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## Nature of Art in Fārābī's Thought

(ماهیت هنر در اندیشه فارابی)

imagination and comprehension of the intelligible are useful for explaining the task of the utopian artist. As it was mentioned above, he believes that the most exalted art is the one through which the imaginary forms lead the people to imagine the divine thoughts and actions. Moreover, the desirable art, by creating imaginations, tries to moderate the extremity of emotions and feelings.

On the other hand, as it was expressed about Fārābī's imagination theory, he believes that there is a relation between the imagination and the intellectual faculty and that the imaginary faculties are able to embody the intelligible meanings and affairs by creating the imaginary and sensory forms. The ultimate goal of the utopian rulers also is to provide the public the intelligible happiness. The prophet, through revelation, perceives all the truths both in the rational and the imaginary way. He has the ability to perceive the essence of truths and, additionally, knows the metaphors and analogies for describing these truths.

But given that the intellectual perception of true happiness is not possible for the public, analogies or metaphors about the intelligible affairs should be thrown into their imaginary faculties. The utopian artist engages in embodying the intelligible happiness by using sensory and imaginary forms. So, the artist performs an activity similar to that of the prophet.

### Conclusion

Fārābī has considered two kinds of art: art as it is and art as it should be or the utopian art. Art in the existing way includes desirable and undesirable arts which are classified into six types. The utopian art is the function of the utopian artist.

The ultimate goal of the utopia is that the public achieve the intelligible happiness. But given that the public, based on their nature or habit, are not able to perceive the intelligible truths, the intelligible happiness should be transferred to their imagination. The utopian artist is able to embody the intelligible happiness using sensory and imaginary forms and like the prophet, brings the intelligible happiness close to people's minds through their imagination.

### Note

- 1- The poem is translated by Dastjerdi, 2006.

the reasoning is possible, the majority of people do not have the reasoning power due to their nature or habitude (ibid, 1997, p. 225). In other words they are not used to reason about the intelligible. In most of people, the soul is attracted to the imagination, imagination controls the self, and bodily forces prevent the soul to be solely concerned with its essence and rational perceptions. Hence, the self finds a confidence in the sensible to the extent that it denies the existence of the intelligible truths and considers them as baseless delusions (ibid, 1992, pp. 129-130). Thus, the proper method for educating these affairs to the public is transferring their images and resemblances to the imagination (ibid, 1997, p. 225).

Fārābī elsewhere has also reiterated that the public are not to follow the intelligible, and human actions in many times, are subject to imagination, though this imagination may be in conflict with their knowledge or suspicion (ibid, 1987, p. 502). Even, in some cases, one's belief is contrary to what he/she is imagining, and he/she is sure that the reality is different with what he/she has imagined. For instance, when imagining a frightening affair, people are being shocked (ibid, 2003b, pp. 52-53); even though they know that a dead body is harmless they are scared to sleep next to it.

Therefore, in order to bring people to happiness, there is no other way but to transfer the rational facts and the intelligible happiness through the images and embodied forms.

### **Art as Embodiment of the Intelligible**

Art has some special roles in Fārābī's utopia. His utopia includes five sections of which the highest position is dedicated to the first head and the sages, as well as the clear-sighted in important affairs (Fārābī, 2003b, p. 55). The first head of utopia is no one but the prophet, and his government is believed to be accompanied by the divine revelation and all his actions and views are based on heavenly inspiration (ibid, 1991, p. 44). In second place, there are 'religion-conveyers' including orators, missionaries, poets, singers, writers and the like (ibid, 2003b, p. 55).

Fārābī puts poets, singers and the like, whom are called artists, immediately following the prophetic ruler and next to the orators and religious missionaries.

Now, we can realize the function of the utopian artist. Among the elements introduced by Fārābī in the discussion of art, two elements of

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(ماهیت هنر در اندیشه فارابی)

Adam's sons are body limbs, to say;  
For they're created of the same clay.  
Should one organ be troubled by pain,  
Others would suffer severe strain.  
Thou, careless of people's suffering,  
Deserve not the name, "human being" (Sa'dī, 2009, p. 15).<sup>1</sup>

In this poem, Sa'dī has simplified many intelligible concepts such as sympathy, compassion, and sacrifice and has brought them close to people's imaginary faculties by embodying human beings as organs of one body.

Although before Fārābī, Aristotle had spoken about the nature of imagination in his discussions on the self (Aristotle, 1995, 427a18-429a4, 432a9), some researchers hold that he had not considered the third feature mentioned above (for example, Black, 1996, p. 185).

### Imagination functioning for Happiness

According to Fārābī, final happiness is the state in which a human being would be successful in perceiving the intelligible and in achieving the nearest status to Active Intellect (Fārābī, 1984, p. 31). In addition, from his point of view, there is a familiarity with imagination among the public who cannot understand the rational (ibid, 1992, pp. 129-130). So, the intelligible truths and happiness should be transferred somehow to the imagination of people, and they should be approached to the true happiness through their imaginary faculties. This should be undertaken firstly by the Prophet who himself has been linked to Active Intellect and received all the facts by the intelligible and imaginary forms.

According to Fārābī, there are two ways for understanding the affairs and things: 1. perceiving the essence of a thing and imagining it in its existing form; and, 2. imagining the ideas and things similar to it (ibid, 1997, p. 225). It is not possible to speak of or bring in action the particular details of non-sensible arenas, such as soul, ten heavenly intellects, the hyle, and all abstract beings, unless they are formed in the imagination. But given that these affairs are not possible to be imagined through feeling them, another way should be chosen to help us imagining them and this way is nothing but analogy, parallelism or allegory (ibid, 1995, p. 43).

This point is related to the affairs about which it is not fundamentally possible to reason. Although concerning the other affairs about which

The latter sort merely creates pleasure and the useful sort, in addition to the pleasure, aims at creating imaginations and emotions within the self and through this way, visualizes and embodies other meanings (ibid, p. 559).

He also suggests a definition for art in general and, at the beginning of *Kitāb al-Mūsīqī al-Kabīr*. After dividing music into the art of practical music and the art of theoretical music, he defines art as a taste and talent along with an intelligible element. These talents act based on the concepts and imaginations existing within the soul (ibid, p. 13).

Generally speaking, when discussing the definition and description of art, Fārābī focuses on components such as taste, imagination, comprehension of meanings (*i.e.*, understanding of the intelligible), sensual emotions, and pleasure. As mentioned above, in his view, people understand the intelligible truths and meanings by way of imagination. Furthermore, the arousal of people's feelings and emotions often originates from the imagination and the imaginary forms.

### **Imagination**

Fārābī conceptualizes the imagination through three principal activities: 1. Storing sensory forms; 2. Analyzing and synthesizing sensory forms. The imaginary faculties produce a variety of analyses and syntheses and make infinite compositions and decompositions; sometimes in concordance with the sensible and sometimes not (Fārābī, 2003a, pp. 84, 95). For example, the imagination invents the winged human through combining the wings of the bird with the human body; and 3. Using metaphor and embodiment. Among different faculties of the soul, only the imagination is able to portray the sensible and even the intelligible. It can even depict the intelligible truths that are in the utmost perfection, such as the prime cause and abstract beings. Of course, it embodies them using the highest and the most perfect sensible forms, such as beautiful and stunning things. On the contrary, it does embody the imperfect intelligible affairs by despicable, ugly and imperfect sensible forms (ibid, pp. 106-107).

Thus the imagination is a force that stores, analyzes, and synthesizes sensory forms and utilizes them to embody the sensible and the intelligible. For example, the Iranian poet Sa'dī has brought one of the best metaphors for analogizing the intelligible to the sensible:

The third desirable type of art is concerned with the opposite qualities such as inability and feebleness and tries to correct them, to moderate lassitude, fear, grief, *etc.* and to make them be used for acquiring goodness, instead of creating obscenity.

Fārābī does not describe the other three undesirable and wicked arts, and points out that these arts are just on the opposite side of the three sorts mentioned above. They seek to corrupt thoughts and tend to immoderate sensual qualities and moods.

Although at the beginning, this classification is directed at poetry, at the end of the discussion it has been clarified that music, songs and melodies follow the same classification (*ibid*, 2003b, pp. 53-54). In short, when describing the desirable art, Fārābī focuses on bringing goodness and happiness into imagination and moderating the feelings. In the other words, he emphasizes on two elements: imagination and emotions.

Fārābī in many paragraphs of *Kitāb al-Mūsīqī al-Kabīr* or *The Great Book of Music* has discussed melodies and notes. He believes that there are three types of melodies: 1. melodies which create pleasure and comfort in the self, and have no more effect, 2. melodies which, in addition to the creating pleasure, create imaginations and ideas in the self and embody some affairs, and 3. melodies which are inspired by jocund or painful emotions. Dividing melodies into pleasing, imaginative, and passive categories is repeated a little further in the book.

When reviewing the motives for singing and playing music, he does also distinguish between three kinds: 1. Some croons are played with the intention of attaining comfort and pleasure and to forget the fatigue and the passage of time. 2. For some people, it is intended to strengthen or quiet or fade away their emotions and sentiments, and 3. Some sings are played in order to make words more understandable and more visionary (*ibid*, 1996, pp. 19-24).

In the discussion of melodies, Fārābī presents the latter intention as two separate goals and introduces four purposes for melodies: 1. pleasing melodies, 2. melodies creating sensual emotions like satisfaction, affection, anger, fear, grief and the like, 3. melodies creating imaginary forms, and 4. melodies enabling human to understand the meaning of the words that are accompanying the notes of the melody. Obviously, many melodies and notes have more than one single purpose (*ibid*, pp. 554 - 555).

Fārābī has also paid attention to visual arts. He divides all kinds of images, statues, and paintings into two categories: useful and of little use.

## Introduction

What is art? Does Fārābī have an answer for this question?

Since the word art is contentious and the conceptualization of art encounters some difficulties, in this inquiry, we focus on the least controversial kind of definition, i.e. definition by exemplification (Tūsī, 1997, p. 415; Qaramaleki, 2001, pp. 100-103).

In Fārābī's works, there are several points in which he has spoken of art in general and also of some arts in particular, such as poetry, music, singing and visual arts. So, can we find a particular view or a specified definition for art in Fārābī's philosophy? And does art have a function in Fārābī's utopia 'al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah', which has been translated as "Virtuous City" (Fakhry, 2002, p. 79) and "Excellent City" (Alon, 1990, p. 56)?

## Kinds of Art

When describing the characteristics of poems, Fārābī says: "Poetic speech consists of words which excite a mood in the audience, or demonstrate something higher than what it is or below the reality. These qualities refer to description of beauty, ugliness, magnificence, disgrace, and the like. When listening to poetic words, imagination appears so real that it is just like what we feel when looking (for example) at disgusting objects" (Fārābī, 2002, pp. 66-67). In this definition of poetry, Fārābī emphasizes on two elements: exciting sensual emotions and creating strong imagination.

At another point, he has divided the art of singing, music, and poetry to six types, three of which are considered as desirable, and the other three as undesirable.

First type of art, which is regarded as the highest from Fārābī's viewpoint, aims at reforming the reasoning faculty, thoughts, and actions toward happiness and leads the mind to think about divine actions and glorifies the virtues.

The second type is an art trying to moderate radical qualities and attitudes of the self; these qualities include feelings such as anger, egotism, possessiveness, acquisitiveness, and the like. The aim of artistic activity is to make their holders use them for obtaining goodness, instead of using them for creating obscenity.

## Nature of Art in Fārābī's Thought

Nadia Maftouni\*

### Abstract

*Fārābī discusses art in two levels: art as it is, and art as it should be or the utopian art. Considering art as it is includes desirable and undesirable arts. But the utopian art or art as the working of the utopian artist consists only of desirable ones. When describing the desirable art, Fārābī focuses on bringing goodness and happiness into imagination and moderating the feelings. Undesirable and wicked arts are just on the opposite side of desirable ones. They seek to corrupt thoughts and tend to immoderate sensual qualities and moods.*

*In Fārābī's view, people understand the intelligible truths and meanings through imagination. Furthermore, the arousal of people's feelings and emotions often originates from the imagination and the imaginary forms. The ultimate goal of the utopia is that the public achieve the intelligible happiness. Given that the public, based on their nature or habit, are not able to perceive the intelligible truths, the intelligible happiness should be transferred to their imagination. The utopian artist is able to embody the intelligible happiness using sensory and imaginary forms and he/she brings the intelligible happiness close to people's minds through their imagination.*

**Keywords:** *Fārābī, undesirable art, desirable art, imaginary forms, intelligible happiness emotions.*

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\* Assistant Professor of Islamic Philosophy and Kalam University of Tehran  
E-mail: nadia.maftouni@ut.ac.ir