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ARTICLE

Prophecy Between Poetics and Politics from Al-Farabi to Leo Strauss

Peter Makhlouf[1]

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Abstract

Judaeo-Arabic prophetology, as developed in the wake of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, was highly attentive to the kind of representational modes produced by divine revelation and their political use—but also their political precarity. By drawing on another corpus, less often discussed in this context, the Arabic commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, this study proposes to undertake a close analysis of how the medieval thinkers in question (Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Averroes, and Maimonides) understood the poetics of prophecy to function. What emerges is an account of how the political theo-logic of poetics and rhetoric—as developed with respect to terms such as imitation, imagination and visualization—came to play a central role in the theory of prophecy, and how that theory of prophecy in turn gave rise to an understanding of what Leo Strauss once termed the 'literary character' of these philosophers' 'art of writing'.

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✉ Peter Makhlouf
makhlouf@princeton.edu

[1] Department of Comparative Literature, Princeton University, 133 East Pyne, Princeton, NJ 08544, USA

So I swear by what you see
and by what you do not see,
truly [the Quran] is the speech of a noble messenger
and not the speech of a poet (*wa mā huwwa bi-qawli shā'irin*).

How little you believe!
Sūrah 69, al-Ḥāqqah
[The Inevitable Truth/Reality]
vv. 38–41

Marginalia

Epochs gifted with particularly virulent imaginations tend to conceal their most original impulses and creative innovations by presenting themselves as little more than a *post scriptum* to traditions past. For the medieval Arabic-language Aristotelians, the epitome or abridgement—*jawāmi*', *mukhtaṣar*—and the commentary—*sharḥ, tafsīr, talkhīs*—were the primary forms in which classical Greek thought was not only preserved but elaborated in a process that resembles a revolution as much as a commitment to textual fidelity.[1] Among the more productive alterations within the process of cultural transfer that was rife throughout the late antique period was the Arabic canonization of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* as parts of the *Organon*, that is, the logical portion of the Aristotelian corpus.[2] Firmly establishing what was, among the Alexandrian commentators, a supposition, this logicizing operation drew rhetoric and poetry into the domain of the syllogism.[3]

In their work elucidating the logic of the poetic and rhetorical crafts, the Judaeo-Arabic commentators (of whom I focus in this essay on Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Averroes and Maimonides) placed these arts within a well-elaborated framework of phantastical poetics that abutted their transformative commentaries on the *De anima*

[1] See D. Gutas, 'Aspects of Literary Form and Genre in Arabic Logical Works', in *Glosses and Commentaries on Aristotelian Logical Texts: The Syriac, Arabic and Medieval Traditions*, ed. C. Burnett, London, 1993, pp. 29–76.

[2] For the background of the translations themselves, see O. Schrier, 'The Syriac and Arabic Versions of Aristotle's *Poetics'*, in *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism: Studies on the Transmission of Greek Philosophy and Sciences dedicated to H. J. Drossaart Lulofs on His Ninetieth Birthday,* ed. G. Endress and R. Kruk, Leiden, 1997, pp. 259–79, and U. Vagelpohl, *Aristotle's Rhetoric in the East: The Syriac and Arabic Translation and Commentary Tradition*, Leiden, 2008. For the general transmission, see A. Badawi, *La transmission de la philosophie grecque au monde arabe*, Paris, 1987, and D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsid Society*, London and New York, 1998. For an apt summary of the exegetical tradition of late antiquity, see G. Fowden, *Before and After Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused*, Princeton, 2014, pp. 127–63.

[3] The definitive study remains R. Walzer, 'Zur Traditionsgeschichte der aristotelischen Poetik', in *Studi italiani di filologia classica*, 1, 1934, pp. 5–14, repr. in id., *Greek into Arabic. Essays on Islamic Philosophy*, Oxford, 1962, pp. 127–36; but see also D. Gutas, 'Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Baghdad', *Der Islam*, 60, 1983, pp. 231–67, and the recent overview of T. Kleven, 'Rhetoric, Poetics, and the *Organon*', in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy,* ed. R. Taylor and L. Xavier López-Farjeat, London, 2016, pp. 82–92.

and the *Parva naturalia*, as these all contained developed doctrines of the powers of *phantasia*, that is, the imaginative faculty.[4] At the centre of this commentary tradition lay the question: 'what are the logical, ethical and political implications—logical *and thus* ethical and political implications—of the kinds of sensible representation that are produced by poetry and rhetoric?' 'We say', writes Averroes in his *Commentary on Plato's 'Republic*',

> that there are two ways by which the virtues in general are brought about in the souls of political humans. One of them is to establish the opinions in their souls through rhetorical and poetical arguments. This is limited to theoretical science presented to the multitude of humans ... .[5]

This quote would catch the attention of the man who, among all twentieth-century scholars, perhaps most closely imitated the expository practices of the commentators he studied:[6] Leo Strauss, whose notes—recently published in 2022—on this treatise of Averroes's describe the political application of poetics and rhetoric raised in this passage as nothing less than 'the issue':

> What is the issue? There are two ways in which the vulgar (≠ the elite) can acquire speculative opinions, opinions about matters of speculation, i.e., about the first principle of the whole and the end (25, 24): 1. rhetorical and poetic speeches and, 2. compulsion.[7]

Strauss—and here his *oeuvre*, however contentious, was unique, even exemplary—had homed in on what he rightly perceived as a unique contribution of the Arabic commentators: a fully developed doctrine of the relation between politics, poetics, and theology, which intersected in a theory of imaginative representation.[8]

[4] On *phantasia*, see M. Schofield, 'Aristotle on the Imagination', in *Essays on Aristotle's 'De Anima'*, ed. M. C. Nussbaum and A. O. Rorty, Oxford, 1995, pp. 249–77. On the medieval Islamic theory of the intellect, see, e.g. H. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, & Averroes, on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, & Theories of Human Intellect*, Oxford, 1992.

[5] *Averroes on Plato's 'Republic'*, transl. R. Lerner, Ithaca, 1974, p. 10. On Averroes's understanding of the political use of poetics, see D. Kries, 'Music, Poetry and Politics in Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's 'Republic'*', in *Plato's 'Republic' in the Islamic Context: New Perspectives on Averroes's Commentary*, ed. A. Orwin, Rochester NY, 2022, pp. 87–109. For the role that the Arabic reception of the *Republic* was to play in the interpretation of the philosophy–religion–imitation triad here in question, see J. Lameer, *Al-Fārābi and Aristotelian Syllogistics: Greek Theory and Islamic Practice*, Leiden, 1994, pp. 259–91.

[6] A fact which forms the point of departure for D. Tanguay, *Leo Strauss, une biographie intellectuelle*, Paris, 2003.

[7] See 'Leo Strauss's Notes on Averroes's Commentary on Plato's *Republic*', published as 'Appendix A', in R. Namazi, *Leo Strauss and Islamic Political Thought*, Cambridge, 2022, pp. 205–15 (208).

[8] A brief word is in order about the terms 'political theology' or the modifier 'politico-theological'. Islamic thinkers may have been committed to political *philosophy*, but they nevertheless provide an account of political *theology*. The need to identify one as the 'true' choice is misguided, for the former concerns the discussion *intra muros* as to the relation between the philosophers and the state, while the latter is a means: in our case, political theology concerns a philosophical understanding of how the poetical and rhetorical forms of theological revelation are utilized in order to achieve political effects, and thus, as F. Stella rightly notes, '[t]he politico-theological problem is an issue whose development is inter-

And, as those familiar with Strauss's work know well, he persistently called to his readers' attention the political account of *phantasia* that was developed in the theories of prophecy beginning with Al-Farabi and continuing through to Maimonides. But the mention of compulsion by Averroes, and Strauss in turn, should give pause. At stake is a philosophical account in which *phantasia* and *mimesis* are implicated in matters of force: poetics and rhetoric here impel consent. While the *falāsifa* make clear that the true way of knowledge consists of logical reasoning, they radically limit who is capable of the proper theoretical exercise of intellect and to what extent. The breach between *burhān* (demonstrative proof) and its opposites—*tamthīl* (figurative representation), *muḥākāh* (imitation), and so on—(the distinction which is at work in the passage of Averroes cited above) forms the central antinomy of this study.

The thinkers here in question develop a politicized account of *mimesis*, *phantasia* and figurative language at the crossroads between, on the one hand, their theories of poetics and rhetoric (the subject of Section II) and, on the other, their theory of prophecy (the subject of Section III), both of which derive from the Arabic reception of the Aristotelian corpus and ultimately give rise to a theory of representation—an art of writing but also of reading—that is developed in Strauss's work (the subject of Section IV). Present throughout this study and the works it considers are a set of concerns about visualization, understood both literally—'what may be made perceptible to the faculty of sight?'—and figuratively—'what ought to or must remain concealed?'

The Politics of Poetics

In elaborating a theory of imaginative representation—as well as its political and ethical uses—the Arabic commentators took as their point of departure developments that had already begun in the world of late antiquity, most notably, the 'the widespread collocation of the terms *phantasia*, *enargeia* and *mimesis* in ancient

Footnote 8 (Continued)

nal to political philosophy ...', in 'Leo Strauss and the Quest for the Other City: Philosophical Speech within the City from Al-Fārābī to Plato', in *Praxis des Philosophierens, Praktiken der Historiographie: Perspektiven von der Spätantike bis zur Moderne*, ed. M. Meliadò and S. Negri, Freiburg and Munich, 2018, pp. 248–69 (250). (What's more: the account of prophetology becomes the theoretical pivot by which the 'politico-theological problem'—Strauss's term, see below n. 122—is included under the rubric of political philosophy.) Stella's comment finds resonance in that of Mahdi and Lerner's: 'One approach was to consider political theology within the framework of political philosophy. This was the dominant mode among the Muslim political philosophers; it was used by Maimonides in so far as he followed their political teaching': *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. M. Mahdi and R. Lerner, Glencoe, 1963, p. 8; see their 'Introduction' *in toto* for a (Straussian) account of this distinction. For the debate between political theology and political philosophy, see the respective contributions of M. Campanini and C. E. Butterworth in *Islam, the State, and Political Authority: Medieval Issues and Modern Concerns*, ed. A. Afsaruddin, New York, 2011, pp. 35–52 and 53–74. For further debate around these concepts, see *Islamic Political Theology*, ed. M. Campanini and M. Di Donato, Lanham, 2021, as well as H. Meier, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*, transl. J. Harvey Lomax, Chicago, 1995, and id., *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, transl. M. Brainard, Cambridge, 2006.

literary criticism'.[9] The insinuation of *mimesis* into the account of the imaginative faculty established imitation as a central power of *phantasia*, while the inclusion of *enargeia* ('vividnesss' or 'representing something as if before one's eyes') in this triad lent particular weight to questions about visualization and visibility,[10] as can be seen in Pseudo-Longinus's *Περὶ Ὕψους* (*On the Sublime*), where this terminological convergence is clearly articulated:

> Weight, grandeur, and urgency in writing are very largely produced, dear young friend, by the use of 'visualizations' (αἱ φαντασίαι). That at least is what I call them; others call them 'image productions' (εἰδωλοποιΐας). ... [T]he word has now come to be used predominantly of passages where, inspired by strong emotion, you seem to see what you describe and bring it vividly before the eyes of your audience (πάθους βλέπειν δοκῇς καὶ ὑπ᾽ ὄψιν τιθῇς τοῖς ἀκούουσιν). (15.1–2)[11]

So, too, do we find these three terms discussed together in Proclus's *Commentary on the 'Republic'*:

> Indeed the representation (μίμησις) of these men moves our imagination (τὴν φαντασίαν ἡμῶν) ... . We seem to be actually present at the events on account of the vivid presentation of the things imitated, generated in us by the representation (τῶν πραγμάτων διὰ τὴν ἐκ τῆς μιμήσεως ἐναργῆ φαντασίαν τῶν μεμιμημένων).[12]

Both *mimesis* and *phantasia* would be received, translated, and explicated in the Arabic commentaries. And while *enargeia* was neither translated into Arabic nor became the object of a theoretical account,[13] the intensification of the association

[9] A. Sheppard, 'Preface', in *Takhyīl: The Imaginary in Classical Arabic Poetics*, ed. G. J. van Gelder and M. Hammond, Exeter, 2008, (hereafter: *Takhyīl*), pp. ix–xv (xiv). For a general account of the fate of this triad of terms up to their assumption into the Arabic world, see ead., *The Poetics of Phantasia: Imagination in Ancient Aesthetics*, London, 2014, pp. 19–47, as well as A. Manieri, *L'immagine poetica nella teoria degli antichi: phantasia ed enargeia*, Pisa, 1998.

[10] The literature on *enargeia* is vast, but for some of the most important accounts of its history, see M. W. Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought,* Urbana, 1927, pp. 105–16; G. Zanker, 'Enargeia in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, 124.3–4, 1981, pp. 297–311; N. Otto, *Enargeia: Untersuchung zur Charakteristik alexandrinischer Dichtung*, Stuttgart, 2009; R. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*, Farnham, 2009, esp. pp. 87–106; and H. Plett, *Enargeia in Classical Antiquity and the Early Modern Age: The Aesthetics of Evidence,* Leiden and Boston, 2012.

[11] R. Walzer, 'Al-Farabi's Theory of Prophecy and Divination', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 77, 1957, pp. 142–8 (145 n. 25), also cites this passage in a definitive statement on *phantasia* in the theory of prophecy. K. Kohl, 'Poetic Universals?', in *Takhyīl,* pp. 133–46, relates this passage to the question of 'poetic universals', which is crucial in a context that is not thinking of philosophical applicability in cultural or civilizational terms, but in terms of universal validity given its epistemological status as logic.

[12] *Proclus the Successor on Poetics and the Homeric Poems: Essays 5 and 6 of his 'Commentary on the Republic of Plato'*, ed. and transl. R. Lamberton, Atlanta, 2012, p. 232 (163.19–164.7).

[13] The Arabic translation appears not to have transmitted either of the instances of the word in the *Poetics*; see ad loc. in *Poetics: Editio Maior of the Greek Text with Historical Introductions and Philological Commentaries*, ed. L. Tarán and D. Gutas, Leiden, 2012, p. 398; for the Arabic, see pp. 119–20. When,

of *phantasia* with *enargeia* in the late antique period, particularly among the Neoplatonists,[14] would emerge from the assimilation of the theory of *phantasia* in *De anima* to the account of *enargeia* in the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, the very triad of texts that would play *the* central role in the Arabic commentaries here in question.[15] In turn, the pronounced attention devoted to how *phantasia* makes something appear before one's eyes and renders something visible was to persist in the Arabic world, where it would form the centre of an inquiry into the possible use and political precarity of vivid representations.[16]

In the Arabic context, the term *takhyīl* came to cover much the same semantic field as the Greek *phantasia/mimesis/enargeia* triad.[17] It is the unique word used to express how representation induces an effect in the imaginative faculty. In the context of the Aristotelian commentaries, 'Vorstellungsevokation'—'the (psychic) evocation of a representation' (as suggested by Heinrichs)—remains the scholarly consensus for a translation.[18] Formed from the second verbal root, the verb could be

Footnote 13 (Continued)

at 1462a17, Aristotle notes that tragedy creates the 'most vivid pleasures' ('αἱ ἡδοναὶ συνίστανται ἐναργέστατα'), the Arabic text reads ἐνεργέστατα, as it does in the next sentence: [*humma akthara f'alan, FAS* 144].

[14] This association had to do, of course, with *phantasia*'s relation to 'appearance' as well as Aristotle's description of the calling up of images by the *phantasia* to be like a representation of images before the eyes (*De anima*, 427b18–19; *De memoria* 450a, 4). Sheppard also draws important connections between *phantasia*'s image-making power and the representation of the intelligibles; these two senses are not *absolutely* distinguished (despite Plotinus's sui generis claim at *Enneads*, IV.3.30–1 about two 'image-making powers' (*phantastika*) which is not found elsewhere). See, e.g. Sheppard, *Poetics of Phantasia* (n. 9 above), p. 45, to the effect that as the Neoplatonists developed the philosophical edifice of *phantasia* further afield, they 'continue to use *phantasia* in the sense of "visualization"'. The Neoplatonic belief that *phantasia* could both receive images of *sensibilia* as well as *intelligiblia*, the latter specifically in an inspired or prophetic state, will be developed expansively in the Arabic commentaries; see ibid., pp. 71–100 ('Prophecy, Inspiration and Allegory').

[15] On the *De anima* commentaries, see H. J. Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity: Interpretations of the 'De Anima'*, London, 1996.

[16] Recent studies of *enargeia*, in which I would group my own, signal a shift in a direction that considers the ethical and political dimensions of the term as a corrective to the frequent consideration of it from an exclusively aesthetic or cognitive purview. See, e.g. A. Itkin, 'Bring up the Bodies: The Classical Concept of Poetic Vividness and its Reevaluation in Holocaust Literature' *PLMA*, 133.1, 2018, pp. 107–23, and J. Mansky, '"Look No More": Jonson's *Catiline* and the Politics of Enargeia', *PLMA*, 134.2, 2019, pp. 332–50.

[17] Cf. Ibn Rashīq's claim that 'the best *waṣf* [description] is a description that represents its object in such a way that the listener almost envisions it with his/her own eyes. Ibn Rashīq further says that some of his contemporary *littérateurs* (*al-muta'akhkhirūn*) argue that the most eloquent *waṣf* is a transformation of hearing (*sam'*) into seeing/vision (*baṣar*). According to him, the origin of *waṣf* is 'revealing' (*kashf*) and 'showing' (*iẓhār*), as seen in the statement: "The attire described (*wuṣifat*) the body underneath it", cited in A. M. Sumi, *Description in Classical Arabic Poetry: Waṣf, Ekphrasis, and Interarts Theory*, Leiden and Boston, 2004, p. 8. However, this concept is 1) part of the autochthonous field of literary criticism, not the Greek-inspired Aristotelian commentaries and 2) despite the convergent phrasing, investigating *waṣf* creates almost an exactly analogous problem as investigating *ekphrasis* in the context of *enargeia*.

[18] See W. Heinrichs, 'Die antike Verknüpfung von phantasia und Dichtung bei den Arabern', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 128.2, 1978, pp. 252–98, as well as his expansion of this article into his book, id. *Arabische Dichtung und Griechische Poetik: Ḥāzim al-Qarṭāǧannīs Grundle-*

said to evoke the noun form of the word, that is, *khayāl*, which means most broadly 'image'. Words from the root *kh-y-l*, of which we will see many, cover the field encompassing 'imagination', 'representation', and 'the evocation of images'.

The Arabic commentaries on the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* revolved around three key terms: the previously mentioned *takhyīl*, as well as *muḥākāh* (=*μίμησις*, imitation) and *tashbīh* (figurative language). Put generally, the *falāsifā* develop an account of how figurative language makes possible the imitation of entities both physical and conceptual and, through this imitation, generates imaginative effects. Visualization and the sensible representation of the conceptual are central to this process, as seen in Averroes's gloss on the claim in the *Poetics* that one should have 'the material as much as possible in the mind's eye (μάλιστα πρὸ ὀμμάτων)' and that, in doing so, one sees things 'most vividly, as if one was present at the events (ἐναργέστατα ὁρῶν ὥσπερ παρ' αὐτοῖς γιγνόμενος)' (1455a22–5):

> He [i.e., Aristotle] said: the poetical narrative becomes excellent and attains utmost perfection/completion [*al-tamām*] when in describing the thing or the incident taking place the poet attains a level such that the listeners see it as though it were sense-perceptible and visible without its contrary occurring too them from this description.[19]

And this is indeed a gloss: this is an excellent example of the process of adaptation and renovation that the original undergoes in its transfer. For the idea that presenting something before the eyes is centrally concerned with the sensible (visible) presentation of the conceptual is central to the conception of what *takhyīl* is,[20] and was already crucial for Aristotle's own claim about the importance of the representation of an action. Thus, the Arabic commentators stay true to the original sense of Aristotle's text *by way of*, not despite, developing it farther afield.

One can see how this process of representation is tied to affective reactions in the work of the man known in the Arabic world as *al-mu'allim al-thānī*, 'the second teacher' after Aristotle: Al-Farabi. Writing in his *Kitāb al-Shi'r* (*The Book of Poetry*), a treatise that was not only one of the earliest but also one of the most definitive for the formation of Arabic philosophical poetics, he writes:

> For evocation is [to poetry] what knowledge is to demonstration, opinion is to dialectic and persuasion to oratory. Indeed, one's actions often follow one's

Footnote 18 (Continued)

gung der Poetik mit Hilfe aristotelischer Begriffe, Beirut, 1969. See also his brief discussion of the term in id., '*Takhyīl*: Make-Believe and Image Creation in Arabic Literary Theory', in *Takhyīl*, pp. 1–14.

[19] For the Arabic, see Ibn Rushd, *Talkhīs Kitāb Arisṭūṭālīs fī al-Shi'r*, ed. S. Sālim, Cairo, 1971. For the English (which I have modified), see *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's 'Poetics'*, transl. C. E. Butterworth, Princeton, 1986, pp. 108–9. See the justified criticism of this translation in D. Gutas, "Review: On Translating Averroes' Commentaries", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 1990, 110.1, pp. 92–101.

[20] Cf. Averroes's comment on *Rhetoric*, III.10.6, in his *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's 'Rhetoric'*: 'He says: On the whole, someone who speaks of something in an eloquent manner, must present the thing he talks about as if it is seen with the eyes (*ka'annahu mushāhidun bi-l-baṣar*).' See the Arabic edition with French translation, critical introduction and notes of *Averroès (Ibn Rušd). Commentaire moyen à la 'Rhétorique' d'Aristote*, ed. M. Aouad, Paris, 2002, p. 310.

> imaginings (*takhayyulāt*). That is to say that one may imagine (*yatakhayyalu*) a certain thing about a matter and so do the act one would do were the existence of that thing in that matter to be confirmed by the senses or by evidence, even when it happens that what has been evoked in one's mind is not, in actuality, as it has been evoked.[21]

Al-Farabi states explicitly that the imaginative evocation generated by poetry issues in an action that follows from the images or imaginings generated, even if what transpires in the imagination and what transpires in actuality are constitutively at odds. The effectivity of this process has much to do with visualization; he continues:

> just as what one sees with one's own eyes can cause one to imagine (*yukhayyilu ilayhi*) a certain matter in a certain thing, when that very same thing is described in words, then those words can cause him to imagine in that thing the very same thing that he would have imagined had he seen the thing with his own eyes. ... therefore the intended purpose of [imaginatively] evocative utterances (*al-aqāwīl al-mukhayyilah*) is to prompt the listener into acting out the thing about which a certain matter has been evoked to him—be it an act of seeking out or escaping from, or striving for or being averse to, or any other action positive or negative—whether he assents to that [action] that has been evoked in him or not and whether the matter is, in reality, as he has been made to imagine it or not.[22]

We see not only Al-Farabi's manifold and intricate exposition of the entire phantastical process of poetic speech but also how closely the visualization engendered by imaginative representation is tied to an ethico-political register. For the imagination may be manipulated in such a fashion that an individual is either drawn towards or repelled from a given object. To understand how this process works, one must understand the logical poetics and rhetoric upon which the work of the Arabic Aristotelians depends.[23]

The Arabic commentators reasoned that if the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* belong to the *Organon*, then there must be a corresponding syllogism operative within

[21] The Arabic text was printed as an appendix to Ibn Rushd, *Talkhīs Kitāb Arisṭūṭālīs fī al-Shi'r* (n. 19 above), pp. 171–5. For the English, see *Takhyīl,* pp. 17–18.

[22] Ibn Rushd, *Talkhīs Kitāb Arisṭūṭālīs fī al-Shi'r* (n. 19 above), pp. 171–5. For the English, see *Takhyīl,* pp. 17–18.

[23] For a broad introduction, see W. Heinrichs: 'Poetik, Rhetorik, Literaturkritik, Metrik, Reimlehre', in *Grundriss der Arabischen Philologie,* I, Wiesbaden, 1992, pp. 177–207; and for the most thoroughgoing reconstruction of the entire logical edifice, see D. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*, Leiden, 1990. L. Harb, *Arabic Poetics: Aesthetic Experience in Classical Arabic Literature*, Cambridge, 2020, esp. pp. 75–134 (77), has recently elucidated the 'shift in philosophical works similar to that found in literary criticism' and concludes that '[t]he idiosyncratic strand of 'Aristotelian' literary theory ... has more in common with the mainstream strand of literary theory spurred by al-Jurjānī than previously acknowledged'. For a thoroughgoing analysis with attention to the political applications of poetry and rhetoric, see S. Kemal, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroës: The Aristotelian Reception*, London and New York, 2003.

poetic texts. Enter the poetic syllogism,[24] one of the most consistently fascinating aspects of Arabic philosophical poetics. According to the commentators, the figurative language of which poetry consists must have a logical structure. Let us look, for instance, at Avicenna's favourite example (which is all the more memorable on account of the manner in which he pairs careful logical reasoning with grotesque imagery): honey is vomited bile.[25] The logic runs as follows:

Honey is yellow. (Major premise)
Everything yellow is vomited bile. (Minor premise)
Therefore, honey is vomited bile.[26]

Writing in his *Jawāmi' Kitāb al-Shi'r* [*Short Commentary on the Poetics*], Averroes raises alarm about the possible consequences—but also the possible uses—of a logical operation such as this one, by commenting on a famous line of encomiastic poetry by Abū-Tammām:

huwwa al-bahru min ayyi al-nawāhī ataytahu
[He is the sea from whatever direction you come to him.]

The syllogism in the mind of the poet can be formalized as follows:

This ruler gives boundlessly.
Everyone that gives boundlessly is a sea.
Therefore, the ruler is a sea.

Commenting on this line, he writes:

> Now it is evident that this art does not take the representations of something as though they were the thing itself. But many people might err about that and thus take the representations of something as though they were the thing itself ... . For the most part these representations cause error concerning the things which can be conceived of [*tutaṣawwar*] only by their representations or which can be conceived of only with difficulty ... Aristotle came to the opinion that this art was highly useful, because by means of it the souls of the multitude [*al-jumhūr*] could be moved to believe in [*i'tiqād*] or not believe in a certain thing and towards doing or abandoning a certain thing ... .Thus, the art of poet-

[24] For the very latest work, see G. Schoeler, 'The "Poetic Syllogism' Revisited", *Oriens*, 41, 2013, pp. 1–26. See also id., 'Der poetische Syllogismus. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der "logischen" Poetik der Araber', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 133, 1983, pp. 43–92; M. Aouad and G. Schoeler, 'Le syllogisme poétique selon al-Fārābī: un syllogisme incorrect de la deuxième figure', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 12, 2002, pp. 185–96; M. Aouad, 'Le Syllogisme poétique selon *le Livre de la Poétique* d'Ibn Tumlūs', in *Words, Texts and Concepts Cruising the Mediterranean Sea. Studies on the Sources, Contents and Influences of Islamic Civilization and Arabic Philosophy and Science. Dedicated to Gerhard Endress on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday,* ed. R. Arnzen and J. Tielmann, Leuven, 2004, pp. 259–70.

[25] This is, of course, evocative of the passages in Aristotle's *De anima* and *On Sophistical Refutations* in which he notes deceptions concerned with judgements about sense-perceptions using similar examples.

[26] Schoeler, '"Poetic Syllogism" Revisited' (n. 24 above), pp. 7–8. These are, admittedly, different types of syllogism, but for my purposes the types are less important than the general ways in which they function.

> ics is that which enables a man to devise an imaginative representation of each particular thing in the most complete manner possible for it.[27]

In this passage, which is certainly not *sui generis* among treatises of this type, Averroes notes that the potential error and, correspondingly, the 'highly useful' nature of this art results from a process of imaginative representation that issues in a kind of belief.[28] Within the corpus under consideration here, conception, belief, and representation were organized within a logical framework that centred on two terms: *taṣawwur* (conception) and *taṣdīq* (assent). This dyad underpins both the rhetorical and poetical arts *insofar as they are logical*.[29] The masses are influenced to act in accordance with the 'conception' of reality that has been instilled in them through these figurative and rhetorical uses of language because they 'assent' to the conclusion drawn by comparison. The metonymy here 1) serves to express the ruler's generosity (a non-sensible attribute) in a concrete image and 2) has a logic even though the conclusion is false (that is, even though the ruler is not *actually* a sea). There is a corresponding syllogism that takes place in the mind of the audience members, which can be distinguished from the one offered above 'because it leads the listener to the conclusion that the thing in question has certain properties and should be aspired to or avoided'.[30] It runs as follows:

> The ruler is a sea.
> Every sea gives freely and liberally.
> Therefore, the ruler gives freely and liberally.

The populace gathered around to listen to this encomiastic poetry are able to conceive of this non-sensible attribute (*taṣawwur* of his generosity), they imaginatively envision the greatness of his generosity through the wonder of the metaphor (*takhyīl*) and thus they assent to the notion that the ruler is a benign, liberal sovereign (*taṣdīq*). The three concepts operate closely together.

There are minor differences in how this process functions between rhetoric and poetics but elucidating them is neither my intention here nor entirely feasible. For in trying to discern clear distinctions between them, one runs up against what Black calls 'a major inconsistency in the Arabic philosophical tradition's development of the logical interpretation of poetics':[31] that there is no logically grounded manner by which one could perfectly divide the two fields. What can, however, be stated without a doubt is that a proper understanding of the logical process underpinning these two arts in tandem is the *sine qua non* of understanding the ethico-political field of their application. As Black puts it elegantly and emphatically:

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[27] English and Arabic in *Averroës' Three Short Commentaries on Aristotle's 'Topics', Rhetoric', and 'Poetics'*, ed. and transl. C. E. Butterworth, Albany, 1977, pp. 83–4 and 203–6.

[28] Compare al-Jurjānī's near-identical comments in *Takhyīl,* p. 57.

[29] See H. A. Wolfson, 'The Terms Taṣawwur and Taṣdiq in Arabic Philosophy and Their Greek, Latin, and Hebrew Equivalents', *The Muslim World*, 33.2, 1943, pp. 114–28, and Black, *Logic* (n. 23 above), pp. 52–102 and 180–208.

[30] Schoeler, '"Poetic Syllogism" Revisited' (n. 24 above), p. 8. Cf. Black, *Logic* (n. 23 above), pp. 229–31.

[31] Black, *Logic* (n. 23 above), p. 187.

> The acknowledgement of the political utility of rhetorical and poetical modes of argument by the Islamic tradition is a direct consequence of that tradition's logical and epistemological analyses of the kinds of knowledge that these arguments' forms are capable of engendering.[32]

The remarkable claim that the Arab philosophers make apropos of poetics is that following Aristotle's distinctions between the degree of veracity of each type of syllogism, the poetic syllogism is logical though *entirely false*.[33] The poetical art offers an instance of a non-apophantic mode of predication whose statements are not judged on the dichotomy of true-or-false but rather on the efficacy of the imaginative result and subsequent production of consensus. The criterion of evaluation shifts from a 'truth/falsehood binary [that] depends on extrinsic values' to a 'rational/make-believe binary [that] depends on the intrinsic logic of an image'.[34] The *takhyīl* which poetry effects takes place in the no-man's land between psychology and logic, assent and knowledge, and in this gap lie the possibilities of an ethico-political appropriation and application of poetry.[35] In al-Jurjānī's *Asrār al-Balāghah* [*The Secrets of Eloquence*], Averroes's fear, cited above, that in a vivid representation the mass may take a figure of the thing for the thing itself is given a precise terminological account and, again, connected directly to vivid representation:

> Here is another kind of make-believe (*takhyīl*), one that harks back to what went before on the feigned forgetting of the comparison (*tanāsā al-tashbīh*) and turning one's mind away from imagining it. ... Poets borrow some human attribute that is perceptible through the senses as a metaphor for attributes that are abstract. Then it is *as if* they find that very attribute *and perceive it in reality, with their eyes* (*ka'annahum qad wajadū tilk al-ṣifah bi-'ayyniha*), and as if the metaphor and the analogy have altogether slipped from their minds. ... Obviously, the intention is to induce the hearers to be amazed at seeing what they have never seen before and what is contrary to custom ... .[36]

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[32] Ibid., p. 10.

[33] The list of the truth value of all five syllogisms is found in Al-Farabi's *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*, ed. U. Amin, Cairo, 1968, p. 79. The problem of poetry's falsity both concerned 1) whether it was reproachable *per se* due to its false nature and 2) the question of how one accounts for comparisons between religious texts and poetry given the falsity of the latter. One of the definitive studies here remains, J. C. Bürgel's '"Die beste Dichtung ist die lügenreichste". Wesen und Bedeutung eines literarischen Streites des arabischen Mittelalters im Lichte komparatistischer Betrachtung', *Oriens*, 23–4, 1974, pp. 7–102.

[34] Harb, *Arabic Poetics* (n. 23 above), p. 47.

[35] Charles Butterworth has devoted a career to the political interpretation of Arabic Aristotelian rhetoric especially. See C. E. Butterworth, 'Rhetoric and Islamic Political Philosophy', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 3.2, 1972, pp. 187–98; id., 'Averroes: Politics and Opinion', in *The American Political Science Review*, 66.3, 1972, pp. 894–901; id., 'The Rhetorician and his Relationship to the Community: Three Accounts of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*', in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, Albany, 1984, pp. 111–36; and id., 'The Political Teaching of Avicenna' in *Topoi: An International Review of Philosophy*, 2000, pp. 35–44.

[36] Arabic in *Asrār Al-balāgha: The Mysteries of Eloquence of 'Abdalqāhir Al-Jurjānī*, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul, 1954, pp. 278–9. English in *Takhyīl*, p. 57, my emphasis.

Through the elision of the trope's rhetorical nature, comparison gives way to reification in a process that Gruendler terms 'naturalization'.[37] The 'natural' or the 'real' can thus be produced in a process of forgery that operates in the imaginative faculty. 'Because of the corruption of their sense perception and of their imagination, those who have sick bodies imagine what is sweet to be bitter and what is bitter to be sweet', runs an aphorism of Al-Farabi's before immediately switching to the register of virtue ethics: 'They form a concept of the suitable as being unsuitable and a concept of the unsuitable as being suitable'.[38] One can immediately see how this may be exploited. Schoeler puts it nicely when he writes that '[t]he rational process of syllogistic reasoning in the listener's mind that is set in motion by figurative language therefore immediately turns into a psychological process that results in an *action* or a *reaction*'.[39] The sentiment is fitting in a context that paid such careful attention to what Aristotle meant in the *Poetics* by the representation of action and the ethico-political stakes thereof.

This bind between the knowledge and the action resultant from poetic language is clearly articulated at the start of Al-Farabi's *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah* [*The Attainment of Happiness*],[40] where he notes that the logical faculty separates between the thing itself and its image or similitude.[41] Instruction mediates the difference; this difference in turn mediates between mass and elite, who are granted differential access to knowledge:[42] '[t]he vulgar ought to comprehend merely the similitude of these [ultimate and incorporeal] principles, which should be established in their souls by persuasive arguments'.[43]

In his *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīs* [*The Philosophy of Aristotle*],[44] one discovers Al-Farabi's own position by a sort of interlinear reading, paying close attention to the manner in which he provides his 'objective' account of Aristotle's philosophy:

> Therefore he [that is, Aristotle] gave an account of the art [that is, rhetoric] that enables man to persuade the multitude regarding a) all theoretical things

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[37] B. Gruendler, 'Fantastic Aesthetics and Practical Criticism in Ninth-Century Baghdad', in *Takhyīl* pp. 196–220 (201); cf. Alexander Key's comments on how 'al-Ǧurǧānī connected elision to poetic affect', in his *Language between God and the Poets: Ma'na in the Eleventh Century,* Oakland, 2018, pp. 218–19.

[38] Al-Farabi, *The Political Writings*, transl. C. E. Butterworth, II, Ithaca, 2015, p. 32.

[39] Schoeler, '"Poetic Syllogism" Revisited' (n. 24 above), p. 5. Cf. Heinrichs speaking of 'the creation of a mental image which forces the soul of the listener to accept or reject the assertion in question without a declaration of true or false *and to act accordingly*' (my emphasis), in his '*Takhyīl* and Its Traditions', in *Gott ist Schön und er liebt die Schönheit*, Berne, 1994, p. 228. Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, VI.2.30, on *enargeia*: 'imagines prosecuntur ut ... videamur ... nec cogitare sed facere' ('our images haunt us and thus we seem not to be thinking but acting').

[40] For the Arabic, see *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'āda*, ed. J. al Yasin, Beirut, 1987; for the English, see *The Attainment of Happiness*, in *Al-Farabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, transl. M. Mahdi, rev. ed., Glencoe, 1969 (hereafter: *AH*).

[41] *AH,* p. 15 (§4).

[42] On this topic, see *The Popularization of Philosophy in Medieval Islam, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. M. Abram, Turnhout 2022.

[43] *AH*, p. 36 (§40); cf. *AH*, p. 42 (§51).

[44] *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālīṣ*, ed. M. Mahdi, Beirut, 1961; for the English, see *Al-Farabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (n. 40 above), pp. 71–130 (92).

> and b) those practical things in which it is customary to confine oneself to using persuasive arguments based on particular examples ... . Then afterwards he gave an account of the art [that is, poetics] that enables man to project images of the things that became evident in the certain demonstrations in the theoretical arts, to imitate them by means of their similitudes, and to project images of, and imitate, all the other particular things in which it is customary to employ images and imitation through speech. ... He called the faculty resulting from these arts the *logical* faculty.

Anyone with even a passing knowledge of the *Poetics* should be surprised to discover the essence of the text described in this manner and rightly so, for what we are given is Al-Farabi's understanding of what the poetical art is, articulated through the authority of Aristotle and mediated through third-person locutions—'he gave an account', 'he called'—which place these claims in the Stagirite's mouth.[45] The association of the masses with the imaginative faculty was consistent throughout the work of Al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes.[46] All of them made clear that image-evoking representations—*mukhayyalāt*—effected in the minds of the public issue in a certain kind of knowledge and action.

The Poetics of Prophecy

Put summarily: from the moment when the Aristotelian corpus began to be commented upon by its Arabic interpreters, the rhetorical and poetical arts were both logicized and given a (further) political articulation. The exposition of the dual aims of rhetorical and poetical discourse—that is, the representation of higher truths through imitation and the determination of individual action through imaginative effects—reaches its apex in Al-Farabi's theory of religion through at times shocking means and with at times renegade conclusions.[47] Continuing his account of the imagination's use in instruction, he notes:

> Now when one acquires knowledge of the beings ['*ilm al-mawjūdāt*] or receives instructions in them, if he perceives their ideas themselves with his intellect, and his assent to them is by means of certain demonstration [*al-barāhīn al-yaqīnah*], then the science that comprises these cognitions is

[45] Al-Farabi's work must also be understood against the backdrop of Greek and Syriac late antique rhetorical practice: see J. W. Watt, *Rhetoric and Philosophy from Greek into Syriac*, Farnham, 2010, and id., *The Aristotelian Tradition in Syriac*, London, 2019. See also H. Daiber, 'Die Aristotelesrezeption in der syrischen Literatur', in id., *From the Greeks to the Arabs and Beyond*, 4 vols, Leiden, 2021, I, ch. 8 (all of Daiber's works are cited from this recent edition of his collected writings as vol./chapter).

[46] For Al-Farabi, see *Political Regime*, pp. 74–5 (§90). For Avicenna, see *Al-Isharāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*; translation in *Takhyīl*, p. 25. For Averroes, see Arabic and English in '*The Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom' and 'Epistle Dedicatory*', ed. and transl. C. E. Butterworth, Provo, 2001, p. 20.

[47] For one of the very best general studies see G. Schoeler, 'Poeticher Syllogismus—Bildliche Redeweise—Religion vom Aristotelischen *Organon* zu al-Farabis Religionstheorie', in *Logik und Theologie: Das Organon im arabischen und lateinischen Mittelalter,* ed. D. Peler and U. Rudolph Leiden 2005, pp. 45–58.

> *philosophy*. But if they are known by imagining them through similitudes [*mithālāt*] that imitate them, and assent to what is imagined of them is caused by persuasive methods, then the ancients call what comprises these cognitions *religion*. ... Therefore, according to the ancients, religion [*millah*] is an imitation of philosophy [*muḥākiyyah li-l-falsafah*].[48]

It does not require the mind of a Strauss but only a Straussian vigilance before deflections to realize that Al-Farabi is practising proper social distancing by placing his claim in the mouth of the ancients (who knew no such thing as religion in the sense in which he describes). One can say along with Strauss that 'Fârâbî avails himself then of the specific immunity of the commentator, or of the historian, in order to speak his mind concerning grave matters',[49] as he wrote in an essay that would later be reworked into the introduction of his epochal *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.[50] The thesis that the relation between religion and philosophy is an imitative one and thus ultimately a matter of *mimesis* brings the *Poetics* decisively within the politico-theological fold and unites *takhyīl*'s two aims—the cognitive and the ethical—within the purview of revealed religion.[51]

What is in essence described by Al-Farabi is the structure of prophetic revelation. Islamic prophetology offers a theory of imaginative representation which is intimately linked with the one found in the commentaries on the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* and which explains how exactly intelligible truths are represented in religious texts or, in other words, how religion is an imitation of philosophy.[52] Al-Farabi will undertake an innovation absent from the work of his precursors (notably Al-Kindi),

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[48] *AH*, p. 44 (§55), italics original; *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'ādah*, p. 90; see F. Stella's inquiry into Al-Farabi's lexicon of religion, including *millah*, in 'Religion as Law: Meaning and Context of Law in al-Fārābī's Philosophy", *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 2019, pp. 57–71.

[49] Leo Strauss, 'Farabi's *Plato*', in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume*, New York, 1945, pp. 357–93. Cf. Lerner's near-identical comments on Averroes manner of interweaving quotes and assertions in his *Averroes on Plato's 'Republic'* (n. 5 above), p. xv.

[50] Leo Strauss, 'Introduction', in id., *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Glencoe, 1952, pp. 7–21. Strauss's inquiry into the *falāsifa* began as an attempt to philosophically understand the politics of imaginative prophecy, as S. Harvey shows in 'The Story of a Twentieth-Century Jewish Scholar's Discovery of Plato's Political Philosophy in Tenth-Century Islam: Leo Strauss' Early Interest in the Islamic *Falāsifa*', in *Modern Jewish Scholarship on Islam in Context: Rationality, European Borders, and the Search for Belonging*, ed. O. Fraisse, Berlin and Boston, 2018, pp. 219–44. His relation to Islamic philosophy has been extensively documented in G. Tamer, *Islamische Philosophie und die Krise der Moderne: Das Verhältnis von Leo Strauss zu Alfarabi, Avicenna und Averroes*, Leiden, 2001.

[51] For which, see J. Janssens, 'Al-Farabi: La religion comme imitation de la philosophie', in *Orient-Occident: racines spirituelles de l'Europe*: *enjeux et implications de la 'translatio studiorum' dans le judaïsme, le christianisme et l'islam de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance,* ed. M. Delgado et al., Paris, 2014, pp. 497–512. An interesting analysis is also found in E. Gannagé, 'Y a-t-il une pensée politique dans le *Kitāb al-ḥurūf* d'al-Fārābī?', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 57, 2004, pp. 121–49.

[52] For an excellent short summary of prophetic visions, see H. Daiber, '*Ru'yā*: In its Philosophical-Mystical Meaning', in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (hereafter: *EI*^{2}) [= id., *From the Greeks to the Arabs* (n. 45 above), II, ch. 4]. For an introduction to the theory of prophecy with many excerpted passages in translation, see F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy*, London and New York, 2008 [1958], and, for another overview, H. Gaetje, 'Philosophische Traumlehren im Islam', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 109, 1959, pp. 258–85. For some of the latest work, see *Prophecy and Prophets in the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Palazzo and A. Rodolfi, Florence, 2020.

whereby he associates prophetic revelation via *phantasia* with a process of imitation (*muḥākāh/mimesis*).[53] His theory of prophecy emerges against the backdrop of several ancient sources, notably: 1) the account of the internal senses (*al-ḥawāss al-bāṭinah*) derived from Aristotle's *De anima* and Alexander of Aphrodisias's commentary (that is, the location of the psychic faculties in the ventricles of the brain),[54] 2) the account of *phantasia* as expounded into a theory of *takhyīl*, 3) Neoplatonic emanationism,[55] and 4) of particular importance, the Arabic version (an adaptation more than a translation) of the *Parva naturalia*. The prophet, who possesses an intellect of divine quality, receives the emanation which 'spills over' from the Active Intellect to the faculty of imagination.[56] The imaginative faculty in turn imitates the intelligibles through images, which are then projected onto the common sense [=κοινὴ αἴσθησις = *al-ḥiss al-mushtarak*], where they appear to the senses, notably the faculty of vision. The association of visualization and prophecy[57] both precedes Al-Farabi—as in Kindi's claim that the prophet 'sees [the sensible form of the concept of his thoughts] alone as if it were in front of his eyes, there being no difference

[53] The relation between *muḥākāh* and prophecy is most definitively stated in *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abu Nasr al-Farabi's Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*, ed. and transl. R. Walzer, Oxford, 1985, pp. 210–27. His use of *mimesis* has both Platonic and Aristotelian precedents. For the Neoplatonic backdrop of Al-Farabi's theory of prophecy, see Walzer, 'Al-Farabi's Theory' (n. 11 above), p. 147; for the Aristotelian backdrop, see H. Daiber, 'Prophetie und Ethik bei Fārābī (258/872–339/950 oder 951)', in id., *From the Greeks to the Arabs* (n. 45 above), II, ch. 17. Cf. also Lameer's claim: 'As an alternative to the explanations offered by Walzer and Daiber, it might be worthwhile to consider the possibility that *muḥākāh* as employed in the context of prophecy and divination has its ultimate basis in the theory of religion as an imitative expression of philosophical truth', in id., *Al-Fārābi and Aristotelian Syllogistics* (n. 5 above), pp. 271–2. This seems to me to beg the question. However, see Lameer's crucial study of the relation of syllogistics to politics and religion in ibid., pp. 259–89.

[54] Variable and at times complex, the structure of the internal senses in the Arabic world depends upon a given author. The most essential distinction for our purposes is that the projection of the image of the intelligibles onto the common sense is to be highlighted insofar as it gives the *impression* of direct sensible perception. In other words, the images of the intelligibles do not appear to the prophet as emerging from a place internal to his mind but rather, by being projecting onto the common sense, seem to visibly appear before him in the external world at the present moment. For a general overview of the doctrine of the internal senses, see R. Harvey, *The Inward Wits. Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, London, 1975; more specific to the context of this article, see H. A. Wolfson, 'The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew Philosophical Texts', *The Harvard Theological Review,* 28.2, 1935, pp. 69–133, and id., 'Maimonides on the Internal Senses', *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 25.4, 1935, pp. 441–67, both repr. in id., *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, ed. I. Twersky and G. H. Williams, 2 vols, Cambridge, 1973–7, I, pp. 250–314 and 344–70 (note also the important correctives based on new classification of authorship in D. Black, 'Imagination and Estimation: Arabic Paradigms and Western Transformations', *Topoi*, 19, 2000, pp. 59–75); G. Strohmaier, 'Avicennas Lehre von den «inneren Sinnen» und ihre Voraussetzungen bei Galen', in *Von Demokrit bis Dante: Die Bewahrung antiken Erbes in der arabischen Kultur*, Hildesheim, 1996, pp. 330–41; and R. Hansberger, 'Averroes and the 'Internal Senses', in *Interpreting Averroes: Critical Essays*, ed. P. Adamson and M. Di Giovanni, Cambridge, 2018, pp. 138–57.

[55] T.-A. Druart, 'Al-Farabi and Emanationism', in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. J. F. Wippel, Washington DC, 1987, pp. 23–44.

[56] Cf. *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State* (n. 53 above), p. 244, and the entry 'Prophet'/'Nabī' in Ilai Alon and Shukri Abed, *Al-Fārābī's Philosophical Lexicon* [=*Qāmūs al-Fārābī al-Falsafī*], 2 vols, Cambridge, 2007, I, pp. 465–6 and II, p. 693 (ad loc.).

[57] For which, see W. C. Streetmen, '"If it were God who sent them ...": Aristotle and Al-Fārābī on Prophetic Vision', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 18, 2008, pp. 211–46 (226).

between the two [that is, seeing with one's own eyes and with one's mind]'[58]—and continues through to Maimonides,[59] who, citing Al-Farabi's definition of prophecy nearly verbatim, adds that:

> it is a perfection that comes in a dream or in a vision [*mar'eh*]. The word *mar'eh* [vision] derives from the verb *ra'oh* [to see]. This signifies that the imaginative faculty [*al-quwwah al-mutakhayyilah*] achieves so great a perfection of action that it sees the thing as if it were outside [*ka'annahu min khārij*].[60]

Within the account of prophecy developed in relation to imagination's power of imitation,[61] there develops what in essence ought to be termed a poetics of prophetic revelation. Indeed, Avicenna had classified poetry [*shi'r*] as one of the things that may be received from the celestial flux during visions,[62] while the Arabic version of the *De divinitatione per somnum* provided a fully developed account of how the Active Intellect 'dresses up' the intelligibles with spiritual forms that then appear as corporeal words and pictures to the *sensus communis* during visions.[63] The intelligibles thus appear to be images of corporeal objects put before the eyes of the prophet,

58 Al-Kindī, '*Fī Māhiyat an-nawm wa-l-ruʾyā*', in *Rasāʾil al-Kindī al-falsafiyya*, ed. M. ʿAbd al-Hādī Abū Rīda, 2 vols, Cairo, 1950–3, I, pp. 293–311 (296) [= 'On the Quiddity of Sleep and Dreams', in *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī,* ed. P. Adamson and P. E. Pormann, Oxford 2012, pp. 122–33 (126)].

59 For an overview of Maimonides's conception of prophecy, see A. Reines, *Maimonides and Abrabanel on Prophecy*, Cincinnatti, 1970, pp. xxiii–lxxxi; H. Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Amsterdam, 2001; and D. Rabinowitz, 'The Prophetic Method in the *Guide*', in *Maimonides' 'Guide of the Perplexed': A Critical Guide*, ed. D. Frank and A. Segal, Cambridge, 2021, pp. 161–83. See also, more broadly, C. Sirat, *Les théories des visions surnaturelles dans la pensée juive du moyen âge*, Leiden, 1969.

60 For the Judaeo-Arabic, see Maimonides, *Le Guide des Égarés: Traité de théologie et de philosophie*, 3 vols., ed. and transl. S. Munk Paris: 1856–1866, p. 78 (II.36) (hereafter: *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*) and for the English: id., *The Guide of the Perplexed*, transl. S. Pines, 2 vols, Chicago, 1963, II pp. 369–70 (hereafter: *Guide*).

61 Avicenna, too, follows Al-Farabi in associating *muḥākāh* with the psychology of visions; see *Avicenna's De Anima (Arabic Text): Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā',* ed. F. Rahman, London, 1959, p. 177.

62 Ibid., p. 174. For more on the mode of representation in Avicenna's account of prophecy, notably what she terms 'necessary truths conveyed through poetical and rhetorical images', see O. L. Lizzini, 'Representation and Reality: On the Definition of Imaginative Prophecy in Avicenna', in *The Parva Naturalia in Greek, Arabic and Latin Aristotelianism*, ed. B Bydén and F. Radovic, Cham, 2018, pp. 133–53 (140).

63 R. Hansberger is currently completing an edition of these texts: *Kitāb al-Ḥiss wa-l-maḥsūs: The Arabic Version of Aristotle's Parva Naturalia. Edition, Translation and Study of the Text preserved in MS Rampur 1752*, Leiden, forthcoming. She has devoted several essays to the theory of prophecy in these texts; see ead., 'How Aristotle Came to Believe in God-Given Dreams: The Arabic Version of *De divinatione per somnum*', in *Dreaming across Boundaries: The Interpretation of Dreams in Islamic Lands*, ed. L. Marlow, Boston and Washington DC, 2008, pp. 50–77; ead., 'Kitāb al-Ḥiss wa-l-maḥsūs: Aristotle's *Parva naturalia* in Arabic Guise', in *Les Parva naturalia d'Aristote: Fortune antique et médiévale*, ed. C. Grellard and P.-M. Morel, Paris, 2010, pp. 143–62; ead., 'The Arabic *Parva Naturalia*', in *Noétique et théorie de la connaissance dans la philosophie arabe du IXe au XIIe siècle: des traductions gréco-arabes aux disciples d'Avicenne*, ed. M. Sebti and D. De Smet, Paris, 2019, pp. 45–78. Her work builds on that of S. Pines, 'The Arabic Recension of the *Parva Naturalia* and the Philosophical Doctrine concerning Veridical Dreams according to *al-Risāla al-Manāmiyya* and Other Sources', *Israel Oriental Studies* 4, pp. 104–53.

whose text then recreates that imaginative process in reverse, so to speak, permitting its readers/listeners knowledge of the intelligibles.[64] This twofold process of representation and reception has a perfect analogue in discussions of the poetic syllogism, in which there is one kind of syllogism that takes place in the mind of the poet and one that takes place in the mind of the reader/listener.[65] These two types of syllogisms would thus correspond to the two parts of prophetic activity.[66] This process *in toto* is best summarized by Gutas: 'the imagination may also help the theoretical intellect during its contact with the active intellect. In both cases the imagination converts this knowledge into audible and visible images, but when the contents of the knowledge are the divine message of revelation, this is conveyed to people as a recited holy text ...'.[67]

The *falāsifa*'s account of the poetics of prophecy develops through a series of lexical transpositions between the domain of poetics and rhetoric and that of prophecy, the most notable being Al-Farabi's previously mentioned use of *mimesis*. Consider, for instance, Avicenna's reference to prophecy as a *mushāhadah ḥaqqah* ('true vision'),[68] which ought to be supplemented by al-Jurjānī's poetic account of *mushāhadah*, in which he describes how poetic language renders visible either something obscure or something that is not sense-perceptible.[69] There is not only a particular kind of knowledge that emerges from poetic language, al-Jurjānī notes, but the vivid representation of the opaque through *mushāhadah* results in a more deep affection of the soul, an affection, which possesses both epistemological and

[64] The kind of prophecy under consideration here is the second kind recognized by Al-Farabi and the only kind recognized by Maimonides (with the exception of Moses): when both the imagination and the intellect work in tandem. See the account provided by Strauss in *Philosophie und Gesetz: Beiträge zum Verständnis Maimunis und seiner Vorläufer,* repr. in id., *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. II*: Philosophie und Gesetz–Frühe Schriften*, ed. H. Meier, Stuttgart, 1997, pp. 87–124. For the relation between prophecy and noetics, see M. Afifi al-Akiti 'The Three Properties of Prophethood in Certain Works of Avicenna and al-Gazālī', in *Interpreting Avicenna: Science and Philosophy in Medieval Islam*, ed. J. McGinnis with the assistance of D. C. Reisman, Leiden and Boston, 2004, pp. 189–212.

[65] See Black, *Logic* (n. 23 above), pp. 229–31.

[66] The process of descent through revelation (the Arabic word for which—*nuzūl*—has the original sense of 'going down') and return to the Eternal Intellect through the imagination is a familiar (Neoplatonic) pattern that one can find in both Al-Farabi and Avicenna; see J. Michot, *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenna: Le retour à Dieu (ma'ād) et l'imagination*, Leuven, 1986, esp. pp. 118–33.

[67] This is from D. Gutas, 'Imagination and Transcendental Knowledge in Avicenna', in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy. From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. J. E. Montgomery, Leuven, 2006, pp. 337–54 (344), which is part of a trilogy of articles directly relevant to our discussion: id., 'The Logic of Theology (*Kalām*) in Avicenna', in *Logik und Theologie: Das Organon im arabischen und lateinischen Mittelalter,* ed. D. Peler and U. Rudolph Leiden 2005, pp. 59–72, and id., 'Intellect without Limits: The Absence of Mysticism in Avicenna', in *Intellect et imagination dans la philosophie médiévale*, ed. M. C. Pachecho and J. F. Meirinhos, I, Turnhout, 2006, pp. 351–72. A similar notion is nicely formulated by F. Zimmermann: 'Inasmuch as the particular religions share this goal [i.e., the happiness of man and of society] they are, so to speak, vernacular versions of the universal religion of philosophy', in *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's 'De Interpretatione',* ed. F. Zimmerman, Oxford, 1991, p. XLIII n. 2.

[68] *Ariṣṭū 'inda al-'Arab: dirāsah wa-nuṣūṣ ghayr manshūrah*, ed. A. Badawī, Cairo, 1947; G. Vajda, 'Les notes d'Avicenne sur la "Théologie d'Aristote"', *Revue Thomiste*, 51, 1951, pp. 360–1.

[69] *Asrār al-Balāgha* (n. 36 above), p. 109.

ethical force.[70] The vision granted the prophet—*mushāhadah* in Avicenna's sense—would thus find its complement in the visualization produced by the poetic language of the holy text—*mushāhadah* in al-Jurjānī's sense.

Precisely how this process of visualization functions in prophecy may be seen in the extension of *takhyīl* into the sphere of *tafsīr,* that is, Quranic exegesis, an extension, which, one ought to add, comes closest to the use of *takhyīl* in philosophical poetics.[71] It was the great jurist and Mu'tazalite theologian al-Zamakhsharī who demonstrated the manner in which *takhyīl* makes possible corporeal representations of abstract, ineffable notions. He uses one of the famous quandaries of Quranic interpretation: how to interpret the references, in *Sūrat al-Zumar* 39/67, to God's body?

> They have not shown Allah His proper reverence—when on the Day of Judgement the whole earth will be in His Fist [*wa-l-arḍu jamī'an qabḍatuhu*], and the heavens will be rolled up in His Right Hand [*wa-l-samawātu maṭwīyātun bi-yamīnihi*]. Glorified and Exalted is He above what they associate with Him!

'The intentions of this utterance', he writes, 'if you take it as it is in its entirety and totality, is the depiction (*taṣwīr*) of His majesty and *putting before our eyes* the essence of His majesticness and nothing else, without taking the "handful" or the "right hand" into the realm of the literal or that of the figurative'.[72] Al-Zamakhshari appeals to *takhyīl* as the principle that grounds his interpretation, for where there is *takhyīl* there is a reduction of 'some abstract notion such as God's omnipotence to a hypothetically posited corporeal image which is intended to make the abstract notion tangible',[73] and thus one cannot accuse the holy text of an anthropomorphism of the divine. In sum, to make one of the modalities of God's Being such as his majesty apprehensible to the great mass of people, the prophetic revelation of the Qur'ān employs an imagistic language that results in an imaginative effect, as Al-Farabi describes perfectly in his *Political Regime*:

> Most people have no ability, either by innate character or by custom, to understand and form a concept of those things. For those people, an image ought to be made, by means of things that represent them, of how the principles, their rankings, the active intellect, and the first ruler come about. ... [R]eligion is a sketch of these things or of their images in the soul.[74]

In the setup to this passage, Al-Farabi describes how theoretical truths (the principles of the existents) are expressed in images and he chooses the analogy of a

[70] Cf. Key, *Language* (n. 37 above), p. 198: 'What al-Ĝurĝānī cared about—and in this he typifies Classical Arabic literary criticism—was the mechanism by which the two images, each taken on its own, produced affect. ... Al-Ĝurĝānī cared about the formal mechanisms that manipulate the cognitive processes of the audience'.

[71] As may be seen in Heinrich's fivefold distinction of the term in *Takhyīl*, p. 2.

[72] *Al-Kashshāf*, ed. M. al-Ṣādiq Qamḥāwī, III, Cairo, 1972, pp. 308.6–309.9, cited in Heinrichs '*Takhyīl* and Its Traditions' (n. 39 above), my emphasis.

[73] Heinrichs, '*Takhyīl* and Its Traditions' (n. 39 above), pp. 238–9.

[74] Al-Farabi, *Political Regime* (n. 46 above), p. 74 (§90).

human whose image can be found in a statue, or in a mirror, *or* twice-removed, as when one sees the image of a statue reflected in a mirror. Al-Farabi makes use of the exact same analogy, using almost identical wording, in his *Kitāb al-Shi'r* [*The Book of Poetry*] where he is discussing *mimesis* and figurative language.[75] But whereas the referent in *Kitāb al-Shi'r* is poetry, here (in the passage above) it is religion. We see yet again (this time intertextually) the mutual articulation of the poetic and the theological.[76]

That *takhyīl* provides a logical account of the seeming heresy of representing the immaterial God through *sensibilia* would not have been lost on Maimonides, whose *Guide* takes up the problem of anthropomorphism as its central theme. His work reveals a more than passing acquaintance with the poetics of prophecy developed by the *falāsifa*, interest in which would persist in Judaeo-Arabic letters, such as in the *Kitāb al-muḥāḍarah wa-l-mudhākarah*[77] of Maimonides's predecessor Moses Ibn Ezra. Drawing upon both the Arabic version of the *Parva naturalia* and the commentaries on the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, Ibn Ezra assimilates the logic of rhetoric and poetics to that of prophecy:

> The art of oratory [*khiṭābah*] is called rhetorica in Greek ... . According to the philosopher Aristotle it is speech that persuades ... . Its excellence increases or decreases depending on the speaker's poetic elegance [*faṣāḥah*] and rhetorical eloquence [*balāghah*] ... . And orations are found in our sacred prophetic books ... . The art of poetry [*shi'r*] is called poetica in Greek ... . The term for poet [*shā'ir*] in our language [that is, Hebrew] is *navi* [=prophet —PM].[78]

Divergences notwithstanding, Maimonides will in many respects continue in Ibn Ezra's wake as he offers an account of prophecy that relies on the transposition of poetic and prophetic categories, much like Al-Farabi's account of *muḥākāh* (*mimesis*), though in this case words from the trilateral *m–th–l* are at stake. The dependence upon literary categories is even more pronounced in Maimonides's

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[75] *Takhyīl,* p. 18.

[76] Arabic thought and culture were persistently confronted with this dichotomy insofar as the Qur'ān was embroiled, from the very moment of its appearance, in a dissension between poets and prophets particular to the Arabic tradition see *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition,* ed. J. L. Kugel, Ithaca, 1990, pp. 75–119.

[77] Arabic original and Spanish translation in Moses Ibn Ezra, *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara wal-mudhākara*, ed. and trans. M. A. Mas, 2 vols., Madrid 1985.

[78] Ibid., 12v-14; translation cited in M. Cohen, 'Words of Eloquence: Rhetoric and Poetics in Jewish Bible Exegesis in Its Muslim and Christian Contexts', in *Interpreting Scripture in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries,* ed. A. Berlin and id., Cambridge, 2016, pp. 266–84 (267). Cohen has published several crucial studies on the relation between the Arabic commentaries on the *Organon* and the *Guide*; see id., 'Moses Ibn Ezra vs. Maimonides: Argument for a Poetic Definition of Metaphor (*Isti'āra*)', *Edebiyât: Journal of Middle Eastern and Comparative Literature*, 11, 2000, pp. 1–28; id., 'Logic to Interpretation: Maimonides' Use of Al-Farabi's Model of Metaphor', *Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture*, 2, 2002, pp. 104–13. In his *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor: From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimhi*, Leiden and Boston, 2003, Cohen offers a substantial analysis of the practices of interpreting *mashal* as they proceed from the Graeco-Arabic commentaries into the Judaeo-Arabic commentaries, noting that the commentators used this term to refer to both figurative language and allegory, assimilating them under one rubric.

case because he possesses a more developed theory of parable and allegory than the Islamic authors.

Maimonides's discussion of parables centres on the imaginative modes of representation that the prophets employ as a means of conveying divine truth. Persistently throughout the *Guide*, he avails himself of the word *meshalim* (s. *mashal*) to refer to biblical parables (though the word itself can generally refer to 'imitations'), which, in the main of his text (that is, not in biblical quotations), he will refer to with the Arabic *amthāl/amthila* (s. *mathal*; similes, metaphors, symbols).[79] Between Judaeo-Arabic and Hebrew, Maimonides's *mathal/mashal* bears two further resonances. First, in Averroes's *Epitome of the Parva naturalia*, to which the Judaeo-Arabic accounts of prophecy (both Ibn Ezra's and Maimonides's) are indebted, *tamthīl* denotes the poetic process by which the imaginative faculty executes the work of representation during visions:

> ... the powers of thought and memory are inactive during sleep and ... the faculty that is active during sleep is the imagination [*al-mutakhayyilah*]. For this power is in perpetual movement, and its activity consists of concept formation [*al-taṣawwur*] and representation [*al-tamthīl*] and proceeding from image to image.[80]

The result of *tamthīl*, the process by which the imaginative faculty represents, is thus *amthāl/meshalim* ('representations', 'parables', 'symbols', etc.).[81] What is more—and here we find the second resonance—the full account of how this process of figuration functions is actually provided in Arabic literary criticism, not least in the Aristotelian commentaries here in question, in which *tamthīl* forms a mainstay of poetics and rhetoric.[82] It is for this reason that Maimonides claims that since the

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[79] For more on the uses of *mathal* as well as, generally, one of the very best accounts of the political stakes of *mimesis*, see P. Vallat, *Farabi et l'École d'Alexandrie. Des prémisses de la conaissance à la philosophie politique*, Paris, 2004, pp. 275–346. Vallat notes, p. 318, that there has been a neglect of what he terms 'le but théologico-politique de la poésie, c'est-à-dire son fonction religieuse', which he defines as the necessary condition 'que le prédicat commun apparaisse comme une similitude structurelle des deux termes qui soit exprimable dans le vocabulaire politique de la hiérarchie'. See, further, id., 'Vrai philosophe et faux prophète selon Fārābī. Aspects historiques et théoriques de l'art du symbole', in *Miroir et Savoir. La transmission d'un thème platonicien, des Alexandrins à la philosophie arabo-musulmane*, ed. D. De Smet et al., Leuven, 2008, pp. 117–43, which contains useful comments on the political uses of the poetic syllogism.

[80] Arabic: *Averrois Cordubensis Compendia librorum Aristotelis qui Parva naturalia vocantur*, ed. H. Blumberg, Cambridge, 1972, p. 69; English: Averroes, *Epitome of Parva Naturalia*, transl. H. Blumberg, Cambridge, 1961, p. 41; Averroes further discusses the 'imitations present in visions' ('*al-muḥākāt allati yakūn fī al-ru'yā'*), Arabic p. 85, English p. 49. Cf. Avicenna's account of prophetic representation as *tamthīl* in *Avicenna's De Anima* (n. 61 above), pp. 170–3.

[81] See the comments in the important study of H. Kahana-Smilansky, 'The Mental Faculties and the Psychology of Sleep and Dreams', in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. G. Freudenthal, Cambridge, 2012, pp. 230–54 (243–4).

[82] See, e.g. Al-Farabi's discussion of *al-tamthīl* in his *Kitāb al-Khaṭāba*, in *Deux ouvrages inédits sur la rhétorique*, ed. J. Langhade and M. Grignaschi, Beirut, 1971, pp. 118–21, as well as al-Jurjānī's account of *tamthīl* in ch. 14 of *Asrār Al-Balāgha* (n. 36 above), p. 221, where, crucially, *tamthīl* is related to an intellectual (*'aqlī*) similarity between terms. For a prophetological account of *mathal*, see the chapter '*Fī bāb al-mathal wa-l-m'anā*' ['Concerning Parable and Meaning'] in the Arabic-English edition of al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-nubūwwa* [*The Proofs of Prophecy*], ed. and transl. T. Khalidi, Provo, 2011, pp. 77–86.

majority of the prophetic books utilize *amthāl*, it is necessary for the philosopher to know something about the workings of figurative language.[83] In the following quotation from Al-Farabi, for instance, it is clear that *tamthīl* bears both poetic and prophetic connotations (the passage comes in the course of a discussion of prophecy):

> Now these [theoretical truths] can be known in two ways, either by being impressed on their souls as they really are or by being impressed on them through affinity and symbolic representation [*bi-l-munāsabah wa-l-tamthīl*]. In that case symbols [*mithālāt*] arise in man's minds, which reproduce them by imitation [*tuhākīha*].[84]

His comment here, which arises in the context of a discussion of the relation between religion and politics, concurs seamlessly with Averroes's claim in his *Short Commentary on Aristotle's 'Poetics'* that

> [w]ith [poetical speeches], one strives for an imaginary representation [*takhyīl*] or exemplification [*tamthīl*] of something in speech so as to move the soul to flee from the thing, or to long for it, or simply to wonder because of the delightfulness which issues from the imaginary representation.[85]

Put sweepingly: the prophetic dreamwork is structured like figurative language. Given that prophecy is 'political and ultimately metaphysical',[86] its representation of *intelligiblia* during prophetic visions was to take on a marked philosophical significance. But the comprehensibility of these broader philosophical repercussions depends upon an exposition of the poetics of prophecy, for its politics indeed derive from its literary nature.

The Politics of Prophecy

Prophecy becomes a—perhaps *the*—nodal point at which the ancient philosophical corpus and revealed religion enter most significantly into dialogue. Al-Farabi's theory of prophecy is *de facto* a political theory[87]: 'the idea of *Imam* [read: Prophet —PM],[88] Philosopher, and Legislator is a single idea ... these [theoretical] things are *philosophy* when they are in the soul of the legislator. They are *religion* when they

[83] "Maimonides, *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn* (n. 60 above), II, pp. 99–100, (II.47); *Guide* (n. 60 above), II, pp. 407–8.

[84] *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*, (n. 53 above), pp. 278–9.

[85] *Averroës' Three Short Commentaries* (n. 27 above), p. 203.3–5; English tr., p. 83. The pure pleasure elicited by poetry is not discussed here but forms a central part of Harb, *Arabic Poetics* (n. 23 above).

[86] See O. L. Lizzini, 'Le théologico-politique à la lumière de la philosophie. Prophète, Khalīfa et espèce humaine selon Avicenne', in *Le théologico-politique au Moyen Âge*, ed. D. Poirel, Paris, 2020, pp. 75–82 (80): 'La nécessité de la prophétie est donc politique et finalement métaphysique'.

[87] M. Sebti, 'La dimension éthique et politique de la révélation prophétique chez les *falāsifa*', in *Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam*, I: The *Prophet Between Doctrine, Literature and Arts: Historical Legacies and Their Unfolding*, ed. D. Gril et al., Leiden and Boston, 2022, pp. 327–48.

[88] As Janssens notes in 'Al-Farabi: La religion comme imitation' (n. 51 above), p. 511.

are in the soul of the multitude'.[89] This idea comes up repeatedly in Al-Farabi's work.[90] To say that 'Imam, Philosopher and Legislator' are a single idea is not to say that they are evaluated equally, but the ranking of philosophy vs. prophecy is of less central concern for my purposes here than is the fact that the division of the sciences in Al-Farabi's *oeuvre* (as in Avicenna's after him) culminates in the political science that serves to conduct men and women's lives. And it was from the purview of this political science that prophecy had to be studied.[91]

The division of sciences is far from a mechanical exercise. Indeed, it constitutes one of those particularly premodern paratextual operations, like the gloss or epitome, which, while appearing to be but a middling genre of importance for (political) philosophy, in fact bears marked esoteric significance, as Strauss well recognized. The defining role that Islamic philosophy came to play for Strauss in the course of the 1930s was precipitated by his encounter with precisely such a parageneric text of Avicenna's, his 'On the Divisions of the Rational Sciences',[92] in which Strauss discovered that Avicenna had classified and summarized Plato's *Laws* as the text in which prophecy and divine law are treated.[93]

Precisely what, if anything, of Plato's *Laws* was actually known first-hand has been a topic of intense debate, including in the very pages of this journal.[94] But the Arabic philosophers are remarkably consistent in considering Plato's *Laws* a dialogue in which Plato addresses the political precarity of representational modes, particularly the kind found in prophecy. We have seen that the logical account of poetics and rhetoric was related to the psychological account of prophecy insofar as both emerged out of the Arabic philosophical framework in which imagination, imitation, and visualization were treated in tandem. Thus far, my analysis has been concerned

[89] *AH*, pp. 46–7 (§57–9).

[90] E.g. *Philosophy of Plato* (n. 40 above), p. 60 (§22); *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State* (n. 53 above), pp. 277–86. On Al-Farabi's political philosophy, see M. Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy,* Chicago, 2001, as well as F. Stella, *Politica e conoscenza nella filosofia di al-Farabi*, Canterano, 2016.

[91] See O. L. Lizzini, 'L' Epistola sulle divisioni delle scienze intellettuali di Avicenna: alcune note sulla definizione e la collocazione della profetologia e della psicologia', in '*Ad Ingenii Acuitionem'. Studies in Honour of Alfonso Maierù*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2006, pp. 221–48, esp. 227, where that organization is laid out.

[92] Translation in *Medieval Political Philosophy* (n. 8 above), pp. 95–7.

[93] For the importance of this encounter for Strauss, see H. Meier's foreword to Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften* (n. 64 above), pp. IX–XVI (XVIII). For an English translation of the foreword see H. Meier, 'How Strauss became Strauss', in *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s*, ed. M. Yaffe and R. Ruderman, New York, 2014, pp. 13–32 (17). For another example of the importance of the genre of the classification of sciences, see Strauss's 'Maimonides' Statement on Political Science', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 22, 1953, pp. 115–30, repr. in *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies*, New York, 1959, as well as H. A. Wolfson, 'The Classification of Sciences in Medieval Jewish Philosophy', *Hebrew Union College Jubilee Volume*, Cincinatti: 1925, pp. 263–315, and id., 'Note on Maimondes' Classification of the Sciences', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 26, 1936, pp. 369–77, both repr. in id., *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, ed. I. Twersky and G. H. Williams, 2 vols, Cambridge, 1973–7, I, pp. 493–545 and 551–60.

[94] See C. Connelly, 'New Evidence for the Source of Al-Fārābī's Philosophy of Plato', in *A New Work by Apuleius: The Lost Third Book of De Platone*, ed. J. Stover, Oxford, 2016, pp. 183–97; S. Harvey, 'Did Alfarabi Read Plato's *Laws*?', *Medioevo*, 27, 2003, pp. 51–68; and D. Gutas, 'Fārābī's Knowledge of Plato's *Laws*', *The International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 4.3, 1998, pp. 405–11.

with the sensible representation of the intelligibles; however, this formed but one of two representational strategies, the second of which—the concealment of intelligible truths—we must now explore in greater depth.

The Arabic philosophers' account of visualization and concealment explicitly develops the Platonic interplay between *logos* and *muthos*, *burhān* and *hikāyah*. Exemplary in this respect is Avicenna's '*Risāla fī ithbāt al-nubuwwāt'* ('*Epistle on the Proof of Prophecies'*)—a text of which Strauss was explicitly aware[95]—in which Avicenna explains the essence of prophecy:

> The message (*al-risālah*), therefore, is that part of the emanation termed 'revelation' (*waḥy*) which has been received and couched in whatever mode of expression is deemed best for furthering man's good in both the eternal and the corruptible worlds as regards knowledge and political governance, respectively.[96]

Avicenna then goes on to respond to his interlocutor's question about interpreting symbols, specifically the symbols or images in which revelation is couched. This leads him to make quite a remarkable statement:

> We will now take up the interpretation of the symbols [*al-marāmīz*] you asked me about. It has been said that a condition the prophet must adhere to is that his words should be symbols and his expressions hints. Or, as Plato states in the *Laws*: whoever does not understand the apostles' symbols [*rumūz al-rusul*] will not attain the Divine Kingdom [*al-malakūt al-ilāhī*]. Moreover, the foremost Greek philosophers and prophets made use in their books of symbols and signs [*marāmīz wa-ishārāt*] in which they hid their secret doctrine ... . Moreover, how could the prophet Muhammad (may God's prayers and peace be on him) bring knowledge to the uncouth nomad, not to say to the whole human race considering that he was sent a messenger to all? Political guidance, on the other hand, comes easily to prophets; also the imposition of obligations on people.[97]

Of course, no such passage exists in Plato's *Laws*, a dialogue, which was, as mentioned, unlikely to have been known in the Arabic world. But Avicenna's claim is in line with a particular conception of the *Laws* that reaches back, I would argue, to Al-Farabi's *Jawāmi' Kitāb al-Nawāmīs li-Aflāṭūn (Summary of Plato's Laws)*, in which he states:

> Our purpose in making this introduction is this: the wise Plato did not permit himself to present and uncover all kinds of knowledge to all people. Therefore he followed the path of using symbols, riddles, obscurity, and difficulty [*al-ramz wa-l-ilghāz wa-l-t'amīyyah wa-l-taṣ'īb*] lest knowledge fall into the

[95] Strauss cites it in *Philosophie und Gesetz* (n. 64 above), p. 103 n. 39.

[96] See O. L. Lizzini and J.-B. Brenet's excellent edition with Arabic text, French translation, critical introduction and copious notes: Avicenne (?), *Épître sur les prophéties*, Paris, 2018. It is translated into English as 'On the Proof of Prophecies and the Interpretation of the Prophet's Symbols and Metaphors', in *Medieval Political Philosophy* (n. 8 above), pp. 112–21.

[97] *Épître*, 99/ *On the Proof,* 116.

hands of those not deserving of it and be deformed or into the hands of someone who is not cognizant of its worth or uses it improperly. In this he was correct. ... [T]he one who reads or hears his discussion presumes it is symbolic and that he intends a meaning different from what he has openly declared. This notion is one of the secrets of his books. Moreover, no one can grasp what he declares openly and what he states. This is how his discussion proceeds in the *Laws*.[98]

Al-Farabi and Avicenna announce a representational strategy that is, so to speak, the photographic negative of that of prophecy: whereas prophetic revelation gives the truths of theoretical knowledge a corporeal and thus readily perceptible garb, philosophy retreats from exoteric doctrine into a language that may be interpreted correctly only by the initiates of *theoria*.[99] This distinction does not contradict the fact that philosophical truth and revealed truth are one but rather defines each as symmetrically analogous, but opposite, operations.[100] Maimonides represents the continuation of this tradition[101] as can be seen in his admonition in the *Guide*:

Do not think that only the divine science should be withheld from the multitude. This holds good also for the greater part of natural science. ... This is not only the case with regard to people adhering to Law, but also with regard to the philosophers and learned men of the various communities in ancient times. For they concealed what they said about the first principles and presented it in riddles. Thus Plato and his predecessors designated Matter as the female and Form as the male.[102]

What all three thinkers formulate in the passages just quoted is in essence the distinction between what Strauss termed esotericism and exotericism.[103] But the element of Strauss's contribution that I would like to highlight here consists of his understanding how the political–prophetic distinction of esotericism vs. exotericism

[98] Arabic text in 'Le sommaire du livre des 'Lois' de Platon (*Ǧawāmi' Kitāb al-Nawāmīs li-Aflāṭūn*) par Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī', ed. and transl. T.-A. Druart, *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 50 (1998): pp. 109–55 (125); English translation as 'Summary of Plato's Laws', in Al-Farabi, *Political Writings* (n. 38 above), pp. 129–74 (130–1). Cf. the similar comments on Plato and allegories (*amthāl*) in al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-nubūwwa* (n. 82 above).

[99] Cf. Strauss's essay 'How Fārābī read Plato's Laws', in *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, Damascus, 1957, repr. in id., *What Is Political Philosophy?* (n. 93 above), pp. 134–54.

[100] Cf. Lizzini's perspicacious comment in ead., 'Le théologico-politique' (n. 86 above), p. 82: 'Cette communication symbolique a d'ailleurs une conséquence précise pour la recherche philosophique: le prophète s'adresse non seulement à ceux qui se contentent de la vérité du symbole, mais aussi à ceux qui dépassent—et doivent dépasser—cette même vérité: les philosophes qui «détectent» les symboles et en comprennent la vérité secrète'.

[101] For the intellectual tradition out of which Maimonides's work emerges, see *The Trias of Maimonides: Jewish, Arabic and Ancient Culture of Knowledge,* ed. G. Tamer, Berlin and New York, 2005.

[102] Maimonides, *Dalālat* (n. 60 above) (I.17), I, pp. 23–4; *Guide* (n. 60 above), pp. 42–3.

[103] Further studies of esotericism worth consulting include M. Halbertal, *Esotericism in Jewish Thought and its Philosophical Implications: Concealment and Revelation*, transl. J. Feldman, Princeton, 2007, and A. Melzer, *Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing*, Chicago, 2014.

was part of the same conceptual system as the theory of *phantasia*/*takhyīl*, which the medievals had inherited from the ancients:

> Pour guider l'homme vers le bien-être de l'âme, la loi divine a donc indiqué les plus importantes de ces opinions, mais seulement d'une manière qui ne dépasse pas l'entendement du vulgaire. C'est pourquoi il était nécessaire que les prophètes disposassent de la perfection suprême de la faculté imaginative: l'imagination rend possible la représentation métaphorique, exotérique, des vérités dont le sens propre, ésotérique, doit être caché au vulgaire.[104]

Placing this imaginative poetics at the core of an inquiry into these philosophers' account of prophecy enriches—and, indeed, forms a necessary complement to—what Strauss once called the 'literary character' of these thinkers' 'art of writing'.[105] The concept of a 'literary character' in these writings (a concept that Strauss would develop in an essay that marked a turning point in his own thinking on Islamic and Jewish prophecy) already alerts us to the philosophical import of the poetics in question here.[106] The literary strategies studied and employed by these philosophers were far from univocal: they could serve to make something visible for a wide audience, keep something hidden for a small elite, or, as was most often the case, offer a multi-faceted poetic construct that permitted access to truth in different forms and at

[104] Leo Strauss, 'Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Maïmonide et de Fârâbî', in id., *Gesammelte Schriften* (n. 64 above), II, pp. 125–58 (152). The inception and afterlife of Strauss's original views on Al-Farabi have been studied by S. Harvey, 'Leo Strauss's Developing Interest in Alfarabi and Its Reverberations in the Study of Medieval Islamic Philosophy', in *The Pilgrimage of Philosophy: A Festschrift for Charles E. Butterworth*, ed. R. M. Paddags et al., South Bend, 2019, pp. 60–83. Gutas has strongly criticized Strauss's position in a now well-known essay: 'The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 29, 2002, pp. 5–25. Gutas's article was subsequently reprinted with a postscript, which addressed the essay's critics; see 'On the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy. Postscript 2017', in *La philosophie arabe à l'étude: sens, limites et défis d'une discipline moderne*, ed. J.-B. Brenet and O. L. Lizzini, Paris, 2019, pp. 37–46. For an overview of these debates, see Namazi, *Leo Strauss* (n. 7 above), pp. 22–41. Note, however, Gutas's own comments (largely complementary to Strauss's) on the relationship between Greek and Islamic attitudes towards the communication of knowledge, in D. Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, Leiden and New York, 1988, pp. 261–5, something also noted by F. Stella, 'L'illuminismo esoterico religioso medievale. Leo Strauss interprete di al-Farabi', in *Doctor Virtualis*, 13, 2015, pp. 119–33.

[105] See Leo Strauss, 'The Literary Character of *The Guide of the Perplexed*', in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Glencoe, 1952, pp. 38–94; repr. in *Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings*, ed. K. H. Green, Chicago, 2013, pp. 341–98 (in what follows, I cite from Green's reprint). Arguably the best account of how the discovery of esotericism emerged out of prophetology is offered by Tanguay, *Leo Strauss* (n. 6 above), pp. 49–98, esp. 68–9.

[106] While many believe that Strauss has exaggerated or overemphasized the *extent* of such concealments, few today would claim that they are totally absent. See, e.g. W. Z. Harvey, 'How Leo Strauss Paralyzed the Study of the *Guide of the Perplexed* in the Twentieth Century' (Hebrew), *Iyyun*, 50, 2001, pp. 387–96, and the English abstract in *Iyyun*, 51, 2002, pp. 107–8; id., 'Les nœuds du Guide des égarés: une critique de la lecture politique de Leo Strauss', in *Lumières médiévales*, ed. G. Roux, Paris, 2009, pp. 163–76, and id., 'How to Begin to Study Strauss's "How to Begin to Study the *Guide of the Perplexed*"', in *Interpreting Maimonides: Critical Essays*, ed. C. Manekin and D. Davies, Cambridge, 2018, pp. 228–46. My interest in Strauss here lies far more in his identification (apropos of prophecy) of the link between the imaginative faculty and the art of writing, than a) in identifying *how strictly* separate the esoteric and exoteric levels are or b) in *what exactly* in the philosophers studied should be understood esoterically or exoterically.

different levels depending on the sense that a given reader could interpret based on his/her degree of theoretical training (or lack thereof).

This is perhaps nowhere more clearly seen than in the philosophical study and practice of allegorical representation (i.e. the *amthāl/meshalim* previously considered in relation to the poetics of prophecy). Thus, for instance, while Avicenna establishes a dichotomy between prophet and philosopher (in other words, between visualization and concealment), his visionary recitals (that is, his philosophical allegories) lie somewhere in between: they instantiate the imaginative poetics elaborated in his philosophical work, but their sense varies dramatically based upon the reader, whether one of the literal-minded common readers or an initiate who knows how to read the concealed secret doctrines. This multi-faceted literary approach derived explicitly from the politics of poetics, rhetoric and prophecy that Avicenna derived from the Aristotelian corpus.[107]

Both this theory and practice of the allegorical art of writing would persist in the Judaeo-Arabic milieu from which Maimonides's work emerged. Ibn Ezra's *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara* offers one of the most prominent examples of a treatise that is explicitly indebted to the work of the Islamic Aristotelians and that develops their poetics and rhetoric into an account of esoteric writing related to the *mashal*, which, he notes, like the *ḥiddah* (a riddle or enigma), has 'a hidden interpretation [*ta'wīl bāṭin*] other than that which is apparent'. 'We use these parables [*tilk al-amthāl*] for the people [*li-l-nās*]', notes Ibn Ezra, 'but only the learned [*al-'ālimūn*] comprehend them'.[108] Scholarship has only recently begun to give a comprehensive account—and herein lies one of the points of departure for this study—that Maimonides's account of prophecy and of the literary structure of divine revelation (like that of the *falāsifa*) developed in relation to the commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics*.[109] The philosophical terminology developed

[107] The desideratum expressed in Heinrichs's entry on *Takhyīl* in *EI*[2]—'Whether logical poetics was also used to generate 'poetic' texts rather than characterise existing ones needs further investigation'—has in many respects been met by the excellent works of S. Stroumsa, 'Avicenna's Philosophical Stories: Aristotle's *Poetics* Reinterpreted', *Arabica*, 39.2, 1992, pp. 183–206; P. Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna*, Philadelphia, 1992; and A. Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought*, Bloomington, 2004. Cf. J. Morris's claim that these 'esoteric treatises ... successfully imitated ... prophetic speeches' in id., 'The Philosopher-Prophet in Avicenna's Political Philosophy', in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi*, ed. C. E. Butterworth, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 152–98 (165).

[108] *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara* (n. 77 above), p. 146. Cf. M Cohen, *Opening the Gates of Interpretation: Maimonides' Biblical Hermeneutics in Light of his Geonic-Andalusian Heritage and Muslim Milieu*, Leiden, 2011, p. 202: 'The third factor, concealment, reflects a distinct (though related) aspect of Greco-Arabic literary thinking, namely the notion of the parable as a genre used by ancient authors to hide deep philosophical concepts from the masses—as noted by Moses Ibn Ezra as well'; and, ibid., p. 111: 'It is worth noting the parallels between [Maimonides's] discussion of this genre [i.e., *mashal* – PM] and Moses Ibn Ezra's chapter devoted to esoteric writing in his *Book of Discussion and Conversation* ... '. See further id., *Three Approaches* (above n. 78) for the most thoroughgoing discussion of *mashal*.

[109] See, e.g. the important study of J. Stern, 'The Maimonidean Parable, the Arabic *Poetics*, and the Garden of Eden', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 33, 2009, pp. 209-47, and the more recent work in D. L. Roberts-Zauderer, *Metaphor and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Thought: Moses ibn Ezra, Judah Halevi, Moses Maimonides, and Shem Tov Falquera*, Cham, 2019. Stern, developing his theses at greater length in *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' 'Guide'*, Cambridge, 2013, dispassionately notes how literary strategies of concealment and illustration, rather than operating on a *strict* esoteric/exoteric dichot-

in the theories of *takhyīl* reappear in the *Guide* as part of the lexicon of which Maimonides avails himself in order to give a logical account of how allegorical representation actually functions. He explains, for instance, at *Guide* I.33 that parables lead those with unperfected minds towards the assent (*taṣdīq)* of 'the existence of the objects of these opinions and representations [of tradition] but not toward grasping their essence as it truly is'.[110] Such claims—of which there are many—proceed from an understanding of how the imaginative faculty functions, as Maimonides says explicitly: 'Undoubtedly it has become clear and manifest that the greater part of the prophecies of the prophets proceeds by means of parables (*amthāl*); for that is the action of the instrument for this, I mean the imagination (*al-mutakhayyilah*)'.[111]

It followed from Maimonides's account of the poetics of revelation that he would have to write in this style as well and thus, as Strauss notes:

> Maimonides will also have imitated, in some manner or other, the way of the prophets, that is, the twofold method of representation of the *Torah*, by concealing what ought to be concealed while offering parables for those unable to directly comprehend intelligible truth.[112]

But this 'twofold method', as Strauss well recognized, could never simply retreat into a simple or simplistic doctrine of the dichotomy of esoteric vs. exoteric modes of writing, for this too-neat opposition is complicated by Maimonides's recognition, underscored by Strauss, that '[t]he authors of the Bible chose, in order to reveal the truth by not revealing it, and not to reveal it by revealing it, the use of words of certain kinds and of parables and enigmas'.[113] In other words, the poles of visualization and concealment do not align with the poles of exoteric and esoteric writing.

The consequences of this recognition are immense. It has been the hope here that by recovering the imbrication of *takhyīl* at the heart of the politics of prophecy,

the Arabic Aristotelians' commentaries on the *Organon* have taken on a novel urgency. We now see that they did not simply expound the relation between imaginative discourse and prophecy but politicized the distinction between vivid and concealed language. For if knowledge of the intelligibles offers a philosophical truth too politically potent to be expressed in its unembellished form, then it must only be conveyed in symbolic form, which means, in turn, that the very imaginative process used to represent something vividly before people's eyes and thus render it

Footnote 109 (Continued)

omy, are part of an intricate, dialogic attempt to present certain intractable theoretical problems in the *Guide*. See the similar comments in I. Gruenwald, 'Maimonides' Quest beyond Philosophy and Prophecy', in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. J. Kramer, Oxford, 2020, pp. 141–57, which also doubles as an intelligent discussion of Maimonides's theory of prophecy. For a similar understanding (of the dialectical relationship between levels of meaning) with respect to Al-Farabi's work, see M. Galston, *Politics and Excellence: The Political Philosophy of Alfarabi*, Princeton, 1990, esp. pp. 22–54 (ch. 1: 'Alfarabi's Method of Writing').

[110] Maimonides, *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn* (n. 60 above), I, pp. 37–8 (I.33), *Guide* (n. 60 above), p. 71.

[111] Maimonides, *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn* (n. 60 above), II, pp. 99–100, *Guide*, p. 407 (II.47).

[112] Strauss, 'The Literary Character' (n. 105 above), pp. 394–5.

[113] Ibid., p. 370.

comprehensible is at the same time a process of concealment.[114]When the question of what *mimesis* can or does make visible is properly situated at the core of political prophecy, the possible extensions of the discussion farther afield are manifold,[115] for, yet again, imitation is revealed to be a category of the utmost politico-theological relevance, even to a perilous degree—a problem, of which any careful student of Plato will already have been aware.

If we follow the trajectory of the theory of prophecy that Strauss sketches,[116] it has its origins in a politico-philosophical problematic that emerges out of Plato's *Laws*, is first developed among the Islamic *falāsifa* (who are confronted with both Platonic political philosophy *and* divine revelation) and reaches its definitive summation in Maimonides's *Guide*. As Strauss would later say explicitly, in order to understand Maimonides he read the *falāsifa* and only after reading the *falāsifa* could he properly read Plato.[117] Thus, the legibility of a particular philosophical problem was indissoluble from the dynamic of culture transfer by which that problem was transmitted:[118] what happens to classical Greek philosophy in its translation to the world of revealed religion?[119] What are the genres and subgenres within which that transfer takes place? How are the literary forms of that transfer implicated in the

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[114] Cf. W. Harvey's comment: 'One of the wonderful characteristics of allegory is that it can be used either to conceal or to reveal', in 'On Maimondes' Allegorical Readings of Scripture', in *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period*, ed. J. Whitman, Leiden and Boston 2000, pp. 181–8 (186).

[115] If the concealment of intelligible truth through representation is situated at one extreme, then the impossibility of access to intelligible truth without imagination represents the opposite pole, one intimately related to questions of aniconism; see E. R. Wolfson's magisterial *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism,* Princeton, 1994, as well as G. Stone in 'Dante and the "Falasifa": Religion as Imagination', *Dante Studies*, 125, 2007, pp. 133–56, in which the Latin transmission of these theories of the poetics of prophecy and reception in discourses both philosophical and literary is addressed.

[116] There is a trajectory of sorts within Strauss's own work, which has been reconstructed in D. Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Philosophy, Prophecy and Politics in Leo Strauss's Early Thought,* Albany, 2008.

[117] See his letter of 30 Nov. 1933 to Cyrus Adler: 'This research...led me from Maimonides to Islamic philosophers, of whom I studied several in Arabic manuscripts–and made me realize that the connection between medieval Jewish and Islamic teaching on prophecy and Plato's *Statesman* and *Laws* has not yet been thoroughly evaluated'. Cited in H. Korth, *Guide to the Leo Strauss Papers*, Chicago, 1978, p. 5. See his near-identical comments in 'A Giving of Accounts', in Leo Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*: *Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*, Albany, 1997, pp. 457–66 (463).

[118] Cf. A. Momigliano's comment that '[Strauss] has proceeded from medieval thought to classical thought, not with the intention of rediscovering the modernity of the classics but of drawing inspiration from their example in order to fight the moderns', in 'Hermeneutics and Classical Political Thought in Leo Strauss', in id., *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, Chicago, 1994, pp. 178–89 (188).

[119] This process of cultural transfer does not remain limited to the medieval period. Indeed, in the 20th-century scholarly milieu out of which Strauss's work emerged, there are complex dynamics of cultural reception that have been investigated by S. Heschel in her 'German Jewish Scholarship on Islam as a Tool for De-Orientalizing Judaism', *New German Critique*, 117, 2012, pp. 91–107, and ead., 'Constructions of Jewish Identity through Reflections on Islam', in *Faithful Narratives: Historians, Religions, and the Challenge of Objectivity*, ed. A. Sterk and N. Caputo, Ithaca, 2014, pp. 169–84. See also *Encountering the Medieval in Modern Jewish Thought*, ed. J. Diamond and A. Hughes, Leiden and Boston, 2012.

objects themselves of philosophical inquiry?[120] And what kind of reading is required to engage with Platonic political philosophy if (as Strauss claims) certain questions and answers first become visible *post facto*, that is, retroactively from the medieval period looking 'back'?[121]

Any possible answers depend on a thoroughgoing account of the manner in which *takhyīl* is implicated at the core of that agon between poetry and philosophy, which already with Plato was said to be ancient (*Republic*, 607b). The Arabic introduction of prophecy into that age-old quarrel at once prolongs and displaces that dialectic, whose afterlife extends from its origins in the ancient world through its prophetic reformulations in the medieval period and into our modern era under the grip, as it is, of the 'theologico-political predicament' that radiates out from—or rather, up to—Weimar Germany and beyond.[122]

Declarations

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[120] See *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and its Literary Forms*, ed. A. Hughes and J. Robinson, Bloomington, 2019.

[121] Rémi Brague has authored some intriguing contributions to these questions. See his 'Athènes, Jérusalem, La Mecque: L'interprétation 'musulmane' de la philosophie grecque chez Leo Strauss', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 94.3, 1989, pp. 309–36, and id., 'Leo Strauss et Maïmonide' in *Maimonides and Philosophy: Papers Presented at the Sixth Jerusalem Philosophical Encounter, May 1985,* ed. S. Pines and Y. Yovel, Dordrecht and Boston, 1986, pp. 246–68, in which he notes, p. 258, apropos of Strauss and Maimonides: 'Il s'agit de faire de la religion une *fiction*, au sens juridique du term ... '.

[122] Upon the publication of his *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, New York, 1965, which originally was published in German in 1930, Strauss appended a foreword in which he wrote, p. 1: 'This study on Spinoza's *Theologico-political Treatise* was written during the years 1925–28 in Germany. The author was a young Jew born and raised in Germany who found himself in the grip of the theologico-political predicament'. On the nature of this predicament, see Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem* (n. 116 above), pp. 1–30.