 207) supports this. Avicenna there claims that for the ancient, presumably Platonic, philosophers the doctrine of reincarnation was a fable symbolizing the state of a vicious soul in the afterlife, which due to its bodily desires is still "as if it were in a body."

52 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 24, 355. See also *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.17, 35.

53 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 25, 356; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.17, 35–39; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.15, 114–115; Idem, *Epistola sulla vita futura*, VII, 223–225. For Avicenna's imaginal afterlife, see, in particular, Michot, *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne*. Since all psychical faculties, except the intellect, operate through a bodily organ, Avicenna has to postulate a surrogate body. For Avicenna, the intimate connection between a particular bodily temperament and a particular soul implies the impossibility of reincarnation. However, the imaginal afterlife is not reincarnation in a strict sense of the term since the human soul attaches to and employs an astral body but does not become the soul that governs that body. In any case, Avicenna is aware of the possible contradiction and restricts the rule's application to reincarnations within a genus (*jins*), that is, within the genus of animal (*al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.17, 37). Thus, reincarnation from a human to a celestial body appears to be possible after all.

54 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.17, 36.

55 The Platonic inspiration is also supported by the fact that Avicenna mentions the possibility of separated human souls employing celestial bodies in his commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle* (*Tafsīr Kitāb "Uthūlūjiyā,"* 72).

pains. Avicenna is also clearly not entirely convinced by this theory, which he attributes to "some scholar" (*baʿḍ al-ʿulamāʾ*),[56] and qualifies by terms like "probable" (*yushbih*), "not impossible" (*lā yamtaniʿ*), and "possible" (*mumkin*).[57] In introducing the subject of the afterlife, Avicenna states that knowledge about the bodily afterlife is conveyed by religion (*sharʿ*) but cannot be demonstrated by rational proofs. In contrast, the spiritual afterlife is demonstratively true and is the only kind in which the "metaphysical philosophers" (*al-ḥukamāʾ al-ilāhiyyūn*) are interested.[58] In the *Treatise on Immolation*, Avicenna argued for the impossibility of bodily resurrection because it is a form of reincarnation. For Avicenna, this theory, then, offers a possible avenue for both providing a philosophical rationale for the Islamic bodily afterlife and restricting immortality to the soul.

Our present interest, however, lies primarily in the otherworldly happiness of the souls that have attained the perfection corresponding to the human substance, as it is this form of happiness that constitutes the ethical end for the human being. Avicenna's theory of the afterlife shows that although he does not restrict happiness only to the intellectually competent, the other forms of happiness are still only imperfect reflections of happiness in an absolute sense. The afterlife of the perfected souls is essentially the completion of contemplative perfection discussed in chapter 3. It is the body that prevents the human soul from fully living a life according to its essence, perceiving its perfection, and experiencing the resulting pleasure. When it leaves the body, the perfected soul will be like the separate intellects,[59] whose activity consists of contemplation of themselves and the First. Upon separation, then, the soul will experience the indescribable contemplative pleasure of the pure intellects:

> If the rational faculty had brought the soul to a degree of perfection by which it is enabled, when it separates from the body, to achieve that

56 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 25, 356; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.15, 114; Idem, *Epistola sulla vita futura*, VII, 223. In classical Arabic, *baʿḍ* may have a singular or plural reference. Thus, the translation could also be "some scholars." In the latter source, the scholar is qualified as one of those "who do not speak vainly" (*mimman lā yujāzif fī mā yaqūl*), which would seem to make it singular.

57 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 25, 356; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.17, 36; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.15, 114, respectively.

58 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 2–3, 347–348.

59 In *Epistola sulla vita futura*, VII, 201, Avicenna states that the perfected human soul will be of the angelic substance (*min al-jawhar al-malakī*), that is, of the substance of the separate intellects, because an angel by definition is a "separate intellectual form" (*ṣūra ʿaqliyya mufāriqa*).

> complete perfection that is appropriate for it to attain, it would be like when the benumbed person is made to taste the most delicious taste and exposed to the most appetizing state but who does not feel this, but who thereafter has the numbness removed, experiencing as a result momentous pleasure all at once. This pleasure will not be of the same genus as sensory and animal pleasure, but a pleasure that is similar to that of the pure, good, celestial substances. It is more elevated and noble than every other pleasure.[60]

Given that Avicenna's discussions of happiness are primarily discussions of the soul's afterlife, should Avicenna's ethical outlook be characterized as wholly otherworldly? Like al-Fārābī, Avicenna makes a distinction between worldly happiness (*al-saʿāda al-ʿājila al-badaniyya*) and otherworldly happiness: the former is related to bodily well-being and the latter to the perfection of the soul.[61] Avicenna is as uninterested in the former as al-Fārābī, and it is clear that it can have only instrumental value in providing the means to pursue the latter. Avicenna's ethical outlook is, then, otherworldly in the same sense as al-Fārābī's: he locates the fully realized human good in the afterlife, and it is in the afterlife that the virtuous souls will be ultimately compensated for their merits.

However, the human ethical end is not entirely otherworldly since Avicenna views the human end in the afterlife as not contrary to, but contiguous with, the human end in this life. His account of happiness is by no means only an account of the afterlife since the human being may acquire a significant portion of it already in this life. Avicenna's arguments for contemplative happiness discussed previously are founded on neither pleasure nor the soul's immortality. That the intellectually and morally perfected human being will be rewarded by eternal contemplative bliss in the afterlife certainly seems to make Avicenna's case for contemplative happiness more persuasive. However, the otherworldly reward, or pleasure in general for that matter, does not constitute an end in itself for the sake of which happiness would be pursued.[62] Contemplative hap-

60 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 17, 352 [Marmura's translation with modifications]. See also Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.14, 32; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.14, 111, 112; Idem, *Epistola sulla vita futura*, 205.

61 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, VII.24, 306–307.

62 In *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, IX.3, 59, Avicenna contrasts asceticism (*zuhd*) and worship (*ʿibāda*), performed for the end of 'buying' rewards in the afterlife by sacrifices in this life, to the knower (*ʿārif*), whose only objective is the truth. In Ibid, IX.5–6, 68–76, he contrasts the motivation of the knower, who pursues the First Truth (*al-ḥaqq al-awwal*) always as the self-sufficient end and never as an instrument for a further end, to people motivated by fear of punishment or desire for a reward in the afterlife.

piness is, for Avicenna, the highest human good by the objective grounds that it constitutes the perfection of the human substance, and this would be true even if the soul had no afterlife.

If the afterlife is just a perfected version of contemplative perfection in this life, in what sense does the former differ from the latter? For Avicenna, as for al-Fārābī, the perfected rational soul in a sense attains incorporeality already in this life with respect to its intellection. Still, for Avicenna, the relation of the embodied human souls to their perfection in even the best of cases is one of yearning (*shawq*) for the never fully attainable objective. It is only in the afterlife that the yearning ceases and the separated rational soul finally comes to possess the object of its desire.[63] What are, then, the more precise consequences that disembodiment has for the soul? The first consequence we have already seen: the disembodied soul will immediately come to enjoy a rush of intellectual pleasure once there is no body to cushion its self-perception. Second, the disembodiment will inevitably affect the purity of its intellectual activity, as becomes apparent in the following passage of the *Beginning and Return*:

> If we are separated from the body, when our intellect has already become actual, and we are in such a state that we are able to perfectly receive the active intellect in itself (*bi-l-dhāt*), we will immediately witness (*ṭālaʿnā*) the true objects of love and become connected with them (*ittaṣalnā bihā*), and we will cast no glance whatsoever at the world of corruption that is below us, nor will we remember any of its states, but we will have attained the true happiness that cannot be described in words.[64]

Based on this passage, the condition of the soul would seem to undergo several changes upon its separation from the body. First, even though the human soul as a whole is an immortal substance for Avicenna, in the afterlife, the perfected soul will truly become a pure intellect so that its activity consists solely of eternal and uninterrupted contemplation undisturbed by the body or bodily dispositions. Consequently, while Avicenna's afterlife is personal to the extent that the human soul remains a separate substance, it is not individuated, for example, by memories of its bodily existence. Therefore, it is an impersonal afterlife in that all perfect souls share identical contemplative activity with identical objects of contemplation. Second, while the human rational soul may

63 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.18, 45.
64 Avicenna, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.14, 112 [my translation].

already in its embodied state attain a perfect disposition to connect with the active intellect, only in the afterlife will the perfected intellect join (*ittaṣala*) the active intellect in a continuous and permanent manner, although still remaining a separate substance.[65] This is related to the first point, as it is through its permanent connection with the active intellect, locus of the intelligible forms, that the human intellect will have uninterrupted, simple, and timeless, that is, non-discursive, knowledge of all the intelligibles, the way the separate intellects have.[66] Third, when there is no body to prevent it, the human intellect, as the separate intellects, will have its perfected essence as its permanent object of contemplation,[67] and through its essence, it perceives all the intelligibles in a timeless and undifferentiated manner. As we have seen, in some works, Avicenna also follows al-Fārābī in suggesting that the perfected human intellects join each other and, besides themselves, contemplate the essences of other perfected human intellects. Finally, for Avicenna, the philosophical paradise also means "proximity" (*mujāwara*/*muqāraba*) to the First,[68] which could just mean the relative closeness of the intelligible world to God. What it must also mean, however, is that, like the separate intellects, the perfected human intellect will enjoy a more permanent vision than possible in this world of, not only of its essence, the intelligible forms, and the active intellect but also of the First.[69]

65 See also Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, v.6, 248: "When it [the rational soul] becomes free (*khalaṣa*) from the body and its accidents, it is then possible (*yajūz*) for it to join the active intellect completely (*yattaṣil bi-l-ʿaql al-faʿʿāl tamām al-ittiṣāl*), and there it will find the intellectual beauty (*al-jamāl al-ʿaqlī*) and eternal pleasure." Avicenna does not here, or anywhere, employ the term 'union' (*ittiḥād*) to qualify the relationship between the human and active intellects.

66 For non-discursive knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-basīṭ*) in Avicenna, see, in particular, *Avicenna's De anima*, v.6, 243, and Adamson, "Non-Discursive Thought in Avicenna's Commentary on the Theology of Aristotle."

67 For the general principle, see Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 2, III.19, 415–421, and concerning the afterlife, *Epistola sulla vita futura*, VII, 215.

68 See Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 3, 348; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.15, 115; Idem, "Risāla fī al-ʿishq," 20–21.

69 For a discussion of the 'divine vision,' see the previous chapter. Including a vision of God in a philosophical afterlife also makes sense from the viewpoint of Islamic theology since the idea has a Quranic basis, and its nature was consequently a subject of much debate among Islamic thinkers (see Gimaret, "Ruʾyat Allāh").

PART 2

Virtue

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CHAPTER 7

Virtue and Happiness

Like classical ethics, Arabic philosophical ethics is virtue ethics. Virtues are optimal psychical dispositions ingrained in a person's character, which induce him to act consistently in a morally right way. Thus, the primary focus of virtue ethics is on the moral character rather than the moral status of actions as abstracted from the character.[1] The concept of virtue (*aretē*/*faḍīla*) was hardly mentioned in the previous part because al-Fārābī and Avicenna, in contrast to Aristotle,[2] do not primarily define happiness in terms of virtue. Nevertheless, virtue constitutes the second primary concept of Arabic philosophical ethics. It is especially at the level of virtue theory that Arabic philosophical ethics often gives the appearance of being entirely derivative of classical sources. In his account of virtue, al-Fārābī follows the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Avicenna, somewhat surprisingly given his Aristotelian credentials, adopts his theory of virtue mainly from Plato. Despite their differences, both authors agree in defining virtue as an intermediate psychical state, and thus commit to the ethical ideal of moderation.

This definition of virtue, however, raises a problem. If the human good is entirely intellectual, as was established in the previous part of this book, why should moral virtues, defined as intermediate dispositions with regard to different aspects of human life, constitute an ethical end for the human being? If the excellence of theoretical activity is the final and self-sufficient human end, should it not rather be the case that people ought to devote themselves

1 This is in contrast not only to contemporary action-centered consequentialist or deontological ethical theories but also to the ethics of classical Islamic theology (*kalām*), where the focus is on the moral status of acts rather than the moral agent. For *kalām* theories of value, see, for example, Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics*; Shihadeh, "Theories of Ethical Value in Kalām." Among Arabic philosophers of the classical period, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī also constitutes an exception in that the ethical theory that he formulates in the *Philosophical Life* (*Kitāb al-Sīra al-falsafiyya*) is action-centered. For al-Rāzī's ethics, see Druart, "Al-Razi (Rhazes) and Normative Ethics"; Idem, "The Ethics of al-Razi." Virtue ethics was not, then, the only alternative available for al-Fārābī and Avicenna in the sense that they would have been unaware of the existence of rationally argued ethical theories taking a form distinct from virtue ethics. However, it was perhaps the only option insofar as they regarded themselves as Aristotelians.

2 Cf. Aristotle's definition of happiness (*Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 1102a5–6) as "a certain activity of the soul in conformity with complete virtue" (*psukhēs energeia tis kat' aretēn teleian*/*fi'l li-l-nafs bi-ḥasab al-faḍīla al-kāmila*).

entirely to the pursuit of theoretical knowledge? As it happens, neither al-Fārābī nor Avicenna consistently commits to Aristotelian moderation even in their explicit discussions of virtue. Instead, they also appear to advocate an entirely different notion of virtue that encourages the rational soul's separation from the body. This contest between two contradictory ethical ideals forms the most important thread in this second part of the book.

Building on the concept of contemplative happiness established in the previous part, this first chapter on virtue concerns the relation that virtue has with happiness. The Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic currents of ethical thought influencing Arabic philosophers defined the relation between virtues as ideal character traits and happiness as the final human end in somewhat different terms. As regards Aristotle, there is a long-standing debate concerning a comprehensive versus intellectualist interpretation of his view of happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[3] The problem arises from the tension between the accounts of happiness provided in the first and tenth books, in particular. In the first book, Aristotle defines happiness as human excellence, more specifically as human psychical activity in accordance with rationality and virtue (1098a13–18). In the subsequent eight books, he discusses moral and intellectual virtues, justice, pleasure, and friendship, all of which would appear to form part of happiness as the excellent human life organized by rational principles. In the final book, Aristotle, against himself as it seems, argues that contemplation (*theōria*/*raʾy*) is the highest virtue and happiness, therefore, consists only of the excellence of contemplative activity. Moral virtue is a part of happiness only in a secondary sense (*deuterōs*/*bi-nawʿthānin*) insofar as the human being cannot restrict himself to the divine life of a pure intellect (1177b27–1178a23).

According to the inclusive interpretation, then, happiness for Aristotle consists of a plurality of intrinsically valuable ends, and moral virtue forms a part of happiness. According to the intellectualist interpretation, happiness consists of a single end, the excellence of contemplative activity, and moral virtue contributes to happiness but is excluded from it in its primary sense. Perhaps for Aristotle also, at the basis lies the question concerning human nature, that is, whether the true self of the human being is the compound of all his rational and subrational activities or only the theoretical intellect as the highest part.[4] Based on the previous part of this book, al-Fārābī and Avicenna would undoubtedly

3 Among the huge literature on this issue, see Nagel, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia"; Ackrill, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia"; Cooper, "Contemplation and Happiness"; Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*; Richardson, "Degrees of Finality and the Highest Good in Aristotle"; Long, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia, Nous, and Divinity."

4 See Ibid, 1178a1–3, where Aristotle suggests, despite his hylomorphism and in an almost Pla-

join the intellectualist camp in the contemporary discussion concerning Aristotle's understanding of happiness. Nevertheless, the two contradictory ideals of virtue present an analogous problem for their ethics.

While the ethical thought of Plato and his late ancient followers also involves considerable problems of interpretation, the Neoplatonic position at least appears more straightforwardly intellectualist. In Plotinus' short treatise on happiness, it is beyond question that happiness is the life of the intellect.[5] It is the intellect that constitutes our "true self" rather than the compound of soul and body. Moreover, at a metaphysical level, happiness means that the human soul participates in the cosmic Intellect. This implies that only intellectual activity is of intrinsic value and moral virtue, therefore, cannot be a constitutive part of happiness.[6] While Plotinus' treatises on neither happiness nor virtue were translated into Arabic, the more generic ethical ideal was transmitted in the Arabic Neoplatonic corpus. At its foundation are the cosmological and psychological propositions of contrariety between the sensible and intelligible worlds (*al-ʿālam al-ḥissī*/*ʿaqlī*),[7] sensation and intellection, and body and soul.[8] The true self of the human being, then, is the intellect in the ontological sense that the human soul pertains to and is originally from the intelligible world, although since its descent to the sensible world, it has become forgetful

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tonic vein, that it might be appropriate to say that the human being really is identical with his highest part since it is the better and ruling part in him.

5 Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.4. See also Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, 139–152; Gerson, "Plotinus on Happiness." The treatise is not included in the Arabic Plotinus, and the reference is thus meant to illustrate the Plotinian intellectualist understanding of happiness in general, even if this particular epistle in all likelihood did not reach the Arabic philosophers. I am also assuming that the Arabic Plotinus is the chief Neoplatonic ethical source influencing authors like al-Fārābī and Avicenna and will not discuss how the ethical thought of Porphyry or Proclus, for example, diverges from Plotinus. I will also ignore Plotinus' doctrine of the undescended human intellect. Although it makes a difference for the psychological foundation of the ethical thought of Plotinus, even the Arabic Plotinus does not adopt it consistently (see Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 75–83) and al-Fārābī and Avicenna ignore it completely.

6 More precisely, at least the 'civic' (*politikos*) virtues corresponding to Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* cannot form part of the life of the intellect (see Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.2.1.16–21). For the 'purificatory' virtues, see chapter 10.

7 The notion permeates the *Theology of Aristotle* but is particularly clearly formulated in the *Treatise of the Greek Sage on Explaining the Spiritual and Corporeal Worlds* (*Risāla li-l-Shaykh al-Yūnānī fī bayān ʿālamay al-rūḥānī wa-l-jismānī*), edited in Rosenthal, "Ash-Shaykh al-Yūnānī and the Arabic Plotinus Source," vol. 24, 42–64.

8 For the soul-body relation and its ethical consequences in the Arabic Plotinus, which in many aspects diverges from the Greek original it paraphrases, see Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, 49–75.

of its spiritual origin.[9] The human ethical goal thereby becomes formulated in the cosmological terms of the human soul's reascent to its intelligible origin.[10] Since the two directions of the embodied soul, upwards towards the intelligible world through its rational part and downwards towards the sensible world through its bodily faculties, are antithetical,[11] moral virtue understood as separation from the body becomes a necessary condition for the human soul's ascent for various reasons. First, in order for the human soul to regain awareness of its true nature and thereby develop a desire (*shawq*) for a return to the intelligible world.[12] Second, because the body and the bodily faculties distract the human soul from living a life in accordance with its intellectual essence.[13] Third, moral virtue seems also to form an epistemological condition in the sense that it is a prerequisite for intellectual emanations to flow to the human soul.[14]

In this metaphysical and psychological context, moral virtue becomes an indispensable instrument for contemplative happiness rather than an end in itself. Besides the general ethical, psychological, and cosmological framework, the Platonic influence manifests itself in Arabic philosophy also in the form of specific classical Platonic themes and terms. These include, first, the idea that moral virtue consists of the "purification" (*katharsis*) of the soul, where the soul's purity is understood as separation from the body and bodily affections.[15] A second Platonic theme is the formulation of the human ethical goal in terms of "becoming like God" (*homoiōsis theō*), which may refer to moral or theoretical virtue or a combination of both.[16]

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9 Pseudo-Aristotle, "Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālīs," II.35–40, 34–35; II.43–45, 36; Rosenthal, "Ash-Shaykh al-Yūnānī and the Arabic Plotinus Source," vol. 24, 45–46; Pseudo-Porphyry, "Ein Arabisches Bruchstück Aus Porphyrios," § 4, 269.

10 See the discussion in chapter 5.

11 Pseudo-Aristotle, "Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālīs," VII.45–50, 91.

12 Ibid, VIII.73–75, 103–104.

13 Ibid, VII.49, 91.

14 Ibid, IV.44–45, 61–62; X.71, 145. This may be compared with Olympiodorus' (d. 570) argument in his *Prolegomena* (quoted in Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators*, 324) for the necessity of character training before the study of philosophy: "For just as those whose eyes have been in the dark cannot look towards the sun, so a person weighed down by passions of the soul cannot take hold of these studies."

15 Pseudo-Aristotle, "Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālīs," I.14–15, 20–21; II.35, 34; VIII.61, 101. In *Enneads*, III.6.5, Plotinus essentially defines purification as the intellect's separation from the soul-body composite.

16 See, for example, O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 35–39. According to Plato (*Theaetetus*, 176b; *Republic*, X, 613B), the highest virtue is to "become like a god as much as is possible for the human being" (*hoson dunaton anthrōpō homoiousthai theō*/*al-tashabbuh bi-ilāh*/*llāh*/*af'āl Allāh bi-qadr mā fī ṭāqat al-insān*). For the adoption of the Platonic maxim in the late

Moral virtue is, of course, an essential part of an ethical theory regardless of whether its value is intrinsic or instrumental. Even if moral virtue were not a self-sufficient end for Plotinus, the life according to the intellect in this world, nevertheless, involves virtuous dispositions and actions rather than merely solitary contemplation.[17] During the first centuries of the Arabic philosophical tradition, defining the end of either philosophy or the human being as consisting of both knowledge and virtue was a commonplace. To cite only a few examples, al-Kindī states that the philosopher should "reach the truth in his knowledge and act according to it in his actions (*al-ʿamal bi-l-ḥaqq*)."[18] Al-ʿĀmirī states that the human being is endowed with the faculty of reason in order for him to both know the truth and act in accordance with the truth.[19] Miskawayh emphasizes the dual end of both philosophy and the human being: through the theoretical part of philosophy, he may acquire intelligible knowledge and through the practical part, the good deeds. Together these constitute human perfection.[20] The ethical end of philosophy also manifests itself in the Platonic definition of philosophy as "becoming like God," one of the six standard definitions of philosophy for the Alexandrian Neoplatonists adopted by various Arabic authors.[21] As we will see, both al-Fārābī and Avicenna similarly emphasize the necessity of moral virtue for both human perfection and the practice of philosophy. Nevertheless, despite their nominal allegiance to the Aristotelian ideal of moderation, their view on the nature of moral virtue and its relation to happiness is best understood within the Neoplatonic context as an indispensable instrument for attaining contemplative happiness.

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ancient Alexandrian and medieval Islamic contexts, see Hein, *Definition und Einteilung der Philosophie*, 99–100, 116.

17 See, in particular, the interpretation of Plotinus' ethics in Remes, "Plotinus's Ethics of Disinterested Interest."

18 Al-Kindī, "Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā," 9.

19 Al-ʿĀmirī, *Kitāb al-Iʿlām bi-manāqib al-islām*, 77–78. For al-ʿĀmirī, this principle is crystallized in the maxim "knowledge is the beginning of action and action is the completion of knowledge" (*al-ʿilm mabdaʾ li-l-ʿamal wa-l-ʿamal tamām al-ʿilm*).

20 See Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy," 232, quoting Miskawayh's *Degrees of Happiness* (*Tartīb al-saʿādāt*): "Whoever wishes to perfect himself as a human being … let him acquire these two arts—I mean the theoretical and practical parts of philosophy; as a result, there will accrue to him the essential natures of things by means of the theoretical part and good deeds by means of the practical part."

21 See al-Kindī, "Risālat al-Kindī fī ḥudūd al-ashyāʾ," 172–174; al-Rāzī, "Kitāb al-Sīra al-falsafiyya," 108; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *On Music*, 137; Idem, *On Logic*, 29. For the employment of the maxim by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, see Baffioni, "Platone e Aristotele negli Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ," 479–486. Perceiving the end of either philosophy or the human being as *imitatio dei* can refer to theoretical knowledge and moral virtue taken together or only one or the other. Thus, the Arabic authors interpret its meaning in different ways.

1 Al-Fārābī

Al-Fārābī devotes a considerable part of his philosophical output to practical philosophy but he is much more famous as a political than he is as a moral philosopher. Thus, his political philosophy has been studied repeatedly.[22] In contrast, his ethics has received much less scholarly interest. The aim of this book is to concentrate on al-Fārābī's ethics as abstracted from political philosophy while still taking into account the political context of his ethics. As regards the status of moral virtue, to begin with, al-Fārābī emphasizes in various works that moral virtue constitutes a necessary part of philosophy. Sometimes, he gives the impression that the standing of virtue as a goal for philosophical activities is almost equal to theoretical knowledge.[23] In the *Philosophy of Plato*, al-Fārābī tells us that Socrates chose death over life when he realized that the corrupted opinions of his city would prevent him from living the rest of his life according to philosophical knowledge and virtue.[24] The *Agreement between the Opinions of the Two Philosophers Divine Plato and Aristotle* (*Kitāb al-Jamʿ bayna raʾyay al-ḥakīmayn Aflāṭun al-ilāhī wa-Arisṭūṭālīs*) presents the moral lives of Plato and Aristotle as one of the apparent contradictions between the two philosophers.[25] The work attributes this to temperamental differences between them with regard to realizing their philosophical ideals in their own lives, while doctrinally, they agreed on the necessity of moral virtue for the philosopher. In his introduction to Aristotelian philosophy, al-Fārābī states that the final goal of philosophy is knowledge of the Creator as the culmination of theoretical

22 For two fairly recent overviews of al-Fārābī's political philosophy placed within a larger historical context, see O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 185–197; Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza*, 154–163.

23 Al-Fārābī's later biographers also attribute a virtuous life in accordance with the "way of life of the ancient philosophers" (*sīrat al-falāsifa al-mutaqaddimīn*) to him. See Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbāʾ*, vol. 2, 134.

24 Al-Fārābī, *Alfarabius de Platonis philosophia*, 19.

25 Al-Fārābī, *L'harmonie entre les opinions de Platon et d'Aristote*, §§ 8–11, 67–71 [= al-Fārābī, *L'armonia delle opinioni dei due sapienti*, 41–42]. The treatise is translated into English in Butterworth, *Alfarabi: The Political Writings*, 115–167. The attribution of the work to al-Fārābī has been contested in Lameer, *Al-Fārābī and Aristotelian Syllogistics*, 30–39; Rashed, "On the Authorship of the Treatise On the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages." Their grounds are mainly doctrinal, and Rashed suggests that Ibrāhīm Ibn ʿAdī, or someone else related to the circle of Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī, is the author instead. For scholarly views defending the authenticity of the treatise, see Mallet's introduction to his edition (37–40, 42–45), the preface by Endress, and the introduction by Bonadeo in her edition, as well as the discussion in Janos, *Method, Structure, and Development in al-Fārābī's Cosmology*, 238–241. Since the treatise is of minor significance for the arguments presented in this study, I will not take a stand on the question of its authenticity.

knowledge on the one hand and "becoming like God in one's actions as much as is possible for a human being" on the other.[26] A similar definition of philosophy as both knowledge and virtue is repeated in the *Selected Aphorisms*.[27] Finally, in the *Attainment of Happiness*, al-Fārābī defines the true philosopher (*al-faylasūf fī al-ḥaqīqa*) as one who combines theoretical knowledge with moral virtue, as well as political prudence. In contrast, those who lack one of the three characteristics form different classes of deficient philosophers.[28]

Philosophy and the human being do not necessarily have identical ends, but al-Fārābī explicitly argues that the highest human good, or happiness, is attained through philosophy.[29] Hence, against what I claimed in the previous chapter, al-Fārābī seems to be saying that the human good consists equally of theoretical knowledge and moral virtue. Some scholars have indeed argued that al-Fārābī advocates an inclusive view on happiness of which moral virtue forms a constitutive part.[30] However, most of the passages on which these claims are based present moral virtue as a necessary means for the highest good rather than as the highest good itself.[31] When al-Fārābī, in a political-religious context, states that the philosopher-prophet enjoys the highest degree of happiness (*fī aʿlā darajāt al-saʿāda*) due to his intellectual and practical perfection,[32] he, nevertheless, does seem to claim that contemplation is not a self-sufficient end but that practical virtue provides additional value to it. Moreover, the passages of the *Attainment of Happiness* mentioned above appear to

26 Al-Fārābī, "Risāla fī-mā yanbaghī," § 4, 53. As stated previously, the treatise is more likely to be a faithful adaptation of an Alexandrian introduction to Aristotle's philosophy than a genuinely independent work by al-Fārābī. Moreover, in contrast to Greek Neoplatonists, or some Arabic philosophers, such as Abū Bakr al-Rāzī or the Brethren of Purity, al-Fārabī does not develop the Platonic theme of "likeness to God" in his other works. However, it seems to be present implicitly in that becoming a pure intellect, in effect, means becoming like God "as much as is possible for the human being."

27 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 98, 100.

28 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, §§ 62–64, 94–97.

29 This is pretty much the point of both the *Exhortation to the Way to Happiness* (see *Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, § 17, 77) and the *Attainment of Happiness*.

30 Galston, *Politics and Excellence*, 55–94; Idem, "Theoretical and Practical Dimensions of Happiness"; Daiber, "Saʿāda." See also Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge," which, based on the reports on al-Fārābī's lost commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, discussed in chapter 6, attributes to al-Fārābī only a "political" form of happiness. See also the refutation of Pines in Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 102–126.

31 See especially the passages cited in Galston, "Theoretical and Practical Dimensions of Happiness," 61–68.

32 This passage (*On the Perfect State*, ch. 15, § 11, 244–246) is brought up in Galston, "Theoretical and Practical Dimensions of Happiness," 6, to support an inclusive interpretation of al-Fārābī's theory of happiness.

suggest that not only does moral and political excellence add to the value of a philosopher but also philosopher is not even properly speaking a philosopher without them. The first passage concerns the political excellence of the prophet. In analogy with the creative activity of the First, and following the late ancient Platonists, it is probably, nevertheless, the case that political perfection is for al-Fārābī a necessary consequence of the philosopher's theoretical perfection rather than a genuinely self-sufficient end.[33] As for the second passage, it does not necessarily imply that moral virtue constitutes a self-sufficient end for the human being. It may rather be the case that moral virtue is a necessary condition for the contemplative end. Thus, while it is impossible to attain the contemplative end without moral virtue, and hence there is no happiness without moral virtue, its value is still instrumental rather than intrinsic.

Based on al-Fārābī's intellectualist definition of happiness and the arguments he provides to support it, it is, in fact, clear that moral virtue must be of instrumental rather than intrinsic value in relation to the contemplative end. Moral virtues are psychical dispositions that the human being has with regard to his subrational faculties. As we have seen, for al-Fārābī, the human essence is exclusively the theoretical intellect, and the other psychical faculties, including the practical intellect, are subordinated to serve its purposes. Accordingly, al-Fārābī defines happiness exclusively as a function of the activity of the theoretical intellect where the active intellect constitutes the upper limit and final cause for human existence. Since the active intellect is an incorporeal intellect that has no subrational activities, it should not possess moral virtues either.[34] Consequently, insofar as the active intellect is identical with the human ethical end, moral virtue cannot form a part of it.

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33 That is, the political activity in a sense overflows from the intellectually perfected philosopher-prophet in the same way as existence overflows from the First without diminishing or adding to His perfection. For this principle in Greek Neoplatonism, see O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 73–83. See also Vallat, *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie*, 178–179, which suggests that the human end of imitation of the active intellect is not limited only to the latter's contemplative activity but also concerns its providential activity with regard to the material world.

34 Al-Fārābī never attributes practical virtues to the separate intellects, although, as far as I know, he does not directly address the question of whether the cosmic intellects could possess virtues. As for parallels, in *Enneads*, I.2, Plotinus denies that the Intellect could have at least the civic virtues, whereas the Arabic Plotinus ("*Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālīs*," IX.68–70, 130) states that the cosmic Intellect has all the virtues continually and perfectly. The Ismāʿīlī theologian Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 1020), who adopts al-Farābī's cosmology of ten separate intellects, however, explicitly denies that moral virtues could be attributed to the separate intellects (*Rāḥat al-ʿaql*, VII.14, 571–572).

It seems, therefore, to be the case that moral virtue bears an instrumental relation to contemplative happiness: since we cannot only be pure intellects in this life, developing virtuous dispositions is necessary for us in our embodied state to pursue our contemplative perfection. In the *Virtuous City* and the *Political Governance*, al-Fārābī states this instrumental relationship between happiness and moral virtue explicitly.[35] Happiness, defined in contemplative terms, is the ultimate human good that is only sought for its own sake (*al-khayr al-maṭlūb li-dhātihi*). Virtuous acts and dispositions are goods (*khayrāt*) in the lesser sense that they are beneficial (*tanfaʿ*) for attaining happiness but they are not final ends in the sense that they would only be sought for their own sake. Thus, it is clear that for al-Fārābī, there is a single ethical end from which the value of all other things, including moral virtue, must be derived.

For what specific reasons is moral virtue, then, necessary for the sake of the contemplative good? Al-Fārābī does not adopt the ethical, cosmological, or psychological framework of the Arabic Neoplatonic corpus in any straightforward way. Thus, he does not attribute derogatory terms to the material world and the body, nor does he, in his independent philosophical works, speak of moral virtue in terms of purifying the soul from bodily influences. The Platonic language of the purity of the soul only appears in some form in al-Fārābī's short *prolegomena* to the study of philosophy. In this treatise, he quotes Plato's saying that "only the pure (*naqī*/*zakī*) can approach the pure" as an argument used by those ancient philosophers who believed that the study of philosophy should start with ethics.[36] He later concludes as his own opinion that prephilosophical training of the appetitive soul is necessary in order to direct the appetites exclusively towards "what is virtue in reality" (*allatī hiya bi-l-ḥaqīqa faḍīla*).[37] However, even here, al-Fārābī does not adopt the morally charged language of "purity" of the soul and "impurity" of the body as his own. In the *Virtuous City*, he instead explicitly condemns philosophical views that see the body and the sensible world as something unnatural to the human being from which he should flee.[38] Al-Fārābī's view, then, seems to be that in order to practice philosophy, it is necessary to redirect the appetites towards intellectual concerns.

35 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, § 6, 206; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 72–73. The distinction between happiness as the "absolute (human) good" (*al-khayr ʿalā al-iṭlāq*) and virtue as the relative good is also formulated in *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 28, 45–46.

36 Al-Fārābī, "Risāla fī-mā yanbaghī," § 3, 52.

37 Ibid, 53.

38 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 19, §§ 1–7, 314–322. The refutation is directed against various positions, and although al-Fārābī does not name their adherents, some of them might well be Platonists of some kind. I will return to these passages in the next chapter.

This idea is present in the *Attainment of Happiness*, where al-Fārābī, paraphrasing Plato's *Republic*, states that the prerequisites of a philosopher include moral qualities, such as natural (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) disregard for bodily appetites.[39] The general notion is that insofar as the desires related to the subrational faculties are antithetical to attaining the human soul's contemplative perfection, they must be reformed.

Beyond this, moral virtue for al-Fārābī possesses an epistemological function. The activity of the separate intellects consists of pure intellection only because they are completely separate from matter. Consequently, it is matter that prevents other existents from purely intelligible existence.[40] The human intellect is entirely immaterial but it is related to matter through forming part of an embodied soul. In the following lengthy passage of the *Virtuous City*, which I quote in full because of its importance for both al-Fārābī and Avicenna, al-Fārābī ascribes the deficiencies inherent in the human intellect to the human soul's embodied state:

> The more complete (*atamm*) the existence of something that is intellected (*ʿuqila*) and known (*ʿulima*), the more completely it is intellected and known since its intellection in our souls conforms to what it is and comes to exist because of it (*al-maʿqūl minhu fī nufūsinā muṭābiqan li-mā huwa mawjūd minhu*), and it becomes intellected in our souls in accordance with its existence outside our souls and corresponding to its (external) existence (*fa-ʿālā ḥasab wujūdihi khārij nufūsinā yakūn maʿqūluhu fī nufūsinā al-muṭābiq li-wujūdihi*). If it is of deficient (*nāqiṣ*) existence, its intellection in our souls will be more deficient. Thus, motion, time, infinity, non-existence (*ʿadam*), and similar existents will all be deficiently intellected in our souls because they are themselves of deficient existence. Number, triangle, square, and their like will have more perfect (*akmal*) intellections (*maʿqūlāt*) in our souls because they are themselves more perfect in existence. Since the First is of utmost perfection of existence (*fī al-ghāya min kamāl al-wujūd*), His intellection in our souls must also be of utmost perfection. We find, however, that this is not the case. It must, therefore, be known that the First is not difficult to perceive (*idrāk*) in Himself (*min jihatihi*) since He is of utmost perfection. He is,

39 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, § 62, 94–95. The passage reproduces *Republic*, VI, 485b.

40 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 26, 45: "because it is matter that prevents something from being an intellect and from actually intellecting." For the essentially Aristotelian background of the identification of immateriality with intellection, see Aristotle, *De anima*, III.4, 430a2–9; Adamson, "Avicenna and His Commentators on Human and Divine Self-Intellection."

however, difficult and hard for us to perceive and conceive (*taṣawwur*) because of the weakness of our intellectual faculties, as they are mixed with matter and non-existence, and we are, therefore, too weak to intellect His existence as it really is (*ʿalā mā ʿalayhi wujūduhu*). For His utmost perfection dazzles us, and we are not capable of conceiving Him completely. Likewise, light is the first, most perfect, and most manifest of visible things, and other visible things become visible through it, and it is the cause of the colors becoming visible. Hence, our visual perception of anything that is more complete and powerful should be more complete. Nevertheless, we see that just the opposite happens. The more complete and powerful the object, the weaker our visual perception of it, and not because of its latency or deficiency—for it is in itself of the utmost brightness and luminosity—but because its perfection as light (*bi-mā huwa nūr*) dazzles our sight so that our eyes are bewildered. Thus are our intellects in relation to the First Cause, the First Intellect, and the First Living. Our deficient intellection of Him is not due to any deficiency in Himself, and perceiving Him is not difficult for us due to a difficulty in Himself, but due to the weakness of our intellectual faculties to conceive Him as He is. Therefore, the intelligibles in our souls are deficient, and our conception of them is weak for two kinds of objects of intellection. One kind is in itself impossible to conceive and intellect completely because of the weakness of its existence and the deficiency of its essence and substance. The other kind is in itself generous (*mabdhūl*) for its most complete and perfect conception but our minds (*adhhān*) and intellectual faculties are prevented by their weakness and distance from the substance of that thing to conceive it completely such as it is in its perfection of existence. These two kinds lie at the opposite extremes of existence, one being of the utmost perfection, the other of the utmost deficiency. Since we are mixed up with matter (*multabisīna bi-l-mādda*) and since matter is the cause of our substances becoming remote from the First Substance, the nearer our substances draw to Him, the more perfect (*atqan*) and truthful (*aṣdaq*) will necessarily be our conception of Him. Because the nearer we draw to separating ourselves from matter (*mufāraqat al-mādda*), the more complete will be our conception of Him. We come nearer to Him by becoming an actual intellect. When we are completely separated from matter, our intellection of the First in our minds will be as perfect as possible (*akmala mā yakūn*).[41]

41 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 1, § 11, 76–82 [translation by Walzer with modifications].

According to this passage, the more perfect the objects of thought are in their extra-mental existence, the more perfectly they should be represented in the human intellect.[42] Thus, since the concepts of time and motion are of weak existence, meaning that they only have relational existence but no independent ontological existence as either corporeal or separate forms, their essence is difficult to conceive for the human being. Mathematical objects, on the other hand, have some such existence and are, therefore, easier to conceive.[43] This is how it supposedly works for the separate intellects. The human intellect's relation to matter, however, results in its deficiency to conceive the "brightest" objects of intellection, in particular, the First, in analogy to the deficiency of sensation to perceive bright sensible objects.[44] Therefore, the more separate the human substance becomes from matter, the more closely its mental representation of the First comes to represent His essence. The principle that the human soul's separation from materiality enhances the conception of the intelligible object, of course, applies to other objects of intellection as well. Based on this passage, then, separation from materiality for al-Fārābī constitutes a necessary condition for the human contemplative end for epistemological reasons.

When al-Fārābī's idea of moral virtue is viewed from the perspective of its relation to the ultimate human end of contemplative happiness, the following picture arises. First, al-Fārābī explicitly states that the relation of virtue to happiness is instrumental. That is, virtue is by definition whatever contributes to the attainment of happiness. Second, the Platonic theme of impurity of the body and the sensible world, and the consequent definition of moral virtue as purification of the soul, is almost entirely absent. Nevertheless, moral virtue constitutes a prerequisite for contemplative perfection because the human soul must redirect its attention towards the contemplative activity that corresponds to its essence. Third, since it is matter that prevents pure intellec-

42 Al-Fārābī's inspiration here is possibly a passage in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (II.1, 993b7–11): "Perhaps, since the difficulties (in the investigation of the truth) are of two kinds, the cause of this difficulty lies not in the things themselves (*en tois prāgmasin*) but in ourselves: just as the eyes of the bats are with regard to daylight, so is the intellect of our soul with regard to the things which are by nature most evident of all."

43 For the mathematicals, nevertheless, having no independent ontological existence for al-Fārābī, see, for example, al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, §§ 9–11, 55–58; Idem, *Iḥṣā' al-ʿulūm*, III, 35.

44 In *De anima* (III.4, 429a32–429b5), Aristotle, in contrast, argues that the intellect's capability to conceive an "extremely intelligible object" (*to sphodra noēton*), *contra* the deficiency in the senses to perceive strong sensible objects (*to sphodra aisthēton*), such as loud sounds or bright colors, supports the conclusion that it is an immaterial potency.

tion, moral virtue is also an epistemological prerequisite due to the contrariety between material and sensible existence on the one hand and intelligible and spiritual existence on the other hand. This could, of course, refer to cognitive separation in the sense that through the gradual abstraction of intelligible concepts from sensible forms, the theoretical faculty attains independence from the bodily faculties of sensation and imagination, as we saw in chapter 4. However, insofar as the sensible and intelligible spheres of existence are antithetical, and the human end is identified exclusively with the latter, surely it is reasonable to conclude that it involves separation from all the bodily faculties, including appetites and emotions, which direct the intellect towards the body and away from its proper activity. As a result, even though al-Fārābī avoids derogatory language concerning the body, it would still seem to be the case that moral virtue for him means the intellect's separation from the body and the bodily faculties to the greatest extent possible.

2 Avicenna

Since Avicenna's theory of happiness, and its metaphysical and psychological foundations, are very similar to al-Fārābī's, it is not very surprising that his position on the relation prevailing between moral virtue and happiness converges with that of al-Fārābī. Like al-Fārābī, Avicenna sees the ends of philosophy and the human being as identical so that the ultimate goal of philosophy is human perfection or happiness.[45] He also relates the theoretical and practical parts of the Aristotelian division of philosophy to the human ends of theoretical knowledge and practical virtue, respectively. Thus, in his classificatory work, *Parts of the Intellectual Sciences*, Avicenna provides a general definition of philosophy as a "theoretical discipline" (*ṣināʿat naẓar*), through which the human being attains knowledge of "all existence" (*al-wujūd kulluhu*) on the one hand and of the "actions he must take to ennoble his soul" on the other.[46] Together the two aspects of philosophy prepare the human soul for happiness in the afterlife. In the introduction to the *Metaphysics* of the *Healing*, he states that the theoretical sciences pursue knowledge concerning the external reality for the sake of actualizing the theoretical intellect. In contrast, practical philosophy seeks knowledge concerning the human actions for the sake of perfecting (*istikmāl*)

45 See, for example, Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, 1.3, § 1, 13: "All the sciences share in one benefit, which is the attainment of the human soul's perfection in act, preparing it for happiness in the afterlife."

46 Avicenna, "Aqsām al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya," 104–105.

the practical faculty by means of virtuous psychical dispositions (*akhlāq*).[47] Thus, for Avicenna also, the end of philosophy and the human being consists of both knowledge and virtue. However, as we saw in the case of al-Fārābī, this by no means must entail that these constitute two independent ends of equal value.

A significant difference between the psychological theories of al-Fārābī and Avicenna is that for the former, the immortal human substance is only the theoretical intellect. In contrast, for the latter, the human substance is formed of all the human psychical activities. Perhaps, as a consequence, the human ethical end for Avicenna involves moral virtue in a more genuine sense. Some passages seem to support this conclusion. In the *Beginning and Return*, Avicenna defines happiness as "becoming an intelligible world" with regard to the human soul's proper activity (*min al-jiha allatī takhuṣṣuhā*) and as acquiring a "dominating disposition" (*al-hay'a al-istīlā'iyya*) with regard to the soul's relation with the body.[48] I will return to the meaning of the latter part shortly. For now, it is sufficient to note that this definition does not appear to be purely intellectualist given that happiness involves two aspects: an intellectual one related to the theoretical intellect and a practical one concerned with the practical intellect's relation with the body. In the same context, Avicenna further specifies the function of the practical end:

> In the same way, the perfection of the human soul is to become an intellect separated from matter and the concomitants of matter (*lawāḥiq al-mādda*). For the proper activity of the human soul (*fi'luhā alladhī yakhtaṣṣ bihā*) is not only the perception of the intelligibles but it has in association (*bi-mushāraka*) with the body other activities, through which [unintelligible in the original] it gains different forms of happiness (*sa'ādāt*) when these are the way they should be (*hiya 'alā mā yanbaghī*), that is, when they are conducive towards justice. The meaning of justice is for the soul to attain mediate dispositions between contrary character states (*tatawassaṭ al-nafs bayna al-akhlāq*) with regard to whether it desires (*tashtahī*) or not, is aroused to anger or not, and governs life (*tudabbir bihi al-ḥayāt*) or not.[49]

Avicenna now claims that the activities of both the theoretical intellect and the soul-body composite are "proper" (*yakhtaṣṣ bihā*) to the human soul, whereas

47 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, I.1, § 2, 2.
48 Avicenna, *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād*, III.14, 110.
49 Ibid, 109 [my translation].

in the previous passage, he stated that only intellection is its "proper" (*yakhuṣṣuhā*) activity. Apparently, Avicenna means different things in the two passages. The activity of the theoretical intellect is proper to the human soul alone in the sense that, in contrast to all other psychical activities, it does not employ a corporeal instrument. However, for Avicenna, the human soul genuinely is a unified substance. Therefore, governance of the subrational activities towards virtue is also "proper" to the human soul, although not in the sense that it would pertain to the soul without the body.

Nevertheless, when both formulations are read in the context of Avicenna's psychological theory, they imply that the practical end, in fact, must have an instrumental relation to the theoretical end. Both passages entail a duality of very different kinds of human activities: abstract theoretical thought that pertains to the human soul alone and the rest of the human activities that pertain to the soul-body composite. That the rational ordering of bodily activities is an instrumental end for the ultimate end related to the theoretical intellect is evident based on Avicenna's hierarchical conception of the psychical faculties, discussed in chapter 4. In the psychological part of the *Healing*, then, Avicenna formulates the psychological basis of the human being's two ends in the following way:

> For the human soul, though one substance … has a relation (*nisba*/*qiyās*) to two sides (*janbatayn*), one below it and one above it, and for each side, there is a faculty through which the connection between it and that side is ordered (*tantaẓim*). Therefore, this practical faculty is the one the soul possesses for the connection with the side below it, that is, the body and its governance (*siyāsatihi*). The theoretical faculty is the one that the soul possesses for the connection with the side above it, to be influenced by it, learn from it, and receive from it. So, it is as though our soul has two faces, one directed to the body—and this is the one that must not endure any effect (*athar*) of a type entailed by the body's nature—and another one directed to the high principles (*al-mabādiʾ al-ʿāliya*)—and this is the one that must always be receptive to and affected by what is there. It is from the lower side that the character traits (*akhlāq*) are produced, whereas it is from the higher side that the sciences are produced. This, then, is the practical faculty.[50]

50 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, 1.5, § 48, 47 [translation cited with modifications from McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 184].

For Avicenna, the first "face" of the human soul is concerned with moral virtue and the second "face" with theoretical thought. Psychologically, the relationship between happiness and moral virtue is one between the theoretical and practical parts of the intellect,[51] which are in charge of these two kinds of human activities. Ontologically, the two "faces" represent the upwards and downwards directions of the human soul, where the Arabic Plotinus seems to be the primary inspiration.[52] Consequently, Avicenna's doctrine of two faces has a distinctly Platonic ring, which was not present in al-Fārābī, in that the duality of human activities is clearly related to the duality of the ontological spheres of being. Through the theoretical intellect, the human soul is directed upwards towards the separate intellects, in particular, the active intellect as the cause of its intellectual activity. Through the practical intellect, it is directed downwards towards the body, the subrational faculties, and the sensible world. The Platonic duality becomes more manifest in Avicenna's normative evaluation of how the two intellectual faculties ought to function. The end of the practical intellect is for the human substance to be affected as little as possible by the body, while the end of the theoretical intellect is for it to be influenced as much as possible by the separate intellects. In sum, the necessity of moral virtue for Avicenna arises from the contrariety of the two directions faced by the human being because excessive preoccupation with the body diverts the human soul from directing its attention upwards towards the intellects.[53]

Avicenna expresses the same idea in slightly more Platonic terms in his commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*:

> For the soul adheres to the body in order to be an ornament (*zīna*) for the body, by which it is directed towards the intellectual things (*takhtaṣṣ bi-l-umūr al-ʿaqliyya*), it is an intellectual ornament, and for the soul to be able to connect with (*ittiṣāl*) the high substances that possess the true pleasure, beauty, and splendor. The soul must make the body and the bodily organs instruments (*makāsib*) by which it acquires the perfection that

51 For the relatively sharp division between the theoretical and practical parts of the intellect in Avicenna, see Sebti, "La distinction entre intellect pratique et intellect théorique."

52 Cf. Pseudo-Aristotle, *Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālīs*, VII.45, 91: "We say that every soul has something that is joined (*yattaṣil*) to the body below and (something that) is joined to the intellect above." For the Plotinian background of the doctrine of "two faces" in Avicenna, see also De Smet, "La doctrine avicennienne des deux faces de l'âme."

53 Cf. Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-nafs wa-baqāʾihā wa-maʿādihā," VII, 94, where Avicenna states that the two activities (*fiʿl*) of the human soul are in contention with each other (*mutaʿānid*/*mutamāniʿ*). For this treatise, see Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 477–479.

> is proper to it (*al-kamāl al-khāṣṣ bihā*) only. For it is known that the soul's preoccupation (*ishtighāl*) with the lower side diverts it (*yaṣudduhu*) from the higher side, just as its turning towards the higher side diverts it from the lower side. The soul is not associated (*mukhāliṭa*) with the body so that the body by its association should divert it from the high perfection (*al-kamāl al-ʿulwī*), for then the soul does not use the body the way it should but instead gains a disposition (*bi-hayʾa*) where the body turns it away from receiving (its perfection).[54]

Even if the highest human end is purely intellectual, the human soul's association with the body plays a positive instrumental role in the sense that for Avicenna, the human theoretical perfection can only be attained gradually through a process of abstraction employing bodily organs and faculties. Moral virtue is, then, for Avicenna necessary for the contemplative end in that it ensures that the body and the bodily faculties serve the purpose they have with regard to the intellectual end, as opposed to hinder its attainment by turning the soul's attention towards bodily activities and the sensible world.

Beyond the general contrariety of the human soul's two directions, Avicenna also elaborates on the more specific reasons that make moral virtue necessary. First, due to its two directions, the human soul possesses both a downwards and upwards directed desire (*shawq*). In his commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*, Avicenna relates the two contrary desires to the two ontological realities: the human soul has a desire for the sensible world due to its connection with the body and for the intelligible world through the intellect.[55] In the metaphysical part of the *Healing*, Avicenna expresses the same idea without the cosmological framework but in terms of the human soul's desire for the perfection of its essence versus its desire to preoccupy itself with bodily affections (*āthār*) and accidents (*ʿawāriḍ*).[56] In contrast to Plotinus, since the soul for Avicenna is not pre-existent, the contrariety is not between the soul's desire for its predescent intelligible existence and the desire it adopts as a consequence of its

54 Avicenna, "Tafsīr Kitāb 'Uthūlūjiyā,'" I, 41–42 [my translation].

55 Ibid, 37, 39, 40. For Avicenna, the "intelligible world" (*al-ʿālam al-ʿaqlī*) refers to the series of separate intellects as a whole.

56 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 22, 354–355. However, the cosmological context is present in the following passage (Ibid, § 19, 354) [translation by Marmura with modifications]: "It seems that the human being will not free himself from this world and its connections unless he has firmly established his relation (*akkada al-ʿalāqa*) with that world so that he has a desire (*shawq*) and love (*ʿishq*) for what is there that stops him entirely from looking at what is behind him."

descent into materiality. Rather, both kinds of desire are innate and natural to the human soul.[57] Nevertheless, it is the preoccupation (*ishtighāl*) with the body and its states that makes the human soul oblivious of its essence (*dhāt*) and distracts it from desiring its proper perfection.[58] Thus, moral virtue in the sense of at least some degree of separation from the body and its faculties appears to be a prerequisite for the human being even to develop a desire for contemplative happiness.

Second, moral virtue is an epistemological prerequisite for Avicenna, just as it was for al-Fārābī. In fact, insofar as the human end consists of complete intelligible knowledge, and the function of moral virtue is to enable the human end, the epistemological function is the primary purpose of moral virtue. Again, the separate intellects are always in a complete state of actuality because of their immateriality,[59] while the human theoretical intellect is a completely immaterial human potency that only becomes actualized through the agency of the active intellect. What prevents the human intellect from becoming immediately actualized is the fact that it forms part of an embodied soul in which the other faculties are connected with a body.[60] However, if the theoretical intellect is entirely immaterial, how can the body and the bodily faculties affect it at all, let alone prevent it from becoming actualized? In a passage drawing either on the passage of al-Fārābī cited above or on a common source, Avicenna

57 Cf. Pseudo-Aristotle, "*Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālīs*," I.1–3, 18–19. Thus, in his commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle* ("Tafsīr Kitāb 'Uthūlūjiyā,'" I, 37), Avicenna both rejects that the passage he is commenting on could imply pre-existence and insists that the human soul has sensible desires by nature (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*).

58 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, §14, 351; §16, 352; §22, 354–355. See also Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.10, 26; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.14, 114.

59 For the identification of immateriality and intellection in Avicenna, see *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 2, III.20, 422–424; Adamson, "Avicenna and his Commentators on Human and Divine Self-Intellection."

60 See, for example, Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-kalām ʿalā al-nafs al-nāṭiqa," §10, 197 [translation cited with modifications from Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 73]: "It has become clear in the physical sciences that the celestial bodies are not constituted from a mixture of these four elements but are totally lacking in the opposites. It is only the involvement with these opposites that hinders the reception of the divine emanation (*al-fayḍ al-ilāhī*), by which I mean lordly inspiration (*al-ilhām al-rabbānī*), occurring all at once and revealing some intellectual truth (*ḥaqīqa min al-ḥaqāʾiq al-ʿaqliyya*)." *The Epistle on the Discussion of the Rational Soul* is probably the very last treatise written by Avicenna. It is translated in its entirety in Gutas, 68–75. In contrast to works such as the *Healing*, the treatise employs religious terms for many of Avicenna's philosophical concepts, such as "lordly inspiration" for intellectual emanation in the passage above or angel for the active intellect elsewhere.

explains more precisely how the human soul's association with the body presents a hindrance for its intellectual activity:

> The inability of the intellect to conceive (*taṣawwur*) things that are at the upper limit of being intelligible and abstracted from matter (*fī ghāyat al-maʿqūliyya wa-l-tajrīd ʿan al-mādda*) is not on account of something in those things themselves (*fī dhāt tilka al-ashyāʾ*), nor on account of something innate (*gharīza*) to the intellect, but rather on account of the fact that the soul is distracted (*mashghūla*) while in the body by the body. It needs the body for many things, but the body keeps it at a remove from the noblest of its perfections. The eye cannot bear to gaze at the Sun, certainly not on account of something in the Sun nor because it is not clearly visible, but rather on account of something about the natural makeup (*jibilla*) of the body. When this state of being immersed and impeded are removed from our soul, it will intellect these in the noblest, clearest (*awḍaḥ*), and most pleasurable ways. Our discussion here, however, concerns the soul only inasmuch as it is a soul and that only inasmuch as it is associated with this matter. So we should not discuss the return of the soul when we are discussing nature until we move on to the discipline of philosophy (*al-ṣināʿa al-ḥikmiyya*) [meaning metaphysics] and there investigate the separate things (*al-umūr al-mufāriqa*). The investigation in the natural philosophy, however, is restricted to what is appropriate to natural things, and they are the things that bear relation to matter and motion.[61]

The "bright" objects of intellection are the ones that are separate from matter, to begin with, that is, the separate intellects as well as the Necessary Existent as the "brightest" and most difficult to conceive of them all. The human intellect is deficient in its ability to conceive "bright" intelligible objects, just as the eye is deficient in its ability to gaze directly at the Sun.[62] While the eye is a corporeal

61 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, V.5, §6, 237–238 [translation cited with modifications from McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 201–202].

62 This may be compared with Avicenna, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.5, 98 [my translation]: "The material intellect is disposed to become the world of the whole (*ʿālam al-kull*) for it is like (*yatashabbah*) the intelligible world and resembles (*yushbih*) the sensible world through its soul. The essence and form of every existing thing will then be in it. But if some of this is difficult for it, it is because it [the object of knowledge] is of weak existence (*ḍāʿif al-wujūd*) in itself, lowly (*khasīsa*) and resembling non-existence (*shabīh bi-l-ʿadam*), such as matter, movement, time, and infinity, or because it is of strong manifestation (*shadīd al-ẓuhūr*) and radiates power (*yabhar al-quwwa*) like strong light to vision, such as the

organ, and its deficiency is due to its material constitution, the intellect is an incorporeal faculty whose deficiency cannot be something inherent in it but is rather due to its being "distracted" by the body. According to Avicenna, the most perfectly intelligible objects of thought will become the "clearest" objects of intellection when the soul becomes separate from the body. It is not, then, the case that the bodily faculties could really affect the theoretical intellect and thereby prevent its actuality. It is instead the case that they distract the human soul from focusing its attention on intellection.[63] In other words, it is the bodily distraction that prevents the human intellect from properly building the "disposition of connection" (*malakat al-ittiṣāl*) with the active intellect, on which intellection is conditional for Avicenna. It is presumably also the case that the embodied human soul can never fully actualize its theoretical faculty. But by eliminating the bodily distractions, it can at least enhance its connection with the active intellect as much as possible. Avicenna portrays such a state as analogous to that of the celestial bodies:

> Since the celestial bodies are totally devoid of opposites, they are receptive to the divine emanation. A human being, on the other hand, even if his temperament were extremely balanced (*ghāyat al-iʿtidāl*), is not free from defects due to opposites (*shawāʾib al-aḍdād*). As long as the rational soul is associated with the human body, no corporeal entity (*jirm*) can be completely ready to receive the divine emanation or have perfectly

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principle of the whole and the pure intellectual things. For the human soul due to its being in matter inherits a weakness for conceiving (*taṣawwur*) these extremely manifest things (*al-ẓāhirāt jiddan*) in nature, and it is as if when it becomes separate it will truly view them and become perfected by becoming assimilated to the intelligible world (*tashabbuhan bi-l-ʿālam al-ʿaqlī*)." The two passages have the same intent in that the intelligibles of both strong and weak existence, although the latter are excluded in the citation of the main text, are difficult to conceive for the human intellect, as in the previously quoted passage of al-Fārābī. The "weak" intelligibles, such as matter and time, are difficult to conceive because they have only relational existence for the embodied human intellect, and they are not conceived at all by the pure intellects that exist outside time and space.

63 Cf. Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-nafs wa-baqāʾihā wa-maʿādihā," VII, 94–95, which lists the "bodily distractions" (*shawāghiluhā min jihat al-badan*) of sensation, imagination (*takhayyul*), appetites (*shahawāt*), anger (*ghaḍab*), fear, anxiety (*ghamm*), and pain (*waja*ʿ), that is, in essence, all subrational faculties and their psychical states. Thus, "when you start thinking about an intelligible (*tufakkir fī al-maʿqūl*), all these other things will become idle for you (*taʿṭal ʿalayka*)." In *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.11, 27, the distractions (*shawāghil*) are defined as "passions (*infiʿālāt*) and dispositions (*hayʾāt*) that adhere to the soul due to its closeness to the body (*talḥaq al-nafs bi-mujāwarat al-badan*)," and in Ibid, X.11, 125–126, the psychical faculties are told to be in contention with each other (*mutajādhiba*/*mutanāziʿa*).

> revealed to it all the intelligibles. But when a person expends all his efforts to purify his rational soul through knowledge, acquires the disposition of contact (*malakat al-ittiṣāl*) with the divine emanation, or with the intellectual substance through which the divine emanation takes place, which is called angel in the religious language (*lisān al-shar*ʿ) and active intellect in the philosophical language (*lisān al-ḥikma*), has a balanced temperament and lacks these opposites that hinder his reception of the divine emanation, then there comes about him a certain similarity (*mushābaha mā*) to the celestial bodies.[64]

Temperamental mixtures for Avicenna constitute the physiological basis for psychical dispositions. Thus, balanced temperament, in effect, means moral virtue, as we will see in the next chapter. Moral virtue is, then, an epistemological prerequisite in the sense that it minimizes the hindrance that the body and its affections form for the human intellect's capability to connect with the active intellect. In other words, moral virtue is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for the human being to develop his theoretical faculty to the extent that it is possible for an embodied soul. However, it still must be the case that imbalanced temperamental states and the resulting bad psychical dispositions cannot affect the immaterial theoretical intellect itself. Instead, they prevent the intellect from forming an optimal contact with the active intellect by diverting the soul's attention to less valuable activities. On the other hand, it is by means of the external and internal senses that the intellect abstracts the intelligible concepts in the first place.[65] Thus, the body seems to play the two contradictory roles of both enabling and hindering the human contemplative end.

Besides the theme of intellectual desire, Avicenna incorporates more Platonic terminology into his ethical language than al-Fārābī did. First, he sometimes employs the terms "purity" (*zakāʾ*/*ṭahāra*) and "purification" (*tazkiyya*/*taṭhīr*) in the context of moral virtue.[66] The language of purity and impurity

64 Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-kalām ʿalā al-nafs al-nāṭiqa," §10, 197–198 [translation cited with modifications from Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 73]. See also Avicenna, "Tafsīr Kitāb 'Uthūlūjiyā,'" IV, 56: "When he purifies (*zakkā*) his soul, discards these coverings (*aghshiya*) from it, and trains (*rāḍahā*) and polishes (*hadhdhabahā*) the soul, he will prepare it for receiving the high emanation (*al-fayḍ al-ʿulwī*)."

65 For the rival scholarly positions on the roles that the human versus active intellects have in the process of abstraction, see note 56 in chapter 5.

66 See, for example, Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, X.5, §10, 377; Idem, "Tafsīr Kitāb 'Uthūlūjiyā,'" IV, 56; Idem, "Risāla fī al-kalām ʿalā al-nafs al-nāṭiqa," §§6–8, 196–197; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, X.28, 156.

gives the initial appearance of a more severely anti-corporeal ethical outlook, insofar as it is the body and its influence that is conceived as "impure." Avicenna, however, never talks of the body as an evil, nor is the body a "prison of the soul,"[67] and even in the passage quoted above, he brings up the positive function that the body has for the human soul. In his commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*, Avicenna explains the terms employed by the Arabic Plotinus as follows: "pure soul" (*al-nafs al-naqiyya al-ṭāhira*) is a soul that is not distracted by the body from directing its attention upwards and from attaining its intellectual perfection. "Impurities" (*awsākh*), in turn, are bodily states that obstruct the soul from attaining the perfection corresponding to its essence.[68] Although bodily states and desires are natural in the sense of being innate to the human soul, the "impurities" are alien to the soul's intellectual essence since for Avicenna, the natural, or "pure," state is for the human soul not to be dominated by them.[69] It is not the body in itself that is "impure" but rather the psychical states in which bodily affections dominate the human soul. The language of "purity" and "impurity" is, hence, just another expression for virtue and vice, which Avicenna has picked up from the Arabic Plotinus. The meaning of purification is elaborated further in the following passage from Avicenna's late treatise on the rational soul. In this case, Avicenna relates the purification of the soul directly to the attainment of happiness:

> The happiness of the rational soul comes about when its substance is perfected, and this is accomplished when it is purified through knowledge of God (*bi-tazkiyyatihi bi-l-ʿilm bi-llāh*) and acts for God (*al-ʿamal li-llāh*). Its purification through acts for God consists of its being cleansed of vicious and bad character traits (*taṭhīruhu ʿan al-akhlāq al-radhīla al-radīʾa*), its rectification (*taqwīmuhu*) from blameworthy attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-dhamīma*) and evil and repugnant habits (*al-ʿādāt al-sayyiʾa al-qabīḥa*) by following reason and religion (*ʿaqlan wa-sharʿan*), and its being adorned with good habits (*al-ʿādāt al-ḥasana*), praiseworthy character

67 Cf. Plato, *Phaedo*, 82E.

68 Avicenna, "Tafsīr Kitāb 'Uthūlūjiyā,'" I, 41–43. Similarly, Avicenna in *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.14, talks of the "dirt of association with the body" (*daran muqāranat al-badan*), which is identified with bodily "distractions" (*shawāghil*).

69 Avicenna explains the general meaning of the term "impurity" (*waskh*) ("Tafsīr Kitāb 'Uthūlūjiyā,'" I, 42) employed by the Arabic Plotinus as follows: "He means by impurities the bad, vicious, unnatural, and inappropriate additions that attach to something that in relation to them is pure (*zawāʾid radīʾa radhīla ghayr ṭabīʿiyya wa-lā munāsiba talzam al-shayʾ alladhī huwa bi-l-qiyās ilayhā naqī*)." For virtue as the soul's natural state, see Avicenna, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.14, 110.

> traits (*al-akhlāq al-ḥamīda*), and virtuous and pleasing dispositions (*al-malakāt al-fāḍila al-marḍiyya*) by following reason and religious law. Its purification through knowledge of God consists of its attaining a disposition (*taḥṣīl malaka lahu*) by means of which it is disposed to retrieve (*yatahayya' li-iḥḍār*) all the intelligibles whenever it wishes without needing to acquire (*iktisāb*) them, and thus to have all the intelligibles present in it in actuality (*ḥāṣila lahu bi-l-fiʿl*), or in a potentiality that is extremely close to actuality. The soul then becomes like a polished mirror upon which are reflected the forms of things as they are in themselves without any distortion, and whenever it stands face to face with them having been purified through knowledge, there ensues practicing of the theoretical, philosophical sciences.[70]

In this passage, Avicenna introduces a further division into a theoretical and practical purification. However, the novelty is mainly linguistic, as it involves no doctrinal innovations with respect to the passages discussed above. Avicenna defines theoretical purification as the human soul's actualization of the theoretical faculty through intelligible knowledge and acquiring the disposition to connect with the active intellect. Practical purification, in turn, again simply means acquiring virtuous character traits. The addition that practical virtue is acquired by reason and religion is important for the political context of Avicenna's ethical thought. For Avicenna, religious law is an essential means for habituating the soul to virtue, in addition to character training based on philosophical ethics. Regarding the relation that moral virtue has with contemplative happiness, however, the conclusion is that purity for Avicenna, in essence, means incorporeality in the case of both theoretical and practical purification. By theoretical purification, Avicenna means the gradual abstraction of material attachments from sensible forms, which eventually leads to the actualization of the theoretical intellect. Practical purification, in turn, means that the soul turns from the bodily faculties towards the intellect.

In further contrast to al-Fārābī, Avicenna also adopts the second Platonic theme of "becoming like God," at least in a qualified sense. We have seen in the previous chapter that Avicenna understands the human ethical end to consist of becoming like the separate intellects, an "intelligible world," which dispenses with the bodily faculties in its intellectual activity.[71] In the passage

70 Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-kalām ʿalā al-nafs al-nāṭiqa," §§ 6–7, 196 [translation cited with modifications from Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 71].

71 See chapter 4.

quoted above, Avicenna states that the human being by perfecting his intellectual and moral dispositions attains "some resemblance" to the celestial bodies (*al-ajrām al-falakiyya*) in the form of balanced temperamental and, by consequence, psychical dispositions that facilitate the intellectual emanations.[72] The astral bodies are not composites of the four elements but only of the fifth element of ether. Presumably, Avicenna brings them up here to emphasize that the optimal temperamental balance for the human being bears some resemblance to the simplicity of the celestial bodies rather than to suggest that the human end is to emulate the celestial bodies in any more profound sense. In the *Treatise on Love*, however, Avicenna goes further and states that the end for both planetary and human souls, rather than intellects, is to imitate the Necessary Existent:

> The perfection of the human and angelic souls consists in 1) them conceiving (*tataṣawwar*) the intelligibles such as they are (*ʿalā mā hiya ʿalayhā*) according to their capability, and thereby imitating (*tashabbuhan*) the essence of the Absolute Good, and 2) of actions (*afāʿīl*) ensuing from them (*taṣdur ʿanhā*) that are just (*ʿādila*) for them (*ʿindahā*) and in relation to themselves (*bi-l-iḍāfa ilayhā*), such as the human virtues (*al-faḍāʾil al-basharīyya*) and the movements that the angelic souls import to the high substances in order to preserve generation and corruption, and thereby imitating the essence of the Absolute Good. These imitations take place in order to enable proximity to the Absolute Good and to gain (*tastafīd*) virtue and perfection through that approximation (*taqarrub*).[73]

The analogy between the human and celestial souls is based on the fact that both are embodied. Both, therefore, imitate the Necessary Existent by means of both bodily and intellectual activity. For the astral bodies, this bodily aspect consists of their perfect circular movement and for the human being, it consists of virtuous actions. Thus, human virtue and the circular movement of the spheres are similar in the general sense that for each, this constitutes imitation of the First in the sphere of corporeal activity. However, as becomes clear little further on in the treatise, all sublunar existents from the elements upwards strive to emulate the First in this sense of pursuing the end that inheres in their nature.[74] This is, then, just another way of saying that in an Aristotelian uni-

72 Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-kalām ʿalā al-nafs al-nāṭiqa," § 10, 198.

73 Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-ʿishq," VI, 20–21 [my translation].

74 Ibid, VII, 25.

verse, all existents are teleologically oriented towards an end that constitutes their actuality or perfection. By attaining their respective ends, they resemble the First as much as is possible for that species of existents. Human perfection consists of "intelligence and justice,"[75] that is, of contemplative perfection and moral virtue, and through them, the human being approaches the First in the sense of reaching his specific perfection. In other words, the First is the Pure Good, and the human being by attaining the human good in some sense approaches the Pure Good, even if the two goods are incommensurate. Since the First is a pure intellect, the human being, of course, comes to resemble Him, as well as the separate intellects, by actualizing his theoretical faculty. However, although Avicenna does not say so explicitly, the resemblance would seem to extend also to the practical aspect of human perfection. Insofar as attaining virtuous dispositions means the intellect's separation from the body, the human being through acquiring them also approaches the incorporeality of the First.

In consequence, Avicenna's position is that moral virtue is an instrumental end for the human being, which enables the final contemplative end in the sense that it directs the human soul towards its intellectual essence and its corresponding perfection. In contrast to al-Fārābī, Avicenna explicitly adopts the Platonic themes identifying virtue with purity and divinization. However, he employs the terms in a way that is not particularly hostile towards the body and the material world but rather alternate terms for expressing the subordinate relation that moral virtue has with respect to contemplative perfection. Despite this, the consequence of subjugating moral virtue to the end of contemplative happiness is that moral virtue should mean the intellect's separation from the body to the greatest extent possible.

There remains one crucial problem, however. The final contemplative end for Avicenna is ultimately eschatological, and it is, therefore, only fully realized in the afterlife. With regard to the afterlife, as we have seen, Avicenna states that bad psychical dispositions are accidental to the human essence and will not persist once the soul becomes separated from the body.[76] In Avicennan eschatology, the intellectually but not morally perfected souls will suffer from their bad psychical dispositions for some time, but not eternally.[77] However, the very possibility of an eschatological class of intellectually but not morally perfected souls means that moral virtue cannot be a necessary condition for the con-

75 Ibid, 25–26.

76 See Avicenna, "Tafsīr Kitāb 'Uthūlūjiyā,'" 1, 42–43; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.12, 28–29.

77 See chapter 6.

templative end in this life after all.[78] Moreover, if the intellectually perfected souls will eventually reach complete happiness in any case, moral virtue is not a necessary condition for happiness in the afterlife either. This would greatly limit even the instrumental value of moral virtue and make happiness conditional only on intellectual activity. It is probably the case, then, that Avicenna's eschatology is not entirely consistent with his overall philosophy for religious reasons since he needs a philosophical explanation for the punishment of the intelligent but bad people. In any case, the preceding textual evidence clearly shows that moral virtue in the sense of at least some degree of separation from the body is necessary for the human being to attain his contemplative end.

78 The same problem applies to al-Fārābī only in part since he does not consistently ascribe immortality to the morally vicious souls.

CHAPTER 8

Theory of Virtue

Considering that al-Fārābī and Avicenna are almost unanimous as regards their concept of happiness, their theories of virtue are strikingly different, even if both operate firmly within the classical tradition of virtue ethics. The books II–VI of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* constitute the most influential discussion of virtue in the history of philosophy. This discussion is obviously of central importance for Arabic philosophers also, either directly or through various intermediaries.[1] However, Aristotle is far from being the only classical influence. As regards the concept of virtue itself, ancient, and by extension medieval Arabic, ethical theories, nevertheless, generally agree on what constitute the central properties of virtue.[2] First, virtue is a relatively stable psychical disposition (*heksis*/*malaka*)[3] or character trait (*ēthos*/*khulq*),[4] based on which a virtuous person consistently performs virtuous actions. It is commonly compared to a craft or skill, in particular, in the sense that both are learned by habituation—we become just or temperate by performing just or temperate acts, just as we become lute-players by playing a lute.[5] Second, virtue includes an affective component in that a virtuous person wants to perform virtuous actions rather than has to force himself to do so against his will, which distinguishes virtue from self-restraint (*enkrateia*/*ḍabṭ*).[6] Virtue, therefore, introduces a harmonious order into the different human activities so that none of the different motivating powers presents an internal opposition for a human being to perform virtuous actions. Third, virtue includes an intellectual component in the sense that virtuous acts do not follow mechanically from virtuous character traits but acting in a particular context always involves delibera-

1 For the transmission history of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, see the introduction.

2 See, in particular, Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 47–84; Idem, "Virtue Ethics"; Idem, *Intelligent Virtue*.

3 See, for example, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.5, 1105b25–1106a13. In the Arabic translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *heksis* is commonly rendered as *ḥāl*, a state, as well as *hay'a*, a disposition. *Malaka*, a disposition, is employed in the Arabic translation less frequently (cf. 1098b33) but is used consistently by al-Fārābī, whereas Avicenna employs both *malaka* and *hay'a*.

4 See, in particular, Jālīnūs, "Kitāb al-Akhlāq li-Jālīnūs," I, 191.

5 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1, 1103a31–1103b1. In the Arabic translation, *kithara* is rendered as lute (*'ūd*).

6 Ibid, VII.1, 1145a15–1145b20.

tion (*bouleusis*/*rawiyya*).[7] Practical wisdom (*phronēsis*/*taʿaqqul*) is, therefore, an indispensable component for all of the individual virtues.[8] It may further be the case that virtue is intellectual also in the sense that the knowledge about what constitutes virtue is ultimately founded on theoretical knowledge.

The classical theories of virtue were transmitted into Arabic through various channels, of which the Platonic and Aristotelian constitute the two most prevalent ones. At least on a superficial level, al-Fārābī adopts the latter and Avicenna the former. Aristotle divides virtues into intellectual (*dianoētikē*/*fikriyya*) and moral (*ēthikē*/*khulqiyya*), corresponding to the reasoning part of the soul and those subrational activities that are capable of being guided by reason, respectively.[9] He famously defines moral virtue as a mean (*meson*/*tawassuṭ*) between an excessive (*huberbolē*/*ziyāda*) and deficient (*elleipsis*/*nuqṣān*) disposition, both of which constitute vices (*kakia*/*radhīla*),[10] and arrives at a list of eleven moral virtues,[11] which he discusses in detail in books II–V. These are not meant to be understood as arithmetical means. Rather, the idea of moderation is context-dependent, meaning that practical reasoning occupies a central role in determining what is courageous, temperate, and so forth for a particular person in a particular situation.[12] The intellectual virtues related to theoretical and practical thought are discussed in book VI, including practical wisdom as the excellence of deliberating the best actions conducive to virtue.[13]

The equally famous Platonic cardinal virtues, as presented in the *Republic*, consist of temperance (*sōphrosunē*/*ʿiffa*), courage (*andreia*/*shajāʿa*), and wisdom (*sophia*/*ḥikma*), corresponding to the appetitive (*epithumētikon*/*shahwānī*), irascible (*thumoeides*/*ghaḍabī*), and rational (*logistikon*/*nāṭiq*) parts of the soul, complemented by justice (*dikaiosunē*/*ʿadāla*) as their combination.[14] Justice in this agent-centered sense refers to the overall virtue, which, in

7 Ibid, III.3.

8 Ibid, X.8, 1178a16–19.

9 Ibid, I.13, 1103a1–10.

10 Ibid, II.6, 1106a26–1107b8. In the Arabic *Nicomachean Ethics*, vice is rendered as *khasīsa*, but the word usually employed by both al-Fārābī and Avicenna is *radhīla*.

11 Ibid, II.7, 1107a33–1108b10.

12 Ibid, II.6, 1106a35–1106b7.

13 Ibid, VI.13, 1144b14–17.

14 Plato, *Republic*, IV, 441C–443E. The fact that two passages rendering the original text of the *Republic* survive in Arabic citations could mean that the *Republic* was translated in its entirety in the dialogue form. In any case, Galen's synopsis of the work was translated, although it has not survived either. The doctrine of cardinal virtues of the *Republic* was also transmitted through various indirect sources, such as doxographies and citations. The idea of virtue as the optimal balance of the three parts also comes through in Galen's paraphrase of the *Timaeus* (Jālīnūs, *Galeni compendium Timaei*, 23, 33). For the Arabic

essence, means harmonious and ordered activity of all three psychical powers under the guidance of reason. Both the Aristotelian and Platonic formulations may be characterized as forms of *metriopatheia*, meaning that the goal of virtue is understood as moderation or regulation of desires and emotions.

The ethical ideal of moderation may be contrasted with that of *apatheia*, where the goal of virtue is understood as extirpation of appetites and emotions rather than their moderation. The apathetic ethical ideal, of course, is commonly attributed to the Stoics but its main channel of transmission in the Arabic context is the Neoplatonic corpus. The tension in Plato's ethical writings, in particular, between the doctrine of cardinal virtues in the *Republic* and passages of the *Phaedo* (cf. 67A–68B) equating virtue with the soul's separation from the body, presented an exegetical problem for his Neoplatonic interpreters.[15] For Plotinus and his followers, the tension was solved by the introduction of a distinction between 'civic' or 'political' (*politikos*) and 'cathartic' or 'purificatory' (*kathartikos*) virtues attributed to the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*, respectively, with the Platonic cardinal virtues occupying a different meaning within each of the two.[16] The result is a progression of virtue in the sense that *metriopatheia* constitutes only the first step to be practiced in the *polis*. In contrast, for the philosopher at least, the ultimate goal is *apatheia*, understood in the sense of non-affection of the rational part of the soul by the body.[17] It is unclear whether any of the treatises by Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and others in which the idea of 'ladder of virtues' was explicitly formulated were translated into Arabic. The ethical ideal of *apatheia* was nevertheless present in

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transmission of the *Republic*, see Baffioni, "Frammenti e testimonianze platoniche nelle Rasā'il degli Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'," 163–178; Reisman, "Plato's Republic in Arabic"; Gutas, "Platon: Tradition arabe," 856–858.

15 Dillon, "Metriopatheia and Apatheia"; Idem, "Plotinus, Philo and Origen on the Grades of Virtue"; O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 40–49; Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators*, 337–344; Baltzly, "Pathways to Purification."

16 The contrast between the 'civic' and 'philosophical' interpretation of the virtues is made already in *Phaedo*, 67E–69E, which describes the latter as the soul's "purification" (*katharsis*) from the body.

17 See Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.2.3.10–21 [translation by Armstrong with modifications]: "What then do we mean when we call these other virtues 'purifications' (*katharseis*) and how are we made really like [God] by being purified? Since the soul is evil when it is thoroughly mixed with the body and shares its experiences and has all the same opinions, it will be good and possess virtue when it no longer has the same opinions but acts alone—this is intelligence and wisdom—and does not share the body's experiences—this is temperance (*sōphronein*)—and is not afraid of departing from the body—this is courage—and is ruled by reason (*logos*) and intellect (*nous*) without opposition—and this is justice. One would not be wrong in calling this state of the soul likeness to God, in which its activity is intellectual (*kath' hēn noei*), and it is free in this way from bodily affections (*apathēs*)."

the Arabic Neoplatonic corpus, and perhaps directly influenced the interpretation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* through Porphyry's lost commentary on that work.[18] Of course, the ethical ideal of the *Phaedo* itself was also transmitted in various forms.[19]

The mix of classical influences is complicated further by Galen who exercised considerable influence on Arabic moral philosophy, including the theory of virtue. Galen's ethical thought is essentially Platonic: the Platonic tripartition of the soul forms its psychological basis, while resemblance to God constitutes the overall ethical goal.[20] As regards psychical states in general, Galen emphasizes their physiological basis in temperamental balance or imbalance, in particular, in the treatise *That Psychical Faculties are Dependent on Bodily Mixtures* (*Hoti tais tou sōmatos krasesin hai tēs psukhēs dunameis hepontai*/*Kitāb fī anna quwā al-nafs tābiʿa li-mizāj al-badan*).[21] In *On Character Traits* (*Peri ēthōn*/*Fī al-akhlāq*), Galen defines a character trait (*ēthos*/*khulq*) as a "state of the soul (*ḥal li-l-nafs*) that induces someone to perform the psychical actions without deliberation (*rawiyya*) or choice (*ikhtiyār*)."[22] He then argues, *contra* the Stoics, that character states are irrational in the sense that they pertain exclusively to the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul.[23] Reason and bodily affections

18 For the ancient Neoplatonists, the virtues of the *Nicomachean Ethics* were identified with the 'civic' level of Plato's *Republic*. For Plotinus' relation with the *Nicomachean Ethics*, see O'Meara, "Aristotelian Ethics in Plotinus."

19 The *Phaedo* circulated in various Arabic recensions, the precise relations of which to the Greek original remain obscure, although it is clear that its content was well-known in the Islamic world. For the transmission of the *Phaedo*, see al-ʿĀmirī, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate*, 29–42; Biesterfeldt, "Phaedo arabus"; Gutas, "Platon: Tradition arabe," 854–855.

20 For Galen's general philosophical context, see, for example, Chiaradonna, "Galen and Middle Platonism"; Singer, *Galen: Psychological Writings*, 18–42. For his psychology, see Donini, "Psychology," and for his ethics, Walzer, "New Light on Galen's Moral Philosophy"; Singer, *Galen: Psychological Writings*, 109–134.

21 The Arabic translation is edited in Jālīnūs, *Galens Traktat ,Dass die Kräfte der Seele den Mischungen des Körpers folgen,'* accompanied by a German translation. For the influence of this treatise on Arabic philosophers, see the introduction to the edition and Biesterfeldt, "Miszellen: Ǧālīnūs Quwā n-nafs." The physiological basis is less prominently present also, for example, in "Kitāb al-Akhlāq li-Jālīnūs," 1, 27, where the irascible soul is connected with the vital heat (*al-ḥarāra al-gharīziyya*). The idea that the human soul has a connection with bodily organs is Platonically founded (*Timaeus*, 69Cff., paraphrased in Arabic in Jālīnūs, *Galeni compendium Timaei*, 22 ff.), but Galen diverges from both Plato and Aristotle in transferring it into an ethical context.

22 Jālīnūs, "Kitāb al-Akhlāq li-Jālīnūs," 1, 25 [translation by Davies in Singer, *Galen: Psychological Writings*, 135, with modifications].

23 Ibid, 25–26.

(*pathos*/*ʿāriḍ*) are, then, essentially contrary to each other, which results in the necessity to correct the passions, an ideal that is particularly evident in Galen's therapeutic works.[24] Virtue (*faḍīla*), as a plausible interpretation of Plato's *Republic*, IV, is correspondingly defined as a state of balance (*iʿtidāl*) between the three psychical faculties.[25] Galen understands this to be a psychical state where the two irrational parts are submitted (*inqiyād*) to reason so that reason engages the spirited part to suppress (*qamʿ*) the appetites.[26] Galen does not, then, endorse the idea that virtue consists of the moderation of passions at least explicitly. Galen's ethical writings on the whole, in fact, seem to be ambivalent with regard to the competing ethical ideals of *metriopatheia* and *apatheia*.[27] However, many passages suggest that Galen understands the ethical end of imitation of God to be intellectualist to the extent that reason should be liberated from bodily affections to the greatest extent possible. The following passage is certainly more reminiscent of the ethical ideal conveyed by the Arabic Plotinus than of Aristotelian *metriopatheia*:

> Know that the body is only joined to you so that you have an instrument for your actions, and that the appetitive soul is planted in you for the sake of the body and the spirited soul so that you may call upon it for help against the appetitive soul. Just as a human being would remain a human being if his hands and feet were cut off, together with the rest of the members after whose loss he could still live and retain his humanity since his thought and intellect would remain, in the same way [he would remain a human being] since he could remain alive and intelligent after the loss of all of his bodily members, after having been stripped also of the soul that nourished the body along with the body. Since you are a human being only by virtue of your rational soul, and you can remain alive and intelligent by virtue of this soul without the appetitive and the spirited souls, and since if [the rational soul] were freed from the [other] two, an evil way of life would not affect it, you should treat as of no importance the actions and the affections (*ʿawāriḍ*) of the [other] two. If freed from these two souls at the same time as you are freed from the body, you are able to

24 These include *On Passions and Errors of the Soul* (*Peri diagnōseōs kai therapeias tōn en tē hekastou psukhē idiōn pathōn*/*Maqāla fī taʿarruf al-insān ʿuyūb nafsihi*) and *On Avoiding Distress* (*Peri alupias*). For Galen's philosophical therapeutics and its relation to Stoic thought, in particular, see Gill, *Naturalistic Psychology in Galen & Stoicism*, 243–329.

25 Jālīnūs, "Kitāb al-Akhlāq li-Jālīnūs," I, 27.

26 Ibid, I, 27–28; II, 39.

27 See Donini, "Psychology," 194.

> be intelligent and understanding, as the proficient philosophers claim for the human state after death, know that your way of life after your release from the body will be like that of the angels. Even if you are not convinced that the intellect that is in you will not die, you should in no way slacken your efforts as long as you live to make your way of life like that of the angels. Perhaps you will say that this is impossible. I agree with you in this, for you must eat and drink. Nevertheless, just as if you could live without food or drink, you would be an angel, in the same way, if you restrict yourself to what is necessary for the life of the body, you will come near to being an angel. It is up to you whether you honor your soul by imitating the angels (*bi-mushābahat al-malā'ika*) or disdain it by making it like the beasts.[28]

When the relationship between Arabic virtue ethics and its classical sources is summed up, the picture is quite complicated. On the one hand, it is true that Arabic virtue ethics is derivative of its classical sources, but on the other hand, these sources are multifarious and their transmission history is complex. First, there is the binary division between the Platonic and Aristotelian classifications of virtues. These, however, were commonly fused already in antiquity, as were the Platonic and Aristotelian psychological theories on which they are based, and many of the Arabic ethical sources transmitting them are equally eclectic.[29] Various Arabic philosophers of this period adopt the Platonic cardinal virtues in some form, including, alongside Avicenna, Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī[30] and Miskawayh,[31] while al-Fārābī appears almost as an anomaly in his faithful reproduction of the Aristotelian list of virtues. Second, there is the Neoplatonic

28 Jālīnūs, "Kitāb al-Akhlāq li-Jālīnūs," II, 39–40 [translation by Davies in Singer, *Galen: Psychological Writings*, 157–158, with modifications]. 'Angels' presumably renders 'gods' (*theoi*), and the word choice does not necessarily imply an interpolation by the translator, although the precise relation of the Arabic epitome to the Greek original is problematic (see Singer, *Galen: Psychological Writings*, 110–118).

29 See, for example, Lyons, "A Greek Ethical Treatise," for the Arabic rendering of a Greek ethical treatise, which Lyons suggests could be attributed to Nicolaus of Laodicea (fl. 4th century). The treatise complements the Platonic cardinal virtues with the Aristotelian theory of the mean, as well as further Peripatetic, Neoplatonic, and Stoic influences.

30 Ibn ʿAdī, *The Reformation of Morals*, II, 14–27, presents the Platonic tripartition of the soul as the basis for the discussion of virtue, while the following list of twenty virtues and vices (28 ff.) is Ibn ʿAdī's own, even if it betrays both Platonic and Aristotelian inspiration.

31 Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, I, 16–18, presents the Platonic virtues as accompanied by the Aristotelian theory of the mean (24–29). Moreover, Miskawayh gives a list of subvirtues for each cardinal virtue (18–24), following the later classical practice.

framework of the soul's ascent and the consequent necessity of its purification, within which virtue ethics is situated for most Arabic authors. Thus, it seems that the choice between a Platonic or Aristotelian theory of virtue may, in the end, only form a superstructure placed on an ethical infrastructure ultimately founded on a metaphysical, psychological, and eschatological theory. Al-Fārābī and Avicenna share the Neoplatonic foundation in essential respects, but they differ in the specifics of their theories of virtue. We will now see whether the latter also results in genuinely different perspectives with regard to their ethical ideals.

1 Al-Fārābī

Al-Fārābī discusses virtues in various treatises, which approach the subject from different angles. This concerns, in particular, the extent to which he sets the discussion in a political rather than a purely ethical context. The *Exhortation to the Way to Happiness* is a rare work in that in it he discusses virtue from an entirely ethical perspective. Thus, the political context is only alluded to[32] and psychology and cosmology are entirely absent. Furthermore, the treatise follows Aristotle closely to the extent that much of the treatise is practically a summary of parts of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[33] The theory of virtue that al-Fārābī presents in the *Aphorisms* is also Aristotelian. However, its presentation varies between an ethical and political perspective, and the psychological and cosmological components are also present. In the *Attainment of Happiness*, the *Virtuous City*, and the *Political Governance*, the general context is mainly political and the reliance on Aristotle seems negligible. Even more interestingly, al-Fārābī does not provide an explicit list of virtues in any of these three works, even though he does discuss virtue and subjects related to virtue, nor does he introduce the Aristotelian theory of virtue as the mean.

Starting with al-Fārābī's general concept of virtue, he understands it along classical lines as a dispositional, affective, and intellectual psychical state. In the *Exhortation*, al-Fārābī defines virtue as a character trait (*khulq*) based on which the human being voluntarily and consistently performs good (*jamīl*)

32 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, § 8, 57.

33 The treatise consists of three thematic sections focusing on happiness, moral virtues, and intellectual virtues, corresponding to NE I, II–III, and VI, respectively. As noted by Mallet (*Le rappel de la voie à suivre pour parvenir au bonheur*, 114), the third part follows NE, VI rather less faithfully, however, and the discussion of pleasure is ultimately founded on books VII and X.

acts, his psychical affections (*ʿawāriḍ al-nafs*), that is, emotions,[34] are properly ordered (*ʿalā mā yanbaghī*), and he possesses excellent discernment (*tamyīz*) to guide his actions.[35] As for Aristotle, the virtuous is distinguished from the self-restrained (*al-ḍābiṭ li-nafsihi*) in that the latter performs virtuous actions only against his desires since his emotions are not harmoniously ordered towards virtue.[36] Virtuous character trait is, then, a relatively stable disposition (*malaka*/*hayʾa*), which is acquired (*muktasaba*) through habituation (*iʿtiyād*), that is, by repeatedly performing good actions. In this respect, it is analogous to crafts (*ṣināʿa*), such as writing, which is similarly learned through repeated practice of the act of writing.[37] Finally, al-Fārābī introduces the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean, defining virtue as a mediate state (*ḥāl tawassuṭ*) between excessive (*ziyāda*) and deficient (*nuqṣān*) states, and characterizing it as a psychical state of balance (*iʿtidāl*) analogous to physical health as a harmonious state of bodily mixtures.[38] Al-Fārābī further extends the body-soul analogy to emphasize, like Aristotle, that identifying the mediate action is not mechanical but context-dependent, just as in medicine, each patient should be treated according to his particular condition and temperamental state.[39]

As regards the classification of virtues, al-Fārābī follows Aristotle in dividing virtues into moral (*khulqiyya*) and rational (*nuṭqiyya*), corresponding to the rational and appetitive (*nuzūʿī*) parts of the soul.[40] In the *Aphorisms*, the

34 Al-Fārābī's illustrative list (*Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, §3, 50) of affections consists of appetite (*shahwa*), pleasure (*ladhdha*), joy (*faraḥ*), anger (*ghaḍab*), fear (*khawf*), desire (*shawq*), compassion (*raḥma*), and jealousy (*ghayra*).

35 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, §§3–6, 50–55. See also *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, §§1–2, 23–24, where virtues are defined as "psychical dispositions through which the human being performs good things and actions" (*al-hayʾāt al-nafsāniyya allatī bi-hā yafʿal al-insān al-khayrāt wa-l-afʿāl al-jamīla*) and virtue is equated with psychical health (*ṣiḥḥa*) in analogy to physical health.

36 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, §14, 34–35.

37 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, §§7–8, 55–57. See also *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, §§9–10, 30–32; *On the Perfect State*, ch. 16, §2, 260–262. These employ the same example of writing, complemented by weaving (*ḥiyāka*) in the former. The first two accounts emphasize that while the human being may be naturally disposed (*maftūr*) to virtue, just as he may have natural talent for the art of the scribe, this innate disposition is not properly virtue, just as the inborn talent does not yet constitute the art of the scribe.

38 Ibid, §9, 57–59. See also the discussion of the mediate disposition in *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, §§18–21, 36–39. Interestingly, the technical terms are slightly different in the two works, as in the latter, for example, excess is rendered by *ifrāṭ* and deficiency by *naqṣ*.

39 Ibid, §9, 59–60. See also *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, §§19–20, 37–39. For the correspondence between ethics and medicine as imprecise practical sciences in Aristotle, see *Nicomachean Ethics*, 11.2, 1103b34–1104a10.

40 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, §8, 30.

discussion of virtue is prefaced by a summary of faculty psychology, which highlights the importance of the psychological basis for al-Fārābī's conception of virtue.[41] The appetitive faculty, in which al-Fārābī locates moral virtue, is the principle of motion for all animals in the sense of being the locus of desire or aversion towards objects of sensation and imagination, and, for human beings, of reason, as well as being the locus of emotions in general.[42] Compared to Aristotle, al-Fārābī's discussion of the concrete virtues is extremely brief. In fact, based on the way he introduces this section in the *Exhortation*, it is evident that his purpose in discussing the individual virtues at all is to illustrate the general principle "by way of example" (*ʿalā sabīl al-tamthīl*) by mentioning some character traits that are "commonly" (*mashhūr*) thought to be good.[43] Al-Fārābī lists six moral virtues, courage (*shajāʿa*), generosity (*sakhāʾ*), temperance (*ʿiffa*), gracefulness (*ẓaraf*), truthfulness (*ṣidq ʿan nafsihi*), and affection (*tawaddud*),[44] which are drawn from Aristotle's list of eleven moral virtues. Each virtue represents a mean for a particular sphere of human activity, with the corresponding deficient and excessive psychical dispositions being vices. Al-Fārābī states that the list is not exhaustive but the same principle of mean, excess, and deficiency may be applied to other actions.[45] Al-Fārābī's aim in the *Exhortation* and the *Selected Aphorisms*, in contrast to many classical and Islamic authors, is clearly not to provide a complete list of virtues. It is still remarkable that justice, in particular, to which Aristotle devotes the entire fifth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is absent.

As regards the way we become virtuous, al-Fārābī offers delightfully concrete instructions. In the *Exhortation*, he concludes the discussion of moral virtue by an intriguing section, which provides a precise "method" (*ḥīla*) by which one

41 Ibid, § 7, 27–30. A more complete account, including the physiological basis of psychical faculties, is provided in *On the Perfect State*, chs. 10–12.

42 Ibid, 28–29. The passions mentioned here are desire (*shawq*), aversion (*karāha*), seeking (*ṭalab*), fleeing (*harab*), preference (*īthār*), avoidance (*tajannub*), anger (*ghaḍab*), contentment (*riḍan*), fear (*khawf*), boldness (*iqdām*), sternness (*qaswa*), compassion (*raḥma*), love (*maḥabba*), hatred (*bighḍa*), longing (*hawan*), and appetite (*shahwa*). See also *On the Perfect State*, IV, ch. 10, §§ 6–8, 170–172.

43 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, § 10, 60–61. Somewhat later, al-Fārābī states that this work will not provide a detailed exposition (*istiqṣā'*) of virtues also because they have been discussed thoroughly elsewhere, where the reference is perhaps to his lost commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

44 Ibid, 61–63. The list of virtues in *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 18, 36–37, again provided as an example (*mathal*), is slightly different, and not entirely Aristotelian: temperance, generosity, courage, gracefulness, modesty (*tawāḍuʿ*), nobility (*ḥurriyya*/*karam*), gentleness (*ḥilm*), bashfulness (*ḥayā'*), and affection.

45 Ibid, 63.

may gradually habituate character traits towards virtuous dispositions.[46] The account, first, follows Aristotle in according pain and pleasure a primary role in the habituation process in the sense that, since character traits are affective states, we are able to identify the ones we currently possess by reflecting which actions are pleasant for us.[47] Second, this approach is set in the framework of the analogy between ethics and medicine in that, since virtue is a balanced state of the soul just as health is of the body, habituation to virtue works with regard to the soul much the same way as medicine works with regard to the body. The analogy is a commonplace in classical philosophy and is present in both Plato and Aristotle.[48] For al-Fārābī, the primary inspiration comes probably from Galen.[49] Based on all this, al-Fārābī, then, suggests a detailed procedure for character formation. First, we should list all character traits and the actions that correspond to each character trait.[50] Second, we should identify the character traits we currently have by examining their psychical 'symptoms,' that is, whether particular actions corresponding to virtuous or vicious dispositions are pleasant or painful for us to perform, just as the doctor starts by diagnosing the patient's condition by means of his bodily symptoms.[51] Third, in the case of virtuous dispositions, we should find the means (*iḥtalnā*) to preserve them and in the case of vicious dispositions, the means to eradicate them, just as the physician prescribes treatments to preserve the body's health and cure its diseases.[52]

For al-Fārābī, the medicine analogy extends further to the specific devices by which vices are gradually reformed towards mediate psychical states. I quote the passage at length to illustrate his method:

> After that, we then investigate (*nanẓur*) the bad character trait (*al-khulq al-qabīḥ*) we find ourselves to have: is it bad because of excess or deficiency? Just as it is the case that whenever the doctor finds the tempera-

46 Ibid, §§ 11–12, 63–67.

47 Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.9.

48 For Plato, see Kenny, *The Anatomy of the Soul*, 1–27, and for Aristotle, Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 48–101.

49 In antiquity, the theme of ethics as medicine of the soul was particularly prominent in Hellenistic philosophy (see Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*). Given the paucity of direct Stoic or Epicurean transmission, Galen appears to be the prime influence for the idea in the Islamic world. For the idea of philosophical medicine in the Arabic strand of "Galenic ethics," see Adamson, "Spiritual Medicine"; Idem, "Health in Arabic Ethical Works."

50 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, § 11, 63.

51 Ibid, 63–64.

52 Ibid, 64.

ture of the body to be too high or too low, he returns it to the median temperature according to the mean determined by the discipline of medicine, so too is it the case that whenever we find ourselves to have an excess or deficiency in our character traits, we return ourselves to the mean defined in this book. Now, since identifying the mean initially proves very difficult, a way is sought to allow a person to bring his character trait into accord with it, or as close as possible, just as it is the case that, since identifying the median body temperature initially proves very difficult, a way is sought to bring the body into accord with it, or as close as possible. The way to bring the character trait into accord with the mean is to investigate the trait we currently have. If it is excessive, we habituate ourselves to the actions that come from its contrary, that is, from the direction of deficiency. If we find it to be deficient, we habituate ourselves to the actions that come from its contrary, that is, from the direction of excess. We continue this for a period, and then we reflect and investigate which character trait is present. It can admit only of three states: either it inclines (*mā'il*) from the mean towards the other extreme (*ḍidd*), it is the mean, or it is still further from the mean than the initial trait. If it is close to the mean, without our having gone beyond it toward the other extreme, we continue with the very same actions for another period until we have reached the mean. If we have gone beyond the mean toward the other extreme, we perform the actions of the initial character trait and continue with them for a period. Then we reflect on our condition (*ḥāl*). By way of summary, whenever we find ourselves inclining to one side, we habituate ourselves to the actions of the other side, and continue that until we arrive at the mean or as close as possible. As for how we can know that we have brought our character traits into accord with the median, we know that by considering the ease of the action coming from excess: is it for us of the same degree of ease as the action coming from deficiency or not? If both are performed with equal ease, or closely approximate one another, we know that we have brought ourselves into accord with the median. We may test (*namtaḥin*) their ease by considering both actions together. If neither of them brings us pain (*lā nata'adhdhā*), or if each brings us pleasure, or if one brings us pleasure and the other brings no pain, or at least the pain from it is very slight, we know that they are equally easy or extremely close.[53]

53 Ibid, §§11–12, 64–66 [translation cited with modifications from McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 112]. In what follows (§§13–14, 67–70), al-Fārābī employs

Al-Fārābī's account of moral virtue presented so far suggests two things: 1) optimism with regard to each individual's capability to become virtuous by independent character formation and 2) firm adherence to the Aristotelian ethical ideal of moderation. However, both of these aspects become problematic when they are set in the context of his other works. As regards the first aspect, even the *Exhortation*, despite its non-political focus, restricts the possibility of virtuous self-governance to the "free by merit" (*al-ḥurr bi-istiʾhāl*),[54] that is, those with excellent deliberative skills (*rawiyya*) and strong determination (*quwwat al-ʿazīma*) to follow the judgments of reason. In contrast, "brutish" people (*al-insān al-bahīmī*) are deficient in both, "natural slaves" (*al-ʿabd bi-l-ṭabʿ*) lack determination, and those who only lack deliberation are either beastly or free depending on whether they submit to the deliberation of others.[55] Since these other groups are not capable of becoming virtuous, due to either deficient deliberative skills or lack of determination, they must be guided towards virtue against their wills by political legislation.[56] These groups for al-Fārābī presumably constitute the majority of the humankind, and it is mainly for this reason that al-Fārābī treats virtue ethics predominantly in a political context. As stated before, the *Exhortation* is exceptional in its mostly

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pleasure and pain also as a method for motivating the choice of virtue over vice in the first place, for which see chapter 3.

54 This may be compared with a passage in *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa* (§ 27, 44), which once again employs the medicine analogy [translation cited with modifications from Butterworth, *Alfarabi: The Political Writings*, 24–25]: "It is not unknown for a human being to have the ability to infer (*istinbāṭ*) the mean in actions and character traits as pertains to himself alone, just as it is not unknown for a human being to have the ability to infer the mean and balanced (*muʿtadil*) among the nutriments by which he nourishes himself alone."

55 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, § 15, 70. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.1, 1145a15–35, for a contrast between "brutish" (*thērios*/*sabʿī*) and "godly" (*theios*/*ilāhī*) men (reflected by al-Fārābī in *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 12, 32–33) and Ibid, VII.8, 1150b19–22, for lack of deliberation versus failure to follow one's deliberation as variants of lack of self-restraint (*akrasia*). Aristotle's *Politics*, where the concept of "natural slave" (*phusei doulos*) appears prominently (I.5, 1254b20–23), probably was not translated into Arabic at least in its entirety. However, al-Fārābī's use of the term here would fit in, in particular, with a passage (VII.6, 1327b26–29) where the Asiatics are said to be subject to enslavement due to their deficient spirit (*thumos*) rather than a deficiency in practical reasoning. In *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 60, 69, al-Fārābī, in a political context, attributes to "slaves by nature" (*bi-l-ṭabʿ ʿabd*) submissiveness and lack of deliberation, while in *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 87, he identifies the "beastly by nature" (*al-bahīmiyyūn bi-l-ṭabʿ*) with the incapacity for political association. Among such people, those that are beneficial for the city should be enslaved. McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 114, renders *al-ʿabd bi-l-ṭabʿ* instead as "slaves to their nature," which suggests a non-Aristotelian origin for the expression but neither fits the context nor renders the Arabic correctly.

56 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, § 15, 71–73.

non-political focus, whereas al-Fārābī's major works approach virtue as a primarily political question. In the *Selected Aphorisms* and the *Book of Religion*, the simile of ethics as the medicine of the soul is consequently transplanted into a political context: it is the political or religious ruler that is the physician of the souls in the sense of determining the mediate dispositions and actions,[57] and thereby legislating the appropriate remedies bringing about virtue for the subjects of a particular city or nation (*umma*).[58]

As for the second aspect, the Aristotelian ideal of moderation seems at odds with the cornerstones of al-Fārābī's ethics discussed previously: the entirely intellectualist view of happiness and moral virtue as a means towards happiness understood in the sense of separation from the body. As it happens, al-Fārābī only introduces the Aristotelian doctrine of moderation in the *Exhortation* and the *Selected Aphorisms*, whereas it is entirely absent in the rest of his works. In the *Virtuous City*, al-Fārābī defines virtuous actions and dispositions only in terms of their instrumental value for the pursuit of happiness without taking a stance on their specific content concerning the desires and emotions located in the appetitive faculty and without providing even an illustrative list of virtues.[59] In the *Virtuous City*, virtue as a means to contemplative happiness, in effect, means that the human being should dispense with materiality and the body and thus prepare the rational soul for the afterlife.[60] In consequence, the Aristotelian ethical ideal of moderation presented in the *Exhortation* and the *Selected Aphorisms* appears strangely detached from the largely Neoplatonic metaphysical and psychological context in which ethics is situated in the bulk of al-Fārābī's philosophical writings. Thus, it seems that the Aristotelian moderation cannot be taken to represent al-Fārābī's ethical ideal as a whole. In chapter 10, I will argue that Aristotelian moderation, nevertheless, can be incorporated to his ethical system in a coherent way.

2 Avicenna

Avicenna discusses virtue explicitly in a number of treatises, even if is fair to say that the subject does not count among his primary concerns as a philosopher. In the *Healing*, Avicenna addresses virtue in four separate occasions: in the psychological section of the physics and in chapters IX.7, X.3, and X.5 of

57 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 21, 39.
58 Al-Fārābī, "Kitāb al-Milla," §§ 14b–d, 56–57.
59 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, § 6, 206; Idem, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 72–74.
60 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 16, § 2, 260–262.

the metaphysical part. All these passages discuss virtue in a context that is not primarily ethical but psychological, metaphysical, eschatological, or political-religious. However, in the *Healing*, Avicenna also states that he devoted a work entitled the *Piety and Sin* entirely to practical philosophy and suggests that anyone interested in the subject should consult it.[61] An extensive book by this name has not survived. Instead, the manuscripts convey us a short treatise bearing the same title, as well as two further concise ethical treatises with the titles the *Science of Ethics* and the *Covenant* (*Risāla fī al-ʿahd*). The three texts are interrelated and partially confused in the manuscripts and could represent parts of the original more extensive work.[62] Moreover, these texts draw heavily on al-Fārābī.[63] I believe that they, nevertheless, should be considered as authentically Avicennan, in particular, since they agree with Avicenna's Platonic account of virtue in the *Healing* and the *Beginning and Return* rather than al-Fārābī's Aristotelian classification of virtues.[64] Among Avicenna's other treatises usually considered authentic, the *Epistle of the Present*, the *Treatise on Love*, and the *Beginning and Return* also address the question of virtue. All of these works, as I will argue, present a consistent account of virtue, some minor divergences notwithstanding, which, along general lines, can be described as Platonic. In the following, my interpretation of Avicenna's theory of virtue will be primarily based on the *Healing* and complemented in important respects by the shorter works. In addition to these works, the final part of the *Pointers and Reminders* also presents an account of virtue, which differs from the *Healing* account in both its terminology and content. I will address the question of how it can be fitted together with Avicenna's other works in the final chapter.

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61 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, X.1, 362. For this work, see Karliga, "Un nouveau traité d'éthique d'Ibn Sīnā"; Janssens, "Al-Birr wa l-ithm, Piety and Sin"; Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 94–96. In his autobiography (Avicenna and al-Jūzjānī, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, 38–40), Avicenna likewise tells that, as a young man of 22 or 23, he wrote a book on ethics (*fī al-akhlāq*) entitled *On Piety and Sin* for a man named Abū Bakr al-Baraqī who at the time owned its only copy.

62 This is suggested in Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 96. Karliga, "Un nouveau traité d'éthique d'Ibn Sīnā," argues instead that the *Science of Ethics* and the short treatise of the *Piety and Sin* preserved in the manuscripts constitute the two parts of the original work, but, as noted by Gutas, this would not amount to the comprehensive book to which Avicenna is clearly referring.

63 For a comparison of the preserved text of the *Piety and Sin* with al-Fārābī's *Exhortation to the Way to Happiness* and *Selected Aphorisms*, see Janssens, "Al-Birr wa l-ithm, Piety and Sin."

64 Karliga and Janssens attribute all three treatises to Avicenna, while Gutas is mildly skeptical.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the *De anima* part of the *Healing*, Avicenna defines virtuous (*faḍīliyya*) and vicious (*radhīliyya*) character traits (*akhlāq*) in faculty psychological terms as two contrary psychical states concerning the relation that the practical intellect has with the subrational human faculties.[65] Virtuous psychical dispositions are those in which the intellect rules (*tatasallaṭ*) over the bodily faculties in order to not be affected (*tanfaʿil*) by their activities. Instead, the intellect acts (*tafʿal*) on the bodily faculties so that they follow its lead and are suppressed (*maqmūʿa*) by it. Vicious dispositions, in contrary, are those in which the rational soul adopts submissive dispositions (*hayʾāt inqiyādiyya*) with regard to the "natural things" (*umūr ṭabīʿiyya*).[66] The relation of virtue is, then, wholly instrumental to the activity of the theoretical intellect in that through the practical intellect, the human soul is predisposed to "be on guard against any harm that may happen to it by associating (*mushāraka*) with the bodily faculties."[67] Therefore, Avicenna's conception of virtue seems to accord with what was said in the previous chapter: moral virtue means that the intellect turns away from the body and its affections. Thus, virtue has the instrumental function of enabling contemplative perfection.

However, in *Metaphysics*, IX.7, the definition of virtue as rational control of bodily affections is combined with the doctrine of the mean.[68] First, Avicenna, following Galen, defines a character trait (*khulq*) as a "disposition (*malaka*) through which certain acts ensue with ease from the soul without prior deliberation."[69] The Galenic background of Avicenna's conception of virtue is also evident in his physiological identification of virtues and vices with states of temperamental balance and imbalance, respectively.[70] Avicenna next states that Aristotle has "commanded (*amara*) in the books of ethics (*kutub al-akhlāq*)"

65 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, I.5, 46–47. The relevant passage is cited in chapter 7.

66 See also Avicenna, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿad*, III.14, 109–110.

67 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, V.1, 208 [translation cited from McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 187]. See also *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, X.3, § 5, 369 [translation by Marmura with modifications]: "The soul's purification (*tanzīh*) removes it away from the acquisition of bodily dispositions opposed to the means (*asbāb*) for happiness. This purification is realized through character traits and dispositions (*malakāt*). Character traits and dispositions are acquired by acts whose task is to turn the soul away from the body and the senses and to make continuous its remembrance of its [true] element (*maʿdin*)."

68 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, §§ 21–22, 354–355.

69 Ibid, § 21, 354.

70 For an explicit identification of the good and bad psychical dispositions with temperamental mixtures, see, in particular, Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-kalām ʿalā al-nafs al-nāṭiqa," § 9, 197.

that mediate dispositions (*malakat al-tawassuṭ*) should be adopted.[71] The virtuous mediate psychical disposition is defined in terms of the relation between the rational and animal faculties so that the latter should attain a submissive disposition (*hay'at al-idhʿān*) and the former a disposition of ascendancy (*hay'at al-istiʿlā'*). In the opposite case, the result would be a strong connection (*ʿalāqa*) between the rational soul and the body. The goal (*murād*) of mediate psychical dispositions is to liberate the rational soul from submission to bodily affections so that it can follow its natural constitution (*jibilla*).[72] A mediate psychical disposition, as Avicenna defines it, is one that is not contrary to the rational soul's substance (*jawhar*), making it "incline in the direction of the body," but rather one that directs it away from the body.[73] Moderate disposition, then, means a psychical state where reason rules over the bodily faculties and, therefore, is unaffected by them. In contrast, both excessive and deficient dispositions involve the submission of reason to bodily influence. Regardless of Avicenna's contrary claims in various works,[74] this theory of virtue clearly bears no affinity to the *Nicomachean Ethics* but is instead of Platonic-Galenic inspiration. While Avicenna adopts the doctrine of the mean, he redefines it within the Platonic framework so that a mediate disposition is understood as the rational soul's separation from the body. This does not seem to be a mean between anything but it is rather a psychical disposition that is contrary to excessive attachment to bodily affections.

Avicenna's only, and very brief, discussion of the individual virtues in the *Healing* occurs in *Metaphysics*, X.5, where the context is the political-religious one of prophetic legislation.[75] Avicenna now adopts the three Platonic cardinal virtues of temperance (*ʿiffa*), courage (*shajāʿa*), and practical wisdom (*ḥikma*). These correspond to the appetitive (*shahwānīyya*), irascible (*ghaḍabīyya*), and practical (*tadbīrīyya*) "motivational powers" (*daʿāwin*) rather than parts of the soul, since Avicenna otherwise adheres to Aristotelian psychology. The three virtues taken together constitute the overall virtue of justice (*ʿadāla*). The cardinal virtues are mediate dispositions with respect to sensible and imagined (*wahmīyya*) pleasures, emotions, and practical reason, respectively.[76] The passage, moreover, clarifies what Avicenna means by virtue as a mediate disposi-

71 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, § 21, 354. Aristotle is not explicitly named but is, nevertheless, undoubtedly intended.

72 Ibid, § 22, 354.

73 Ibid, 354–355.

74 Cf. Avicenna, "Aqsām al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya," 107, where Avicenna states that ethics is founded on "Aristotle's book on ethics" (*kitāb Arisṭāṭālīs fī al-akhlāq*).

75 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, X.5, §§ 10–11, 377–378.

76 See also Avicenna, *al-Mabda' wa-l-maʿād*, III.14, 109.

tion. Besides serving the purificatory end of separating reason from the body, virtues now also serve the worldly and political ends of procreation and, in the case of courage, protection of the city. Moreover, it is only the excessive dispositions that are harmful to the good of the human being, while deficient dispositions are harmful to the good of the political community.[77] The unstated consequence of this is that the doctrine of the mean for Avicenna only makes sense at a political level. From an individual perspective, a deficient disposition should be even more beneficial for the purificatory end of separating the rational soul from bodily affections.

The extremely concise discussion of the individual virtues in the *Healing* is complemented by the trio of ethical treatises probably extracted from the larger work of *Piety and Sin*. Their authentic attribution to Avicenna is supported by the fact that they fit well within the overall Platonic picture of virtue sketched so far, while they at the same time refine his account of the individual virtues. In the *Science of Ethics*, Avicenna presents the three cardinal virtues as the higher-level virtues (*uṣūl*) related to the three Platonic parts of the soul, which he now divides further into three sets of sub-virtues (*furūʿ*) with neither Platonic nor Aristotelian basis.[78] From the perspective of Avicenna's general conception of virtue as a particular relation between soul and body, the most interesting of these are the definitions of temperance as restraint (*tamassuk*) from sensible pleasures for the sake of correct opinion (*al-raʾy al-ṣaḥīḥ*), contentment as restraining one's desires to what is sufficient for the livelihood (*maʿāsh*) and subsistence of the body, and patience as resisting being overpowered by pain or appetites towards what is contrary to the judgments of reason.[79] In the *Covenant*, the individual virtues, moreover, are connected with the doctrine of the mean in the sense that most virtues are to be understood as mediate dispositions between two vices.[80] Temperance is, then, a mean between

77 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, X.5, § 10, 378.

78 Avicenna, "Risāla fī ʿilm al-akhlāq," 152–153. These virtues are generosity (*sakhāʾ*), contentment (*qināʿa*), and temperance (*ʿiffa*) related to the appetitive part, patience (*ṣabr*), nobility (*karam*), gentleness (*ḥilm*), forgiveness (*ṣafḥ*), clemency (*tajāwuz*), liberality (*raḥb al-bāʿ*), and keeping of secrets (*kitmān al-sirr*) related to the irascible part, and wisdom (*ḥikma*), eloquence (*bayān*), cleverness (*fiṭna*), firmness of opinion (*aṣālat al-raʾy*), determination (*ḥazm*), truthfulness (*ṣidq*), loyalty (*wafāʾ*), affection (*wadd*), compassion (*raḥma*), shamefulness (*ḥayāʾ*), ambition (*ʿiẓam al-himma*), commitment to promises (*ḥusn al-ʿahd*), and modesty (*tawāḍuʿ*) related to practical reason (*al-quwwa al-tamyīziyya*). In "Risāla fī al-ʿahd," 144, which gives a slightly different list of virtues, Avicenna states that these virtues are derived from religious authorities (*arbāb al-milal*).

79 Ibid, 153–154.

80 Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-ʿahd," 145. See also Avicenna, "Risālat al-Birr wa-l-ithm," 353–354.

gluttony (*sharah*) and lack of appetite (*khumūd al-shahwa*) and contentment between greed (*ḥirṣ*) and submissiveness with respect to what is sufficient (*al-istihāna bi-taḥṣīl al-kifāya*).[81]

Avicenna's concrete examples of virtues do not necessarily help in resolving the problem of his general ethical ideal. The definition of contentment as restraining the sensible desires to the bare minimum necessary for bodily subsistence supports the view that he understands moral virtue more in the Neoplatonic sense of purification of the intellect from bodily affections than in the Aristotelian sense of a mediate disposition. In another work, he, nevertheless, defines contentment as a mediate disposition, where restraining one's desires to the minimum of sufficiency is classified as a vice corresponding to a deficient psychical disposition.

The three ethical treatises also bring further light to Avicenna's view on the precise ways by which virtues are acquired. Like al-Fārābī, Avicenna emphasizes that virtues are to be attained by repeatedly habituating oneself to the actions corresponding to a particular disposition and compares habituation to virtue to learning the art of trade.[82] Again, as in the case of al-Fārābī, Avicenna compares character formation to medicine in two senses. First, the mediate action can only be assessed with respect to a particular moral agent and the time and place in which he is situated. Second, Avicenna also offers practical advice on how to gradually steer one's character traits from one contrary towards its opposite in order to eventually hit the middle disposition.[83]

The tension between the Platonic and Aristotelian ideals of virtue is present even more clearly in the *Epistle of the Present*. In this treatise, Avicenna discusses the related questions of happiness, the substantiality of the soul, the afterlife, and virtue. The starting point of the treatise is already familiar: the final ethical end of the human being is the perfection of the theoretical intellect, whereas the practical faculties constitute a necessary instrument for its attainment. However, Avicenna in this context now states that the human being should severe all his aspirations (*himma*) for worldly connections (*al-ʿalāʾiq al-dunyawiyya*) and appetitive motivations (*al-dawāʿī al-shahwāniyya*)[84] since they are antithetical to the perfection of the intellectual essence. In the section devoted to virtue, Avicenna argues further that the rational soul should counter the affections ensuing from these faculties by suppressing them in

81 Ibid, 145.
82 Ibid, 146.
83 Ibid, 147–148.
84 Avicenna, *Mutluluk ve Insan Nefsinin Cevher*, 4.

order to avoid their harmful effects on the rational soul.[85] However, he also emphasizes that the goal is not the complete suspension (*taʿṭīl*) of subrational activities as they are not bad in themselves, given that their origin lies in the divine goodness. In any case, they are necessary for the survival of the species and the defense of the political and religious community.[86] Instead, the goal should be to tune them towards the mediate dispositions of temperance, courage, and prudence,[87] as it is the Platonic cardinal virtues combined with theoretical perfection that make a wise philosopher. Avicenna, then, explicitly advocates *metriopatheia* as the ethical end for the philosopher and not only as an end that is beneficial for the good of the political community. However, this passage is immediately followed by another passage that paints a very different picture of the ethical goal of the philosopher:

> Then, when he besides this, commits himself to habituating his soul to a desire (*shawq*) for his world and appetite (*nuzūʿ*) for his Creator by cutting his aspirations (*himma*) for this world and [commits himself also] to restraining himself from all its harmful accidents and to elevating his aspirations and acquiring a pure aspiration, which is the purification of the soul's essence (*tajrīd dhātihā*) in order to behold its world and Creator so that it becomes a disposition (*malaka*) in it and it is cut off from everything else (*muqaṭṭaʿa ʿammā siwā dhālika*), the soul becomes as if separate in its essence (*ka-l-mujarrad fī dhātihā*).[88]

This passage utterly contradicts Avicenna's previous claim that the ethical end for the philosopher consists of the Platonic cardinal virtues understood as mediate dispositions. Instead, in a very Neoplatonic fashion, Avicenna now contrasts the intellectual essence of the human being with the bodily faculties, which he explicitly relates to the contrariety between the intelligible and sensible worlds, and suggests that the ethical goal is separation from rather than moderation of the bodily affections.

Overall, Avicenna's explicit discussions of virtue in the *Healing* and various brief treatises present a Platonic-Galenic picture of moral virtue as a psychical state where practical reason attains a dominant disposition with regard to the desires and emotions of the bodily faculties. Avicenna's understanding of the individual virtues is that of the Platonic cardinal virtues related to the

85 Ibid, 34.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid, 35.
88 Ibid [my translation].

three parts of the soul, which he in his smaller works elaborates further into a list of minor virtues. Beyond this, in both the *Healing* and some other treatises, Avicenna complements the Platonic doctrine of cardinal virtues with the Aristotelian theory of the mean. At the same time, he also defines the mediate psychical disposition as a psychical state in which the soul is directed away from the body, which is not the Aristotelian definition. All of this gives the impression that while Avicenna nominally adheres to Aristotelian *metriopatheia*, he also understands virtue in the Platonic sense as the soul's separation from the body because this is the logical conclusion of the instrumental role that virtue has for the purely contemplative human end.

Avicenna's insistence on Aristotelian moderation may be explained in two ways. First, Avicenna, in various passages, suggests that deficient psychical dispositions are in many cases harmful primarily from the viewpoint of the political community rather than that of the moral agent viewed in isolation. Since different people occupy different positions within such a community, their ideals of virtue should also be different, keeping in mind that Avicenna emphasizes that virtue must always be assessed with respect to a particular subject in a particular context. If the motivation for, say, moderating as opposed to suppressing bodily appetites were primarily political, then a philosopher wholly devoted to the contemplative life might be free of such restrictions. This interpretation is supported by the *Pointers and Reminders*, as we will see in chapter 10. Second, if the Aristotelian moderation, nevertheless, is taken seriously as a universal ethical ideal, it may be interpreted as the lower limit for restraining the bodily faculties. As Avicenna states in the *Epistle of the Present*, separation from the body does not mean complete suspension of bodily activities, which, in any case, would be an unrealistic objective as long as the human soul remains embodied. Given the definitions of the individual virtues cited above, the lower limit would be composed of a complete lack of appetition and going below what is sufficient for bodily health. The result is Platonically corrected Aristotelian moderation, where the human soul's ethical-eschatological goal is complete separation from the body, which in this life is qualified by the inescapable realities of its embodiment. I believe both of these alternatives to be true: moderation in this minimal sense applies even to the philosopher but Avicenna's theory of virtue is also graded with respect to the moral agent's function in society.

CHAPTER 9

Virtue and Rationality

The concept of virtue involves an intellectual aspect in various senses.[1] First, there is the primary division of virtues into moral and intellectual in the faculty psychological sense that the latter pertain to the reasoning part of the soul. Aristotle devotes book six of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to intellectual virtues, which he classifies under the primary division of theoretical (*sophia*/*ḥikma*) and practical wisdom (*phronēsis*/*taʿaqqul*) corresponding to the theoretical and practical parts of the intellect.[2] Second, since moral virtue is not a habit in the sense of a passive psychical disposition that automatically produces virtuous actions, even moral virtues involve reason.[3] This is true, in particular, because of the context-dependent nature of virtue emphasized in the previous chapter: to determine what is courageous or just, for example, in a particular context requires moral deliberation. The same is true of the overall goal of virtue: different virtues may present competing demands, and the moral agent must weigh between these to determine what constitutes a virtuous act in that particular situation. For Aristotle, then, practical wisdom is an indispensable component of virtue.[4] To put it more strongly, the individual virtues are, in effect, instances of practical wisdom within a particular sphere of human activity, and practical wisdom is, thus, identical with possessing all the moral virtues.[5] Third, even if practical wisdom pertains to the sphere of knowledge that concerns the particulars, its deliberative role concerning virtue extends beyond the instantiation of virtue in a particular context.[6] Thus, Aristotle states that virtue should be "in conformity with the right reason" (*kata ton orthon logon*),[7] where *logos* does not necessarily refer to theoretical knowledge but,

1 For the intellectual aspect of virtue in classical philosophy in general, see Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 66–114. For Aristotle in particular, see, for example, Sorabji, "Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue"; Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 20–53.

2 For Aristotle's intellectual virtues, see, for example, Reeve, "Aristotle on the Virtues of Thought."

3 For deliberation and practical wisdom in Aristotle, see, for example, Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason."

4 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.8, 1144b14–30.

5 Ibid, VI.8, 1144b32–1145a2.

6 That the role of deliberation for Aristotle does not concern only the means but also the specification of the ends is argued for in Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 6–11.

7 Ibid, VI.1, 1138b18–20.

nevertheless, implies the ability to deliberate on one's actions based on a larger picture of the human good or happiness.[8]

Both al-Fārābī and Avicenna follow the Aristotelian account of intellectual virtues in general terms and, thus, accord a central role to practical wisdom as concerns the practice of virtue. The last of the three aspects, however, raises the central question of the epistemological status of morality. Concerning this, the most directly relevant context for Arabic philosophers is the Islamic tradition of rationalist theology (*kalām*). At the time of al-Fārābī and Avicenna, theology and philosophy still formed two neatly distinguished disciplines, which approached ethics from very distinct perspectives. For theological authors, the ontological and epistemological status of value concepts formed one of the central questions of their ethical discussions. This is usually framed as a debate between the rival schools of the Muʿtazila and the Ashʿarites: the former argued that the goodness or the badness of an action is due to some property that inheres in the action, which may be grasped by reason; the latter denied this and claimed that good and bad have no referent in the external reality but rather express either God's commands and prohibitions or human emotive responses.[9] For the Muʿtazila, then, their paradigmatic example of "lying is bad" is both an objectively true and rational proposition, whereas the Ashʿarites reject both the ontological and epistemological components of this claim. At least in Avicenna's case, it is clear that some of his discussions on moral epistemology are situated in this *kalām* context of discussions of ethical value.[10]

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8 Ibid, VI.5, 1140a25–28.

9 For a recent overview of the classical Muʿtazilite and Ashʿarite positions on ethical value, see Shihadeh, "Theories of Ethical Value in Kalām." Shihadeh reformulates the traditional narrative in emphasizing that the Ashʿarite position cannot be identified solely with a divine command theory since it also involves the second answer to Muʿtazilite objectivism, in which the contents of value concepts are identified with habitual and learned emotive responses to actions. In both cases, of course, the Ashʿarite ethical theory is anti-realist and subjectivist with regard to value concepts.

10 While the scholarship of the recent decades has established Avicenna's momentous impact on subsequent *kalām*, the ways in which al-Fārābī and Avicenna engage with *kalām* discussions, besides the more obvious context of the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic traditions, has not been studied systematically. Obvious examples of such engagement for Avicenna can be found in his natural philosophy (see McGinnis, "Ibn Sina's Natural Philosophy"), such as in his detailed refutation of atomism, which he directs specifically against *kalām* atomism, as opposed to the Democritean form of the atomic theory which Aristotle had attacked. As further examples, *kalām* influence on Avicenna's argument for the Necessary Existent and the structure of al-Fārābī's *Virtuous City* are proposed in Rudolph, "Ibn Sīnā et Le Kalām"; Idem, "Reflections on al-Fārābī's Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila." As for instances where Avicenna responds to Muʿtazilite ethical views, see Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr Al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, 27, 61–62.

I have argued that, for both al-Fārābī and Avicenna, their ethical theories are ultimately founded on theoretical philosophy. Thus, at the large-scale level of the definitions of happiness and virtue as the ultimate and instrumental human goods, respectively, they presumably view their ethical theories to be demonstrative. This would seem to imply that they agree with the Muʿtazila as regards the objectivity and rationality of moral beliefs. As it happens, on the contrary, their position concerning the ontological and epistemological status of moral propositions is, in fact, much closer to that of the Ashʿarites. It is true that they believe value concepts to be both objective and rational at the abstract level of their definitions of the ultimate and instrumental human good. However, both authors deny that moral propositions of the kind "lying is bad" could be objective and universally true. While this might initially seem counter-intuitive, it is, in fact, a logical consequence of their particularism with regard to virtue: if it is the case that the goodness and badness of actions must always be assessed in the context of a particular time and place, there can be no universal moral rules that determine the value of a particular action in every time and place.

1 Al-Fārābī

Al-Fārābī's understanding of the intellectual virtues has a firmly Aristotelian basis. He relates the sphere of activity of the theoretical intellect to universal knowledge concerning the reality existing independently of human volition, giving the example of mathematical truths, and that of the practical intellect to particular reasoning concerning the human reality. The practical intellect is divided further into a vocational (*mihnī*/*ṣināʿī*) part, which concerns skills and crafts, such as carpentry, and a deliberative (*fikrī*/*murawwī*) part, which is concerned with deliberation (*rawiyya*) on the means to attain a particular goal.[11] It is mainly the deliberative part that is relevant for the question of virtue. As for Aristotle, the theoretical and practical spheres are contrary in the sense that the first concerns the unchanging universal truths for which demonstrative knowledge is possible, while the second concerns the ever-changing realm of particulars for which there can be no knowledge in the scientific sense of the term. The virtues of the theoretical part are scientific knowledge (*ʿilm*) and wisdom (*ḥikma*): al-Fārābī understands the former as demonstratively certain knowledge (*yaqīn*) about existents and the latter as knowledge of the ul-

11 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 7, 29–30. See also *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, § 5, 32–33.

timate causes of existents, that is, the chain of being derived from the First by the intermediacy of the secondary causes.[12]

Al-Fārābī's list of the virtues of the practical intellect includes practical wisdom (*taʿaqqul*), discernment (*dhihn*),[13] excellent opinion (*jūdat al-raʾy*), and correct presumption (*ṣawāb al-ẓann*). These are all related to the proper activity of the practical intellect, which is deliberation on particulars, where the end is an action as opposed to abstract knowledge, as is the case for theoretical thought. Practical wisdom constitutes the main practical virtue under which the other virtues are relegated as sub-virtues related to a particular sphere of activity. While deliberation itself may be directed towards good or bad ends, al-Fārābī defines practical wisdom as "excellent deliberation and inference" (*jūdat al-rawiyya wa-l-istinbāṭ*) over the means leading to an objectively virtuous end, that is, happiness or something conducive to happiness.[14] The fact that practical wisdom is directed exclusively towards virtuous ends means that the practically wise is also virtuous.[15] The individual moral virtues, therefore, become instances of practical wisdom as applied to a particular sphere of human activity. Hence, practical wisdom as the overall virtue means that one possesses all the virtues as well as the excellent capability to deliberate which actions are virtuous in a particular context. Since each virtue requires practical wisdom, while practical wisdom requires all of the virtues, the consequence is the thesis of the unity of virtue: it is not possible to have one virtue without the other.[16]

Al-Fārābī elaborates somewhat on the more precise nature of moral deliberation. As we have seen, he includes correct opinion (*raʾy*) or presumption (*ẓann*) among the sub-virtues falling under practical wisdom. This, in effect, constitutes practical and moral knowledge, with the qualification that since its objects are particulars, it is not knowledge in the Aristotelian technical sense of the word.[17] As for the origin of such moral knowledge, al-Fārābī explains

12 Ibid, §§ 33–37, 50–54.

13 However, in the *Exhortation to the Way to Happiness*, al-Fārābī employs the term discernment for both practical and theoretical reasoning, whereas in the *Aphorisms*, it is a particular kind of practical deliberation.

14 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 39, 55. See also *al-Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, § 2, 4–7, as well as *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, §§ 26–29, 68–69, where al-Fārābī calls the excellence of deliberating between the particulars conducive to an objectively virtuous end (*ghāya fāḍila*) the deliberative virtue (*al-faḍīla al-fikriyya*).

15 Ibid, § 41, 57. See also *al-Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, § 4, 6–7.

16 For the thesis of the unity of virtues, that is, that to possess one virtue means to possess them all, see Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 83–99.

17 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, §§ 43–45, 58–59.

that the practical intellect acquires through cumulative experience (*tajārib*) and perception of sensibles premises (*muqaddimāt*), some of which are universal (*kulliyya*) and others particular (*mufradāt juz'iyya*). By employing them, practical reason is able to correctly deliberate on its choices between particular actions.[18] Since al-Fārābī relates moral knowledge in this sense to the practical intellect, which is by definition concerned with particulars, the distinction is apparently between principles of practical reasoning as applied to a class of objects versus a single object. He states further that the principles of moral reasoning may also be commonly accepted opinions (*al-ashyā' al-mashhūra*),[19] which in the context of his political philosophy are presumably the principles shared by a particular political community or religion. Moral deliberation as such, however, is an entirely rational process of reasoning, which proceeds from premises to conclusions in a manner analogous to theoretical reasoning.[20] However, it is also distinguished from theoretical thought in that its premises are experiential and conclusions motivating reasons for actions.

As for the premises of moral reasoning, al-Fārābī also suggests that they are not only experiential but also innate to the human being. In the *Virtuous City*, he states that inborn primary intelligibles include the principles of practical skills (*al-mihan al-ʿamaliyya*) and theoretical thought, as well as the "principles by which one becomes aware of what is good and bad in human actions."[21] The more precise nature of these innate first principles of moral reasoning is not specified. Since these are first principles, presumably, al-Fārābī does not claim that moral knowledge as such, as concerns particular moral propositions of the form "lying is bad," is inborn. He also attributes first principles to practical crafts, and clearly, knowledge about practical skills cannot be inborn. What al-Fārābī perhaps means, then, is that the capability for moral deliberation is in some sense based on innate principles, although the moral propositions themselves are experientially founded. This provides a further parallel between moral reasoning and theoretical thought: both ultimately go back to simple first principles based on which the human being by employing experiential data gradually develops more complex rational thought.

What is, then, the epistemological basis of moral knowledge for al-Fārābī? If moral reasoning by definition concerns the means, while knowledge about the ends is theoretical knowledge, clearly, the former should be based on the latter. In the *Attainment of Happiness*, al-Fārābī, in a political context, intro-

18 Ibid, § 38, 54–55. See also *al-Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, §§ 7–8, 9–11.

19 Ibid, § 46, 59–60.

20 Al-Fārābī, *al-Risāla fī al-ʿaql*, § 7, 9–10.

21 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, § 4, 202–204.

duces the non-Aristotelian concept of voluntary intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-irādiyya*).[22] These, like the natural intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-ṭabīʿiyya*), are universal ideas in the human mind, which, in contrast to the natural intelligibles, are brought into actual existence by human voluntary acts rather than by nature.[23] Al-Fārābī provides temperance (*ʿiffa*) and wealth (*yasār*) as examples.[24] This presumably means that all moral virtues are similarly voluntary intelligibles. Their relation to extra-mental existence proceeds in the contrary direction than that of the natural intelligibles: while the human mind abstracts the latter from the accidental qualities they have in nature, the human volition makes the former actually exist by providing them with the accidents necessitated by a particular context.[25] In their extra-mental existence, the voluntary intelligibles vary both from one time to another and one place to another, such as between different nations. Their actualization, therefore, requires particular knowledge, which is either subject to general rules (*qawānīn*) or entirely particularistic in the sense that the former apply over generations, while the latter change from one instant to the next.[26] The capability to actualize the voluntary intelligibles by correctly deliberating on the particulars is, then, identical with possessing practical wisdom. As a result, while practical-moral knowledge is particularistic, whether entirely or in the form of rules of more general application, it is derived from universal concepts, which al-Fārābī calls voluntary intelligibles. Al-Fārābī, therefore, states explicitly that moral and deliberative virtue is subordinate to theoretical virtue because the knowledge about the virtuous ends that practical deliberation strives to actualize is universal and intelligible knowledge.[27]

Al-Fārābī does not explain where the voluntary intelligibles themselves come from. While natural intelligibles have independent ontological existence in both the active intellect and their particular instances in nature, voluntary intelligibles do not possess the former at least. It seems, then, that the voluntary intelligibles are intelligibles only in the sense that they are universal concepts but not in the Platonic sense that they would have independent ontological existence as paradigmatic causes of sensible existents. Perhaps, however, they

22 For voluntary intelligibles, see Druart, "Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles"; Zghal, "Métaphysique et Science Politique."

23 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, §§ 22–23, 65–66.

24 Ibid, § 24, 66.

25 Ibid, §§ 23–24, 65–66.

26 Ibid, §§ 23–26, 65–68.

27 Ibid, § 41, 74–75. See also al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 39, 56, for the view that theoretical virtue is composed of the knowledge of all the things that lead to happiness, including deliberative and moral virtues.

could be intelligibles in the sense that they are abstracted from the concept of human nature. In any case, since they are universal concepts, which are actualized through practical wisdom concerning the particulars, their origin cannot be entirely in experience. The only remaining option is that voluntary intelligibles are universal concepts concerning the human reality derived by demonstrative means from intelligible knowledge concerning the reality independent of volition. This fits perfectly with what I have said so far: knowledge about happiness as the human good is ultimately metaphysical and psychological knowledge. Since virtue is defined as the instrumental good, knowledge about virtue is derivative of knowledge about happiness. Knowledge about what constitutes the good for the human being is, then, ultimately inferred from non-moral facts about the world, even if moral reasoning is particularistic. In consequence, and in partial contrast to Aristotle, ethics for al-Fārābī has a demonstrative basis.[28]

The relation between theoretical knowledge on the one hand and moral deliberation and action on the other can also be expressed in psychological terms. In the *Virtuous City*, al-Fārābī explicates the faculty psychological sequence of virtue:

> Theoretical reason is not made to serve anything else but has as its purpose to bring the human being to happiness. All these faculties are linked with the appetitive faculty, which serves the sensing, imaginative, and rational faculties. The subordinate perceptive faculties can perform their activities with the help of the appetitive faculty only. For sensation, imagination, and deliberation are not sufficient in themselves to act unless a desire for what has been sensed, imagined, or deliberated is attached to them because will (*irāda*) is an appetition in the appetitive faculty towards what has been perceived. When happiness becomes known through theoretical intellect and is set up as an aim and desired by the appetitive faculty, and when the deliberative faculty discovers what ought to be done in order to attain that with the assistance of imagination and senses, and when those actions are performed by the instruments of the appetitive faculty, then the actions of man will be all good (*khayrāt*) and virtuous (*jamīla*). But when happiness remains unknown, or becomes known without being set up as an aim which is desired, and something else different from it is set up as an aim and desired by the appetitive fac-

28 The idea that ethics for al-Fārābī has a demonstrative basis is also proposed in Druart, "Al-Farabi on the Practical and Speculative Aspects of Ethics"; Idem, "Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles"; Zghal, "Métaphysique et Science Politique."

> ulty, and the deliberative faculty has discovered what ought to be done in order to attain it with the assistance of the imaginative and sensitive faculties, and when those actions are performed by the instruments of the appetitive faculty, the actions of the human being will all be non-virtuous (*ghayr jamīla*).[29]

Therefore, in terms of psychological faculties, virtuous action is simply the result of all of the human psychical faculties acting in conformance with the knowledge conceived in the theoretical faculty. The intellectual basis of virtue is that the human being comes to know by his theoretical reason what constitutes happiness as the final human end. The affective aspect of virtue consists of the human appetitive faculty generating a desire towards that end. Its deliberative aspect means that the deliberative faculty infers the particular actions that are necessary for attaining the end in any particular context. When actually performed by the instruments of the appetitive faculty, the result is a virtuous act.

In conclusion, al-Fārābī's theory of virtue is rational in the two senses that virtue always involves moral deliberation on what constitutes a virtuous action in any particular situation and that moral deliberation is itself founded on theoretical knowledge about what constitutes the human good universally. Although this makes al-Fārābī's theory of virtue highly intellectualist in nature, it is also not the whole picture. As stated before, al-Fārābī, for the most part, presents his ethical theory in a political context. This is true, in particular, of his discussion of the voluntary intelligibles, where his aim is to describe the procedure in which the philosopher-prophet applies universal ethical concepts to the particular reality of his subjects. It is, then, not so much the case that al-Fārābī thinks that everyone should infer the ends and means for virtue by his unaided reason in order to become virtuous, even if this might be possible for the few who possess the necessary intellectual and moral prerequisites. It is rather the case that the political-religious lawgiver, in whom both the theoretical and practical faculties are perfectly developed, incorporates his philosophical and practical knowledge into the specific laws that will guide his subjects towards virtue and happiness.[30] Thus, al-Fārābī is not a moral rationalist in the Muʿtazilite sense that any given moral agent is able to recognize what is good with regard to human actions by his unaided reason. Instead, he thinks that

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29 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, §7, 208–210 [translation by Walzer with modifications]. See also *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 73–74.

30 See, for example, al-Fārābī, "Kitāb al-Milla," §5, 46–47. For a recent study approaching this particularist aspect of al-Fārābī's ethics from the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), see Bouhafa, "Ethics and Fiqh in al-Fārābī's Philosophy."

in order for most people to become virtuous, the political or religious legislation must be based on rational principles. However, since such legislation must, nevertheless, be founded on theoretical and practical knowledge in order to be conducive to virtue, it is still the case that the basis of moral virtue for al-Fārābī is entirely rational in nature.

2 Avicenna

Avicenna addresses the intellectual aspect of virtue especially in his psychological writings, where the context is the activity of the faculties of theoretical and practical intellects. The psychological starting point is the same as for both Aristotle and al-Fārābī: theoretical intellect concerned with universals and practical intellect concerned with particulars.[31] According to Avicenna, then, the practical intellect has operations in relation to the faculties of appetition, imagination, estimation, and itself, where the first are related to virtues as affective states and the last to rational moral deliberation.[32] Thus, the theoretical faculty distinguishes between truth and falsehood, while the practical faculty distinguishes between good (*khayr*) and bad (*sharr*) with regard to particular things.[33] Avicenna consequently divides the intellectual virtues into practical wisdom (*al-ḥikma al-ʿamaliyya*) as the virtue of the practical intellect and theoretical wisdom or virtue (*al-ḥikma/faḍīla al-naẓariyya*) as the virtue of the theoretical part, where the latter is identified with theoretical knowledge concerning the reality independent of human volition.[34] In his smaller ethical works, Avicenna further divides theoretical virtue into knowledge (*ʿilm*) as sound intellectual understanding (*idrāk*) of existents and wisdom as knowledge based on demonstrative proofs,[35] as well as practical wisdom into a set of sub-virtues on which he does not elaborate much further.[36]

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31 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, I.5, 45–46; V.1, 206–207; Idem, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.4, 96; Idem, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, III.10, 387–388.

32 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, I.5, 45–46.

33 Ibid, V.1, 207.

34 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, X.5, §§10–11, 377–378.

35 Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-ʿahd," 143. In Avicenna, "Risālat al-Birr wa-l-ithm," 363–364, knowledge (*ʿilm*) is defined as certain (*yaqīn*) demonstrative knowledge about the existents and wisdom as knowledge of the remote causes (*al-asbāb al-baʿīda*) of existents, culminating in knowledge about the First and the reality derived from Him. This and the following passages either rely heavily on al-Fārābī or are not authentically Avicennan, as they draw from al-Fārābī even in technical terms, such as in employing *taʿaqqul* for practical wisdom. The characteristically Avicennan distinction between necessary and possible existence is also absent.

36 See note 78 in chapter 8 for Avicenna's list of virtues related to practical wisdom, as well

Since, as we have seen, Avicenna primarily defines virtue as a psychical state in which the practical intellect rules over the subrational faculties, it is clear at the outset that moral virtue for Avicenna is rational. Avicenna's psychological writings expand on the more precise manner in which moral deliberation works. To begin with, Avicenna defines the practical faculty (*al-quwwa al-ʿāmila*) as the "principle that moves the human body to perform particular actions determined by deliberation on what is required by customary opinions specific to those actions" (*al-mabdaʾ muḥarrik badan al-insān ilā al-afāʿīl al-juzʾiyya al-khāṣṣa bi-l-rawiyya ʿalā muqtaḍā ārāʾ takhuṣṣuhā iṣṭilāḥiyya*).[37] This means, first, that practical intellect is the principle in the human being that moves him to perform particular voluntary actions determined by a rational process of deliberation. Further on, Avicenna states that deliberation on particulars in the practical intellect is concerned with "what he should do or not do, what is beneficial or harmful, and what is good (*jamīl*/*khayr*) or bad (*qabīḥ*/*sharr*)."[38] While deliberative activity is what leads to voluntary action in general, moral deliberation is one of its primary spheres of application. As for al-Fārābī, practical wisdom means an excellent capability to deliberate (*tamyīz*/*rawiyya*) on the particulars related to human voluntary actions. Being practically wise and virtuous are, therefore, inseparable. Moral virtue is inherently rational because it always involves a choice based on moral deliberation of which particular actions are virtuous in a given context.

However, the most interesting part of the above definition of the practical intellect is that Avicenna explicitly designates "conventional opinions" as its epistemological basis. As for al-Fārābī, these are particular beliefs (*ārāʾ juzʾiyya*), as opposed to universal knowledge, since the sphere of human actions itself is that of the changing particulars.[39] The fact that Avicenna should call the moral beliefs on which virtuous action is based "conventional" (*iṣṭilāḥiyya*), however, suggests that morality has no epistemological basis beyond what is agreed on within a particular human community. Avicenna elaborates on this by stating that moral beliefs are socially produced in the sense that a human being is since childhood socialized to prefer beneficial activities and shun harmful activities. This way he learns to consider them good (*jamīla*) or bad

as Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-ʿahd," 143–144, for short definitions of some of them. As stated above, these sub-virtues are of neither Platonic nor Aristotelian origin but perhaps represent an effort to introduce religious virtues into the Hellenic philosophical framework.

37 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, 1.5, 45.

38 Ibid, v.1, 207.

39 Ibid.

(*qabīḥa*) and such moral opinions become instinctive (*gharīzī*) to him.[40] Both passages clearly show that Avicenna considers neither virtue nor moral knowledge to be inborn. It is rather the case that we learn to consider some things good and other things bad in a society, that our moral deliberation is based on these conventional norms, and that we, as a result, become habituated to the psychical dispositions that correspond to our moral beliefs.

Avicenna specifies the epistemological status of moral propositions further in his logical writings:

> These are such opinions (*ārā'*) that were a human being to be left with his bare intellect (*'aqluhu al-mujarrad*), estimative power, and sense perception, were he not educated (*yu'addab*) to accept and acknowledge their judgments (*qaḍāyāhā*), were induction not to incline his strong opinion to make a judgment (*ḥukm*) due to the multiplicity of particular cases (*juz'iyyāt*), and were one not provoked to them by the compassion (*raḥma*), shame (*khajal*), pride (*anafa*), zeal (*ḥamiyya*), and other [passions] that are found in human nature (*ṭabī'a*), then his intellect, his estimative power, or his senses would not compel him to assert them. Examples are our judgment (*ḥukm*) that it is bad (*qabīḥ*) to steal people of their wealth and that it is bad to lie and that one should not do it. Of this genus (*jins*), there is that which presents itself to the estimative power of many people, such as that it is bad to slaughter animals, even if the religion (*shar'*) turns them away from this, which follows from instinctive sympathy (*li-mā fī al-gharīza min al-riqqa*) among those whose instincts are like this, which is the majority of people. Nothing of this is required by the pure intellect (*'aql sādhij*). If a human being were to imagine (*tawahhama*) himself as created at once with a complete intellect (*tāmm al-'aql*), having received no education (*adab*) and not being under the power of psychological or moral sentiments (*infi'ālan nafsāniyyan aw khulqiyyan*), he would not assert any such propositions. Rather, he might be ignorant of or hesitant about them. This is not the case with his judgment that the whole is greater than the part. These widely known propositions (*mashhūrāt*) may be true and they may be false.[41]

40 Ibid, 204.

41 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 1, VI.1, 400–401 [translation cited from Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics*, 59, with modifications and addition of the omitted sections].

The context of this fascinating passage is Avicenna's discussion of different types of premises in syllogistic demonstrations, and more specifically, the class of propositions that he calls "widely accepted" (*mashhūra*/*dhāʾiʿa*) or "praiseworthy" (*maḥmūda*).[42] As the passage shows, Avicenna is primarily thinking of moral propositions of the form "stealing is bad" or "lying is bad." These are contrasted with the various classes of propositions that induce certainty on sensory, experiential, or intellectual grounds, including the first principles of thought, such as Avicenna's favourite example of "the whole is greater than the part," to which the intellect assents necessarily with no further grounds than the content of the proposition itself. In contrast, the only epistemological basis of widely accepted propositions is the very fact that they are widely accepted, which, of course, does not guarantee their veracity. Thus, such propositions may be either true or false. Besides their socially constructed basis, moral propositions also include beliefs based on an instinctive emotive response aroused by the estimative faculty, as in the example of "slaughtering animals is bad," which, however, is partially countered by the regulations of religious law.[43] Elsewhere, Avicenna presents another example of an instinctively accepted moral proposition: we should always help our brother, whether he is doing good or bad things.[44] Upon reflection, this turns out to be incorrect: we should not help someone carry out unjust actions.

A striking part of the passage is its introduction of a thought experiment, which varies slightly in form in different works.[45] As in the much more famous

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42 For an analysis of the different classes of propositions in the context of Avicenna's epistemology, see Black, "Certitude, Justification, and the Principles of Knowledge"; Mousavian and Ardeshir, "Avicenna on the Primary Propositions." As noted in Black, "Estimation (Wahm) in Avicenna," 40, note 111, Avicenna employs the term "widely accepted" in a general and a restricted sense: the former includes all propositions that are generally accepted, even the self-evident first principles of thought, while the latter includes only the propositions derived from social consensus. For the background of the concept in Aristotle's *endoxa* in the *Topics*, see Black, "Estimation (Wahm) in Avicenna," 24; Idem, "Certitude, Justification, and the Principles of Knowledge," 134.

43 For the role of the estimative faculty in moral judgments, see Black, "Estimation (Wahm) in Avicenna," 14, 23–28. It is perhaps worth noting that among the passions mentioned in the passage, compassion (*raḥma*) also figures in Avicenna's list of virtues related to practical reason.

44 The passage is cited in Black, "Certitude, Justification, and the Principles of Knowledge," 137.

45 For an analysis of these thought experiments, see Black, "Estimation (Wahm) in Avicenna," 15–17, 24–25; Idem, "Certitude, Justification, and the Principles of Knowledge," 136–137; Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics*, 58–65; Mousavian and Ardeshir, "Avicenna on the Primary Propositions," 209–215, 218–219. For thought experiments in general in Avicenna, see Kukkonen, "Ibn Sīnā and the Early History of Thought Experiments."

thought experiment of the flying man, Avicenna asks us to imagine ourselves created all at once, this time with a completely formed intellect, faculty of estimation, and senses but with no prior education or moral sentiments. The point of this is to exclude some aspects of the human experience in order to see whether we would still accept the veracity of commonly shared moral propositions. Avicenna's claim is that without social education or habitually developed moral sentiments, the evidence given by the intellect, the estimative faculty, and the senses would not induce a person to assent to the commonly accepted moral claims.

How can Avicenna's moral subjectivism, then, be fitted together with the claim that value concepts, such as the human good, are ultimately derived from theoretical philosophy and are, therefore, objective? First, two levels in Avicenna's ethical thought must be distinguished: an abstract ethical theory and a particularistic level of its practical application. At the large-scale level, the propositions "the human good consists of the perfection of the theoretical intellect" and "moral virtue is a necessary condition for the human good" are propositions that are true always and necessarily since they are inferred from non-moral metaphysical and psychological premises. Thus, they constitute demonstrative knowledge. The statement "lying is bad" also bears the appearance of a universal proposition but it, in fact, concerns the ever-changing sphere of particular human actions. Therefore, it might be the case that it can never be shown to be always and necessarily true in every conceivable human society. However, it could also follow as a necessary belief concerning human actions in most, or even all, human societies. The critical thing to notice is that what Avicenna denies, *contra* the Muʿtazila, is that moral knowledge would be innate to human nature. That is, that a human being could by his unaided intellect recognize the truth of propositions such as "lying is bad," as he can in the case of the statement "the whole is greater than the part." However, since some commonly accepted moral propositions apparently are true, Avicenna does not categorically deny their objective reality. Thus, even if the epistemological basis of these propositions in the actual world is in social convention, some of them perhaps could be shown to be always and necessarily true based on universal premises.[46]

Second, if the social norms are themselves rationally founded, morality will have a solid epistemological basis. Ideally, this could be the case since Avicenna's moral epistemology also appears to enable correct inference of particular moral principles from universal knowledge. Thus, Avicenna states that the

46 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, 1.5, 46.

"combination of the practical and theoretical intellects engenders (*tatawallad*) the opinions that are related to human actions and that are spread as commonly held (*dhāʾiʿa mashhūra*), such as that lying and oppression (*ẓulm*) is bad (*qabīḥ*), though not as established by the demonstrative method."[47] Elsewhere, Avicenna says that moral reasoning proceeds from universals to particulars in the sense that the deliberative faculty forms its opinions concerning future particulars based on universal premises derived from the theoretical intellect.[48] Moral opinions, then, come about as a conclusion of a "kind of syllogism and sound or unsound reflection" (*bi-ḍarb min al-qiyās wa-l-taʾammul ṣaḥīḥ aw saqīm*).[49] The upshot is that even if moral reasoning is not founded on self-evident premises, it still constitutes a process that is analogical to theoretical reasoning and is ultimately epistemologically founded on universal theoretical knowledge.[50] The fact that this kind of moral reasoning may be either sound or unsound implies that, in the former case, the particular moral beliefs that follow as its conclusions are valid.

In Avicenna's prophetology, the correctness of moral reasoning would be ensured by the fact that the prophet is endowed with perfect theoretical and practical parts of the intellect, and the religious legislation he stipulates is, therefore, based on rational principles.[51] That this is the case for Islam, in particular, becomes clear in Avicenna's brief excursions into practical philosophy: he accords the regulations of Islamic law an essential, although not exclusive, role in habituating the human being towards virtuous dispositions.[52] Thus, at least as regards the application of ethical principles into Islamic law, the views that people assent to moral principles due to social convention rather than innate moral knowledge and that those principles are, nevertheless, rational in origin are in complete harmony.[53]

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid, v.1, 206–207. See also *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, III.10, 388.

49 Ibid, 207.

50 See also Avicenna, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*, III.4, 96.

51 For Avicenna's philosophical explanation of prophecy, see, for example, Marmura, "Avicenna's Theory of Prophecy."

52 See, for example, Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-kalām ʿalā al-nafs al-nāṭiqa," § 8, 197.

53 For a recent assessment that for Avicenna, the principles of practical philosophy are drawn from Islamic law, see Kaya, "Prophetic Legislation."

CHAPTER 10

Moral Progression

It is now possible to assess the virtue theories of al-Fārābī and Avicenna in the overall context of their eudaimonist ethics. First, we have seen that both authors consider moral virtue to be an instrumental good in relation to the final and self-sufficient human end, which they define in purely contemplative terms. Given that the final end in faculty psychological terms is identical with the perfection of the theoretical intellect, which does not employ a bodily organ, to the exclusion of the rest of the human faculties, each of which operates through a bodily organ, moral virtue must involve at least some degree of separation from the body. We have also seen that both authors view the way to happiness to involve the soul's ontological ascent towards purely incorporeal existence and that Avicenna explicitly employs the Platonic terminology of purification, which identifies moral virtue with the human soul's separation from the body. Second, despite all this, we have also seen that both philosophers, nevertheless, commit themselves to the Aristotelian ideal of moderation in their definition of moral virtue.

As a result, there are two contradictory ethical ideals for the human being: one that corresponds roughly to Aristotelian *metriopatheia*, moderation of passions, and another that corresponds to Stoic-Neoplatonic *apatheia*, extirpation of passions. Therefore, the following problem arises: how is the ethical end of becoming an incorporeal intellect compatible with that of virtue as an intermediate psychical state? The tension between these two ethical ideals is not resolved even by taking into account that the contemplative end is ultimately eschatological and that in the afterlife the human soul, in any case, will become purely incorporeal. Pure intellectuality, which for al-Fārābī and Avicenna is identical with pure immateriality, nevertheless, constitutes the human good, even if it can be only partially realized in this world. Since all value is derivative of what constitutes the good for the human being in absolute terms, it is hard to see how one could arrive at the definition of virtue as moderation. One possible answer is that the tension cannot be resolved but the distinct Greek ethical currents on which al-Fārābī and Avicenna draw result in an inherently contradictory ethical system. However, in the following, I will argue that we can interpret the ethical thought of both al-Fārābī and Avicenna in a way that makes it coherent.

The internal tension within the ethical theories of al-Fārābī and Avicenna is resolved by introducing the idea of moral progression. This interpretation is

supported by both textual evidence presented by the two authors and the historical precedent and influence of the Platonists of late antiquity. Among the latter, the idea of ethical progression was present in two distinct senses. First of these is a distinction between pre-philosophical and philosophical ethics. In the late ancient introductions to philosophy, one of the ten formulaic questions discussed concerned the correct starting point for the study of philosophy.[1] Ethics occupied a dual position because on the one hand, character formation was an indispensable prerequisite for the study of philosophy, while on the other hand, philosophical ethics, such as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, required knowledge of logical argumentation and would have to follow at least the study of logic.[2] Thus, there are two kinds of ethics within the philosophical curriculum: the "popular ethics" preceding philosophy and the rationally argued ethics as one of the philosophical disciplines. Many of these philosophical introductions were translated into Arabic, and a paraphrase of one such introduction is attributed to al-Fārābī.[3] Druart has argued in several articles that this distinction between two levels of ethics is essential for understanding the ethical thought of many Arabic philosophers of the formative period, including al-Fārābī.[4] While in the late ancient curriculum, philosophical ethics was situated right after logic, in the Arabic curriculum, all of practical philosophy is transposed to the very end of philosophical studies. In Arabic philosophy, then, ethics occupies the ambivalent position of the very beginning and the very end of philosophy.[5] Pre-philosophical morality would have to be mainly social or conventional in nature, and in the Islamic context, it becomes easily

1 See Westerink, *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, xxvi–xxvii; Gutas, "The Starting Point of Philosophical Studies"; Hein, *Definition und Einteilung der Philosophie*, 382–384.

2 Gutas, "The Starting Point of Philosophical Studies," 116–117. Hence, Simplicius (d. ca. 560) [cited from Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators*, 323] states: "Perhaps, then, there is every need of an ethical pre-catechism, but not supplied through Aristotle's *Ethics*, but through habituation without texts, and through non-technical exhortations, both written and unwritten, to straighten our character, and after that the logical and demonstrative method. After those, we shall be able to take in scientifically the scientific discussions of character and research into reality."

3 See, in particular, Hein, *Definition und Einteilung der Philosophie*, 247–251. For al-Fārābī's introduction as a paraphrase, or even a translation, of a late Alexandrian treatise, see Gutas, "The Starting Point of Philosophical Studies."

4 Druart, "Al-Kindi's Ethics"; Idem, "Al-Razi (Rhazes) and Normative Ethics"; Idem, "Al-Farabi on the Practical and Speculative Aspects of Ethics"; Idem, "La philosophie morale arabe"; Idem, "Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles"; Idem, "The Ethics of al-Razi."

5 Cf. the statement of Abū Sahl al-Masīḥī (10th cent.), cited in Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 172, that ethics as practiced precedes and as an object of study follows theoretical philosophy.

identified with religious morality. We have seen that both al-Fārābī and Avicenna emphasize the political-religious context of character formation.

The distinction between popular and philosophical ethics would seem to entail a plurality of ethical ends. Given that moral virtue stands in an instrumental relation to contemplative perfection, the fact that the common people and philosophers have different cognitive goals presumably implies that they also have different ends as regards moral virtue. Thus, the second distinction of moral progression arises because of the first distinction and concerns the psychological content assigned to virtue. Virtue as Aristotelian *metriopatheia*, then, corresponds to popular ethics, while virtue as Stoic *apatheia* corresponds to philosophical ethics. These represent the goals of character training for non-philosophers and philosophers, respectively. This interpretation is supported by the late ancient precedent of the Neoplatonic ladder of virtues, discussed in chapter 8, where the virtues form a progression from a political to a purificatory level corresponding to the ethical ideals of *metriopatheia* and *apatheia*, respectively. However, there is no explicit evidence that any of the Greek texts transmitting the idea of a ladder of virtues were translated into Arabic, although the general ethical ideal was transmitted in the Arabic Neoplatonic corpus as a whole. It is also the case that neither al-Fārābī nor Avicenna explicitly adopts the Neoplatonic classification and terminology. Nevertheless, they could have been aware of the notion of a ladder of virtues, as it could have been present, for example, in Porphyry's lost commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Alternatively, since the Arabic philosophers were confronted by two conflicting ethical ideals even in the texts attributed to Aristotle, they could have arrived at similar harmonizing conclusions independently.

In any case, al-Fārābī and Avicenna relate virtue to a political-religious context on the one hand and a philosophical context on the other. Their ethical writings also suggest that they do consider these to correspond to distinct requirements as concerns the degree of virtue. Many Arabic philosophers express this more explicitly. Miskawayh designates two levels of happiness: a worldly life of virtue and purely contemplative happiness.[6] Regarding the application of religious law, the Brethren of Purity postulate a philosophical-divine worship (*al-ʿibāda al-falsafiyya al-ilāhiyya*), which goes beyond the requirements of religious law.[7] In Ibn Ṭufayl's philosophical fable of Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān, the intellectually and morally perfected protagonist follows a purely contemplative life with more stringently ascetic precepts, while he recognizes

6 Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, 82–86.

7 Mattila, "The Philosophical Worship of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ."

that the more lenient requirements of religious law are sufficient for most people.[8] On the other hand, the idea that different requirements of virtue should apply to distinct groups of people based on their natural capabilities and inclinations is hardly unique to philosophy, as it can be found in, for example, Islamic theology or Sufi thought.[9]

The Neoplatonic progression of virtue becomes fully complete in what may perhaps be called the altruistic turn of Neoplatonic ethics. Identifying ethics, as I have done so far, with the progressive acquisition of moral and intellectual virtues aiming for the ultimate goal of self-perfection makes it seem entirely egoistic. This is especially the case when viewed from the contemporary perspective of deontological and consequentialist ethical theories where the morality of acts is defined primarily in relation to other moral agents. While the ethical thought of the late ancient Platonists has traditionally been interpreted as inherently self-centered, many scholars have argued that it necessarily entails other-regard.[10] Related to this, while Neoplatonic ethics has traditionally also been viewed as an apolitical reading of Plato, it now seems obvious that it instead involves a political aspect in that the perfected philosopher must return to the "Platonic cave" to share his perfection with others.[11] For both al-Fārābī and Avicenna, it is clear that complete virtue culminates in altruistic concerns in different senses. It is reasonable to view this final aspect of their ethical thought as resulting from their ultimately Neoplatonic reading of virtue.

1 Al-Fārābī

Al-Fārābī's ethical writings justify the interpretation that he understands moral virtue in terms of progression in the double sense of a distinction between prephilosophical and philosophical ethics corresponding to two distinct stages within the development of virtue.[12] As regards the first distinction, it is clear that al-Fārābī's writings accord ethics an ambivalent position as both the begin-

8 For the ethics and the conception of religion in Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān, see Kukkonen, "No Man Is an Island"; Idem, *Ibn Tufayl*, 79–94, 111–126.

9 As an example, see Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, 44–47, for al-Ghazālī's distinction between salvation (*najāt*) and happiness (*saʿāda*) in reference to a minimalist versus contemplative afterlife, the latter of which culminates in a vision of God.

10 For an altruistic reading of Plotinus' ethics, see Remes, "Plotinus's Ethics of Disinterested Interest."

11 See, in particular, O'Meara, *Platonopolis*.

12 I have argued for this previously in Mattila, "The Ethical Progression of the Philosopher in al-Rāzī and al-Fārābī." Druart has, moreover, applied the distinction between pre-

ning and end of philosophy. Al-Fārābī presents moral virtue as a necessary prerequisite for philosophical studies in several works. His paraphrase of an Alexandrian introduction to philosophy states that the moral dispositions (*akhlāq*) of the appetitive soul must be corrected before the study of philosophy so that the appetites (*shahwa*) are oriented towards what is virtue in reality, as opposed to the false virtues related to the two lower parts of the soul.[13] In the *Attainment of Happiness*, al-Fārābī draws on the *Republic* to present the prerequisites for a student of philosophy, which include both intellectual and moral qualifications:

> For he who sets out to inquire ought to be innately equipped for the theoretical sciences—that is fulfill the conditions prescribed by Plato in the *Republic*. He should excel in comprehending and conceiving that which is essential. Moreover, he should have a good memory and be able to endure the toil of study. He should love truthfulness and truthful people, and justice and just people, and not be headstrong or a wrangler about what he desires. He should not be gluttonous for food and drink and should by natural disposition disdain the appetites, the *dirham*, the *dinar*, and the like. He should be high-minded and avoid what is disgraceful in people. He should be pious, yield easily to goodness and justice, and be stubborn in yielding to evil and injustice. He should be strongly determined in favor of the right thing. Moreover, he should be brought up according to the laws and habits that resemble his innate disposition. He should have sound conviction about the opinions of the religion in which he is reared, hold fast to the virtuous acts in his religion, and not forsake all or most of them. Furthermore, he should hold fast to the generally accepted virtues and not forsake the generally accepted noble acts. For if a youth is such, and then sets out to study philosophy and learns it, it is possible that he will not become a counterfeit or a vain or a false philosopher.[14]

The beginning of the passage insists that the student of philosophy should be innately (*bi-l-fiṭra*) disposed to virtue. However, this does not make pre-

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philosophical and philosophical ethics to al-Fārābī's ethical thought, without suggesting that it would also correspond to a progression in the content ascribed to virtue.

13 Al-Fārābī, "Risāla fī-mā yanbaghī," § 3, 53. The relevant passage is translated in Druart, "Al-Farabi on the Practical and Speculative Aspects of Ethics," 476.

14 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-sa'āda*, § 62, 94–95 [translation cited from Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 48]. For the Platonic basis of the passage, see *Republic*, VI, 485b.

philosophical character training any less necessary, as is apparent in the latter part of the passage, just as theoretical talent does not mean that one could dispense with the study of philosophy.[15] The passage conveys two essential aspects of al-Fārābī's understanding of moral virtue. First, he sees it as a necessary prerequisite for theoretical studies. Second, he makes religion the primary conduit of pre-philosophical moral education. As regards the second aspect, al-Fārābī clearly considers pre-philosophical virtue to be conventional or religious. Thus, an aspiring philosopher should adhere to the religious and "generally accepted" virtues (*al-fāḍā'il allatī hiya fī al-mashhūr faḍā'il*).[16] This is also evident elsewhere in the same work in the definition of the "vain philosopher" (*al-faylasūf al-bahraj*): "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 desires (*hawan*) and appetites (*shahawāt*) in everything, whatever they may happen to be."[17] Like the Greek Neoplatonists, al-Fārābī, then, emphasizes the necessity of moral virtue before one undertakes the philosophical studies. However, he also explicitly identifies pre-philosophical with religious virtue so that one learns to be virtuous in this conventional sense by adhering to the moral norms of the particular religious community to which one pertains.[18]

In other contexts, al-Fārābī presents moral virtue as the culmination of theoretical sciences and emphasizes the role of theoretical knowledge as an indispensable precondition for virtue. In al-Fārābī's Alexandrian introduction, this idea is expressed through the maxim "perfection of knowledge is action" (*tamām al-ʿilm al-ʿamal*).[19] In the *Aphorisms*, al-Fārābī emphasizes that not

15 Al-Fārābī states in various works that moral virtue results from habituation, that is, it is learned, even if some people are naturally more endowed to learn to be virtuous than others are. See al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, §§ 9–13, 30–34; Idem, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh ʿalā sabīl al-saʿāda*, § 7, 55–56. See also the discussion in al-Fārābī, *L'harmonie entre les opinions de Platon et d'Aristote*, §§ 42–46, 108–117, on the inborn versus learned nature of moral dispositions (*akhlāq*), even if the attribution of the treatise to al-Fārābī is contested.

16 In contrast, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, § 40, 74, presents three levels of what is virtue 1) according to the common opinion (*fī al-mashhūr*), 2) within a particular religion (*fī milla mā*), and 3) in reality (*fī al-ḥaqīqa*). Supposedly, 1) is at least in part derived from 2).

17 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, § 63, 95–96 [translation cited from Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 48].

18 Religion and virtue are, nevertheless, connected also for the Greek Neoplatonists, especially after Plotinus, in the sense that theurgic rites occupy a central position for the ascent within the grades of virtue.

19 Al-Fārābī, "Risāla fī-mā yanbaghī," § 5, 53.

only philosophical knowledge about virtue but also knowledge about theoretical philosophy is required for becoming truly virtuous:

> One of the benefits of the theoretical part of philosophy is that it is necessary for the practical part from various aspects. One of them is that an action becomes virtue and correct only when the human being has come to attain true knowledge about the virtues that are virtues in reality and the virtues that are presumed to be virtues but are not so, has habituated his soul to the truly virtuous actions so that they become a disposition (*hay'a*) in him, has come to know the degrees of existence and ranks of merit and how all things descend to his degree within it and accord him his rightful position that is the degree and rank among the ranks of existence that has been bestowed to him, and has come to prefer what he should prefer and avoid what he should avoid and not prefer what is presumed to be preferable and not avoid what is presumed to be avoidable. This is a state that is not attained and perfected except after experience and complete demonstrative knowledge and the completion of physical and metaphysical sciences according to the correct order and arrangement until he, in the end, reaches the science dealing with happiness that is in reality happiness … Then he will know how the theoretical and deliberative virtues come to be the cause and principle for the coming to be of the practical virtues and arts. All this comes to be only through the practice of theoretical reflection and passage from one degree and rank to another [within the sciences].[20]

Al-Fārābī here addresses virtue in the philosophical sense, as founded on philosophical knowledge, which is distinguished from any common sense or religious notions of virtue. Corresponding to the position of ethics within the Arabic philosophical curriculum, al-Fārābī locates the acquisition of virtue in this sense at the very end of philosophical education, that is, after all of theoretical philosophy. After the completion of theoretical philosophy, then, the student of philosophy "progresses to the practical part, and may begin to act the way he is supposed to act."[21] The same idea of philosophical virtue founded on theoretical knowledge is repeated in the *Virtuous City* in terms of the faculties of the soul in a previously cited passage.[22] In consequence, there are two

20 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntaza'a*, § 94, 95–96 [my translation].
21 Ibid, § 94, 98.
22 See chapter 9.

kinds of moral virtue for al-Fārābī: pre-philosophical, identified with conventional or religious morality, and philosophical, which is demonstrative in the sense that value concepts are derived from non-moral facts.

If pre-philosophical virtue is based on religious or commonly shared opinions, while philosophical virtue is founded on demonstrative knowledge, how are the two related? In a further passage of the *Aphorisms*, it becomes clear that al-Fārābī considers the commonly shared and philosophical concepts of virtue to be at least relatively close to each other:

> We posit two persons: the first has learned all of what is contained in Aristotle's books on the physical, logical, metaphysical, political, and mathematical sciences but all or most of his actions are contrary to what is considered to be good according to the first opinion shared by all (*bādiʾ al-raʾy al-mushtarak ʿinda al-jamīʿ*). The second person is such that all of his actions are in accordance with what is considered to be good according to the first opinion shared by all but has no knowledge about the sciences that the first person has learned. This second person is closer to becoming a philosopher than the first, all of whose actions are contrary to what is considered to be good according to the first opinion shared by all, for he is more capable of attaining what the first person has attained than the first person is capable of attaining what the second person has attained. For philosophy, according to the first opinion and in reality, is for the human being to acquire the theoretical sciences and for all of his actions to become in accordance with what is good according to the first common opinion and [what is good] in reality. He, who only restricts himself to the theoretical sciences, without all of his actions being in accordance with what is held to be good by the common opinion, is prevented by the habit ingrained in him of performing the actions that are good according to the first opinion shared by all. Therefore, he is more likely to be prevented by the habit of his actions becoming in accordance with what is good in reality. But he who has habituated himself to the actions that are in accordance with what is held to be good according to the first opinion shared by all is not prevented by his habit of learning the theoretical sciences or of his actions becoming in accordance with what is good in reality.[23]

For a devoted Aristotelian like al-Fārābī to claim that a virtuous but philosophically ignorant person is closer to being a philosopher than a non-virtuous one

23 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 98, 100–101 [my translation].

fully versed in Aristotelian philosophy is in itself surprising. In addition, al-Fārābī claims that this is true even if the first person is virtuous only in the sense that he adheres to the commonly shared norms of virtue. This is explained by the fact that, despite his theoretical knowledge, it is harder for the second person to habituate his soul towards what is good in reality (*mā huwa fī al-ḥaqīqa jamīl*) when his vicious actions are firmly established in him than it is for the virtuous person to acquire theoretical knowledge and philosophical virtue. Clearly, the commonly shared opinions about virtue are sufficiently close to demonstratively based virtue for the former to be conducive to the latter. However, why should the common sense and philosophical ideas of virtue concur to such an extent? For al-Fārābī, this is the case because religious notions of virtue are, or at least should be, derived from philosophical ethics, which is precisely the reason why religion becomes the ideal conduit for pre-philosophical education. In his political philosophy, al-Fārābī defines a "virtuous religion" (*milla fāḍila*) as a religion in which the doctrine and practice are derived from theoretical and practical philosophy, respectively.[24] In particular, the "virtuous laws" (*al-sharā'iʿ al-fāḍila*) are derived from the universals of practical philosophy, that is, the voluntary intelligibles discussed in the previous chapter.

The passage, nevertheless, also shows that pre-philosophical and philosophical virtue are two distinct things for al-Fārābī, despite the fact that religious ethics is ultimately derived from philosophical principles. Even if someone who adheres to religious norms should be considered virtuous, clearly, one who possesses virtue in the philosophical sense is even more virtuous. If both religious and philosophical ethics are derived from the universals of practical philosophy, in what sense are pre-philosophical and philosophical virtue different? The obvious difference is that pre-philosophical virtue is conventional in the sense that it is learned by means of moral education within a religious community. In contrast, philosophical virtue is justified by philosophical arguments. The transition from pre-philosophical to philosophical morality, then, means that the moral agent comes to understand the reasons due to which virtuous actions and dispositions are virtuous. This cannot be the only difference, however. In the passage cited above, acquiring such psychical dispositions that make one prefer what is commonly held to be good will help one later develop dispositions that accord with what is "good in reality." This means that the conventional understanding of the good is in some sense deficient when compared to what is good in reality. The implication is that religious and philosophical virtue constitute two distinct ethical ends.

24 See, in particular, al-Fārābī, "Kitāb al-Milla," § 5, 46–47.

The pluralism of ethical ends is further supported by al-Fārābī's political philosophy. While al-Fārābī's intellectualist understanding of happiness would seem to restrict it only to philosophers, al-Fārābī's philosophy of religion assures that non-philosophers attain a form of happiness employing symbolic representations of philosophical knowledge, that is, religious beliefs derived from philosophical truths.[25] As a result, philosophers and non-philosophers pursue different cognitive ends related to either the theoretical or the imaginative faculty. This means that the seemingly uniform ethical end of happiness diverges into a plurality of ends where each class within the city is oriented towards the perfection or happiness that corresponds to its "degree in humanity."[26] If moral virtue is defined in terms of its instrumental value for the final end, the different cognitive ends should entail different kinds of virtue. In the *Virtuous City*, al-Fārābī states that the psychical dispositions related to the pursuit of happiness are in part class-specific.[27] In the *Aphorisms*, he says that virtue as a balanced (*mu'tadil*) psychical state is relative to not only a particular time and place but also to a particular group (*ṭā'ifa*) of people.[28] What constitutes a virtuous disposition, therefore, cannot be determined universally for all classes of people.

As a result, it is clear that moral virtue for al-Fārābī constitutes a plurality of ethical ends in the sense that 1) the degrees of religious and philosophical virtue are different and 2) virtue is class-specific. Based on this, and since we have seen that al-Fārābī relates the necessity of moral virtue precisely to the end of theoretical perfection, it would seem natural to conclude that virtue for philosophers constitutes a more demanding goal than for the non-philosophers who attain happiness by means of their imaginative faculty. Yet, interpreting al-Fārābī's theory of virtue in terms of moral progression still presents the problem that al-Fārābī explicitly defines the individual virtues as Aristotelian intermediate dispositions. However, when we take a closer look at al-Fārābī's ethical writings as a whole, we find that he only defines moral virtues in terms of Aristotelian moderation in the *Exhortation to the Way to Happiness* and the *Selected Aphorisms*. The first of these is a pre-philosophical work and the second a collection of "aphorisms." In contrast, in the *Virtuous City*, following a passage on contemplative happiness, al-Fārābī does not introduce the Aristotelian doctrine of moderation at all. Instead, he defines virtuous dispositions and actions

25 See, for example, al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 17, §§ 1–2, 278–280.
26 See, for example, al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-sa'āda*, § 49, 81.
27 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 16, § 2, 260–262.
28 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntaza'a*, § 20, 39; § 29, 47.

only in instrumental terms as those that are conducive to happiness.[29] This implies that al-Fārābī, in fact, does not think that the virtues leading to contemplative happiness can be universally defined in terms of mediate dispositions. Rather, it seems to be the case that since moral virtue is both instrumental and class-specific, virtue consists of regulation of desires and emotions in a different sense for a soldier, for example, for whom the irrational faculties are indispensable for fulfilling his function, than for a philosopher. As a result, we may conclude that virtue as Aristotelian moderation serves the political ends of the city, while virtue as the intellect's separation from the body serves the philosophical end of pure contemplation. This results in something like the Neoplatonic grades of political and purificatory virtues, which for the philosopher represent two successive stages of his moral development based on religious morality and philosophical knowledge, respectively.

If this is indeed what al-Fārābī believes, why does he not present the doctrine of a ladder of virtues more explicitly? Perhaps he is not aware of the Neoplatonic doctrine and, therefore, never explicates his ethical theory in its terms. In addition, al-Fārābī's primary focus is on political philosophy and Aristotelian moderation is primarily a political goal. In the *Aphorisms*, al-Fārābī does, nevertheless, make a sharp distinction between the physical and contemplative lives, which doctrine he attributes to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle:

> Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are of the opinion that human beings have two lives. The subsistence of the first is due to nourishment and the external things that we need today for our survival. This is the first life. The other is that in which the subsistence is due to its essence without its requiring for the subsistence of its essence things external to it but it is sufficient in itself for its continued preservation. This is the afterlife (*al-ḥayāt al-akhīra*). For a human being has two perfections, first and last. The last one is attained for us in this life and in the afterlife[30] when it is preceded before by the first perfection in this life of ours. The first perfection is that a human being does the actions of all the virtues, not that he merely possesses virtue without performing its actions, for the perfection consists in his acting, not that he acquires the dispositions (*malakāt*) from which the actions ensue … By means of this perfection, the last per-

29 Al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, ch. 13, § 6, 206. See also similar instrumental definitions of virtue in *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*, v, 64; *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 72–74.

30 See Butterworth, *Alfarabi: The Political Writings*, 25, note 22, for the manuscripts supporting this reading, as opposed to the one chosen by Najjar and by Dunlop in al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl al-Madanī*, 39, where it is rendered: "The last results to us not in this life but in the afterlife."

> fection is attained for us, which is ultimate happiness, that is the absolute good (*al-khayr ʿalā al-iṭlāq*). It is what is preferred and desired for its own sake and not—at any moment at all—preferred for the sake of something else. The rest of what is preferred is preferred only for the sake of its usefulness for attaining happiness, and each thing becomes good when it is useful for attaining happiness. Whatever obstructs it in some way is bad.[31]

Thus, the physical and contemplative lives form two progressive stages where virtuous actions and the Aristotelian "external goods" form part of the first life while they prepare for the attainment of the second life.[32] Since al-Fārābī in the *Aphorisms* defines virtues as Aristotelian intermediate dispositions, we may perhaps conclude that it is virtue in this Aristotelian sense that has value only in the physical life. In contrast, virtue in the second life is defined in terms of what is conducive to contemplative happiness. Even here, al-Fārābī does not state that contemplative happiness requires that bodily desires and emotions should be eradicated altogether. As in the *Virtuous City*, he instead remains completely noncommittal in the question of what kinds of psychical states and actions are conducive to contemplative happiness. Still, based on all of the above, it seems clear that al-Fārābī does endorse the idea of a progression of virtue, where virtue as Aristotelian moderation is connected with the pre-philosophical or religious stage. While the ultimate ethical end of pure incorporeality would seem to entail the identification of moral virtue with liberation from bodily affections to the greatest extent possible, al-Fārābī never says so explicitly.

The final degree of virtue for a philosopher involves transmitting his theoretical and practical knowledge to the larger public. In the *Attainment of Happiness*, al-Fārābī states that the philosopher, insofar as he is truly a philosopher, must convey his theoretical knowledge and practical wisdom to the rest of the people, whether they accept him as their leader or not.[33] In the Platonic context, this means that the philosopher must return to the "cave,"[34] rather than remain in the bubble of solitary contemplation. The political realization

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31 Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntazaʿa*, § 28, 45–46 [my translation].

32 Al-Fārābī employs the terms first and second perfection here differently from their usual technical epistemological sense, for which see chapter 4. Although the first perfection is here also what enables the attainment of the second perfection, identified with happiness, al-Fārābī now defines the first perfection in terms of virtue rather than in epistemological terms.

33 Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, § 57, 92.

34 See O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 185–197, where al-Fārābī's political philosophy is interpreted as an explicated reading of Greek Neoplatonic political thought in an Islamic context.

of virtue can be seen as one more aspect in which the perfect philosopher comes to resemble the incorporeal intellects. Just as the First and the separate intellects overflow their perfection to the existents below them, so does the intellectually and morally perfect human being. In this cosmic context, however, the self-sufficiency of the First and the intellects entails that they cannot act for the sake of the lower beings but their creative activity is instead something additional that follows necessarily from the perfection of their essence.[35] In consequence, the seemingly altruistic concern of the perfect philosopher is, in effect, a necessary consequence of his theoretical perfection, which does not necessarily entail genuine regard for others.

2 Avicenna

We have seen that Avicenna's theory of virtue involves a similar tension that was present in al-Fārābī: Avicenna seems to advocate two contradictory ethical goals. On the one hand, there is virtue as moderation of passions, corresponding to the Platonic-Aristotelian *metriopatheia*. On the other hand, there is virtue as purification of the soul from bodily affections, corresponding to the Stoic-Neoplatonic *apatheia*. While the tension is also present within single treatises, in part, it is one between different works. I have so far presented Avicenna's account of moral virtue based on the *Healing* and some shorter ethical and psychological treatises. This may be called Avicenna's metriopathic account of virtue, of which the *Healing* is the prominent representative. I have until now mostly ignored the *Pointers and Reminders* since it paints a very different picture of virtue, which at first glance does not seem to fit together with the *Healing*. In the following, I will argue that the *Pointers and Reminders* is the prime representative of Avicenna's apathetic account of virtue. Furthermore, as for al-Fārābī, the incoherence of Avicenna's ethics becomes only apparent when it is interpreted in terms of a plurality of virtuous ends. That is, the metriopathic and apathetic accounts should be understood as political-religious and philosophical ends on the one hand and as two successive stages in the moral progression of the philosopher on the other.

It is essential to observe that Avicenna discusses virtue in different contexts, some of which are political-religious. We have seen that Avicenna in the *Healing*, and some other works, defines virtue as an Aristotelian intermediate psychical disposition, even if the framework is otherwise Platonic-

35 Al-Fārābī makes this point in the case of the First in *On the Perfect State*, ch. 2, § 1, 90.

Galenic rather than Aristotelian. In both *De anima*, I.5 and *Metaphysics*, IX.7, Avicenna understands virtue as a state of ascendancy (*istiʿlāʾ*) of the rational part of the soul over the irrational parts, which serves the end of directing reason away from the impulses of the bodily faculties.[36] Even though Avicenna claims this to be a mediate disposition, the end goal of diverting reason from the body sounds more akin to the ethical goal of Neoplatonism than that of the *Republic* or the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Avicenna introduces the Platonic cardinal virtues as mediate dispositions concerning concrete spheres of human activity only in *Metaphysics*, X.5, where the focus is on prophetic legislation as a method of character formation.[37] The context is, then, political-religious in the sense that these are the virtues that the prophetic religion should instill in the populace at large. Avicenna here explicitly associates the mediate dispositions not only with the purificatory end but also with the political ends related to the well-being of the city. The cardinal virtues are purificatory in the sense that they dissociate the rational soul from bodily affections to some extent. However, they also serve non-philosophical ends, such as procreation and military defense, which are necessary for the good of the community.

We have also seen that Avicenna accords religion a central role in the habituation of the soul to virtuous dispositions. Is religious virtue, then, prephilosophical for Avicenna in the sense that it was for al-Fārābī? It has been suggested that Avicenna's reluctance to accord ethics an independent position in his major philosophical works is explained by his contentment with relegating the role of philosophical ethics entirely to religious law,[38] which would mean that there is only religious ethics justified by the rational origin of revelation. Clearly, this is not the case, for Avicenna explicitly accords religious law and philosophical ethics complementary roles in character formation.[39] Religious regulations are beneficial for the purificatory end of submit-

36 Avicenna, *Avicenna's De anima*, I.5, § 13, 46–47; Idem, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, IX.7, §§ 21–22, 354–355. See also the discussions in chapters 7 and 8.

37 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, X.5, §§ 10–11, 377–378.

38 Kaya, "Prophetic Legislation."

39 See, in particular, Avicenna, "Risāla fī al-kalām ʿalā al-nafs al-nāṭiqa," § 8, 197 [translation cited with modifications from Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 71]: "Purification through works is accomplished by methods mentioned in books on ethics and by an assiduous performance of religious duties (*al-waẓāʾif al-sharʿiyya*) and customs (*al-sunan al-milliyya*), such as rites of worship (*ʿibādāt*) relating to the body, property, and a combination of the two. For restrainment to what is required by religious law and its statutes (*marḍiyyāt al-sharʿwa-ḥudūdihi*), and undertaking to submit to its commands, have a beneficial effect on subjugating the soul that incites to the evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi-l-sūʾ*) to

ting the bodily faculties to reason and should, therefore, be employed for this end alongside philosophical ethics. Given that Avicenna motivates the metriopathic doctrine of virtue by primarily political concerns, surely the soldier and the philosopher should have distinct goals as concerns the regulation of their subrational faculties. That is, the philosopher should go further in his pursuit of purely contemplative existence. Since Avicenna, in the final chapters of the *Pointers and Reminders*, addresses virtue in relation to the philosopher, we have an excellent textual basis for assessing whether this is indeed the case.

The account of virtue in the *Pointers and Reminders* is remarkably different from the *Healing* and similar works, not only in its contents but also in its terminology. Avicenna here dispenses with the classical language of virtue ethics altogether and employs religious terms instead. As we have seen, this is also true of the *Pointer*'s discussion of the theoretical end where philosophical terms are translated into religious-mystical concepts. In the *Pointers*, ethical subjects are addressed mainly in the eighth and ninth *namaṭ*s of the second part. The first of these has a direct parallel in *Metaphysics*, X of the *Healing* in that both are concerned with the questions of happiness, the afterlife, and prophetic legislation. However, in the *Pointers*, Avicenna speaks of the necessity of purificatory virtue for the "knowers," that is, the philosophers, in relation to their contemplative end:

> When the knowers (*ʿārifūn*) and unblemished (*mutanazzihūn*) shed of themselves the pollution of the association with the body (*daran muqāranat al-badan*) and become dissociated from its preoccupations (*infakkū ʿan al-shawāghil*), they will reach the world of saintliness and happiness (*ʿālam al-quds wa-l-saʿāda*), the highest perfection will be engraved in them, and they will attain the highest pleasure about which you have already learned. This pleasure is not entirely absent when the soul is in the body. Rather, those who become immersed in reflecting on the divine power (*taʾammul al-jabarūt*) and who abandon bodily preoccupations (*al-muʿriḍūn ʿan al-shawāghil*) achieve, while in the body, an abundant portion of this pleasure, which may take hold of them and distract them from everything else.[40]

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the rational soul which is at peace, that is, making the bodily appetitive and irascible faculties subservient to the rational soul which is at peace."

40 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, VIII.14–15, 32–33 [my translation here and in following passages].

The passage does not mention virtues, as either Aristotelian intermediate dispositions or Platonic cardinal virtues, nor are these concepts introduced elsewhere in the *Pointers*. Nevertheless, the passage is concerned with virtue since virtue for Avicenna means a psychical disposition that is conducive to happiness. Moreover, and in contrast to *Metaphysics*, X.5 of the *Healing*, virtue is here addressed explicitly from the perspective of the philosopher pursuing the contemplative end, excluding any extraneous concerns related to prophetic legislation. In this context, moral virtue signifies the purification of the rational soul from all preoccupations related to the body and its psychical faculties since such a psychical state is what enables complete devotion to contemplative activity. Clearly, Avicenna here understands virtue in terms that resemble Neoplatonic *apatheia* rather than Platonic or Aristotelian *metriopatheia*.

The nature of philosophical virtue is qualified further in the ninth *namaṭ*, "On the stations of the knowers" (*Fī maqāmāt al-ʿārifīn*), which is concerned with the spiritual progression of the philosopher.[41] This chapter has no parallel within the *Healing*. The very first "reminder" (*tanbīh*) attests to the unique moral qualities of the philosopher in terms of his being liberated from bodily concerns:

> In their present lives, the knowers have stations (*maqāmāt*) and ranks (*darajāt*) that pertain only to them to the exclusion of others. It is as if, while being clothed by their bodies, they have shed their bodies, become free from them, and attained the world of saintliness.[42]

In the following two reminders, Avicenna defines an ascetic (*zāhid*) as "one who discards the enjoyments and goods of this world." He states next that while asceticism (*zuhd*) for the "non-knowers," that is, the non-philosophers, means trading worldly for otherworldly enjoyments, for the knower it means refrainment (*tanazzuh*) from everything that distracts his essence (*sirruhu*) from the truth, and consequently disregard (*takabbur*) for everything but the truth.[43] Further on, Avicenna states that in order to attain his contemplative end, the knower needs exercise (*riyāḍa*) for various reasons. The first of these, removal of any preference besides the truth, is directly related to character formation and is attained through what Avicenna now calls "true asceticism" (*al-zuhd al-*

41 See the discussion in chapter 5 for Avicenna's employment of Sufi terminology to characterize the experiential aspect of contemplative happiness.

42 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 4, IX.1, 47.

43 Ibid, IX.2–3, 57–59.

ḥaqīqī).[44] If the knower persists in these exercises, he will gradually become more completely absorbed with the truth. The knower's moral and intellectual progression culminates in the stage of "arrival" (*wuṣūl*) where preoccupation with anything but the truth is a distraction (*shughl*) and relying on what pertains to the animal soul is a weakness (*ʿajz*).[45]

As a result, only contemplative activity possesses intrinsic value, since it is the activity corresponding to the human soul's essence. Subrational interests should be abolished insofar they distract the human being from his contemplative activity. Therefore, ascetic practice is for Avicenna a necessary method that enables the philosopher to direct his appetites entirely to the contemplative end that corresponds to the perfection of the human soul's rational essence. Nevertheless, it is also clear that asceticism is not an end in itself, and the necessity of asceticism as a method of character training does not mean that the accomplished philosopher should see no value in this world, or even that he should necessarily lead an ascetic life at all:

> The knowers may differ in their aspirations (*himam*) according to their different thoughts (*khawāṭir*) that are based on their different motivating concerns (*dawāʿī al-ʿibar*). Misery (*qashaf*) may seem equal to luxury (*taraf*) for the knower, or he may prefer misery. Similarly, bad and good odor may seem equal to him, or he may prefer bad odor. This is so when the concern in his mind (*al-hājis bi-bālihi*) is such that it disdains everything but the truth. He may incline toward ornaments (*zīna*) and love the best of each genus, or hate deficiency and worthlessness. This is so when he considers his habits as being accompanied by external states (*yaʿtabir ʿādatahu min ṣuḥbat al-aḥwāl al-ẓāhira*). For he seeks beauty (*bahāʾ*) in everything, because it is excellence favored by the First Providence (*maziyyat ḥaẓwa min al-ʿināya al-ūlā*) and closer to that toward which his inclination is turned. All of this may differ between knowers and may differ in one knower from one time to another.[46]

It should be noted that the reference here is to a philosopher who has already reached his moral and theoretical end. In contrast, the previous passages about the necessity of ascetic practice related to someone who is still training to become a philosopher. Accordingly, the fully accomplished philosopher no longer needs asceticism as such since his psychical dispositions are already

44 Ibid, IX.8, 78–80.
45 Ibid, IX.18, 94.
46 Ibid, IX.25, 107–108.

developed in a way that directs his desires exclusively to the contemplative end. Therefore, while he sees little value in anything besides the contemplative truth, he may still appreciate the value of material things insofar as they reflect the absolute beauty. Thus, he may prefer the most perfect specimens within each genus since they best reflect the perfection of the First within that genus. He may similarly choose to lead a luxurious life or prefer an ascetic life. It is precisely because he has developed psychical dispositions that make his attitude towards external goods one of complete ambivalence that he may choose or reject them equally.

Thus, the picture of moral virtue in the *Pointers* is utterly different from that of the *Healing* and the other works discussed previously. Avicenna here omits the traditional terminology of virtue ethics, as well as the classical lists of virtues of Platonic or Aristotelian origin. Virtue is discussed only implicitly as regards the training of the subrational faculties of the human soul towards the ultimate end of the purely contemplative life. Most remarkably, any notion of moral virtue as moderation of passions and appetites is entirely absent. Instead, moral virtue as the goal of character formation is a psychical state that corresponds to Neoplatonic *apatheia*, where reason is wholly liberated from desires directed towards non-contemplative ends. Here, Avicenna is discussing virtue as it relates to the contemplative end of the philosopher, whereas when he introduced the cardinal virtues in the *Healing*, the context was the good of the religious community as a whole. Therefore, the conclusion is that virtue as Aristotelian moderation is for Avicenna a political-religious end, whereas virtue as purification of the soul is a philosophical end. Given that Avicenna emphasizes the necessity of both religious and philosophical means for character formation, a further conclusion is that for the philosopher, these constitute two successive stages within his moral progression. That is, the religious ordinances represent only the first step in the process of redirecting desires from those that follow the bodily affections towards those that correspond to the intellectual essence.

Finally, in further passages of the ninth *namaṭ*, Avicenna explains more precisely what he understands moral virtue to mean at its highest philosophical-contemplative level:

> The knower is cheerful (*hashsh*), joyful (*bashsh*), and smiling. Due to his modesty (*tawāḍuʿ*), he honors (*yubajjil*) the humble man (*ṣaghīr*) as he honors the noble (*kabīr*), and he is as delighted (*yanbasiṭ*) with the destitute (*khāmil*) as he is with the eminent (*nabīh*). How could he not be cheerful when he is delighted (*farḥān*) with the truth, and with every other thing, for he sees the truth in it? How could he not treat every-

one as equal when everyone is equal to him, objects of compassion (*ahl al-raḥma*) who have occupied themselves with falsehoods (*qad shughilū bi-l-bāṭil*)?[47]

The knower is not concerned with prying into affairs of others (*al-tajassus wa-l-taḥassus*), nor is he lured to anger at observing reprehensible actions (*munkar*), the way compassion seizes him, for he discerns (*mustabṣir*) God's secrets in destiny (*qadar*). If he bids good actions (*amara bi-l-maʿrūf*), he does so with gentle advice (*bi-rifq nāṣiḥ*), not with harsh reproach (*bi-ʿunf muʿayyir*). If he exaggerates the good deeds (*jassama al-maʿrūf*), it may be because he wishes to guard them against those who have not adopted them (*rubbamā ghāra ʿalayhi min ghayr ahlihi*).[48]

The knower is courageous (*shujāʿ*). How could he not be when he is free from the fear of death (*bi-maʿzil ʿan taqiyyat al-mawt*)? He is generous (*jawād*). How could he not be when he is free from the love of falsehood (*maḥabbat al-bāṭil*)? He is forgiving of offenses (*ṣaffāḥ li-l-dhunūb*). How could he not be when his soul is beyond being injured by human beings (*nafsuhu akbar min an tajraḥahā dhāt bashar*)? He is forgetful of rancor (*nassāʾ al-aḥqād*). How could he not be when his memory is preoccupied with the truth (*dhikruhu mashghūl bi-l-ḥaqq*)?[49]

These passages, first, mention several concrete virtuous character traits that pertain to the philosopher entirely devoted to contemplation: modesty, courage, treating people as equals, discretion, lack of anger, compassion, gentleness, courage, generosity, forgiveness, and lack of rancor. Partly coinciding with the more comprehensive lists in Avicenna's concise ethical treatises,[50] these are religious virtues with no apparent connection with the Platonic or Aristotelian lists of virtues. It is clear that these virtues are not the result of moderating appetites and emotions into intermediate dispositions but instead of complete preoccupation with contemplative activity and consequent disinterest in subrational activities. That is, the knower possesses these virtues because his desires are directed exclusively upwards towards the contemplative good.

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47 Ibid, IX.21, 101. This passage may be compared with Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.4.12, even if this treatise is not included in the Arabic rendering of the *Enneads* [translation by Armstrong]: "The good man (*ho spoudaios*) is always happy, his state is tranquil, his disposition contented and undisturbed by any so-called evils if he is really good. If anyone looks for any other kind of pleasure in the life of virtue, it is not the life of virtue he is looking for."

48 Ibid, IX.23, 104–105.

49 Ibid, IX.24, 106.

50 See chapter 8.

Therefore, he attributes no value to things that are lower in comparison. Consequently, he is courageous because liberated from attachments to bodily life, he is not afraid of death. The philosophical virtues are, then, apathetic in the sense that they arise out of the complete elimination of worldly desires. Second, the passages also show that philosophical virtues are not apathetic in the sense that they would entail the elimination of all emotions but only of negative emotions, such as anger and rancor. Thus, the philosopher is joyful in his contemplation of the truth, consonant with Avicenna's claim, discussed previously, that contemplative pleasure constitutes the highest pleasure, and he feels compassion towards his less fortunate fellow-beings.

In consequence, as for the Greek Neoplatonists, complete philosophical virtue perhaps somewhat surprisingly culminates in altruism. The goal of becoming an incorporeal intellect advocated by Avicenna at first glance appears to be centered entirely on the moral agent's relation with himself. Nevertheless, it has repercussions for his relations with others. Again, this is partly the result of the knower's detachment from worldly ends. He treats all people equally because they are all equal to him in their pursuit of false ends. He is generous because worldly goods are of no value to him. He is forgiving because human beings cannot offend him in a way that would affect him. In part, his compassionate attitude towards human failings seems to arise out of his awareness of the "bigger picture." That is, even things that initially seem evil ultimately may serve a purpose in divine providence. In both aspects, then, it seems less to be the case that the knower's other-regard is motivated by his genuine interest in the well-being of others and more that it is an accidental consequence of contemplative perfection.

Again, as for the Greek Neoplatonists, the position that Avicenna assigns to altruism is firmly founded on the metaphysical basis of his ethics.[51] In the metaphysical part of the *Healing*, Avicenna raises the question of other-regarding goodness (*jūd*), or beneficence, in a chapter devoted to the ontological priority of the final cause (*ghāya*/*ʿilla ghāʾiyya*).[52] As we have seen, for a given species of existents, its final cause, the perfection of existence, and goodness are synonymous terms. Avicenna now states that beneficence and goodness are relational terms in that the same thing constitutes beneficence for the agent (*fāʿil*) from which it proceeds, insofar as it is not affected by it, and goodness

51 For the metaphysical basis of altruism in Plotinus, see Remes, "Plotinus's Ethics of Disinterested Interest," 11–13.

52 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, VI.5. See also *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, VI.5, 125–127.

for the patient (*mafʿūl*) that is perfected by it.[53] Avicenna next defines beneficence as the "giver's bestowal of a benefit to another without deriving compensation in return."[54] He emphasizes further that, contrary to popular belief, gratitude, praise, and fame are also forms of recompense. Therefore, an agent cannot be considered beneficent if he receives even such forms of immaterial recompense in return.[55] The primary reference is clearly to the First, and by extension to the separate intellects, for whom goodness consists of perfect contemplative activity corresponding to their essence, from which the downward directed creative activity overflows as a consequence. Thus, beneficence is not an end for their activity but its consequence.[56] That is, the First is beneficent because He is good but He is not good because He is beneficent. By the same principle, the perfected human essence should overflow its goodness to others without this altruistic activity forming part of its *telos*, which is contemplative happiness. The goodness of the perfected philosopher, then, is defined entirely in terms of the internal relations within himself. However, its consequence is other-regarding goodness that overflows from his perfected essence to his fellow human beings.

53 Ibid, VI.5, § 39, 231.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid, §§ 40–42, 231–232.

56 Ibid, §§ 42–46, 232–233. See also Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 3, VI.5, 127: "Hence, the truly generous (*al-jawwād al-ḥaqq*) is the one from whom benefits flow (*tafīḍ minhu al-fawāʾid*), but not due to his desire of nor intended search for something that will come back to him."

Conclusions

This book aimed to offer a systematic overview of the ethical thought of al-Fārābī and Avicenna. To accomplish this end, I presented three main arguments: 1) the ethical thought of the two authors is not derivative of the classical sources in any straightforward sense, 2) their ethics is founded on theoretical philosophy, and 3) their ethical writings together constitute an ethical theory, which is both systematic and coherent. It is now possible to weave together the different threads of the concepts of happiness and virtue discussed in the previous chapters and assess the three claims from a more holistic perspective. I will approach this through four specific questions. First, in which precise ways do the different aspects of the ethical thought of the two authors draw on specific classical sources? Second, in which sense does their ethics depend on theoretical philosophy? Third, what is the overall structure of their ethics, and to what extent are they successful in formulating a complete and coherent ethical theory? Fourth, given the very similar forms of their ethical theories, what are the most essential differences in their ethics and to what extent is Avicenna indebted to al-Fārābī?

As for the first question, this book has shown that, like Arabic philosophers in general, both al-Fārābī and Avicenna build their ethical thought on a complex combination of classical sources. The basis of their concept of happiness is Aristotelian. They draw on the *Nicomachean Ethics* in their initial understanding of the concept, the function argument, and account of pleasure, of which the final aspect is complemented by the divine pleasure described in the *Metaphysics*. Their understanding of happiness as regards its intellectualist content is both Aristotelian and Neoplatonic. The definition of happiness in terms of perfection is initially based on the concept of second entelechy in Aristotle's *De anima*. However, the term perfection itself is modified in essential respects by its late ancient fusion with a metaphysical sense of perfection and identification with the final cause. The introduction of the cosmological aspect also draws on Neoplatonism: happiness becomes identical with a contact between the human and cosmic intellects and the human soul's ontological ascent to a degree close to the incorporeal intellects. Finally, the eschatological aspect of happiness appears as a philosophical explanation of the Quranic account of paradise ultimately inspired by Platonic and Neoplatonic treatises, or perhaps more immediately by the eschatological interpretations that the previous generations of Arabic philosophers had presented.

Thus, the classical sources of the concept of happiness are essentially the same for the two authors. In contrast, in their theories of virtue, they draw on

different sources. In Arabic virtue ethics, the Platonic and Aristotelian accounts of virtue exist side-by-side or even as merged together. As regards the individual virtues, al-Fārābī follows the Aristotelian account. Avicenna adopts the Platonic cardinal virtues but complements them by the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean, as well as the Galenic definition of virtue as a dominant disposition which practical reason obtains with regard to the bodily faculties. Both authors, nevertheless, commit to the Aristotelian ideal of moderation at the level of their explicit discussions of virtue. However, since they define the human end, to which virtue bears an instrumental relation, in entirely intellectualist terms, they also advocate a second ideal of virtue. This is identified with the human intellect's separation from the body and its affections and corresponds to Plato's *Phaedo* and Neoplatonism. This is the case even though neither of them attributes derogatory terms to the body and the sensible world. However, in contrast to al-Fārābī, Avicenna does at times resort to the Platonic language of purity of the soul and divinization to describe the human ethical end.

The second question concerns the theoretical basis of ethics. Both al-Fārābī and Avicenna also discuss happiness and virtue in treatises and contexts that are purely ethical. However, I have argued that these discussions represent a superficial level of their ethics. The underlying structure is based on theoretical philosophy. In their major works, both authors address happiness and virtue in non-ethical sections. Thus, their ethical theory is ultimately grounded in metaphysics, cosmology, and philosophical psychology. It is founded on metaphysics because value concepts have a metaphysical basis. Both al-Fārābī and Avicenna accord the term perfection, understood as complete actuality, normative contents. The former identifies it with virtue and the latter with goodness. In consequence, the human good consists of the complete actuality of the potential inherent in the human species. The cosmic hierarchy of existents constitutes a descending hierarchy of perfection from the first principle downwards and thus also a hierarchy of goodness. Therefore, cosmology determines the position of the human good with respect to the cosmic hierarchy of goodness, pinpointing it at the degree immediately below that of the agent intellect. Psychology determines the precise nature of the human good by showing that the perfection of the theoretical intellect is the final and self-sufficient end for the rest of the psychical faculties and thus identical with the perfection of the human species. Since happiness is the foundational ethical concept, whereas virtue is defined in instrumental terms, the ethical system as a whole is founded on theoretical philosophy.

The third question regards the structure and coherence of the ethical thought of the two authors. When their ethics is set in the context of theoret-

ical philosophy, the result is a systematic ethical theory of eudaimonist virtue ethics. In its large-scale structure, the basis for all value lies in the concept of happiness defined as the final end for human activities. Virtuous acts and dispositions constitute a necessary but instrumental precondition for happiness. The theory is systematic because both authors argue from a thin concept of happiness to a thick concept filled with content based on the Aristotelian arguments on pleasure and the human function. Since the human function is, in the end, determined by various branches of theoretical philosophy, which for the two authors constitute demonstrative knowledge, the main contours of the ethical theory are presumably demonstratively true. This large-scale structure is completed by aspects that concern a particular moral agent acting in the real world: the lists of individual virtues, methods for habituation to virtue, the nature of moral deliberation, the epistemological basis of morality, and the political-religious context in which most people ultimately attain happiness and virtue.

The main problem with the consistency of this ethical theory is that it seems to involve two contradictory ethical ideals: the contemplative end implies that virtue as its instrument consists of the intellect's separation from bodily affections, whereas both authors, nevertheless, define virtue in terms of Aristotelian moderation. Textual grounds and the Greek Neoplatonic precedent, however, justify a solution that resolves the apparent contradiction by introducing the ideas of moral progression and different constituencies in the application of virtue. In the end, the metriopathic notion of virtue does not represent a universal ethical ideal for either author. Instead, in analogy with the political virtues of Greek Neoplatonists, Aristotelian moderation corresponds to the level of virtue embodied in religious law, which applies to all people equally. For the philosophers, the contemplative end entails a further degree of separation from the body.

The fourth question concerns the differences between the ethical thought of the two authors. In this book, I have presented them as proceeding more or less in tandem in their ethics. I believe that this is justified because their ethical theories, in fact, do have an identical structure. Both authors subscribe to the eudaimonist approach to ethics where the concept of happiness constitutes the foundational ethical concept. Avicenna adopts the general contours of al-Fārābī's metaphysical, cosmological, and psychological theories, and, for both authors, the concept of happiness is essentially a corollary of these parts of theoretical philosophy. In consequence, it is not particularly surprising that their ethical theories would be similar as concerns the general structure. However, it is also true that the two authors approach the subjects of happiness and virtue in rather different ways in their writings.

It seems clear that al-Fārābī had a significant impact on Avicenna's ethical thought, as he did in many other areas of philosophy. Some of Avicenna's concise ethical treatises manifest direct textual dependence on al-Fārābī's ethical writings. Beyond the general structure of the ethical theory, Avicenna also seems to draw on al-Fārābī in some particular questions. As regards the doctrine of pleasure, Avicenna expands and systematizes the account of his predecessor. The result is a more systematic argument for contemplative happiness based on pleasure than was present in al-Fārābī. This is also true of the metaphysical basis of goodness, which remains somewhat implicit in al-Fārābī's writings but Avicenna makes explicit.

However, it is also the case that the ethical thought of al-Fārābī and Avicenna is not identical. By applying the same thematic structure to both authors, to some extent, I have forced Avicenna to follow a conceptual analysis that perhaps best applies to al-Fārābī. Despite the similarities, the two authors often approach ethics in quite different ways. First, for al-Fārābī, the primary context of ethics is political philosophy, whereas for Avicenna, it is the question of the afterlife. Second, while al-Fārābī, in some of his introductory works, presents an elaborate function argument for the contemplative nature of happiness, Avicenna never does this systematically in an ethical context. Third, Avicenna's ethical thought is somewhat more Platonically inclined than al-Fārābī's. This is the case both in the obvious sense that he employs the Platonic division of virtues and in the deeper sense that he adopts some Platonic themes that identify virtue with purity and divinization. However, these aspects may be considered details, while it is still the case that the two authors share a eudaimonist ethical system with an essentially identical structure.

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