

## Farabi's Perspective on Global Peace

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### ABSTRACT

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Does it sound plausible to obtain a strategy for global peace in Farabi's political philosophy? Put another way, could we procure a common language leading to peace among all cultures and religions, according to Farabi? Farabi's utopia (al-madīnat al-fāḍila), literally meaning 'the excellent state', consists of five levels. On the first level stands the philosopher (fīlsūf) or the prophet (nabī). The second level includes poets (shu'arā), music composers (mulaḥḥinūn), writers (kuttāb) and the likes. Farabi strongly believes in the power of imagination (khīyāl) and that most people are under the influence of their imaginative faculty (al-quwwat al-mutakhayyila). This faculty has an important outcome which influences his view on religion (milla), prophet, and their relation with the public (jumhūr): imagination, in his view, is the most powerful tool of influencing the public. Regarding this principle, it could be concluded that there is a shared function between the poet and the prophet. Farabi theory of peace may well be identified, based on the shared function between the poet and the prophet. In other words, for Farabi rational truth and rational happiness is fixed and one, having only one denotation, while its connotations, that is, sensory images and imagery forms are more than one—possibly many more. That being the case, various and sundry cultures and religions might well have different ways to pursue the same knowledge, truth, and contentment.

#### Keywords:

Farabi, culture, global peace,  
imagination, utopia.

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## Introduction

Can we conceive a strategy for peace in Farabi's utopia? Put another way, may we obtain a global peace language among all cultures and religions of his utopia? As a first cut to answering the question, we need to drive at Farabi's utopia.

Farabi's utopia (al-madīnat al-fāḍila), literally meaning 'the excellent State', consists of five levels. On the first level stands the philosopher (fīlsūf) or the prophet (nabī). The second level includes poets (shu'arā), music composers (mulaḥḥinūn), writers (kuttāb) and "the likes of them" (Farabi, 2004: 54-55). Why does Farabi put poets and writers right after the prophet and the true philosopher? Why does he name them as "carriers of religion" (ḥamalāt al-dīn)?

Some contemporary studies have focused on Farabi's poetics, analyzing his logical writings on the subject (Kemal, 1991) while more recent studies have marked out the notability of artists in Farabi's utopia from a philosophical perspective (Maftouni, 2007). Both approaches have speculated, to some extent, the process of mimesis (muḥākā) and how it could be used to affect the audience, having overlooked a general axiom in Farabi's philosophy: imagination. Farabi strongly believes in the power of imagination (khīyāl), estimating most people are under the influence of their imaginative faculty (al-quwwat al-mutakhayyila). This notion has an important outcome which influences his view on religion (milla), prophet, and their relation with the public (jumhūr): Images, in his view, are the most powerful means of influencing the public. Regarding this principle, it could be concluded that there is a shared function between the poet and the prophet. In other words, Farabi's prophet performs, in part, a poetic task. An examination of Farabi's utopia is essential in deriving such a conclusion.

## Levels of Utopia

Farabi's hierarchical structure for his utopia consists of five ranks, first of which belongs to the head of state who is primarily the philosopher or the prophet. But who is the prophet and what is the religion? In some instances, Farabi has spoken of the philosopher and the sage (ḥakīm) as the head of utopia without mentioning the prophet (Farabi, 2004: 55). What view leads him to use these ascriptions alternatively? How does he define philosopher and prophet? What is the relation between them? and how are they linked to the second rank? How these questions relate to the power of images?

On different occasions, Farabi introduces the highest position in utopia to be the philosopher or the prophet or the lawmaker (wāḍe' al-nawāmīs) (Farabi, 2003: 121; 2005: 92; see also: Nuri 2019: 92). These are three characteristics of the same entity. Philosopher, in effect, is who considers the notion of achieving the intellectual truth (al-ḥaqā'eq al-aqlīyya) from the active intellect (al-aql al-fā'āl) (Farabi, 2003: 121). He will be a prophet when he translates the intellectual concepts into words understandable for the public (Farabi, 2003: 121) and the laws (nawāmīs) he designs to set rules for the society makes him the lawmaker (Farabi, 2005: 92). The second rank of Farabi's utopia is not limited to poets but includes music composers and writers near the orators (khubatā)

and preachers (bulaghā). Describing them all as “carriers of religion”, he leaves room for similar fields by adding “and all those who are in the same pattern and are counted among them” (Farabi, 2004: 54). The third rank consists of those who deal with calculation and measurement (muqaddirūn) like architects and physicians. The fourth rank includes strivers (mujāhidūn) like fighters and guards. And the last rank belongs to those who deal with capital (mālīyyūn) like merchants, businessmen, farmers and peasants (Farabi, 2004: 54-55). There should be close ties between the first two ranks of the utopia since the first belongs to the prophet and the second to the carriers of religion. But what point defines the relation between these two ranks? How does the second rank carry the religion defined by the first rank? An examination of Farabi’s regard to poetics and how he describes the capabilities of, not only poets, but music composers, sculptors and painters whom henceforward we loosely call artists, would benefit the understanding of the first rank of utopia and its relation to poetics.

### Perceptual Faculties of the Soul

Farabi introduces the concept of perceptual faculties which should be regarded as a prerequisite to further topics. According to him, there are three perceptual faculties in the soul: the sensory faculty (al-quwwat al-hāssa), the imaginative faculty and the intellectual faculty (al-quwwat al-nātiqa). The sensory faculty is in charge of the five senses, while the intellectual faculty conceives the meanings without any attachment to imaginary or sensory forms. The sensory faculty is realized in every living human being and also in animals while the intellectual faculty is exclusive to human beings and is realized in very few of them. But the imaginative faculty, which is in an intermediary position, is the one that Farabi focuses on when dealing with the public. He marks out three functions for the imaginative faculty first of which is saving the forms received by the senses as the senses lose touch with those forms (e.g. being able to review one’s appearance after the eyes are closed). The second function is composition and decomposition of such forms. In some instances, the outcome matches with the things in the sensible realm and in some instances it does not (Farabi 2003: 84, 95) (e.g. attaching the wings of an eagle to a lion and creating a flying lion). The third function of the imaginative faculty is mimesis (muḥākā). It is solely this faculty, among the three faculties, which has the ability of creating alternative images for sensible objects (maḥsūsāt) (e.g. likening the beloved to a flower) or creating allegorical images for intellectual ideas (ma‘qūlāt). The latter function, besides dealing with poetics, has a role in Farabi's theory of prophethood (nubuwwa) which will be discussed later. But as an instance, Farabi mentions that Plato in his *Timaeus* has implemented the rendering of intelligible concepts into their allegories from among sensible entities “like the one who likens matter with desert or nothingness with darkness” (Farabi, 2005: 70).

### Farabi's Poetics and the Power of Images

In this part we are to take up the bonds between prophethood and imagination, and to discuss on Farabi's poetics and its relation to imagination. Here are merely some instances where he stresses the importance of creating images for the audience of art.

In his definition for poetic accounts (*al-aqāwīl al-shi'riyya*), Farabi expresses that, first and foremost, he believes in the effectiveness of images: "A poetic account consists of words that arouse emotions in the listener, or represent a thing at a superior level compared to what it is in reality or at an inferior level. It consists of the description of elegance, ugliness, grandeur, pudency and so forth. As we hear a poem, the feeling that we perceive is similar to that which we perceive when we observe [for instance] a disgusting object" (Farabi, 1996: 42; 1949: 67-68). In this definition he underlines the stimulation of feelings caused by perception of effective images. In his *The Grand Book of Music* (*kitāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr*), Farabi classifies melodies and songs into three types. He firstly mentions songs that cause tranquility and delight for the soul without having any additional function. He then marks out songs that, besides causing comfort, create images and imaginations in the soul. The third type includes songs sung by a person affected by agony and ecstasy (Farabi, 1967: 62-63). His classification of songs to passive, imaginative and comforting is again mentioned further in the same book (Farabi, 1998: 19-20).

When describing the intentions of those who sing songs or perform music, he marks out that some implement a melody in order to make a statement more imaginable and more comprehensible (Farabi, 1998: 24). In another classification, aimed at paintings and statues, he puts them into two categories of advantageous and less advantageous. The latter type merely intends to cause joy (*ladhdha*) for the senses without any additional benefit for the soul while the former type, in addition to causing joy, creates imaginations and depicts other meanings through mimesis. (Farabi 1967: 1180) This function, besides being a task done by a painter or a poet, is the one he emphasizes when dealing with the relation between revelation, the prophet and the public.

### Prophethood and Mimesis

Farabi's theory of prophethood is based on his views regarding functions of the imaginative faculty. The process of revelation (*waḥy*) is explained by Farabi in two aspects, both springing from his theory of imagination: First, pertaining to perception of the revelation from the active<sup>1</sup> intellect and second, transmission of the revelation to the public. Farabi believes that the prophet is a person who has accomplished the levels of perfection and has reached a connection with the active intellect (Farabi, 2003: 115). Such a connection is established when one's imaginative faculty reaches the utmost perfection (Farabi, 2003: 110). What is graced by God (Allah)<sup>2</sup> to the active intellect

1. In Farabi's view, prophet is the real philosopher, so he can percept the revelation from A.I. (Farabi, 2003: 121)

2. Aside from mentioning Allah as the primary cause, it is hard to trace any reference to a particular religion or prophet in Farabi's discussions on revelation and prophethood while there are direct remarks on how various religions can function in different utopias

reaches the prophet's intellectual faculty and then it reaches his imaginative faculty (Farabi, 2003: 121). This faculty in the prophet has the utmost power which makes sensible objects and sensory forms less effective in occupying it. It is not entirely submissive to the intellectual faculty either. As a result, at the same time that the imaginative faculty of the prophet is busy dealing with the intellectual faculty and the sensory faculty, it still owns a wide empty space and an enormous power for its internal functions. The imaginative faculty of such a person is similar to that of an ordinary person while being asleep. The imaginative faculty of a sleeping person is free from both intellectual and sensory faculties (Farabi, 2003: 110).

What is the role of the imaginative faculty in this theory? Why isn't Farabi satisfied with the intellectual faculty alone receiving all the intellectual concepts from the active intellect? It seems the main reason Farabi has for the inclusion of the imaginative faculty in his characterization of the prophethood is that prophet's role is basically transferring the ultimate truth gained from the active intellect to the public. Such intellectual concepts are not perceivable by the public since the majority of people ('amma) are unable to implement their intellectual faculty whether because of natural limitations (ṭab') or because they are not accustomed to it ('āda) (Farabi, 2013: 89). Emphasizing such inability in perception of intellectual concepts (ma'qūlāt), Farabi concludes that the prophet, or the sages of the utopia, who are most aware of the intellectual truth, convey it to people's imaginative faculties through allegories and examples (Farabi, 2013: 89), that is, by means of an imaginary form. As an instance, Farabi mentions that there are some degrees in the existence which are not space bound or time bound, therefore these degrees are not easy to imagine for the people, so it's inevitable to make time bound and space bound allegories to help people understand non time bound and space bound degrees (Farabi, 2005: 70-71). Although the head of utopia is familiar with argument and reasoning, he uses tangible allegories dealing with the populace and tries to persuade them via their imagination (Farabi, 2005: 79; 1986: 152). He mentions that the imaginative faculty, through mimesis, has the power of creating images for the most inexplicable and intangible intellectual ideas like Primary Principle (al-mabda' al-awwal) and separate substances (mufāriqāt) (Farabi, 2003: 106-107). In one instance, when describing the admirable type of music, Farabi mentions the rendering of intellectual concepts into imaginary forms and then offers an unexpected example while he explains the second type:

And a type {of music} benefits the soul with these imaginations and creates in them perceptions of things and simulates things draws in the soul, and it's somehow similar to the visual ornaments and statues. some of them create in the sight only an elegant view, and some of them mimic with that the things bodies, interactions, essences and features, like the way the ancient statues were revered by the public in the old days, given that they were statues of the deities they used

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(Farabi, 1997: 226) since he, like Plato, believes that the idea is one, and then asserts that the examples that prophets issue for every society might vary based on people's diverse perceptions (Farabi, 1997: 226).

to worship, besides Allah, be He glorified, or apart from Him. Because they were depicted based on characteristics which informed the deeds, behaviors and sentiments they attributed to those deities. Like what Galen has recounted of the idols he saw, or like what is now present in farthest sites of India (Farabi, 1967: 62-63).

In this example, the remarkable point is how he shifts from music to faith and ideology by likening imagination in music to sculpture to depict God. Whereas the music is considered as one of the philosopher-prophet's tools for ruling the utopia in Farabi's view, can we conclude that he has the same believe about what his ideal philosopher-prophet does? Is the religion in Farabi's view, in the same way, consisting of allegories that, through mimesis, tend to render the intellectual concepts into imaginary forms?

### Religion vs. Philosophy

As we mentioned in prophet's case, Farabi marks out that the active intellect graces intellectual concepts to prophet's intellectual faculty and then these concepts are transmitted to his imaginative faculty. Whether the latter part, i.e. the transmission of intellectual concepts to the imaginative faculty of the prophet, is done by the active intellect or by the prophet himself, is a subject of controversy (See: Ibn Taymīyya, 1955: 361-362). Some have assumed that Farabi believes this transition could not be done by the active intellect since what he transfers is merely intellectual and immaterial (*mujarrad*) and the active intellect has no relation with imaginable or sensible arenas. If this leads to the conclusion that prophet himself is converting the intelligible concepts into imaginary forms, there will be a byproduct. Based on such a conclusion it could be said that many verses in the Scripture (i.e. Quran), at least the verses that deal with imaginable details, are not actually the contents of revelation, but are the result of prophet's effort in rendering the intelligible into imaginable. So, does Farabi means that prophet, himself, creates these images about afterlife, heaven and hell, or are these the exact images transmitted by the active intellect to him? Farabi doesn't give a direct reply to this question while his succeeding philosopher, Avicenna, mentions in one instance that what prophet receives from the active intellect is merely intellectual (*al-ʿaql al-mahḍ*) but he has been allowed to implement imagination to render these intellectual ideas understandable for the public (Avicenna, 1952: 17). That debate aside, it is a fact that Farabi believes the head of state, uses imaginary ways to simplify intellectual concepts and teach them to the public (Farabi, 1995: 85). He also believes that the head of state, as lawmaker, has responsibility of teaching the laws to the public with persuasive (*iqnāʿī*) skills and depicting it with imaginary forms (Farabi, 1986:152). While mentioning the use of persuasion (*iqnāʿ*) and imagination (*takhyīl*) in dealing with the public, Farabi underlines that the public are more compliant with imagination rather than persuasion. These points explain why Farabi assigns a poetic feature to the prophet spelling out how the second rank of the utopia should include artists as carriers of religion.



### **Farabi's Theory vis-à-vis Global Peace**

The core of Farabi's theory is that people come to grasp rational truths instead of rational knowledge mostly through the use of their imagination. Furthermore, the arousal of people's feelings and emotions often originates in their imagination via sensory images and imagery forms. However, the ultimate utopian goal is to drive the public to gain rational pleasure. Given that the public, because of their nature and general habits, are generally unable to perceive rational truths and knowledge, the path to rational pleasure must be shown via their imagination. So, to bring rational pleasure to people's souls through their imagination, the various virtuous cities in each society should represent rational truths and rational knowledge through the sensory images and imaginary forms actually familiar to that virtuous city. Such being the case, to Farabi, the relation of rationality and imagination may well be considered the philosophical bedrock of global peace.

Now we are to explain Farabi's strategy for establishing global peace based on the mentioned theory. First, it should be noted that the author means by "global peace" a state in which, not only there is no war between countries in the whole world, but also nations and followers of different religions have no motivation to fight each other and there is no enmity in their hearts towards others. For this purpose, we must first identify the root of hostilities that prevent the establishment of global peace. Farabi states that since each nation perceives rational truths via its exclusive imaginary forms, it follows a religion that is different from others, while all these imaginary forms and religions are imitated from the same intellectual truth. This difference in imaginary forms creates the ground of enmity between the followers of different religions; meanwhile, if these facts were revealed to everyone rationally, there would be no place for enmity (Farabi, 2003: 143-144). Therefore, from Farabi's point of view, people's inability to understand the rational truths, also the differences in the imaginary forms represented to various nations and cultures, hinders the establishment of global peace, because the followers of each religion think that the who are following other religions are wrong, and this causes enmity and religious wars in the world.

Now we will examine Farabi's solution to this problem. Farabi notes that if several imaginary forms were equal or had a slight, it does not matter which one is selected; But if one of these imaginary forms was more perfect than the others and reduced or disappears the grounds for enmity and disagreement, then this imaginary form should be used and other imaginary forms should be left out (Farabi, 1997: 98-96). Farabi also that the head of state should use imaginary forms and methods of persuasion that are common to all nations in order to make the people understand the rational truths (Farabi, 1995: 76). These common imaginary forms can be a bedrock to make it clear to nations that the origins of their religions are the same. In this way, the tendency of these people to be enmity with each other will disappear and peace, friendship and cooperation will be formed among them, and global peace will be established.

## Conclusion

According to Farabi, we see a hierarchical utopia consisting of five levels, first of which belongs to the philosopher or the prophet. The second rank includes 'carriers of the religion' who are preachers, orators, poets, music composers, writers and so on. There is a shared task between the first two ranks which is the translation of intellectual concepts into imaginary forms in order to make them understandable for the public. The philosopher, on the first level, uses allegories to render the intelligible into imaginable and this act in the public makes him the prophet. The artists' duty, on the second level, includes, but is not limited to, the same task of simplification of intellectual concepts. This is what makes them the 'carriers of religion'. An interpretation of Farabi's discussions on philosopher, prophet and utopia could lead to the conclusion that religion is nothing but the artistic creation of the philosopher, a product which tends to bring the public closer to the intellectual truth by which the way to global peace could be paved. So, in Farabi's view, carriers of religion are to make common and global imaginary forms, showing the uniqueness of absolute truth and providing a philosophical bedrock for global peace.

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