

3. What's Art Got to Do with Happiness in Farabian Utopia

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Abstract:

Farabi has put the artists on the second level of his utopia seeing them as 'the carrier of the task of religion'. The first level, of course, belongs to God's prophet and his successors. This might seem, at first, as some sort of religious mumbo-jumbo but with some speculation on the age Farabi was living in, one could see that it is a rarity for artists to be such noteworthy entities in a philosopher's utopia. This philosopher, of course, is deeply influenced by Greek philosophy, as it was the case for Islamic philosophy before Abu-Hamid Al-Ghazali shattered it into pieces. The level of importance that Farabi imagines for the artists is hardly traceable in Greek philosophy or any other philosophy before him. This importance, however, comes at a price. The artist has a task like that of the prophets. In the prophet's case, the angel of revelation bestows the rational concepts to his rational faculty and then to his imaginative faculty. The majority of people are not able to obtain rational happiness through reasoning because they are not used to implement their rational faculty. So the prophet, who is well aware of the truth, conveys the truth to peoples' imagination through allegories and examples. The artist too, in Farabi's eyes, is a person who can transfer rational happiness to the minds of the masses through sensible and imaginative forms.

Keywords:

Farabi, Imagination, Art, Happiness, Public, Utopia

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Artists in Utopia

Is it problematic to use the word 'Art' when we speak of Farabi's philosophy? If it is possible to use the word, what does it consist of? Who is its audience? Is it mass audience or is it the elite? When Farabi talks about five levels of his utopia, he puts poets, musicians, singers, painters 'and likes of them' on the second rank. Interestingly the clerics and missionaries are on the same level which comes right after the first level that belongs to the prophet or his righteous successor as the head of the state (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1961; Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2004, Page No.54-55). So, another question is that what does Farabi expect from singers or painters that puts them on such a high-ranking level? First, we would talk about the problematics of the word 'Art' and then we need to explore Farabi's theory of prophecy and revelation and his theory of imagination so that we can understand what he sees as the process of artistic creation and its relationship with the public.

Farabi frequently refers to fields that in modern sense we clearly assume as artistic occupations. When he is making a clarification on who are exactly the inhabitants of the second level of his utopia, he simply names poets, writers, musicians, singers and so on (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1998, Page No. 55), (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2004, Page No. 559), (Maftouni, N., 2014, Page No. 167-168). That's an important point about Farabi since his succeeding philosophers have rarely mentioned the arts so specifically. But is it easy to get away with using the word 'Art' about Farabi's discourse? Farabi sees these occupations in an intermediary position. They are below the prophet and above engineers, astrologists, technicians and so on. This makes sense when we realize that he expects the poets and singers to receive the rational truth from the prophet, and make it sensible by using allegories and parables and transfer them to the people whose minds are naturally weaker than having the ability to receive the intelligible concepts directly. So an artistic product should be beneficial and practical. We must be aware that this is somehow in contrast with

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the modern day understanding of art which has been shaped mainly in the Post-Kantian sense of 'art for art's sake'.

Definitions and Objectives of Farabian Art

Farabi has written some definitions for poetics which could be read as definitions for art and his words show that he believes in the magic of art per se, then he talks about its usefulness: "Poetics are words that arouse some feelings in the audience, or demonstrate something in a higher position or a lower place that it is in reality. It happens with the description of beauty, ugliness, glory, shame and so on. When we listen to a poem we conceive a feeling similar to that which we perceive when we look at [for instance] a disgusting thing" (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2002, Page No. 66-67). Farabi in this definition underlines two points: Stimulation of the feelings and producing powerful images.

In numerous parts of his *The Grand Book of Music* (Al-Musiqi Al-Kabir) he talks about songs and melodies and classifies them in three types:

1. Those which cause comfort and joy in the soul and have no more use.
2. Those which, in addition to the above mentioned, create images and imaginations in the soul.
3. Those produced by a person affected by agony and ecstasy.

This classification of comforting, imaginative and passive is repeated further in the book. (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1998, Page No. 19-20)

Farabi additionally discusses the intentions of those who produce songs and melodies:

1. Some sing a melody to find comfort and joy and avoid the feeling of fatigue and ignore the passing of time.
2. Some try to reinforce an active or passive feeling or suppress it.
3. Some use a melody to make a statement more comprehensible and more imaginative. (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1998, Page No.24)

Farabi underlines that many melodies share more than one intention (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1998, Page no.554-555). He also focuses on visual arts and classifies paintings and statues into two types:

1. Less advantageous: which merely intend to entertain.
2. Advantageous: which, in addition to entertainment, create imaginations and feelings in the soul and, through this process, convey some meanings. (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1998, Page No.559)

The word which was in use in Arabic and Persian for artistic occupations was 'Sana'at' which is close in meaning to 'craft'. In *The Grand Book of Music*, he classifies music to 'the craft of practical music' and 'the craft of theoretical music' and then he offers a definition for craft or art: "Taste and talent accompanied with the rational element." (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1998, Page No.13) Some researchers on the etymology of Sana'at show that this word, chosen as an Arabic translation for the Greek τέχνη, contains a positive perspective to craft. Farabi mentions that taste could work based on righteous imaginations in the soul or based on falsified imaginations (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1998, Page No.13). Here we can clearly see the similarities between the prophet and the artist in Farabi's thought. When he talks about wicked or righteous contents and about mere entertainment or conveying meanings, he is considering the audience. The prophet and the artist both deal with the mass audience, and a befitting artist in this view is one who simplifies the intelligible truth and transfers it to the audience.

Prophecy for Happiness

Farabi's theory on prophecy (in the sense that Noah, Joseph, Moses, Salomon, Jesus, Mohamed, etc. are called prophets or 'Nabi' in Islam) is based on his views about the functions of imaginative faculty. Some have marked out the importance of Farabi's view on imagination because of its relevance to revelation and prophecy (Black, 1996, 315). Farabi used his theory of imagination to explain the revelation in two aspects: First, receiving the revelation from the active intellect (i.e. the angel of revelation; Gabriel in the case of Islam) and second, transferring it to people. After Farabi, the first aspect was the subject of interest

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for the upcoming philosophers, but the second aspect was neglected. It is a disappointing negligence while this aspect could define the first one and help understanding Farabi's theory of art.

In the case of revelation, Farabi believes that a prophet is a person who has walked the path of perfection and is connected to the active intellect (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2003, Page No.115) and his imaginative faculty too has reached perfection (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2003, Page No.110). Whatever bestowed from God to the active intellect reaches the prophet's rational faculty and then it reaches his imaginative faculty (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2003, Page No.121). The imaginative faculty of the prophet has the utmost power. This power makes the exterior sensible objects less effective in occupying his imaginative faculty. This faculty isn't entirely submissive to the rational faculty either. This means that at the same time that the imaginative faculty is busy with the rational faculty and the sensible objects, it still has a vast empty space and an immense power which leaves room for its own purposes. Such a person's imaginative faculty is similar to that of the ordinary people while they are asleep. While sleeping, people's imaginative faculty is free from their rational faculty and the sensible objects (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2003, Page No.110).

So what is the role of the imaginative faculty in this theory? Why wasn't Farabi satisfied with the rational faculty alone receiving all the rational concepts from the active intellect?

One reason could be the role of imaginative faculty in defining the details in the revealed concepts. The allegories and aphorisms which are meant to present the meaning of rational concepts cannot be perceived without the presence of imaginative faculty. But it seems that the main reason Farabi had for entering the imaginative faculty in defining the prophecy is that essentially the prophet's role is transferring the message of God to people. Basically, the prophet is a person sent by the divine entity to the masses, so the masses are supposed to conceive the message of the divine entity. On one hand, Farabi sees happiness in obtaining the rational happiness. But the masses are unable to conceive the rational concepts and these concepts must be transferred to them through allegories and examples, that is to say, through an imaginable form. For instance, when it is said that 'a humble learner would soon conceive much knowledge like a low-level land would attract all the water' a mere analogy is used to make a meaning comprehensible (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2005,

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Page No.70-71). Based on this, the revelation could be defined as the descent of the rational concept to the imaginative faculty. Such a process would later be analyzed in the process of artistic creation.

Imagination vs. Art for Happiness

Farabi divides perceptual faculties of the soul into three divisions: sensory, imaginative and rational. He, then, counts three functions for the imaginative faculty:

1. Saving the forms received by the senses after the senses lose touch with them (i.e. keeping one's image in mind after the eyes are closed).
2. Composition and decomposition of these forms. Sometimes the result is in accordance with reality and sometimes not (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2003, Page No.84, 95). For instance, it attaches the wings of a bird to a man and creates a flying man.
3. Imagery or Image-making.

It is only the imaginative faculty, from among the soul's various faculties, that has the ability of image-making based on sensible objects or rational ideas. It even has the power of producing images for the most non-tangible inexplicable rational ideas like God himself and his angels (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2003, Page No.106-107).

Farabi believes that the imagination and the thought are two producers of art. As we mentioned, he sees a connection between the imaginative faculty and the rational faculty. He believes that the imaginative faculty has the ability to convey rational concepts using sensible forms. The final goal of the rulers of the utopia is helping the public in obtaining the rational happiness (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1984, Page No.31). But the masses are less used to implement their rational faculty. So the rational happiness should be displayed to their imagination. It can thus be said that a person who creates such an artwork, should have a rational dimension besides his imagination. These two factors display the public's role in Farabi's theory of art. Therefore, an artist is a person with the ability to make images of the rational happiness using sensible and imaginative forms to make it comprehensible for the masses.

The importance of the public's role in Farabi's theory of art could be understood in the distinction that he sees between art as it is and art as it should be. Art as it is regarded to the present forms of art. When he speaks of music, he divides it as 'music based on truthful imagination' and 'music based on falsified imagination'. He emphasizes that 'the art of music' as a term is better employed in the first type (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1998, Page No.13). This, in part, shows the role of audience as a group who are going to face some imaginations with different sources of inspiration. He also divides poems, songs and melodies into six types, three of which are advantageous and the other three are disadvantageous. First advantageous type of art is one that tends to correct the thought of its audience and drive the mind towards happiness. Farabi describes this type, which he sees the most excellent type, as follows: "From the three advantageous types of art, there is one by which man's reasoning is improved and all his efforts and thoughts are made stronger in the path of acquiring happiness. This type of rhythmic and imaginary words is about conveying divine thoughts, goodness and development of true virtues, and tries to suppress evil, imperfection and villainy." (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2004, Page No.53). In fact, Farabi sees art as a practical means for the happiness of society and guidance of the public towards moral virtues. He sees the second advantageous type as one which tends to moderate the excessive feelings of the soul. Anger, venerability, egotism, bravery, fraternity, magnanimity, authority and avidity are some of the conditions that can be used in obtaining good or evil and the second type of art tames these feelings for effective use. The third type tends to fortify the neglectful moods of the soul. It tries for the betterment of weakness and slothfulness and tends to moderate feelings of fear, tenderness, sorrow, indolence and softness and use them for acquiring goodness. Farabi doesn't describe the three disadvantageous types and simply mentions that they are on the exact opposite side of the advantageous types and tend to disturb the balance in the soul and push it towards the extremities. At the end of this topic, he stresses that these types are not merely for poems but can be extended to songs, tunes and melodies. (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2004, Page No.53-54)

This classification, again, exposes Farabi's view on arts as a medium for transmission of rational concepts. It is a key force for helping the public in gaining the rational happiness, and if it is not used in that way, it would be a practical means for provocation of vices. The public would only accept the happiness in imaginary forms and it is hard for them to accept

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the rational happiness which is the true happiness (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1997, Page No.225). So the rational happiness is presented to them by its parables and allegories; in other words, it is not the happiness that they perceive, but it is what makes their minds close to happiness. For instance, some degrees of existence which are free of space and time are hard to imagine for people and it is inevitable to make time-and-space-bound allegories to make them understand those degrees (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2005, Page No.70-71). The head of the utopia, despite being intimate with reasoning and arguments, uses tangible allegories and examples for the masses and persuades them by employing their imagination (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1991), (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 2005, Page No.79), (Al-Fārābī, A. N. M., 1986, Page No.152).

Conclusion

Imagination and thought are two producers of art. The imaginative faculty can make images of the rational happiness using sensible and imaginary forms. The goal of the prophets and the heads of the utopia is helping the public in acquiring the rational happiness. The public is not used to implement their rational faculty and they cannot perceive the rational happiness directly. So the rational happiness should be presented to their imagination. It can thus be said that the artist of the utopia makes images of the rational happiness using sensible and imaginary forms.

Advantageous art, according to Farabi, is that which tends to author divine thoughts and deeds and tries to develop moderate feelings. He sees imagination as the key factor in the establishment of the above-mentioned. An artist is a person who undertakes this role and the ultimate purpose of the formation of divine thoughts and deeds and feelings is nothing but acquiring the rational happiness.

The head of the utopia is like an artist of the utopia and has the same ability to persuade the public by implementing their imagination.

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