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Mašhad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḍawī 300, f. 1v; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, grec 1853, f. 186v

Delineating Dialectic: The Perfect Philosopher in al-Fārābī's Commentary on Topics VIII 1

Alexander Lamprakis, Daniel Davies*

Abstract

This article presents and discusses two previously unpublished fragments from al-Fārābī's (d. 950/1) literal commentary on *Topics* VIII. This text survives only in a Hebrew translation of the provençal intellectual Ṭodros ben Mešullam ben David Ṭodrosi (born 1313) and is part of an anthology of philosophical texts that he produced around the year 1333 in Trinquetaille, Arles. In these two fragments, al-Fārābī assesses Aristotle's claim in *Top.* VIII 1, 155b7-10 that the philosopher and the dialectician differ insofar as the philosopher does not need the ability to address others in his speech, while the dialectician necessarily does. Through a close reading of these fragments, the article aims to show that al-Fārābī's commentary is more than mere textual exegesis: Al-Fārābī juxtaposes Aristotle's claim with the concept of 'philosopher' that he himself develops, both in his political writings and in his abridgements of Aristotle's *Organon*. In discussing whether or not a philosopher needs to have command over teaching others, as well as refuting and testing their opinions, al-Fārābī gives a straightforward account of the natures and definitions of both the philosopher and the dialectician, which leads him to distinguish two ways in which a philosopher can be called 'perfect'. It will be argued that al-Fārābī's commentary on *Topics* VIII is therefore an important source text for discussing the way in which he navigates between the different definitions of 'philosopher' inherited from the ancient and late ancient philosophical tradition.

1. Introduction

In his political writings, al-Fārābī (d. 950/1) famously claims that a perfect philosopher must be qualified to become the leader of a political community. The locus classicus for this claim is found in *The Attainment of Happiness*, where he writes that

To be a truly perfect philosopher (*al-faylasūf al-kāmil 'alā l-ittlāq*) one has to possess both the theoretical sciences and the faculty for exploiting them for the benefit of all others according to their capacity. Were one to consider the case of the true philosopher (*al-faylasūf 'alā l-ittlāq*), one would find no difference between him and the supreme leader (*al-ra'īs al-awwal*).¹

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¹ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-sā'ada*, ed. by Ğ. Āl Yāsīn, Dār al-Andalus, Beirut 1981, p. 89.10-13. The translation is taken from M. Mahdī, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, Cornell U.P., Ithaca – New York 1962, p. 43 (slightly modified). For an interpretation of this passage, see also S. Pines, "Translator's Introduction", in *Moses Maimonides. The Guide of the Perplexed*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago – London 1963, pp. LXXXVII-LXXXVIII, M. Galston, "Realism and Idealism in Avicenna's Political Philosophy", *The Review of Politics* 41/4 (1979), pp. 561-577, pp. 575-6, and

Al-Fārābī's concept of the perfect philosopher as depicted in the above-quoted passage has been the subject of controversy, most notably regarding its possible sources.² In his study of Platonic political philosophy in late Antiquity, O'Meara has argued that, in ascribing certain political functions to philosophers, al-Fārābī may be aligned with an idea of 'assimilation to God' (ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ) prevalent in later Neoplatonism, which includes both one's own perfection, theoretical and practical, and also acting providentially upon others.³ In other words, for many of the Neoplatonists, philosophers aim not only at perfecting their theoretical and practical intellects in order to assimilate themselves to God's self-intellection and pure goodness but also at bestowing the good they have attained on others, thereby assimilating to God's providence and emanation of goodness. As O'Meara summarizes:

Becoming divine-like means, for the later Neoplatonist, imitating the divine, not only by leading a life of theoretical wisdom, but also by exercising a providential (i.e. political) role, since the divine not only enjoys perfect intellection, but also confers benefit (providence) on what is lower.⁴

O'Meara's analysis shows that it is important not to limit the study of the sources of al-Fārābī's political thought to Aristotle and Plato alone. He may have found inspiration for his ideas also in the less distant current of philosophers belonging to different streams of

M. Galston, *Politics and Excellence: The Political Philosophy of Alfarabi*, Princeton U.P., Princeton 1990, pp. 63-4.

² For instance, M. Mahdī, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago – London 2001, pp. 36f argues that al-Fārābī recovers a political interpretation of Plato's philosophy. See also Pines, "Translator's Introduction" (above, n. 1), p. LXXXVI: "For al-Fārābī's position and criteria are, as far as political philosophy is concerned, largely Platonic". See also the discussions in M. Galston, *Politics and Excellence* (above, n. 1), pp. 95-145. On the other hand, H. Daiber, "The Ruler as Philosopher. A new interpretation of al-Fārābī's view", *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie Van Wetenschappen*, North-Holland Publishing Co., 1986, pp. 133-49, esp. 134-5, and J. Lameer, "The Philosopher and the Prophet: Greek Parallels to al-Fārābī's Theory of Religion and Philosophy in the State", in A. Hasnawi et alii (eds.), *Perspectives arabes et médiévales sur la tradition scientifique et philosophique greque*. Actes du colloque de la SIHSPAI (Paris, 31 mars-3 avril 1993), Peeters – Institut du monde arabe, Leuven – Paris 1997 (*Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta*, 79), pp. 609-22, esp. 619 both emphasize the Aristotelian framework in which al-Fārābī's Platonic political philosophy is embedded. F.N. Nağğār, "al-Fārābī's Political Philosophy and Shi'ism", *Studia Islamica* 15 (1961), pp. 57-72, and H. Daiber "The Ismā'īlī Background of Fārābī's Political Philosophy: Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī als a forerunner of Fārābī", in U. Tworuschka (ed.), *Gottes ist der Orient, Gottes ist der Okzident. Festschrift für Abdoldjavad Falaturi zum 65. Geburtstag*, Böhlau, Köln – Wien 1991 (Kölner Veröffentlichungen zur Religionsgeschichte, 21), pp. 143-8 emphasize politico-religious influences on al-Fārābī's views.

³ Cf. D.J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis. Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2003, p. 192 with further references to the literature. Earlier, L.W. Berman, "The Political Interpretation of the Maxim: The Purpose of Philosophy is the Imitation of God", *Studia Islamica* 15 (1961), pp. 53-61 drew attention to the importance of the idea of 'assimilation to God' for al-Fārābī's political philosophy.

⁴ Cf. O'Meara, *Platonopolis* (above, n. 3), p. 192. On this, see also J. Mansfeld, "The Complete Philosopher", in Min-Jun Huh (ed.), *Introduction Générale à la Philosophie chez les Commentateurs Néoplatoniciens*, Brepols, Turnhout, pp.97-121, esp. p. 100. The providential activity of philosophers is, for instance, expressed in Ammon. *In Porph. Isag.*, ed. A. Busse, Reimer, Berlin 1891 (CAG IV), p. 3.16-19: ὁ δὲ φιλόσοφος κατ' ἄμφω βούλεται ἐξομοιοῦν ἑαυτὸν τῷ θεῷ· βούλεται γὰρ καὶ θεωρητῆς εἶναι τῶν πάντων (πάντα γὰρ ἐπισκέπτεται), καὶ μέντοι καὶ πρόνοιαν τῶν καταδεστέρων ποιεῖται (ὁ γὰρ τοι πολιτικός φιλόσοφος δικάζει καὶ νόμους τίθησιν). For an English translation, see. M. Chase, *Ammonius: Interpretation of Porphyry's Introduction to Aristotle's Five Terms*, Bloomsbury, London 2020, 18: "The philosopher wishes to assimilate himself to God in both respects. For he wishes both to be a contemplator of all things (for he investigates everything), and yet he also exercises providence over more inferior things (for the political philosopher judges and promulgates laws)". For further examples in the late Ancient philosophical tradition see Mansfeld, "The Complete Philosopher", pp. 101-3.

Neoplatonism.⁵ However, late ancient thinkers who preceded al-Fārābī did not spell out in great detail how philosophers may realize the sort of providential activity they exercise on their communities. From a series of his writings, it is clear that, for al-Fārābī, this happens by conveying knowledge using the syllogistic methods of dialectic, rhetoric, and poetry.⁶ Logic therefore becomes important also for political purposes, since the perfect ruler must adopt the various registers of discourse in order to exercise (political) providence.

It has often been pointed out that al-Fārābī's concept of 'philosopher' may fit well in a Platonic (and, as mentioned, Neoplatonic) framework but appears to contrast with Aristotle's perception of the philosopher as a virtuous, but solitary researcher, who leads a theoretical rather than a political life.⁷ Nevertheless, al-Fārābī himself does not directly oppose the views of the two ancient philosophers to one another in any of his extant treatises: In *The Philosophy of Plato*, al-Fārābī states that, for Aristotle's teacher, "the person who is philosopher and the person who is prince are the same".⁸ In contrast, he does not mention any definition or description of philosophy or the philosopher in his *The Philosophy of Aristotle*.⁹ In his *Book of Debate*, on the other hand, al-Fārābī reports that, according to Aristotle, the philosopher "is the one in whom the end of the two parts of philosophy is present".¹⁰ These two parts are theoretical and practical philosophy – but there is no mention of any political activity.¹¹ Only in *The Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages*, whose authenticity has been frequently contested, does al-Fārābī claim that Plato and Aristotle hold the same views on the nature of philosophy.¹² According to

⁵ O'Meara explicitly draws a connection with al-Fārābī, in the continuation of the above-quoted passage. As he states: "The same interpretation of divine assimilation as both theoretical and providential is found in early Islamic philosophy and can be found in al-Fārābī's perfect ruler, who possesses not only perfect theoretical wisdom, but also the capacity to use this wisdom for the benefit of others". Cf. D. O'Meara, *Platonopolis* (above, n. 3), p. 192.

⁶ On this, see, for instance, al-Fārābī's *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, in which he explains that while the elect few are taught by demonstration (*burhān*), teaching addressed to the masses (*al-ġumbhūr*) "proceeds by dialectical, rhetorical, or poetical methods". Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, ed. by M. Mahdī, Dār al-Mašriq, Beirut 1990, p. 152.3-4.

⁷ On some aspects of the relation between al-Fārābī's concept of philosophy and that of Plato and Aristotle, see the literature quoted in n. 2. In the late ancient philosophical literature, the definitions and descriptions of philosophy are usually discussed in the context of the prologue to Porphyry's *Isagoge*. On Aristotle's definition see, for instance, Ammon., *In Porph. Isag.*, p. 8.8 Busse. On the Syriac and Arabic reception of this interpretation see C. Hein, *Definition und Einleitung der Philosophie. Von der spätantiken Einleitungsliteratur zur arabischen Enzyklopädie*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt a.M. 1985, pp. 86-130.

⁸ Cf. F. Rosenthal – R. Walzer, *Alfarabius de Platonis philosophia*, Warburg Institute, London 1943, p. 13.7 (Arabic). Translation from Mahdī, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (above, n. 1), p. 60 (modified).

⁹ In fact, the word 'philosopher' is not mentioned once and 'philosophy' is only mentioned in the two final sections, introducing the different branches of philosophy. Cf. al-Fārābī, *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*, Arabic Text, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by M. Mahdī, Dār Majallat Ši'r, Beirut 1961, pp. 131.22-133.3, and, for an English translation, Mahdī, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (above, n. 1), p. 130.

¹⁰ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Ġadal*, in *La dialectique dans la philosophie d'Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis by D. Mallet, Université Michel-de-Montaigne (Bordeaux 3) 1992, pp. 19-198, p. 132.9-10.

¹¹ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Ġadal* (above, n. 10), pp. 132.10-12 Mallet: "The end of the theoretical [part] is truth and science alone, and the end of the practical [part] is preferring something and fleeing another"; translation from D.M. DiPasquale, *Alfarabi's Book of Dialectic (Kitāb al-Jadal): On the Starting Point of Islamic Philosophy*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2019, p. 77, slightly modified.

¹² The authenticity of this treatise has been questioned, for instance, by J. Lameer, *al-Fārābī & Aristotelian Syllogistics. Greek Theory & Islamic Practice*, Brill, Leiden 1994, pp. 30-39 and by M. Rashed, "On the Authorship of the *Treatise on the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages* Attributed to al-Fārābī", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 19 (2009), pp. 43-82; al-Fārābī's authorship has been defended by C. Genequand, "Théologie et philosophie:

this treatise both Plato and Aristotle hold that “the definition and essence of philosophy is that it is knowledge of existents insofar as they are existents”.¹³ There appears to be, however, no extant passage in al-Fārābī’s œuvre that addresses and discusses the differences between Aristotle’s and Plato’s definitions of philosophy.

This paper aims to contribute to this discussion by introducing new evidence from his writings that has not yet been taken into account. This evidence consists of two fragments from his literal commentary on the eighth book of Aristotle’s *Topics*, which is only preserved in a Hebrew translation by the provençal intellectual Ṭodros ben Mešullam ben David Ṭodrosi (born 1313) as part of an anthology of philosophical texts written around the year 1333 in Trinquetaille, Arles.¹⁴

In these two fragments, al-Fārābī comments on the opening lines of *Topics* VIII 1, in which Aristotle claims that the philosopher differs from the dialectician insofar as the philosopher is not concerned with addressing others in his discourse, while the dialectician is. Despite being an exegetical commentary on the final book of the *Topics*, al-Fārābī’s discussion of Aristotle’s claim is more than a mere exposition of its meaning. As this paper will argue, it is also an attempt to reconcile Aristotle’s account with al-Fārābī’s own understanding of the philosopher’s nature both in his political and logical writings. By introducing the question of whether the philosopher must have command over teaching, refuting and testing others, al-Fārābī’s commentary picks up a theme he himself introduces in both his *Book of Debate* and *Book of Demonstration*. This also bears consequences for a better understanding of the political function al-Fārābī envisions for the perfect philosopher, for which, as the final analysis will show, one has to differentiate between different meanings of ‘perfection’.

2. *Al-Fārābī’s commentary on Top. VIII 1, 155 b 7-9*

The passage on which al-Fārābī comments in the two fragments introduced below is located at the beginning of the final book of Aristotle’s *Topics*, which deals with practical precepts for the questioner and the respondent in dialectical debates. Elaborating on the commonality and difference between philosophers and dialecticians, Aristotle states that

La providence chez al-Fārābī et l’authenticité de l’*Harmonization des opinions des deux sages*”, *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph* 64 (2012), pp. 195-211.

¹³ Cf. C. Martini Bonadeo, *al-Fārābī. L’armonia delle opinioni dei due sapienti, il divino Platone e Aristotele*. Introduzione, testo arabo, traduzione e commento, Pref. di G. Endress, Pisa U.P., Pisa 2008 (Greco, Arabo, Latino. Testi 3), p. 37. This definition is striking, since it was known through the late ancient commentary tradition that the definition is one of Aristotle’s, while ‘assimilation to God’ (ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ) was known to be one of Plato’s. According to Lameer, *al-Fārābī & Aristotelian Syllogistics* (above, n. 12), p. 32, “this definition is nothing but an echo of Aristotle’s description of first or primary philosophy (...)”. However, given that this definition is known from the late ancient introductory literature, it is not necessary to claim that the author “mistook Aristotle’s description of metaphysics for a definition of philosophy in general” (*ibid.*, p. 33), as pointed out by Martini Bonadeo in her commentary on that passage. In light of the analysis presented in this paper, it is important to note that al-Fārābī here explicitly refers to the ‘essence’ (*māhiyya*) of philosophy. On al-Fārābī’s other definitions of philosophy see also Martini Bonadeo’s commentary on that passage.

¹⁴ An edition and annotated English translation is forthcoming in D. Davies – A. Lamprakis, “Al-Fārābī’s Commentary on the Eighth Book of Aristotle’s *Topics* in Ṭodros Ṭodrosi’s *Philosophical Anthology*”, *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 10 (2022, forthcoming). The methodology and content of Ṭodrosi’s anthology has been recently studied by S. Harvey – O. Horezky, “Averroes ex Averro: Uncovering Ṭodros Ṭodrosi’s Method of Commenting on the Commentator”, *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science & Judaism* 21 (2021), pp. 7-78, esp. 8-35, and their chapter in the present volume.

up to the point of finding the topos, the philosopher's inquiry and the dialectician's proceed alike, but actually arranging these things and devising questions is unique to the dialectician. For all of that is directed at someone else.¹⁵

Aristotle's claim in this passage is that the philosopher and the dialectician both share methods of conducting research and arriving at arguments, which they do through the *topoi* outlined in books II-VII of the *Topics*. The philosopher and the dialectician differ, however, from the point of view of how they arrange and present their knowledge. According to Aristotle, only the dialectician needs to organize his discourse with another party in mind (πρὸς ἕτερον), while the philosopher is merely concerned with the syllogism's soundness and validity.¹⁶

What follows contains the first of two comments on this passage by al-Fārābī. Given that the fragments from his commentary have not yet been published, a complete rendition of the two fragments will be provided.¹⁷ Judging from the the first fragment's position and arrangement in Ṭodrosi's *Philosophical Anthology*, it probably belonged to the passage "up to finding the topos, the philosopher's inquiry and the dialectician's proceed alike" from the above-quoted section of the *Topics*.¹⁸ Al-Fārābī's commentary runs as follows:

[T1] Ṭodros Ṭodrosi says [that] Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī says: [i] It is likely that he meant by 'philosopher' someone who, using demonstrative methods, speculates about existents inasmuch as they are existents, because in this he is equal to the dialectician. He [i.e., the dialectician] shares [with the philosopher], since his speculation is a common speculation about existents inasmuch as they are existents, for he speculates about the existent not only inasmuch as it is quantitative, as in the mathematical arts, nor [does he speculate] about the natural existent in isolation from the artificial. Rather, he speculates about all of them, and when speculating about them he uses generally accepted premises. Someone who speculates about the things the dialectician speculates about, and uses demonstrations when speculating about them, is a philosopher simpliciter (*be-muḥlat*). However, someone who speculates about the mathematical arts alone or natural science alone is not a philosopher simpliciter nor is he equal to the dialectician. [ii] They [i.e., the philosopher and the dialectician] share in knowledge of those *topoi* of this treatise that are [both] generally accepted and true.

¹⁵ Cf. Arist., *Top.* VIII 1, 155 b 7-10 Brunschwig: μέχρι μὲν οὖν τοῦ εὑρεῖν τὸν τόπον ὁμοίως τοῦ φιλοσόφου καὶ τοῦ διαλεκτικοῦ ἢ σκέψις, τὸ δ' ἤδη ταῦτα τάττειν καὶ ἐρωτηματίζειν ἴδιον τοῦ διαλεκτικοῦ· πρὸς ἕτερον γὰρ πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον. English translation by R. Smith: Aristotle, *Topics. Books I and VIII with Excerpts from Related Texts*, Translated with a Commentary, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1997, p. 20 (slightly modified).

¹⁶ See also the subsequent passage in Arist., *Top.* VIII 1, 155 b 10-14: τῷ δὲ φιλοσόφῳ καὶ ζητοῦντι καθ' ἑαυτὸν οὐδὲν μέλει, ἐὰν ἀληθῆ μὲν ἦ καὶ γνώριμα δι' ὧν ὁ συλλογισμός, μὴ θῆ δ' αὐτὰ ὁ ἀποκρινόμενος διὰ τὸ σύνεργος εἶναι τοῦ ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ προορᾶν τὸ συμβησόμενον.

¹⁷ The edition and English translation of these two fragments will be published in Davies – Lamprakis, "Al-Fārābī's Commentary on the Eighth book of Aristotle's *Topics*" (above, n. 14) as Fragment XII [24₂] and Fragment XIII [25₂].

¹⁸ Cf. Arist., *Top.* VIII 1, 155 b 7-8: μέχρι μὲν οὖν τοῦ εὑρεῖν τὸν τόπον ὁμοίως τοῦ φιλοσόφου καὶ τοῦ διαλεκτικοῦ ἢ σκέψις. The context informs us that the following fragment probably belongs to al-Fārābī's commentary on this lemma. However, what is quoted as a lemma in Ṭodrosi's *Philosophical Anthology* is taken from Qalonymos b. Qalonymos's Hebrew translation of Averroes's *Middle Commentary* on the *Topics*, edited by Ch.E. Butterworth – A. 'A. Harīdī, The American Research Center in Egypt, Cairo 1979, p. 199.6-7: *wa-l-faylasūf wa-l-jadālī yashtarikānī fī l-fahs*. For Qalonymos's Hebrew translations of this passage, see MS Paris, BnF, *hebr.* 932, f. 85r3 and MS Munich, BSB, *Cod. Hebr.* 26, f. 384r9. On Ṭodrosi's method of explaining Averroes's middle commentaries in his work, see Harvey – Horezky, "Averroes ex Averroee" (above, n. 14), pp. 8-20 and their chapter in the present volume.

some in other intellectual arts (*al-ṣanāʿiʿ al-fikriyya*).²³ Additionally, his *Book of Debate* states that the *topoi* “that encompass what is certain and what is generally accepted ... apply both for dialectic and philosophy”.²⁴ According to both treatises, there is a set of *topoi* suitable for dialectic that also rise to the level of demonstrative science, and which the philosopher and the dialectician both employ in their respective investigations.²⁵

In summary, al-Fārābī approaches the commonality of the philosopher and the dialectician from two perspectives. One is that they both investigate ‘existents inasmuch as they are existents’, rather than a particular class of being alone, such as mathematical or natural being. The second is that, in developing arguments, the philosopher draws on the class of *topoi* that are both true and generally accepted. These *topoi* are also included in the relevant class of *topoi* on which the dialectician draws, which are those that are (truly) generally accepted.

3. Al-Fārābī's commentary on Top. VIII 1, 155 b 9-10

After elaborating on what the philosopher and the dialectician have in common, al-Fārābī moves on to their differences, which are the subject of the next fragment that is preserved in Todros Ṭodrosi's *Philosophical Anthology*. According to the passage quoted above from the *Topics*, Aristotle states that only the dialectician addresses an interlocutor but the philosopher does not. In consequence, arranging one's speech (in view of an interlocutor or an audience) and the order and wording of the premises one uses in the process of questioning are matters relevant only to the dialectician. The following fragment from al-Fārābī's commentary is likely to have belonged to the lemma “but actually arranging these things and devising questions is unique to the dialectician”²⁶ and runs as follows:

[T2] Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī said in his commentary: [i] Through this he [i.e., Aristotle] makes known that what is in this book is particular to this art, in contrast with what has preceded, and that the two arts share in what has preceded.²⁷ [ii] We ought to investigate his statement because it appears to say that the arrangement and the questioning are not used by the philosopher, but it is evident that the philosopher discourses in order to teach, to refute false statements, and for testing, and that arrangement is needed for teaching or testing. [iii] The answer is that ‘arrangement’ and ‘questioning’ are necessary parts of the art of dialectic such that without them the art of dialectic would not be attained. The essence of the art of dialectic requires its practitioners to have the power over ‘arrangement’ and ‘questioning’. [iv] Philosophy is not so, because the philosopher is a philosopher through the

²³ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Taḥlīl*, in *La dialectique dans la philosophie d'Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī* (above, n. 10), p. 200-266, p. 200.6-8. See also the English trans. in A. Hasnawi, “Topic and Analysis: The Arabic Tradition”, in R. Sharples (ed.), *Whose Aristotle? Whose Aristotelianism?*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2001, pp. 28-62, p. 31.

²⁴ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Ġadal* (above, n. 10), p. 128.13-14. Note that, while the *Kitāb al-Ġadal* uses the expression *yaqīm*, the commentary uses *ṣodeq*. We take the meaning to be equivalent, however.

²⁵ On this, see also the analysis in Hasnawi, “Topic and Analysis” (above, n. 23), esp. pp. 47-51.

²⁶ Cf. Arist., *Top.* VIII 1, 155 b 9-10: τὸ δ' ἤδη ταῦτα τάττειν καὶ ἐρωτηματιζεῖν ἴδιον τοῦ διαλεκτικοῦ. What is quoted as lemma in Ṭodrosi's *Philosophical Anthology* is taken from Qalonymos b. Qalonymos's Hebrew translation of Averroes's *Middle Commentary* on the *Topics* (above, n. 18), p. 199.7-8: (...) *fa-ammā l-tartīb wa-l-su'āl fa-humā yaḥuṣṣāni l-ḡadali*. For the Hebrew, see Paris, BnF, *hebr.* 932, f. 85r4 and Munich, BSB, *Cod. Hebr.* 26, f. 384r10. On the problem of lemmatization in Ṭodrosi's *Philosophical Anthology*, see above, n. 18.

²⁷ By “the two arts” al-Fārābī means philosophy and dialectic. By “what has preceded” he refers to the middle section of the *Topics*, i.e., books II-VII. The Hebrew does not have a definite article before “two arts”, but the sense of the sentence seems to require it.

stratagems, the problem addressed by al-Fārābī is more fundamental: Is it sufficient for the philosopher to be a solitary scientist or must he also interact with others by teaching them, refuting their false opinions, or testing their alleged knowledge? This immediately calls to mind the political function that al-Fārābī ascribed to the 'truly perfect philosopher' in *The Attainment of Happiness*. But why does al-Fārābī pose this question here? And why does he specifically refer to the acts of teaching, refuting, and testing?

A plausible answer to this can be given by taking into account evidence from al-Fārābī's abridgements of Aristotle's *Organon*. Both in his *Book of Debate* and *Book of Demonstration* he does, in fact, claim that command over these acts is necessary for reaching perfection within the demonstrative arts. In the former, he states that while "every teacher of a demonstrative art (*kull mu'allim šinā'a yaqīniyya*)"³⁰ must master the principles and all the demonstrations that could potentially arise from that respective art, that alone is insufficient because he must also be capable of opposing paralogisms.³¹ Al-Fārābī's account is remarkable because it appears to oppose the widespread view of late antique philosophers that opposing paralogisms is the function of dialectic alone.³²

The way in which he attempts to distinguish a demonstrative form of refutation and testing from their dialectical counterparts is apparent when al-Fārābī discusses which possible interlocutors a practitioner of demonstrative sciences may encounter. They are either students, those who deceive or are deceived by someone from among the art's practitioners, or those who deceive or are deceived by someone who is not a practitioner of that art.³³ According to al-Fārābī, one does not need to be a dialectician in order to address the first two kinds of interlocutors, since the arguments one has to formulate do not leave the realm of the art or science of one's own expertise and one can therefore draw on demonstrative premises that are specific to that art or science. Only in the case of encountering those of the final category does one need to argue outside the realm of one's own area of expertise. In this case, one must draw on generally accepted premises and, therefore, become a dialectician.³⁴ When discussing how the philosopher ought to address different interlocutors in his *Book of Debate*, then, al-Fārābī refers to all three of the discourse-types that he mentions in the quoted fragment from his commentary on *Topics VIII*. According to this treatise, the ideal type of philosopher al-Fārābī has in mind must be equally capable of teaching, refuting, and testing.

This discussion shows that al-Fārābī aims at dividing the task of refuting and testing (and elsewhere also that of teaching) between the philosopher and the dialectician. This idea appears again, and this time more systematically, in his treatise that specifically deals with the

³⁰ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Ġadal* (above, n. 10), p. 88.1.

³¹ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Ġadal* (above, n. 10), p. 88.1-9.

³² Al-Fārābī himself states in *Kitāb al-Ġadal* (above, n. 10), p. 67.6-12 that among the uses of dialectic is that "not one of the people of the scientific arts is able to reject – by the faculty that derives from his art – sophistical arguments that he criticizes and opposes in his art (...). Only the dialectician – and he alone – is able to meet sophistical arguments. Therefore, the art of dialectic is also the protector and defender of philosophy against the sophists"; translation from DiPasquale, *Alfarabi's Book of Dialectic* (above, n. 11), p. 39-40.

³³ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Ġadal* (above, n. 10), p. 88.10-13.

³⁴ On this, see also Arist., *Soph. El.* 9, 170 a 20-39, where Aristotle distinguishes between refutations specific to single sciences and those that apply to all sciences. See also *Kitāb al-Ġadal* (above, n. 10), pp. 91.4-5, where al-Fārābī points out that, when the philosopher engages in refuting opinions, neither he, nor the interlocutor becomes a dialectician or investigator, but their discourse is that of teachers and students.

philosopher as practitioner of demonstrative sciences. In the fifth and final part of his *Book of Demonstration*, al-Fārābī aims at elaborating on the different types of demonstrative discourses (*al-muḥāṭabāt al-burhāniyya*). He introduces this section as follows:

Let us now speak about the kinds of demonstrative discourses, which are four in number: Among them is the discourse of ‘teaching and learning’ (*al-ta’līm wa-l-ta’allum*), the discourse of ‘scientific refutation’ (*al-‘inād al-burhānī*), the discussion of those collaborating in ‘proof discovery’ (*al-istinbāt*), and [lastly] scientific testing regarding the matter [of the particular science], that is ‘using deception in demonstrative science’ (*al-muḡālaṭa al-burhāniyya*).³⁵

This part has no direct parallel in Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, and appears to be al-Fārābī’s own attempt to establish the rules of different scientific discourses. In doing so, he fills a gap in the Aristotelian corpus, for Aristotle articulates such rules explicitly only for dialectical, rhetorical, and sophistical discourses, but not for the scientific. This reframing of the *Posterior Analytics* as an art that employs various ranges of discourse, parallel to dialectic and rhetoric, is also significant for al-Fārābī’s political philosophy. As seen in the introduction, the ‘truly perfect philosopher’ has to be able to teach all members of his community. To turn the initial thesis around: In order to act providentially on his community, the philosopher needs methods to address not only those who are not capable of demonstrative thinking (which he does by becoming a dialectician, rhetorician, and someone who uses poetical devices), but also for addressing those who are.

What is important to note for the current investigation is that, according to al-Fārābī, someone only reaches “the perfection in the art (*al-kamāl fī l-ṣinā’a*)”³⁶ when, aside from knowing all principles and mastering all demonstrations, one also “possesses the capacity to make someone else aware (*tabṣīr ḡayrihi*) of what one knows”³⁷ regarding the matters pertaining to the art, the ability “to deceive someone (*muḡālaṭat ḡayrihi*) in points through which it is possible that one may err in that science”³⁸, and, finally, the capability of “nullifying the relevant erroneous refutations (*fashḥ al-muḡālaṭāt*) that arrive from someone else”.³⁹ Including this topic in the *Book of Demonstration* therefore corroborates what al-Fārābī already stated in his *Book of Debate*: The perfect philosopher must be able to teach, refute, and test others qua philosopher, and not only qua dialectician.

In summary, al-Fārābī appears to take Aristotle’s claim in *Top.* VIII 1, 155 b 9-10 as an occasion (perhaps even a pretext) for discussing whether the definition of ‘philosopher’ includes the ability to address others. As both his *Book of Debate* and *Book of Demonstration* show, he believes that the philosopher must be able to address others as a practitioner of his universal science, and from premises and principles peculiar to his art, and not from what is widely held and generally accepted. Al-Fārābī may have found passages in the Aristotelian corpus, or earlier interpretations of it, suggesting such a distinction. A more detailed investigation of his logical writings and their sources is still lacking, but one can speculate that it is his own innovation.

³⁵ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, in M. Fakhri (ed.), *al-Manṭiq ‘inda l-Fārābī*, vol. 4, Dār al-Maṣriq, Beirut 1987, p. 77.3-5.

³⁶ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Burhān* (above, n. 35), p. 94.18.

³⁷ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Burhān* (above, n. 35), p. 94.19-20.

³⁸ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Burhān* (above, n. 35), p. 94.20.

³⁹ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Burhān* (above, n. 35), p. 94.20-21.

4. Al-Fārābī's two notions of 'perfection'

Al-Fārābī's concept of 'philosopher' as encountered in his *Book of Debate* and *Book of Demonstration* is evidently in contrast to what Aristotle claims in *Top.* VIII 1, 155 b 9-10. Aristotle puts philosophers on a level with those who investigate for themselves alone and claims that they do not need to concern themselves with addressing other parties.

What follows in section [iii]–[v] of the above-quoted second fragment from al-Fārābī's commentary comes therefore as a surprise: Al-Fārābī fully adheres to Aristotle's claim that the notion of 'philosopher' does not entail any of the things he introduced in his abridgements. In section [v] he even intensifies his argument in stages, pointing out that another person's deficiency in a demonstrative art does not detract from the philosopher's philosophy, nor does the philosopher's lack of awareness of that deficiency, nor his inaction in rectifying it.⁴⁰

This discrepancy between al-Fārābī's explanation of *Top.* VIII 1, 155 b 9-10 and his other writings was also noticed in the early reception of this commentary, as attested by the following marginal note attached to the translation, written by Ṭodrosi:

In the book of the commentary of Abū Naṣr, from which I translated this, this was written on the page facing this statement: "This is not a philosopher according to Abū Naṣr himself in other places, and his words contradict one another."⁴¹

Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine when and by whom this note was placed in the Arabic manuscript Ṭodrosi used for his translation. Given the fact that Ṭodrosi translated it into Hebrew around the year 1333 CE, the note must have been written earlier than that and attests to the puzzlement the reader must have felt when comparing al-Fārābī's commentary on *Topics* VIII 1 with other sections of his writings. As the comparison between his commentary and his abridgements suggests, al-Fārābī must have himself been aware of a certain tension between his own conception of a philosopher and that outlined in the works of Aristotle. This tension is apparent in *The Attainment of Happiness*, too, where al-Fārābī addresses the difference between the two meanings of the word 'philosopher'. As he writes

'Imam', 'philosopher', and 'lawgiver' denote the same thing, aside from the fact that the name 'philosopher' signifies, first of all, theoretical virtue (*al-faḍīla al-naẓariyya*). But if it be determined that the theoretical virtue reaches its ultimate perfection in every respect (*'alā kamālībā l-aḥīr min kullī l-wuḡūb*), it necessarily follows that he [i.e., the philosopher] [also] has the other faculties.⁴²

⁴⁰ This rhetorical intensification is also reminiscent of a similar point al-Fārābī makes in *The Attainment of Happiness*, where he claims that the true philosopher remains a philosopher, even if he is prevented from exercising his philosophy over his community. Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-sa'āda* (above, n. 1), pp. 96.18-97.9 (for an English translation, see Maḥdī, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (above, n. 1), p. 49. For further references see also idem, 141, *ad loc.*). The argument here is, however, somewhat different. In his commentary on *Topics* VIII 1, al-Fārābī claims not only that a philosopher does not need to exercise his power to act providentially in order to be regarded as a philosopher, but that he does not even need to be able to do so.

⁴¹ Cf. MS London, BL, *Add.* 27559, fol. 87r, margin: אמר טודרוס: בספר פרישת אבו נצר אשר העתקתי זה ממנו היה כתוב בגליון: "זה אינו פילוסוף לפי שאלוהים לא יצא אבו נצר עצמו במקומות אחרים ודבריו סותרים זה לזה."

⁴² Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-sa'āda* (above, n. 1), p. 92.11-14. The translation is taken from Maḥdī, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (above, n. 1), p. 46 (modified). According to Ğ.Ā. Yāsīn's edition, *awwalan* (translated here as 'first of all') does not appear in all manuscripts.

While in *The Attainment of Happiness*, al-Fārābī does not explain the relation between the philosopher as the possessor of theoretical sciences and initiator of political providence in more detail, in his commentary on *Topics* VIII 1 he chooses to tackle this problem head on.

At this point it is worthwhile taking a step back and revisiting [T1]. As has been shown, al-Fārābī gives proper definitions to both the philosopher and the dialectician by introducing their genus and differentiae. To recapitulate, both fall under the genus of ‘investigating being as such’. The philosopher does so while using ‘demonstrative premises’, which is how he is differentiated from the dialectician, whose differentiae are both ‘the usage of generally accepted premises’ and ‘power over arrangement and questioning’. The power over arrangement and questioning is thus part of the definition of the dialectician, but not of the philosopher. Now, in [T2], al-Fārābī draws on these definitions by claiming that

(...) the philosopher is a philosopher through the knowledge that reaches him, even if he does not have the ability to teach someone or to refute false statements or to test someone in the art in question, because the ability to refute false opinions is not among the necessary parts of philosophy.⁴³

By ‘necessary parts’ al-Fārābī alludes to the differentiae given earlier, according to which ‘the power over arrangement and questioning’ is not part of the philosopher’s definition, but of the dialectician’s. In the final part of his exposition, al-Fārābī therefore argues that the ability to teach, refute, and test the opinions of others is simply “praiseworthy” (*mešubbah*)⁴⁴ for the philosopher. He compares this to an animal which may rightly be called a perfect animal (*ḥay šalem*), once it answers to its essential definition, which is “animate sensitive substance”.⁴⁵ As al-Fārābī states, this perfection is not inhibited by the animal’s lack of “beauty”.⁴⁶

Transferred to the definition of the philosopher, one has to distinguish two kinds of ‘perfection’ in al-Fārābī’s treatises: When, in *The Attainment of Happiness*, it is said that the “truly perfect philosopher (*al-faylasūf al-kāmil ‘alā l-iṭlāq*)” must possess “the faculty for exploiting [the theoretical sciences] for the benefit of all others according to their capacity”⁴⁷, or, when it is said in his *Book of Demonstration* that “the perfection in a [demonstrative] art (*al-kamāl fī l-šīnā’a*)”⁴⁸ must include the command over teaching, refuting, and testing, then this sense of ‘perfection’ comprises both aspects that al-Fārābī, in his commentary on

⁴³ Cf. MS London, BL, *Add.* 27559, ff. 87r21–87v3, quoted above as part of [T2].

⁴⁴ Ṭodrosi often uses the Hebrew *mešubbah* to translate the Arabic *mamdūḥ* or *maḥmūd*.

⁴⁵ Defining ‘animal’ as ‘animate sensitive substance’ is often used as a school example in the late ancient logical literature. See, for instance, Porph., *Isag.*, p. 10.6 Busse: ἔστι γὰρ τὸ ζῷον οὐσία ἐμψυχος αἰσθητικὴ.

⁴⁶ On the relation between ‘beauty’ and ‘perfection’ see also al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Mabādi’ āwā’ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*, A revised text with introduction, translation, and commentary by R. Walzer, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1985, pp. 82–4, where al-Fārābī states that “beauty and brilliance and splendour mean in the case of every existent that it is in its most excellent state of existence and that it has attained its ultimate perfection”. However, as al-Fārābī adds, we humans “have beauty and splendour and brilliance as a result of accidental qualities (of our souls), and of what our bodies have in them and because of exterior things, but they are not in our substance (*lā fī ḡawharinā*)” (trans. Walzer). For the distinction of the different meanings of ‘perfection’ and ‘beauty’ as non-substantial perfection, see also al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, Arabic Text, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by F.M. Naḡḡār, Dār al-Mašriq, Beirut 1993, p. 49.7–11.

⁴⁷ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-sa’āda* (above, n. 1), p. 89.10–12. The translation is taken from Maḥdī, *Alfarabi’s Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (above, n. 1), p. 43 (slightly modified).

⁴⁸ Cf. al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Burhān* (above, n. 35), p. 94.17.

Topics VIII 1, calls 'necessary' and 'praiseworthy' for a philosopher.⁴⁹ In light of this analysis, what al-Fārābī means when equating 'the supreme ruler' (*al-ra'īs al-awwal*) with the 'truly perfect philosopher' (*al-faylasūf al-kāmil 'alā l-iṭlāq*) in *The Attainment of Happiness* is that they must fulfil both these criteria.

Therefore, what is merely praiseworthy for the philosopher becomes mandatory for the philosopher-king. To be a 'truly perfect' philosopher means, at first, this: to be a philosopher who deals with universal beings, uses demonstrative premises, and has the power to address others of his rank by teaching them, refuting their false opinions, and testing the knowledge they claim to possess. This is part of how the philosopher exercises his providential activity, and, as the structure of al-Fārābī's *Book of Demonstration* suggests, it is what all philosophers should aim at. In addressing others the philosopher does not have to become a dialectician, as Aristotle's *Topics* has suggested. Only in teaching those who are not of the philosopher's rank, in refuting their false opinions and testing their alleged knowledge, must the philosopher-king be a dialectician (as well as a rhetorician and master of poetic devices), and exercise his providential activity by using premises that are widely held and generally accepted. A truly perfect philosopher who has the power to address all members of a political community is therefore also a dialectician. However, what makes him a dialectician is not his command over 'arrangement' and 'questioning' but, rather, over generally accepted premises and forms of argumentation that use them.

5. Conclusion

Al-Fārābī is the first available philosopher in the Islamic world to continue the practice of writing literal commentaries on Aristotle's works.⁵⁰ However, his commentary dedicated to Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* is the only one that has come down to us in its entirety. Only parts of his commentaries on the *Categories*, *Prior Analytics*, *Rhetoric*, and that on *Topics* VIII survive; others are lost completely. The impact of these commentaries must not be underestimated, given that they served as a model for reading and commenting on Aristotle's treatises, first and foremost for Averroes. Aside from al-Fārābī's commentary on the *De Interpretatione*, which has already been the subject of a profound investigation, the extant fragments of al-Fārābī's other commentaries have been studied only scarcely, if at all.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Al-Fārābī may have been influenced by the way Aristotle defines the term 'praiseworthy' in *Eth. Nic.* I 12, 1101 b 13-15. As Aristotle explains, "we praise the just and the brave and the absolutely good and the virtue due to the actions and deeds (τὸν γὰρ δίκαιον καὶ τὸν ἀνδρεῖον καὶ ὅλως τὸν ἀγαθόν τε καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπαινοῦμεν διὰ τὰς πράξεις καὶ τὰ ἔργα)". The extant Arabic translation renders this thought as "we praise the just and [...] generally the good and virtue, on account of the actions and what results from them (*bi-sabab al-af'āl wa-mā yabdatu 'anhā*)". For the text and an English translation, see A.A. Akasoy – A. Fidora, *The Arabic Version of the Nicomachean Ethics*, With an Introduction and Annotated Translation by Douglas M. Dunlop, Brill, Leiden 2005, p. 144-5. Following Aristotle's line of thought, one may conclude that, if a philosopher engages in teaching, refuting, and testing opinions, it may be considered as praiseworthy due to its consequences and not in relation to him as a philosopher.

⁵⁰ Here one must also take into account al-Fārābī's intellectual context, the Baghdad School, whose members translated many of the late ancient commentaries and themselves also commented on many treatises, such as Aristotle's *Physics* and the *Organon*. Many of these comments only came down to us as glosses on extant manuscripts of Aristotle's texts in their Arabic rendition. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which commentaries that are not extant but are mentioned in the bio-bibliographical literature were indeed literal commentaries.

⁵¹ Al-Fārābī's commentary on *De Interpretatione* has been profoundly studied in F. Zimmermann, *Al-Fārābī's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, Translated with an Introduc-

One of the goals of this article was to contribute to the understanding of how al-Fārābī proceeded in these works, and of how they relate to other treatises of his œuvre. The two passages selected from his commentary on *Topics* VIII prove to be particularly illuminating for this purpose, given that they force al-Fārābī to mediate between Aristotle’s text and what he envisions in his more independent treatises, such as his abridgements of Aristotle’s *Organon* and his political writings. The analysis of the two passages chosen has shown that, on the one hand, al-Fārābī is faithful to his role as a commentator and offers a plausible reading of Aristotle’s text, even though his reading is shaped by the systematizing tendencies of the late ancient Alexandrian tradition. On the other hand, it is evident that he is commenting on Aristotle with an eye on his own philosophy, aiming at presenting his thoughts as though they accord with those of the Stagirite. Al-Fārābī’s subtle reconciliation still provoked surprise and the allegation of self-contradiction by one of his pre-modern readers. It is difficult to discern whether this confusion was caused by the comparison with al-Fārābī’s political works or with his logical writings, but, when translating his commentary into Hebrew, Ṭodrosi considered it worth mentioning, even though he did not comment further. What can be inferred with certainty, is that al-Fārābī’s literal commentaries were not only studied as a means for understanding Aristotle (or, in Ṭodrosi’s case, Averroes) but also in order to shed light on his own philosophy.

tion and Notes, Oxford U.P., London 1981. On the extant fragments of the commentary on the *Categories* see M. Zonta, “Al-Fārābī’s *Long Commentary* on Aristotle’s *Categoriae* in Hebrew and Arabic. A Critical Edition and English Translation of the Newly-found Extant Fragments”, in B. Abrahamov (ed.), *Studies in Arabic and Islamic Culture*, Vol. II, Bar-Ilan U.P., Ramat-Gan 2006, pp. 185-254. On the extant part of al-Fārābī’s commentary on the *Prior Analytics*, edited in M.T. Dānišpazūh, *al-Mantiqiyyāt li-l-Fārābī*, Maktabat-i Āyatullāh al-‘Uzmā al-Mar‘ašī al-Nağafī, Qom 1988-89, Vol. II, pp. 263-553, see, for instance, Lameer, *Al-Fārābī & Aristotelian Syllogistics* (above, n. 12), pp. 7-9, and S. Chatti - W. Hodges, *Al-Fārābī. Syllogism: An Abridgement of Aristotle’s Prior Analytics*, Bloomsbury, London [etc.] 2020, pp. 14-15. The extant part of al-Fārābī’s commentary on the *Rhetoric* has been edited by M. Grignaschi as *Didascalía in Rethoricam Aristotelis Ex Glosa Alpharabii* in J. Langhade – M. Grignaschi, *Al-Fārābī. Deux ouvrages inédits sur la rhétorique*, Dār al-Mašriq, Beirut 1971, pp. 149-252. More recently, Frédérique Woerther has published important studies on this text, for instance, F. Woerther, “Al-Fārābī commentateur d’Aristote dans les *Didascalía in Rethoricam Aristotelis ex glosa Alpharabii*”, in F. Woerther (ed.), *Commenting on Aristotle’s Rhetoric from Antiquity to the Present*, Brill, Leiden 2018 (International Studies in the History of Rhetoric, 11), pp. 41-63.