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THE POETICS OF ALFARABI AND AVICENNA

BY

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INTRODUCTION

This book examines the nature of poetic validity and its role in forming a community. It considers these issues in the writings of some Arabic literary critics and in studies of poetics and Aristotle's *Poetics* by two Medieval Arabic philosophers, Alfarabi (al-Fārābī) and Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā).¹

While the book concerns philosophical analysis and conceptual issues, we must consider the historical context of these studies in order to clarify some philosophical distinctions. This is especially important in the present case. Contemporary scholars do not usually turn to Medieval Arabic commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics*. Greek philosophy was initially transmitted to the West through Latin translations of Arabic translations and commentaries, and Ibn Rushd's commentaries were extremely influential as late as the Renaissance.² But later European scholars rejected the influence of Arabic thought, and modern European scholars of Greek culture and philosophy developed a distinctive tradition—so much so that Arabic works on Aristotle may need explanation.³

One factor determining the Arabic reception of Aristotle's works was its access to the Greek texts: in 932 A.D. Abū Bishr Mattā translated the *Poetics* into Arabic from a Syriac version dating from around 700 AD.⁴ The problems accruing to so tenuous a transmission were accentuated by the literalness of Mattā's translation,⁵ which lent itself to some interpretations of Aristotle. Its influence may be seen in a number of

¹ Latin readers knew the two named here as Alfarabi (Alfarabius) and Avicenna. I have retained their Arabic names (al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā) throughout. Their principal writings on the *Poetics* include the following: al-Fārābī 'Canons of Poetry,' translated and edited by V. Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age, Selection of Texts Accompanied by a Preliminary Study*, (Leiden, 1975), 110–116. (The latter also contains a translation of a passage from the *Catalogue of the Sciences* that deals with poetic language. See 116–117). Ibn Sīnā's commentary is translated as *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle, A Critical Study with an Annotated Translation of the Text* by Ismail M. Dahiyyat (Leiden, 1974). Neither his earlier work on poetics, *Kitāb al Majnū 'fi Ma'āni Kitāb al Shi'r*, nor al-Fārābī's commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* has as yet been translated into English. In this book I have used English translations of texts wherever possible.

² See David Summers, *Michelangelo: The Language of Art* (Princeton, 1978) and *The Judgement of Sense* (Cambridge, 1987), on the role of these theories.

³ But not entirely foreign: H. Davidson in *Proofs For Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*, (New York, 1987), argues that Arabic thought continued to influence Europe in spite of apparent rejections by later thinkers. See also J.D. Bernal, *Black Athena*, (London, 1986), who traces the 'Europeanization' of knowledge of Greek philosophy in a novel manner.

⁴ Dahiyyat, 'Critical Study of the *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*,' 4–5.

⁵ There is a useful general discussion of background issues in F.E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs*, (New York, 1959) and *Aristoteles Arabus, the Oriental Translations and Commentaries on the Aristotelian corpus*, (Leiden, 1968), and in G.J.H. van Gelder, *Beyond the Line, Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of the Poem*, (Leiden, 1974).

commentaries,⁶ and it accounts for some features of the Arabic reception of Aristotle's work.

Another factor in this reception is that Arabic thinkers sometimes published abridgements of the original. Both al-Kindī and al-Khwārizmī produced such monographs and, because of these authors' authority, their interpretations became part of the tradition of commentary. For example, in the *Canons of Poetry* al-Fārābī seems to rely on some source other than the *Poetics* when he enumerates the various kinds of Greek poetry.⁷ He may have copied his list from Aristotle's text *On Poets*, but as this text is no longer extant, we cannot easily assess whether al-Fārābī's commentary is close to the original.⁸ In any case, because of al-Fārābī's authority, Ibn Sīnā incorporated that list into his own commentary, and it later influenced Ibn Rushd.

A more important factor determining the Arabic reception of Greek texts is the context that later Greek commentators gave the *Poetics*. They organized the Stagirite's writings into a single book, *The Organon*, which they divided into eight parts, each of which coincided with an Aristotelian treatise.⁹ As this organisation was present in the Syriac translations which, in turn, were translated into Arabic, it became the context for the Arabic study of the *Poetics*.¹⁰ In this context, demonstrative arguments are of primary concern, providing the set of treatises with an hierarchy that begins with the *Analytics*, the *Categories*, and *On Interpretation*, and ends with the *Topics*, the *Sophists*, followed by the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*. The first books consider the nature of assertions, of demonstrative arguments, and the workings of logical and cognitive necessity. Logic provides methodological rules of thought in pursuit of scientific truths. The last four books examine intellectual tools which are progressively less capable of attaining truth, though rhetorical and poetic statements are still thought of in terms of understanding and conviction. In any case, as a consequence of this context, the *Poetics* takes on a 'logical' colouring in Arabic writing that it lacked in the original.

While we must disentangle these connections in order to explain the Arabic and Islamic reception of Aristotle, we are not suggesting that this

⁶ Dahiyat, 'Critical Study of the *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*,' 6–12.

⁷ *Canons of Poetry*, 110. He may be using a later version of the *Poetics*, or perhaps the *Tractatus Coislinianus*—See Aristotle, *Poetics*, with the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, *Reconstruction of Poetics II*, and the *fragments of the On Poets*, translated with notes by Richard Janko (Indianapolis, 1987).

⁸ See 'Notes to the Fragments of the *On Poets*' in Aristotle's *Poetics* by Richard Janko, 175–196, and Dahiyat, 'Critical Study of the *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*,' 25.

⁹ In *The Logical Dimensions of Rhetoric and Poetics: Aspects of Non-Demonstrative Reasoning in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*, unpublished thesis, University of Toronto, 1987, D.L. Black traces this tradition. See Chapters One and Two.

¹⁰ Dahiyat, 'A Critical Study of the *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*,' 9.

context led people to devalue verse. Poetry may be a lesser cognitive tool but, just because it is a part of reasoning, when commentators discovered criteria for the objectivity of cognitive and scientific claims, they used them to justify the validity of poetic discourse. They ascribed an inter-subjective validity to poetry, based on a community of feeling between subjects, that gave aesthetic responses an epistemological distinctiveness and autonomy which is very modern. Ibn Sinā and Ibn Rushd propose that poetry is subjective yet has other and more validity than an expression of personal preference.¹¹ They also think it promotes social cohesion. Similarly, commentators stress that poetic 'imaginative representations' bring about conviction in the subject, and that poetry has a 'logic' we must understand. Instead of devaluing verse, they think their methodological principles reveal the 'elements which make up the composition of poetic art, its kinds and the artistic means of every kind, how it is made and what things make it better, more beautiful, and under what conditions it becomes persuasive and effective.'¹² For al-Fārābī, poetry moves an audience that is unaffected by logical reasoning, so where their rational capacity fails agents, there poetic representations will give direction. Other writers ascribe poetry a more forceful role.

Further, Arabic philosophers argued that imaginative representations succeed where they result in subjective feelings of awe (*ta^cajjub*, wonder) or pleasure (*ladhdhā*). Clearly, these writers emphasize the human subject, and their concern to validate this subjectivity further distinguishes their reception of Greek texts. For these Arabic writers adapted the Greek original to their own tradition, where the subject was crucial to poetry and the linguistic arts.¹³ In part they may have stressed the Arabic tradition because

¹¹ They use arguments we associate with much later writers. See for example Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, where he tries to distinguish a logic of the senses as the basis of aesthetic judgements. See also David Summers, *The Judgement of Sense*, 182–8, and fn 10, where he considers the tradition in which poetry is defined as a part of logic and shows how it precedes the work of Baumgarten. See also Mary Gregor, 'Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*,' *Review of Metaphysics*, 1985.

¹² Al-Fārābī, *Catalogue of the Sciences*, quoted in Dahiyat, 'A Critical Study of the Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle,' 15. Translations of the relevant phrase sometimes differ: Dahiyat translates *takhyīl* as 'imaginative representation,' while Cantarino prefers 'imaginative creation'—see V. Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, e.g. at 116. I usually follow Dahiyat's usage. See also Mansour Ajami, *The Alchemy of Glory, The Dialectic of Truthfulness and Untruthfulness in Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism*, (Washington, 1988), 62, note 119, for a succinct and useful discussion of the use of *takhyīl*.

¹³ For a fuller account of the influence of Arabic thought on the reception of Greek philosophy, see for example Wolfhart Heinrichs, 'Die Antike Verknüpfung von Phantasia und Dichtung bei den Arabern,' *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 128 (1978), 252–298; Ihsān 'Abbās, *Tarīkh al naqd al Adabī 'ind al 'Arab: naqd al shi'r min al qarn al thānī hattā 'l-qarn al thāmin al hijrī* (Beirut, 1978); R. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, (Cambridge, 1974); M. Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, (Ithaca, 1984); O. Leaman, *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy*, (Cambridge, 1984); W. Heinrichs, *Arabische Dichtung und Griechische Poetik: Ḥāzīm al-Qarṭājannī's Grundlegung der Poetik mit Hilfe aristotelischer Begriffe*, (Beirut, 1969); G. Schoeler, 'Der poetische Syllogismus: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der "logischen" Poetik der Araber,'

they were unfamiliar with the *Poetics* in its Greek application; but a more substantial reason was that they sought explanations of the power and validity of poetry generally as it showed itself in Arabic poetry. That is, philosophy must take its problems from somewhere; in this case it took them from the Arabic and Islamic poetic tradition because this was valued over all others. Philosophers scrutinized this tradition by emphasizing, for example, features of Aristotle's work which explained the role of the subject. By so doing, they elaborated the Greek theory beyond its original cast. As a result their work may seem arbitrary from the perspective of Western philosophy, but it was essential where writers sought philosophical understanding. In turn we must be sensitive to the use of Greek concepts in the Arabic tradition, for these can differ from what we now ascribe to Aristotle.

As the Arabic and Islamic tradition of poetry is crucial to explaining the Arabic reception of Aristotle's *Poetics*, we shall consider it further in the next section, setting out the role it gave to grammar in explaining and validating poetic discourse. This tradition and its issues became central to the work of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. From it they derived the issues central to poetics—the validity of poetic utterances, the nature of satisfactory explanations, the role of the subject, the power of poetry, and its construction of a community. And although the influence of Aristotle caused them to handle these issues in a distinctive way, the stage was set for them by the Arabic literary critics and aestheticians whose work we shall examine in the next section.

ARABIC POETICS BEFORE AL-FĀRĀBĪ AND IBN SĪNĀ

To understand the theories which al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā developed, we must consider the role those issues played in earlier Arabic poetics. *The issues as presented here serve a polemic and heuristic purpose better than they may faithfully record all the positions taken up in Islamic and Arabic poetry.*¹⁴

Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft (133, 1983), 43–92; and *Einige Grundprobleme der autochthonen und der aristotelischen arabischen Literaturtheorie, Ḥāzim Al-Qarṭājannī's Kapitel über die Zielsetzungen der Dichtung und die Vorgeschichte der in ihm dargelegten Gedanken*, (Wiesbaden, 1975), and Gerhard Endress, *Grammatik und Logic, Arabische Philologie und Griechische Philosophie im Widerstreit*, in *Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie*, 3, *Sprachphilosophie in Antike und Mittelalter*, (Amsterdam, 1986). Another important recent work on Arabic literary theory is *Two Arabic Treatises on Stylistics: Al-Marghinānī's al Maḥāsīn fi 'l-nazm wa-'l-nathr*, and *Ibn Aflah's Muqaddima*, formerly ascribed to Al-Marghinānī, edited from the MS Escorial 264, with an Introduction by Geert Jan van Gelder, (Istanbul, 1987).

¹⁴ Our interest is primarily in the later Islamic and Greek influenced traditions. These poetic traditions give distinctive explanations of the status and validity of poetry, and we can clarify some aspects of the transmission of the Greek text by considering features of the Islamic and Arabic poetic tradition.

We shall begin by suggesting what value earlier poetics gave to poetry, how it emphasized the subject, and considered that language was a showcase of Arabic self-understanding. Its poetry is a distinguished product of Arab life, and it became important in Islamic culture also. But some features of the earlier conception of poetry changed under the influence of Islam: poetry became valued for its truth and sincerity, and was now subject to a distinctive linguistic analysis that explained and justified the power of poetry by pointing to its grammatical structure. In any case, positions taken up around issues of the truth of poetry,¹⁵ its validity,¹⁶ the role of the subject,¹⁷ and the procedures used to analyze poetry, all vouch for the concern it continued to generate.

In the following section we shall consider some examples of that reliance on grammar and linguistic rules to grasp the nature of poetry. This should allow us to show, in the section following, why some other approaches to Arabic poetics face problems.

Although this chapter explains the role of grammatical analysis, it does not examine this form of analysis in detail. That task is left to the next chapter, which compares grammar with logic to test the power of grammatical analyses. In any case, we may begin by considering some aspects of poetry in pre-Islamic times.

We can easily show the importance of poetry. Words such as *sayyid* and *amīr* often designated both the leader of the tribe and the orators who defended the tribe's rights in debate. The pressures of nomadic life relied heavily on a persuasive use of language to achieve unity or to defend rights in disputes among tribes. In this situation, the tribal spokesman's role was greatly respected, and the community venerated its orator, spokesman, and speaker.¹⁸ As poetry shared these concerns with unity and eloquence, the community revered it commensurately. Ibn Rashīq claims that the emergence of a poet brought congratulations and feasts. People would celebrate the good news, because a poet provided a defence of their worth by ennobling their achievements in art, preserving knowledge of their actions, and praising their good name. It seems that Arabs congratulated each other on three occasions: when a boy was born, when a poet was discovered, and when a mare foaled.¹⁹

This persuasive tradition began in pre-Islamic times, when poetry and speech acquired a number of conventions.²⁰ Drama as the Greeks con-

¹⁵ See Mansour Ajami, *The Alchemy of Glory, The Dialectic of Truthfulness and Untruthfulness in Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism*, (Washington, 1988) for a discussion tracing the details of this concern with the truthfulness of poetry.

¹⁶ See for example van Gelder, *Beyond The Line*, *passim*.

¹⁷ See below, this chapter, and Chapter 4, below.

¹⁸ See Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Chapter 2.

¹⁹ Ibn Rashīq *Kitāb al-'Umda fī Maḥāsīn al-shi'r wa-ā-dābiḥ wa-naqdih*, edited by M.M. 'Abd al-Ḥamid, (4th edition, 2 volumes), (Beirut, 1972), Volume 1, 116ff.

²⁰ A.J. Arberry. *The Seven Odes: The First Chapter of Arabic Poetry*, (Cambridge, 1957), and Michael Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition in Classical Arabic Poetry, Its Character and*

ceived it was little known, if at all, and the story teller, a traveller among other nomads, was the closest experience of relating dramatic events. And nomadic life imposed other conditions; for a poem involves conventions of style and substance and a homogeneity of cultural reference and sensibility which are all threatened by the centrifugal pressures of nomadic society. Consequently, poets had to announce their own location within that culture, which they did by using quotations from the poetic tradition. Correct response then depended on identifying the conventions which poets displayed or devised, while the wider dispersal of a well-crafted poem within the culture, and its subsequent use in quotation, themselves promoted an homogeneous culture.²¹ Given the role of conventions and the poet's participation in the community, perhaps Arabic poetry must be seen as 'a collective poetry' whose motifs, images, and stylistic resources can be articulated in an intersubjectively valid poetic.²²

Despite these social and conventional features, the workings of poetry denoted the affective part of the subject's nature.²³ Though a poem operates within a convention, so that poets and listeners show their cultural poverty when they compose badly or ineptly receive the work, a poem's success

Implications, (Cambridge, Mass., 1978). But see also Renate Jacobi, *Studien zur Poetik der Altarabische Qasīde*, (Wiesbaden, 1971), where it is suggested that structural analysis must lead us to reject any simple tripartite division of the kind proposed by Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Arabic Poetry*, 80. There is also the issue of the rhetorical patterns of Arabic, but I shall not discuss the issue at any length here.

For other aspects of the use of Arabic and its 'oral' structures, see for example Barbara Johnstone, 'Parataxis in Arabic: Modification as a model for Persuasion' in *Studies in Language*, Volume 11, No.1 (1987): 85-98, and "Orality" and Discourse Structure in Modern Standard Arabic' in *Perspectives on Arabic Linguistics I*, edited by Mushira Eid, (Amsterdam, 1989). See also *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy*, edited by Deborah Tannen, (New Jersey, 1982).

²¹ I am indebted to a lecture on Arabic poetry by Professor Malcolm Lyons, delivered at the Mill Lane Lecture Rooms, University of Cambridge, for a number of points made here. Any mistakes are mine. See also G. v. Grunebaum (ed.), *Arabic Poetry, Theory and Development*, (Wiesbaden, 1973), for a number of essays on the development of Arabic poetry.

²² Renate Jacobi, *Studien zur Poetik der Altarabische Qasīde*, 196.

²³ This role of poetry as a collective repository of images and motifs does not deny a self-consciousness about the subject's part in developing and maintaining a culture generally, but it is important to distinguish the role of such consciousness in the oral tradition of poetry from that in the literary tradition which emerged with Islam. Both recognised the subject-dependent nature of poetry, even if they did so within distinctive contexts. Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Arabic Poetry*, 41, argues that the subject's consciousness operates in oral poetry by the use of formulaic techniques, the absence of enjambment (*taḍmīn*), and the occurrence of well established themes. Although these tell us more of the process of composition than they do of the reception of poetry, some claims about validity are implicit in this description, for it indicates how a proper fashioning and evaluation of poetry must work. Plagiarism will have a different sense where composition generally relies on established themes and formulae, for example, as any authenticity claimed for a poem must be balanced against the fact that the poem only exists in its particular renditions, when it is recreated, so to speak, by following the rules of oral composition (Zwettler, *The Oral tradition in Arabic Poetry*, 10, 23-8). Consequently, a poem cannot claim validity for its authenticity if this means that it is put forward as the version 'originally' created by its 'author.' Nor can it be denigrated because it uses material or themes which appear elsewhere.

depends also on the subjective response it evokes. A poet may learn to compose as he would learn a different language,²⁴ but this also means controlling inflections of composition or rendition to generate particular responses from the audience. Similarly, members of the audience must cultivate the ability to let poetry find a resonance in themselves. That is, the pre-Islamic tradition of oral poetry saw the production and reception of poetry as an individual activity dependent on the subject as the producer and receiver of poetic works.²⁵ It praised poets for their individual sensitivity and insight;²⁶ even though poets used given formulae and themes, the tradition valued individuals for the power with which their composition and rendition moved an audience;²⁷ and it valued individuals who ably responded to and composed poetry.

This conception of poetic activity goes with a particular conception of the subject. For example, in the structure of the classical ode (*qaṣīda*) the function of the *nasīb* or opening section was to attract listeners. It drew them into the poem by appealing to subjective characteristics such as their emotions and liking for eroticism, so that having secured their attention, the poet could cultivate his theme in the following portions of the poem.²⁸ That is, the subject was sovereign²⁹ and the poet and his audience were aware of their roles as subjects in maintaining and promoting a culture that addressed the whole person: the sensual, emotional, and intellectual being. And as the tradition of poetry evolved by creating and spreading familiarity with individual works, its self-conscious and self-referential nature was not lost. For to operate within a nomadic culture, poetry cannot hope to impose its rules on the community. At best, we might expect, verse exercises a seductive power over subjects, attracting them as much by its brilliant insights as by involving them in the community of feeling and sensibility where, by quoting and exploiting older works, the poem gains some resonance. Accordingly, we may expect, poetry attends carefully to sub-

²⁴ See Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition in Arabic Poetry*, 28.

²⁵ See Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Chapter 3, 140ff.

²⁶ Even if their exploits became part of an historical or mythical tradition they are still praised for their individuality. See Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Chapter 3. Writing of *hawliyyāt*, for example, al-Jāhiz explains how individual writers were considered masters of poetry and creativity depending on the length of time they kept and worked over their poems. Other examples of the praise of poets can be discovered in almost any text on poetry, while issues of the sensitivity of readers are suggested in most treatises on poetics—See the next note for some citations.

²⁷ The same claim may be made about later critics. See for example 55ff, Thaʿlab in *Qawāʿid al-Shiʿr*, edited by ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, (Cairo, 1966) or al-ʿAmidi, *Al-Muwāzana bayn Shiʿr Abi Tammām wa-l-Buḥturī*, edited by A. Sakr, (Cairo, 1961), or Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Kiṭāb al-badīʿ* edited by I. Kratchkovsky (London, 1935)—all cited below in the discussion of 'Validation and Exhibition'—all of whom accept this part of the pre-Islamic tradition.

²⁸ See I. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie*, 2 volumes, (Leiden, 1896, 1899), and *Muslim Studies*, translated by C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern, (London, 1967–71).

²⁹ Social and formal poetic conventions must have exerted considerable influence, but they are conventions rather than natural laws because they act as norms which may be rejected, accepted, or willfully offended against.

jects, nurturing their sensibility and participation in the community of feeling. It addresses subjects—idiosyncrasies and all—in the hope that they will give their appreciation.

In addition to nurturing that subjective and communal element, poets also acted as historians. In his *‘Uyūn al-Akhhbār* Ibn Qutaiba provides a description harking back to an older model. He writes that

poetry is the mine of knowledge of the Arabs and the book of their wisdom, the archives of their history, the reservoir of their epic days, the wall that defends their exploits, the impassable trench that protects their glories, their ancestors' noble deeds and praiseworthy actions.

Whoever can celebrate these events, 'all bound together with the rhyme of a poem, reinforced ... with its rhythm, and [can make] them famous with a rare verse, a popular proverb, and a fine concept,' that person delivers his people from obscurity, protects them from fading out of history, and represents them on the day of judgement.³⁰

This notion of poetry as the archives of the Arabs leads critics to value its longevity and general acceptance. The best speaker will spread the fame of his tribe further, and most effectively portray its virtues. Poets praised bravery, good behaviour, and wisdom, and promoted the virtues of individuals and the tribe. And the greater acceptance poets won for their tribe and their own expression of ideas, images, etc., the more valuable their poetry and skill.³¹

By this account, Arabic poetry has the highest place in maintaining individuals' consciousness of their group and their own contribution to its virtues. In important ways this feature changed with the coming of Islam. Poetry was the highest form of speech in composition and complexity, and the most perfectly formal mode people could attain.³² Yet its superiority did not make it the best vehicle for Islam. Certainly the Quran appeared to the Arabs—'is Arabic speech made manifest'³³—to the Prophet—an Arab and 'a messenger from among themselves.'³⁴ It even became a religious duty to learn Arabic. 'Umar ibn Ḥubaira held that an Arabic speaker is better suited than a non-speaker for entry into paradise.³⁵ As poetry was the height of Arabic usage, sometimes scholars suggested that a study of Arabic poetic forms could clarify obscurities in the Quran.³⁶ But despite

³⁰ Cf R.A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, 140ff.

³¹ *ibid.*, see also A.J. Arberry, *Arabic Poetry, A Primer for Students*, (Cambridge, 1965), *passim*.

³² Cf G. v. Grunebaum, 'The Aesthetic Condition of Arabic Literature,' *Comparative Literature*, IV, 1952, 327.

³³ *Quran*, 16.105.

³⁴ *Quran*, 3.158.

³⁵ See J. Fück, *‘Arabiya. Untersuchungen zur arabischen sprach und Stilgeschichte*, 1950, 16. Shafī‘ī seems to hold the same view—I owe this point to Professor N. Matar.

³⁶ J. Fück, *‘Arabiya*, 17

these attempts to inter-relate religious and aesthetic feeling, the Quran is clear about its own nature: it is the speech of a noble messenger, yet it 'is not the speech of a poet.'³⁷ Of the Prophet the Quran says 'We have not taught him poetry; it is not seemly for him,'³⁸ and numerous writers argued that its formal aspects precluded the Quran from being poetry.³⁹

As The Book contains a beauty of non-human origin,⁴⁰ it surpasses all attempts at imitation;⁴¹ yet it provides a standard for literary excellence. Such claims introduced a distinction between, on the one hand, literary perfection and beauty and, on the other, poetic perfection and beauty.⁴²

Only literary perfection and literary beauty were found in the Quranic text, which possesses these qualities to an inimitable degree without being poetic in any way. The importance of the literary uniqueness of the Quran lies in the fact that without being 'poetry' or 'poetic,' it surpasses in style even the most accomplished stylist.⁴³

Critics now denied poetry value because of its untruthfulness. To compare poetry with the word or speech of God was to deride the latter's most truthful speech by comparing it with lies.⁴⁴ Within Islam, speech and utterance no longer simply involved making sense, which was sufficient in the formal analysis of poetry, but invoked a connection with truth and sincerity.⁴⁵ Only the Quran fully matched expression, subject matter, and truth, and so it was the only utterance that was really communicable. Clearly, poetry was inadequate by comparison with the Quran, and various chapters in the Book condemn poets, their products, and their social role. Of the poets, the Prophet says 'the perverse follow them,'⁴⁶ and some critics dismiss poetry as falsehood.⁴⁷ But the condemnation is not absolute. Ibn Rāshiq claims the Prophet holds that poetry 'is a speech [compounded of various elements], whatever is in agreement with the truth is beautiful;

³⁷ *Quran*, 69.40.

³⁸ *Quran*, 36.69.

³⁹ Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb Iʿjāz al Qurʾān*, in G.v. Grunebaum, *A Tenth Century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism: the Sections on Poetry of al-Bāqillānī's Iʿjāz al Qurʾān*, translated and annotated (Chicago, 1950), and al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 36.69, Volume 2, cited in Kamal Abū Deeb, *al-Jurjānī's Theory of Poetic Imagery*, (Warminster, Wilts., 1979).

⁴⁰ *Quran*, 17.90, 13.20, 10.38, 11.13.

⁴¹ Vincente Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 32.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Cf al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb Asrār al Balāgha*, translated in Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 158-174.

⁴⁵ Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 26-53.

⁴⁶ *Quran*, 26.224.

⁴⁷ Carl Brockelman, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur*, 1943, Volume 1, 32ff; see also Ajami, *The Alchemy of Glory*, *passim*.

whatever is not lacks any goodness'⁴⁸ suggesting that poetry is aesthetically valuable where it is truthful. That is, poetry is inadequate by comparison with the Quran, but literary critics stress that poetry is still capable of value. Although it lacks the objectivity of a cognitive judgement, it retains validity and a commensurate certainty, conviction, and truth.

We must explain these references to validity further. The changes Islam wrought in the conception of poetry, despite the Quran's note of censure, still accorded it some validity. While poetry continued to be the archives of the Arabs and retained its subjective character, yet that note of censure placed our appreciation of poetry in a distinctive context. In turn, that led literary theorists to rely on a particular mode of explanation which we shall examine in the next section.

TOWARDS THEORY AND POETICS

One feature of Islam, its method of assessing and validating accounts of the Quran, was shared by philology and literary criticism.⁴⁹ By analogy with Quranic exegesis, analysts explained and justified the rules of language and poetry by discovering analogies with accepted models of usage, by tracing elements of those rules back to their origin in the accepted models, and relying on a consensus among the learned or sensitive. This way of explaining and justifying features of the correct understanding of the Quran may not have become a fully-fledged criterion for proof until Shāfi'i or Ḥanafī, but literary analysts emphasised its validity much earlier.⁵⁰ The procedure of discovering significant analogies with accepted models may have an obscure origin,⁵¹ but grammarians and philologists used it at least one gener-

⁴⁸ The quotation is attributed to the Prophet by Ibn Rashīq in *Kitāb al 'Umda fī Maḥāsini al-shi'r wa-ā-dābihi*, Volume 1, 27; See Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 141–149.

⁴⁹ We may cite a number of works here, in addition to the ones which we shall refer to in what follows. Among others, Schacht's work on *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1979) sets out the use of these tools in analyzing the validity of *sharī'a*, and H.A.R. Gibb, 'Arab Poet and Arabic Philologist' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 12, (1947–48), 574–578 and *Arabic Literature: An Introduction*, 2nd (Revised) Edition, (Oxford, 1963); and Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, have argued that this development of the method, together with its deployment in studying grammar and language, provided a basis for studying poetry, which was considered the paradigmatic use of language. Al-Sirāfi, in his defence of grammar, assumes but does not specifically argue for the use of original models, analogies, and consensus as providing a technique of proof and validation of conclusions that embodies criteria of rationality (See below, Chapter 2).

⁵⁰ See P. Stetkeyvech, *The Modern Arabic Literary Language, Lexical and Stylistic Developments* (Chicago, 1970) Chapters 1–3, 1–55. The author ascribes the origin of philology as a method to Ibn Iṣḥāq and to Khalil ibn 'Aḥmad. See also Anwar G. Chejne, *The Arabic Language, Its Role in History*, (Minnesota, 1969), Chapters 1–3, 1–85.

⁵¹ Al-Sirāfi thinks the method reached its highest level of development with ibn 'Aḥmad; Cf *traite*, 1.27–28, cited in Stetkeyvech, *The Modern Arabic Literary Language*, 2n. Chejne, *The Arabic Language*, n47 argues for some differences in method. For example, he holds that the Kufan development emphasised the importance of established usage and of hearing. Their preferred accepted model was the speech of the bedouin.

ation before it was applied to jurisprudence.⁵² And its use in linguistic analysis leads us to expect this procedure to underpin literary theory also,⁵³ especially so far as the latter concerns the use of language.

The Procedures of Grammar

The relation of grammar to exegesis developed historically. With the rise and spread of Islam, the nature of Arabic came into acute focus. The Quran appeared in Arabic; its authority warranted a close association between beliefs and language; and it soon became imperative to protect the divine message and its Arabic expression. The non-Arab and non-Muslim practices prevalent in the lands where Islam spread threatened to adulterate Islam and Arabic. The memorizers and readers of the Quran began to display a variety of accents, pronunciations, shifts of vowels or consonants, and differences of stress. Together with a misuse of expressions, these anomalies caused disputes about the exact text of the Quran.⁵⁴ In response to these developments, religious and political authorities began to protect the Divine message by critically evaluating given texts.⁵⁵ They identified and collected previously scattered and orally transmitted chapters of the Quran and the Prophet's sayings. They tested alleged imperatives, sayings, and traditions (*ḥadīth*), deeming them valid only if they could be traced back to the Prophet or his companions. Where the expansion of Islam gave rise to situations that genuine traditions did not clearly cover, there the au-

⁵² Stetkeyvech, *The Modern Arabic Literary Language*, 3ff.

⁵³ One attempt to characterise the change wrought by the coming of Islam proposes that the new conception of poetry in Arabic literary theory showed four tendencies, stemming from interests in philology, Quranic exegesis, the development of a *Badī'* style of poetry, and the impact of philosophy, all of which explain the new concern of literature (W. Heinrichs, 'Literary Theory: The Problem of its Efficacy,' pp19–69, 30–1, in Grunebaum, ed. *Arabic Poetry*). This characterisation needs clarification. For example, the last two factors seem to have the same source. For if 'philosophy' is identified as *kalām*, then it can be argued that the *Badī'* style results from adopting a Mu'tazilite standpoint. It may be seen as 'nothing less than the expression in poetry of the entire scope of the metaphorical and analytic process that characterised Mu'tazilite speculative theology (*kalām*) and, in a broader sense, the whole cultural and intellectual framework of the era of Mu'tazilite hegemony' (L. Stetkeyvech, 'Toward a re-definition of *badī'* poetry,' *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XII, 1–29, 5). Conversely, if 'philosophy' refers to the influence of Greek philosophy, then the claim is too vague, for arguably Mu'tazilites such as al-Sirāfi were influenced by Greek Stoic and Sophist logic (See Appendix 1), yet also sought to distinguish their method from the 'logicists' who were influenced by Aristotle. Thus, the source 'in philosophy' must be specified, to show what is meant by philosophy. By doing so we will go some way towards specifying the method in question, and shall be able to raise again, and in a more systematic fashion, the issue of whether the latter has been understood satisfactorily.

⁵⁴ Chejne, *The Arabic Language*, 39ff.

⁵⁵ There is a great deal of literature on this issue. Some useful overviews and analyses are presented in *Arabic Literature To The End of The Umayyad Period*, edited by A.F.L. Beeston, T.M. Johnstone, R.B. Serjeant, and G.R. Smith. See, for example, A. Jones, 'The Quran-II,' 228–245, in this collection.

thorities deployed *qiyās* or analogy, by which the existence of relevant similarities between a present occasion and a past occurrence allowed them to apply the traditions to resolve contemporary issues. And to provide a standard of relevance and success in discovering analogies, this procedure relied on acceptance or a consensus within a community of Muslims,⁵⁶ guided ultimately by Scripture. Thus the alarm that the pious felt at disparities in readings of the Quran and their potential for corrupting the divine message was combined with the desire to preserve the purity of its language and resulted in linguistic studies to generate a single authoritative model of the language and its Quranic message.

In this development, the spread of Islam only sharpened a problem which had already afflicted the Arabic language. As its speakers belonged to distant and diverse tribes, they spoke dialects which differed from the Prophet's usage.⁵⁷ The Quran itself was couched in a distinctive linguistic form. Because of its origin, it was seen as a paragon of linguistic and literary virtues. Here, bedouin usage, unsullied by contact with other languages, was taken as the purest form of Arabic and its poetry was studied as a model for language use. Its close relation with the life, imagery, and style of desert life also gave it authority. Language therefore maintained its traditional role as a showcase of Arabic self-understanding, leading grammarians and philologists to encode its rules. The rapid growth of grammatical and philological studies, then, derived support from a religious need.⁵⁸

Literary critics also followed this mode of analysis.⁵⁹ As grammar told them of the status and validity accorded to statements, it also set out the na-

⁵⁶ See Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Heinrichs, *Arabische Dichtung und Griechische Poetik*, Schacht, *The Origins of Muslim Jurisprudence*, and H.A.R. Gibb, 'Arab Poet and Arabic Philologist,' and *Arabic Literature: an Introduction*, all cited above. See also G. v. Grunebaum, *Themes in Medieval Arabic Literature*, edited with a foreword by Dunning S. Wilson, Preface by Speros Vryonis, Jr., (London, 1981), especially the two essays 'Arabic Literary Criticism in the 10th century A.D.,' VIII, 51-57 and 'Arabic Poetics,' XVI, 1-20.

⁵⁷ Fück, 'Arabiya.

⁵⁸ The need is political as well as religious, here, but the latter stress is more appropriate to this context. See L. Kopf, 'Religious Influences on Medieval Arabic Philology,' 33-59 and C. Rabin, 'The Beginnings of Classical Arabic,' 20-37 and *Ancient West-Arabian* (London, 1951), 21ff, and Goldziher, *Abhandlungen*, Volume 1, 139.

⁵⁹ Al-Suyūti stresses grammar—rather than morphology, lexicography, style, or *belles-lettres*—because of its role in generating meanings. Our interest is in poetics and the nature of the rules by which poetic discourse and language operate meaningfully, so although *belle-lettres* and style play a large role, we attend to grammar because it encodes the structure of poetry. Some writers saw five stages in the composition of discourse: first, joining letters to form words; second, composing words to form meaningful sentences; third, composing sentences to form 'beginnings' as well as *caesure*, preludes, and transitions in rhythmically arranged discourse; fourth, forming rhymed prose by adding rhymes to the ends of sentences; and fifth adding meter to form poetry. (al-Suyūti, cited in Grunebaum, 'Arabic Poetics.' Although al-Suyūti is a later writer, the claims he puts forward have their source in much earlier conceptions of poetry. Other aspects of the issues raised here are discussed for example in 'Al-Mubarrad's Epistle on Poetry and Prose,' translated by G. v. Grunebaum, *Orientalia*, X, (1941), 372-382.) This sort of piece-meal construction was part of the grammarians' understanding of language generally, and so of their analysis of poetry as well.

ture of poetic statements.⁶⁰ Critics justified new poetic or literary forms by pointing out their analogies with accepted models and the consensus in response which the new usages generated. Yet the role of grammar in this kind of analysis was not always clear. For example, initially al-Jurjāni explains that listeners understand the analogy between the relation wealth bears to a generous man and the relation water bears to a high mountain by using their imagination and being sensitive to nuances.⁶¹ This suggests that the poetic metaphor succeeds because subjects rely only on their imagination to grasp new poetic meanings. But later he praises the use of simile while condemning the habit of giving analogies extraordinariness or *gharīb al shakl*: by ignoring analogies with older linguistic rules in favour of novelty, he suggests, we render imagery incoherent.⁶² Similarly, at first the validity of poetic rules and exegesis seems to depend on non-grammatical factors. For example, in arguing that poetry is a better type of eloquence than orations, plain prose, or rhymed discourse,⁶³ rhetoricians assessed eloquence by the effectiveness of words 'in reaching the heart of the listener,' rather than simply by reference to analogies with accepted linguistic usage. The stress on subjective responses seems to focus on the listeners' immediate response rather than on how well the poet follows given rules. But to read al-Mubarrad's *Epistle* in this way may be to misunderstand it.⁶⁴ By referring to the 'heart of the listener' we need not only acknowledge the role of subjects and their response,⁶⁵ but can also accept that we must analyze the complex rhetorical nature and workings of poetry and poetic tradition by reference to grammatical structure.

However, we must qualify a whole-scale transfer of grammatical or linguistic analysis from Quranic exegesis to poetry by considering the object of study. Eminent exegetes such as al-Shaibāni or al-Aṣmaʿī tried to keep their analysis of the Quran entirely separate from their literary criticism for fear of offending against the purity and power of the Quran by mixing their methods.⁶⁶ Our grammatical analysis of poetry does not give it

⁶⁰ This method may be illustrated also by reference to rules for generating new vocabulary. What is important is that new words, as linguistic rules, are seen as valid because of their relation to accepted models. New words are derived from roots by adding prefixes, inflexes, and suffixes.

⁶¹ Al-Jurjāni, *Asrār al Balāghah*, edited by Helmut Ritter, (Istanbul, 1945), 245; see also al-Jurjāni, *Dalā'il al Iʿjāz*, edited by M.A. Ibrahim and M.A. Al-Bijāwī, Third Edition, (Cairo, 1951), 389ff. The discussion in Mansour Ajami, *The Neckveins of Winter, The Controversy over Natural and Artificial Poetry in Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism* (Leiden, 1984), 51–68 and 73ff is illuminating.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ I have in mind 'al-Mubarrad's Epistle on Poetry and Prose.'

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ See below; Jāhīz prefers to see figurative uses assessed by reference to the pleasure or displeasure they occasion; al-Āmidī and Ibn al-Muʿtazz stress the subject. In this context, it should also be made clear that the argument between prose and poetry was not settled. With some differences of emphasis and presuppositions, the issue continued to cause debate in literary criticism over the greater part of X–XII centuries.

⁶⁶ Cf Kopf, 'Religious Influences on Arabic' and Chejne, *The Arabic Language*. 52–82.

the divine and original authority of revelation. Nevertheless, in spite of this limitation, the early critics of poetry and literature were usually philologists and grammarians.⁶⁷ By applying their procedures of linguistic analysis they codified themes in the *qaṣīda*, or classical ode, and ordered the rules for understanding poetry.

We can examine some of that critical work briefly to display its workings. Of course, critics differed over a number of issues, and their work does not form a monolith given to easy analysis. But by following the work of some writers on poetic issues we can show that in spite of variations in levels of evolution, sophistication, conservatism, or radicalism, some commitment to these procedures is evident.

Here, by talking of their procedures as a method we are not trying to replace, say, the sense of a concrete pedigree of transmission of a particular, which *isnād* contains, with some abstract method that merely brings particulars under some general law. Rather, the point of thinking of these procedures—of tracing a particular usage to a given and accepted model, showing that it has significant similarities with the latter, or arguing that there is a consensus among the learned about a particular usage—as a method is to clarify that these procedures provide satisfactory explanations of particulars. This method—this conception of satisfactory explanation—consists in discovering the concrete pedigree of transmission of particulars, and contains the implicit proposal that only such a discovery can explain to our satisfaction why a word has the meaning and use it does or why an event must be seen under one description rather than another. By denoting the use of these procedures as a method, we intend to raise the issue of whether they can provide satisfactory explanations and justifications.⁶⁸

Grammar and Poetry

The linguistic analysis in question may be labelled validation through exhibition. In poetry, if a work fails grammatically because it differs from acceptable usage, lacks significant analogies with the accepted model and fails to generate consensus, then it fails to be poetry at all because it does not make sense.

The last consequence suggests that linguistic analysis is not only a listing of linguistic devices and themes. For the method of analysis consists in *exhibiting* the validity of poetic usage by showing that its operant rules resemble accepted models. This makes it an exercise in philosophical aes-

⁶⁷ For example, the use of *majāz*, (which we identified as poetic metaphor) began in theological discussion, but the concept soon developed an independent life in literary theory until, with al-Āmidī, theorists explained its distinctiveness by reference to its genesis through inspiration (See below for a fuller discussion of al-Āmidī's views).

⁶⁸ The need to make this clear was suggested by a publisher's reader of this typescript.

thetics as much as it is an analysis of particular poems.⁶⁹ For these theorists and critics, literary theory does more than merely work out a set of linguistic rules for analyzing and understanding poems. Rather, it *constitutes* poetry by *exhibiting* the nature of poetic discourse and aesthetic response deployed in particular works. It examines successful model poems to see what in their grammatical and linguistic structure makes them what they are. Instead of analyzing poems on the basis of aesthetic rules which have been produced previously, these literary theorists intend their analysis of particular works to display the nature of poetry generally through the study of particular examples.

Sometimes philosophers see aesthetics as the task of grasping the nature of poetic discourse generally, while they hold that criticism assesses particular works to show how they embody aesthetic value. Yet when our critics analyze and discuss particular works, they are not only assessing the value of these examples, but in doing so they are also engaged in the task of aesthetics through showing how poetic or aesthetic discourse works. Each examination of the particular poem is also a consideration of the nature of aesthetic discourse, so that what counts as aesthetic is also at issue in every examination. Accordingly, a failure to satisfy their requirements does not just show that the object is a bad poem but becomes a more serious matter in that it shows there is a loss of all aesthetic character and that the example is not poetry at all. The alternative method construed each examination as an application of a given set of values, and neither conceived of the analysis of particular works as an argument for or constitution of aesthetic values, nor allowed for the development of poetic discourse through producing and analyzing poems. By contrast, our critics incorporated grammatical and philological method into literary criticism out of a desire to justify the validity and value of poetry generally.

This mode of seeking validity depends on accepting the grammarian's role in legitimating the use of language in poetry and prose by providing an explanation of its nature, for we explain the success of poetry by reference to linguistic devices—like *majāz* or metaphor and *isti'āra*—which make language figurative, rather than simply in terms of feelings, non-linguistic imagery, or psychological mechanisms. Thus, poetry may have a source in mortal inspiration, but to communicate it we must give its expression in figurative language a coherent and rational order, where communication

⁶⁹ We may explain this approach by contrasting it with another. Exhibiting validity is not a matter of applying in practical criticism rules which are separately identified and tested for validity. By that kind of account, the rules for evaluating poems are developed independently and then brought to bear on specific examples to test whether the latter satisfy the former. If they do, then the poems are good; if they do not, then they are bad poems. Here the rules themselves are not open to question. Issues about the nature of poetry, about what constitutes its aesthetic character, and what the latter involves, are all dealt with at some theoretical level, and the conclusions arrived at there are then brought to bear in the practical criticism of particular works.

succeeds when the poet's use of language generates an appropriate response in the subject. Consequently, poetic language differs from the ordinary use of language at least at the level of prosody and rhyme and also more substantially in the figures of speech and organisation of expression, and we can exhibit its rule-governedness and validity over subjects by analyzing its linguistic structure. Poetry differs from prose in its use of figurative language and because it relies on the subject; yet it is not simply something to which we respond in an entirely subjective way, as we do in preferring sweet to sour tastes or red to blue, when we can claim no validity.⁷⁰ By showing the grammatical and philological structure of poetry, we clarify the status and validity of the response the poet evokes.

We can explain this conception by following some 'argument by exhibition' where, by examining the character of poetry, critics distinguish constituting aesthetic character, that allows us to see a poem as an aesthetic piece rather than as, say, an instructional treatise, and evaluation, that leads us to see a poem as a good or bad one of its kind. To *show* that poems contain both constitutive and evaluative aspects is to use the method of validation or argument by exhibition.

We are not being innovative in setting out this analysis. Critics have long thought that criticism consists in identifying significant features of poems and bringing them to attention so that subjects may appreciate the poems. This task, to be meaningful, must be a matter of displaying what poets say and how they say it in the poems themselves, and so is usually seen as a matter of reading poems sensitively, attending to meanings, nuances, insight, dexterity of thought, control over language, and so on. Rather than disagree with this approach, our purpose is to show that in Islamic poetics this approach has the purpose of grasping and advancing the nature of poetry by analyzing particular examples—and that criticism is able to undertake this task because it claims validity of a particular kind.

VALIDATION AND EXHIBITION

We can see this validation through exhibition in the writings of theorists such as al-Jāhīz, Ibn Qutaiba, Tha^clab, Ibn al-Mu^ctazz, al-Āmidī, and al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī⁷¹ though, for different reasons, it first emerges clearly in

⁷⁰ We may be tempted to propose ordinary language as a standard for clarity which poetry must seek to obtain—this suggestion is prevalent in much 18th century writing on poetry in Europe—but as Arab writers usually thought of poetry as a higher use of language, they would not feel such a temptation.

⁷¹ I have not followed a chronological sequence because my concern is not with the historical development of this mode of validation but with an approach that was continuously deployed. Whether the issue was one of the nature of *isti^cāra* (See Heinrichs, *The Hand of the Northwind*), the notion of wholeness in poetry (see van Gelder, *Beyond the Line*), or the controversy between natural and artificial poetry (see Ajami, *The Neckveins of Winter*), in all these cases, the argument of all parties is made by seeking out explanatory terms that articulate

al-Āmidī's *al-Muwāzana*.⁷² By al-Jāḥiẓ' explanation, *isti'āra* is calling one thing by the name of something else because of a similarity between two terms based on their contiguity and resemblance.⁷³ He maintains that it concerns single words or stylistic devices,⁷⁴ whose legitimacy we must warrant by analyzing their linguistic structure.⁷⁵ Following al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn Qutaiba proposes that *majāz* or figurative language underpins poetry, and thus seems to extend a concept originally used in arguments against anthropomorphist and creationist understandings of the Quran. He argues that the concept of *majāz* includes such linguistic terms as *isti'āra*, *tamthīl*, inversion, omission, and repetition,⁷⁶ and explains the nature of the latter by explaining their linguistic structure.⁷⁷ Similarly, to prove a point about the meaning and manner of a passage, he conducts a linguistic analysis, arguing that we cannot explain God's speaking to Moses only as a figurative use of language.⁷⁸

Tha'lab and Ibn al-Mu'tazz reinforce this tradition of linguistic analysis. In *Qawā'id al-Shi'r*,⁷⁹ when arguing that *isti'āra* is used to grasp similarities between traits and characteristics rather than between words alone, Tha'lab displays the relevant usages in order to justify his claims for the nature of aesthetic discourse and analysis. He examines *isti'āra* as the act of borrowing for a thing a name or description belonging to something else on the basis of analogies between the two things. The basis of this transference may lie in mental imagery,⁸⁰ but still the latter must be articulated in language. To this account Ibn al-Mu'tazz adds that we should assess examples of *isti'āra* by reference to whether they are agreeable or disagreeable.⁸¹ Thus, in *Kiṭāb al-badī'*, when Ibn al-Mu'tazz analyses *isti'āra* to argue for its independence from *majāz*, his argument proceeds by exhibiting,

the differences discerned, and these explanatory terms are ones gained from grammar, philology, and linguistic analysis. Thus, the nature of figurative language, which might have been explained by reference to the different mental states of subjects, its different logical status, the play of different causal factors, or the play of imagination alone, is in fact explained by reference to *majāz*, *isti'āra*, *tamthīl*, etc.—all linguistic terms which embody the supposition that a satisfactory explanation must articulate these distinctions in terms of language and linguistic devices.

⁷² Edited by A. Sakr, Cairo, 1961, 1965.

⁷³ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, edited by A. M. Harun, (Cairo,), 4 volumes, Volume 1, 153ff.

⁷⁴ Heinrichs, *Hand of the North Wind*, 29f.

⁷⁵ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, 153; Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*, 26.

⁷⁶ *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, edited by A. Sakr, (Cairo, 1954), 15–16.

⁷⁷ Ibn Qutaiba, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, 15.

⁷⁸ Ibn Qutaiba, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, 78ff. See also the discussion of Ibn Qutaiba, *Ma'ānī al-Shi'r* in Ajami, *The Neckveins of Winter*, at 8f and 11f, Gelder, *Beyond the Line*, 42–6, and Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, all cited above.

⁷⁹ Edited by 'Abd al-Tawwab, (Cairo, 1966), 57.

⁸⁰ See Heinrichs, *The Hand of the Northwind*, 32–3, where he argues that 'the meaning borrows a mental representation' which for Tha'lab constitutes *isti'āra* as a matter of borrowing 'the mental image of the camel, and thus contains all the properties of the camel from which the appropriate ones can be selected to establish the [relevant] analogy.'

⁸¹ *Kiṭāb al-badī'*, 23–4.

in the same examples that Tha^clab used,⁸² how the presence of *isti^cāra* makes poetry a distinctively *artistic* phenomenon. Consonantly, he also analyses other linguistic devices to show their disanalogies with *isti^cāra*. By this means he concludes that *kināya* and *ta^crīḍ* are forms of *maḥāsin al kalām*, or factors that beautify literary expression, rather than elements which are constitutive of the aesthetic character of literary discourse. That is, the deployment or absence of *kināya* and *ta^crīḍ* may make a piece beautiful or ugly; but the presence of *isti^cāra* makes the use of language agreeable or disagreeable,⁸³ and shows that language is figurative rather than literal.⁸⁴

In their analyses, both critics rely on exhibiting the operation of these rules in their examples, trying to convince readers by enabling them to discern the play of significant distinctions in established examples of good poetry. Like the others we will consider, they articulate the characteristics of poetry by using explanatory terms derived from grammar, philology, and linguistic analysis. Thus, instead of explaining the nature of figurative language by reference to the different mental states of subjects, a distinctive logical status, the play of different causal factors, or the play of imagination alone, they refer to linguistic terms like *majāz*, *isti^cāra*, *tamthīl*, etc., suggesting that we must articulate our insights into poetry in terms of language and linguistic devices. Similarly, in spite of explaining transference by referring to mental imagery, still Ibn al-Mu^ctazz explains the latter as a matter of the language poets use to articulate that imagery. And given the stress on linguistic analysis, these arguments succeed by enabling the hearer to analyze the linguistic structure of examples and so to appreciate the poems.

Further, in this context, the use of the same examples provides a body of exemplary cases which establish what is good poetry, and analysis tries to articulate what makes them good, why newer works are also good so far as they use these or analogous rules, and how members of the audience can be brought to appreciate the work and to agree, by having for themselves, in response, a feeling of calm and peace,⁸⁵ or feelings of agreeableness or disagreeableness,⁸⁶ as *maḥāsin al kalām*.⁸⁷ Thus, even if critics disagree about the nature of *isti^cāra*, nevertheless, discussions of the device turn on using a set of examples which includes some eight *shawāhid*⁸⁸ and the 'well

⁸² Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*, is an excellent collection and commentary on the phrases used and developed in this tradition. For the use of the same examples, cf 17 and 3, n8, in which the *shawāhid* are translated.

⁸³ This further emphasizes its subject-dependent character.

⁸⁴ Al-Mu^ctazz, *Kūāb al-badī^c*: the tropes are discussed throughout the book.

⁸⁵ Al-Qāḍi al-Jurjānī, *al-Wasāṭa bayn al-Mutanabbī wa-khuṣūmih*; 4th Edition by M.A. al-Bijjawi and M.A. Ibrāhīm, (Cairo, 1966), 320.

⁸⁶ Al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, 153f.

⁸⁷ Ibn al-Mu^ctazz, *Kūāb al-badī^c*, 64.

⁸⁸ These are set out by Heinrichs in *The Hand of the Northwind*, n8, p7ff. The lines are from Abū Dhu'ayb, cited in Heinrichs, 6.

known line by Abū Dhu'ayb that recurs again and again in the chapters of later authors on *isti'āra*:

wa-idhā l-manīyatu anshabat azfārahā
alfayta kulla tamīmatin lā tanfā'u.

When death sinks its claws in, you find all amulets of no avail.⁸⁹

Similarly, even if Ibn al-Mu'tazz introduces an apparently new set of distinctions, he still displays the presence of his chosen features of poetry to justify his claim about its nature.⁹⁰ Moreover, in *Kitāb al-badī'* he sets out seventeen figures; but his apparently radical innovation is tempered by the fact that earlier writers had already set out nine of these figures,⁹¹ while in the other eight he not only proposes distinctions already present, if inadequately identified, in established and exemplary instances, but also explains them by reference to the grammatical and philological rules governing their use.⁹² That is, Ibn al-Mu'tazz exhibits the validity of devices by showing their successful operation in the particular instance.

With al-Āmidī's *al-Muwāzana* we see again that the use of *isti'āra* constitutes the aesthetic character of a literary discourse and distinguishes it from literal and cognitive statements. In his criticisms of poets such as Abū Tammām, al-Āmidī argues that *isti'āra* should be appropriate to its use and should not introduce disharmony because of its meaning. By implication, these meanings must depend on analogies with accepted usages and cannot be so obscure as to become incomprehensible and thereby disrupt the sense of the whole poem. That is, a misuse of *isti'āra* can spoil a poem by creating obscurity and incomprehension.⁹³

Further, there are other terms he uses to identify excellence in poems, but *isti'āra* is not one of them. This usage suggests that *isti'āra* shows the presence or absence of aesthetic discourse—shows what constitutes the aesthetic nature of discourse—while the other terms show how he would evaluate it. His analysis of *majāz* and *isti'āra* then, is a contribution to our understanding of the nature of figurative and aesthetic language.

In the text itself we cannot separate his discussion of *isti'āra* from his examination of the value of particular poems. By comparing Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī he shows what constitutes aesthetic discourse because he clarifies how sense is lost. Here al-Āmidī argues that as the

⁸⁹ *ibid*, 6.

⁹⁰ See Bonebakker, cited below, for a further discussion of this issue in relation to Goldziher's claims.

⁹¹ For example, his discussion at 60ff, which borrows from Tha'lab, and of *ḥusn al ibtida'* at 75ff—i.e., at the end of the book! Ibn al-Mu'tazz, *Kitāb al-badī'*, and Bonebakker, cited below.

⁹² *passim*, *Kitāb al-badī'*.

⁹³ *Al-Muwāzana bayn shi'r Abī Tammām wa-l-Buḥturī*, Volume 1, 135.

purpose of discourse is to communicate something, if the borrowed word or phrase is not useful it also lacks justification and so cannot claim to be aesthetic. In order to preserve the inter-subjective validity of poetic discourse, he says, first, we cannot make poetic comparisons by using *isti^cāra* that are far-fetched and, second, must use familiar and traditional personification⁹⁴ because, third, the audience must be able to grasp the point of any similarity. Otherwise putative poetic discourses become simply subjective, idiosyncratic, and incapable of general appreciation, telling us more about the psyche of the artist or of the individual members of his audience than they serve to constitute the poem itself. Clearly, for al-Āmidī poetic discourse must be comprehensible.⁹⁵ Its subjective nature cannot make it arbitrary: a poem must retain sense and communicability generally, so that it is epistemologically sound, before it can have any aesthetic validity. Moreover, he validates this sense and communicability by relying first on analogies with accepted usages, to ensure that our use is aesthetic rather than outlandish, and second on agreement in subjects' responses to the aesthetic work.⁹⁶ Thus, al-Āmidī's analysis and argument follows the pattern we proposed.

Al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī too brings this method of exhibition and validation in linguistic analysis to bear on aesthetic discourse. In *al-Wasāṭa bayn al Mutanabbī wa-khuṣūmih* he explains that listeners understand poems by discerning the analogies and nuances at work, and praises the use of comprehensible similarities. He treats *isti^cāra* as part of 'the perfection of the artistic treatment,' discussing the concept as a distinctive feature of the creative ability of the poet.⁹⁷ He sees it as a fundamental element of artistic discourse⁹⁸—as the element that makes aesthetic discourse distinctive because of its source in the creative ability of the artist. That is, by explaining *isti^cāra* genetically, as a result of a poet's artistic ability, al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī shows us the particular quality and nature of aesthetic discourse. He makes it possible to contrast it with literal or cognitive expression and meaning which, presumably, by contrast, do not result from the creative ability of an artist. Moreover, we must evaluate poetic discourse not by reference to truth or falsity but by appeal to the soul's response by the calm and peace it evokes or the antipathy it causes.⁹⁹

In this presentation al-Jurjānī exhibits both the distinctive nature of aesthetic discourse and the criteria for excellence in poetry. As in all these cases, his analysis of aesthetic discourse serves a dual purpose, both appreciating particular poems and also constituting the aesthetic nature of discourse by showing how it operates in poems. Moreover, he explains these

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 223, 250–9, 254.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 250–9.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ 4th Edition, ed by A.M. al-Bajjawi and M.A.F. Ibrahim, (Cairo, 1966), 33, 35–9, 164.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 319.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 320.

by a linguistic and philological analysis of analogies with accepted models and by the consensus in response which particular poems are able to achieve. In other words, his argumentation by exhibition draws its rules from philology and grammar.

With theorists like Ibn Faris, al-Tha^cālībī, and Ibn Rashīq the philological character of their discussions consciously stems from issues raised in Quranic exegesis.¹⁰⁰ But in any case, these critics relied on grammar and philology not just because they happened to be professional practitioners of these disciplines, but because that was a guarantee of validity. Grammar provided rules for language generally, validating particular uses by reference to given model examples and their rules, analogies with the latter, and through consensus.¹⁰¹ Poetry is among the important uses of language which they validated, and they identified the grammatical rules properly guiding its deployment. They set out the validity of poetic language, its efficiency, the demands which are appropriate to it, the compulsion or rational power it has over any appreciating subject, its similarity to or differences from claims to knowledge, and so on, by showing how these elements operate in a given work. In this process, literary theory may also evolve a new vocabulary for exhibiting the operation of rules in use.

In summary, literary theory is an exercise in poetics and validation that displays the operant rules in a work. Where, for example, we can distinguish between literary theory and practical criticism, supposing that the latter applies the former's rules to actual cases, we may expect to test inadequacies in each separately. If a work does not satisfy given precepts, we may think it an example of bad poetry; but the incompatibility between the theory and its object need not lead us to reassess the theory. Similarly, if a theory is inadequate, we can identify its weaknesses by pointing out its internal inconsistencies, discovering a simpler alternative or recognizing that it fails to enlighten us about some examples of poetry. But we can identify these weaknesses in the theory only because we rely on some alternative theory to identify those examples as poetry at all and to argue that the first theory does not account for them. By themselves the examples do not determine the satisfactoriness of a literary theory nor extend what counts as poetic. By contrast, we may propose that in Arabic poetry when we examine a particular work we are concerned with both appreciating that poem and advancing an account of what is poetry generally. For by showing their analogy with or relation to an original model we are extending our claim about the nature of poetry itself. To identify analogies is to provide an explanation *and* to justify the claim that this is poetry *and thereby* to propose what constitutes poetry by exhibiting its operant rules. The method leads us to dis-

¹⁰⁰ See Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*, 45ff and 53–55.

¹⁰¹ Once again, for a fuller account of the use of this method in literary analysis, religious law, and grammatical analyses of language, we may refer to the work of Nicholson, Gibb, Heinrichs, Schacht, Chejne, and Jaroslav Stetkeyevch, cited above.

play and promote our understanding of the aesthetic character of poems generally as exemplified in particular works. Criticism displays how a work manifests the nature of poetry, successfully transmitting themes and images to its contemporary audience. Such display is 'argument by example and illustration.'

Further, the search for consensus is crucial in poetry. But as its success is judged in part by the subjective resonance it generates in its audience, consensus can expect neither to provide objective proof nor to rely on the use of 'objective' language. Instead, critics must refine a distinctive technical vocabulary to articulate the aesthetic nature and validity of poetry generally.¹⁰² They must clarify the techniques of poetry, showing how these work despite lacking an objective reference. This goes to characterise further the peculiar nature of poetic language and its devices, and presents it in a manner that satisfies criteria of proof and explanation. Consensus here consists in a common subjective response to a work, rather than in agreement over an objective claim; and because it is subjective, consensus cannot be compelled but must be evoked in different subjects. Accordingly, again, so far as it brings us to appreciate a work by earning an appropriate subjective response, literary criticism is not just a criticism or comparison of works but is an exhibition of the nature of aesthetic discourse and its basis in our response. When al-Jāḥiẓ objects to poems which are too studied or self-conscious of their craft¹⁰³ or Ibn Qutaiba rejects 'artificial' poetry¹⁰⁴ or when Ibn al-Muʿtazz sets out poetic devices, they are all presenting the nature of aesthetic discourse. So too when al-Mubarrad and Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar criticize poems, suggesting why we cannot respond to them, they are delineating the nature of poetry itself.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, we may argue that Bāqillānī explains the nature of poetry by distinguishing it from Quranic language.¹⁰⁶ All these are contributions to Islamic aesthetics and not merely examples of literary criticism.¹⁰⁷ The

¹⁰² As with Ibn al-Muʿtazz, al-Āmidī, and Qāḍī al-Jurjānī, who developed and refined concepts of *maḥāsīn al kalām*. But this development does not imply the presence of a separate theory which is being applied to poems, as if our procedure were dependent on the theory-particular relation which we distinguished and contested in the past paragraphs.

¹⁰³ Cf *Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, vol 1, p83 and Volume 3, 28.

¹⁰⁴ *Kūāb al Shiʿr wa-l-Shuʿarā*, (in Ajami, *The Neckveins of Winter*, 8).

¹⁰⁵ See 'Epistle on Poetry,' Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 103-7.

¹⁰⁶ For example, al-Bāqillānī *Iʿjāz al Qurʾān*.

¹⁰⁷ Here we might say that al-Āmidī's approach is traditionalistic, Ibn al-Muʿtazz' innovative, and al-Jurjānī's syncretic. In all these cases, though, the matters at issue are considered for what they tell us of the nature of poetry itself, defining our expectation of poetry by reference to its nature. Thus, controversies over the nature of *majāz*, and of natural versus studied or artificial poetry have at their nub the matter of the nature of poetry itself. They are exercises in aesthetics, so far as they concern the nature and validity of poetry, and not mere appreciative analyses of poems. See Ajami and Heinrichs, cited below, among a number of other writers. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, in *Malāmūh Yūnāniyyah fī l-ʿAdab al ʿArabī*, (Beirut, 1977), presents the influence of Greek thought on Arabic theory and considers the issues which motivated and developed Arabic literary theory respectively. However, he does not explicitly identify this progress in the history of literary theory in terms of aesthetics or a

critical statements which those works contain must be seen in part at least as an account of the nature of poetry.

Given this conception of poetry, it is not surprising that critics who wanted to understand new poetry should defend their choice by identifying a newer aesthetic vocabulary with the accepted models of poetry. Ibn al-Mu^ctazz presents this as a matter of articulating in more detail aesthetic devices which were already present in classical poetry but had not always been recognised.¹⁰⁸ His apparently radical claim that a constant and boring repetition of ancient poetry has turned people towards contemporary popular compositions¹⁰⁹ correlates with his praise of writers who combine old and new styles¹¹⁰ and his presentation in *Kitāb al-badī^c* of the traditions found in old and new poetry. In this case as in others, poetic inspiration is valid because it satisfies grammatical criteria for poetic sense. That is, Ibn al-Mu^ctazz is concerned with what constitutes poetry as such. For when a poem fails to satisfy grammar, and fails to bear significant analogies with accepted models, or is unable to achieve consensus, it fails to be poetry at all, and suffers a loss of poetic sense all together.

Aesthetics and Criticism

We can explain this conception of Arabic poetics further by contrasting it with other accounts. Two recent approaches have both alleged variations of a single weakness in Arabic poetics: that it is uncreative and traditionalist.¹¹¹ Both these conclusions, arguably, are insensitive to the philosophical thrust of Arabic literary criticism. Von Grunebaum proposes that the strictures of Arabic poetics cluster around five basic concerns: the use of language;¹¹² the use of accepted stylistic features;¹¹³ a derivative or inferior use of motifs;¹¹⁴ psychological insight;¹¹⁵ and appropriateness.¹¹⁶ From the

concern with the philosophical enterprise of grasping the nature of poetry itself. A book which comes much closer to this kind of philosophical self-consciousness about the issues and motivations native to Arabic literary theory is Kamal Abū Deeb's *Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Poetic Imagery*, (Warminster, 1979), from which I have learnt much. See also Van Gelder, *Beyond the Line*, which concerns other issues about the unity of poetry and the controversies generated by considerations of the wholeness of imagery in poetry.

¹⁰⁸ *Kitāb al-badī^c*, *passim*: see the examples cited above.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Ṭabaqāt -shu^carā' al-muḥdāthin*, edited by A. Ikbāl (London, 1939), 87.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, 108-9, 134, 249-51, 276-7.

¹¹¹ See G.v. Grunebaum, 'Poetics in the 10th Century,' and 'Arabic Poetics,' both cited above, where he carries out a detailed analysis of sources.

¹¹² Here a work may fail because it misuses grammar or particular words.

¹¹³ These include the effective or unsuccessful use of rhetorical devices, constraints in wording, contradictions within a poem, ineffectiveness of comparisons and statements, the unsuitability of form to material, and a number of more technical shortcomings. Among the latter, we may find poor connections between hemstitches and verses, failures in meter, repetition, all of which are more than matters of judgement about the appropriateness of the parts of the poem either to the whole or to some expressed thought, image, or idea.

¹¹⁴ These might be labelled 'historical considerations.'

nature of these strictures he concludes that Arabic poetic theory relegates imagination to an inferior position. This not only leads critics to renounce invention and originality as foremost objectives and criteria for literary accomplishment, but also makes beauty an independent element added at will to any motif or concept.¹¹⁷

However, although literary critics deployed these strictures or something very like them, and while it is true that Arabic poets who followed the Prophet's injunction against falsehood in poetry tempered their invention by that censure, it is not clear that von Grunebaum can justify his conclusions about Arabic poetics. First, his conception of creativity is questionable and this, second, leads him to misconstrue ascriptions of beauty. To begin with the first: von Grunebaum seems to emphasise invention and originality. For him, we judge a work creative because it is novel. But this cannot be the whole account of creativity, for novelty alone surely cannot warrant any ascriptions of creativity. Original nonsense lacks value, in spite of being original and novel, simply because it is nonsense. Consequently, only a more careful explanation of how we ascribe value to novelty will clarify which invented examples are creative rather than nonsensical or uninteresting or which production of images and ideas counts as 'invention' in a sense relevant to poetry. Now, to provide such an explanation of value we would need, first, a set of criteria for judging works and, second, a procedure by which new criteria may be included and outmoded criteria rejected. Arabic poetry satisfies both these requirements: the examples we have cited above contain both instances of criteria applied in judging a work or defending claims about its value and also a procedure by which, in elaborating an aesthetic or critical vocabulary, we bring new criteria to bear on poems by reference to our common response and the analogies between present and past poems. That is, Arabic poetry possesses the tools necessary to making and deploying judgements about what is creative and what is not.

However, this defence of Arabic poetics raises a different problem. Although theorists can judge aesthetic value and its criteria, the critic can

¹¹⁵ Here misunderstandings of emotions or a mistake in psychology could be condemned.

¹¹⁶ The idea presented in the poem may be appreciated for its appropriateness, and the work may be criticized for going against a descriptive convention.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.* It may seem that I am setting up a straw man here, ascribing to the author a stronger position than he actually maintains. His argument may be that Arabic poetry in this period was restricted in how it could develop because an entirely new way of producing poetry was not available within its cultural context. If so, his criticism either applies to any and all works, for by the theory that connects poetry to context no poetry can escape its context, or now ascribes a lack of innovation to the cultural context, which purportedly restricts the production of 'truly' new poetry. If the criticism applies to all poetry, it is not clear why the author does not say so; if the charge is against the culture itself, then the criticisms I make still apply, only now they address culture rather than individuals—and my criticisms apply even if his charges are levelled at that object. I am indebted to Dr. Oliver Leaman for making clear the need to deal with this issue.

argue that Arabic poetics remains traditionalist and cannot allow for novelty. Even an apparently radically new work like *Kitāb al-badīʿ*¹¹⁸ is presented and understood as a traditionalist one because it includes nine old devices among its list of 'new' ones. And even the latter, the author suggests, are merely old ones articulated more clearly and essential to generating a consensual response in subjects.¹¹⁸ Thus, the criteria are not new, and that seems to justify the accusation that critics and poets abjured creativity. However, in response we may argue that stressing the role of the nine old devices does not do justice to the newly articulated devices. In spite of their apparent traditionalism, the forms *are* also new in that Ibn al-Muʿtazz refashioned them because formerly they were used in a confused manner. And because they *are* a development of forms, they are innovative; consequently, so far as creativity is concerned, there is no reason to deny the presence of creativity in Arabic poetry.

But this attempted definition of creativity in Arabic poetry remains incomplete. As analysts test the new criteria mentioned above by reference to accepted models and analogies in Arabic poetry and by consensus in response, von Grunebaum may argue that the very procedure militates towards a conservative conception of poetic value and its development. Al-Āmidī's dismissal of Abū Tammām's poetry, for example, ultimately relies on some conception of accepted usage and denies value to Abū Tammām's images because they differ from ancient usage.¹¹⁹ Through linguistic analysis he argues that where an *istiʿāra* is unintelligible, there the work in which it appears is not aesthetic at all but is an example of nonsense rather than of poetic sense.¹²⁰ al-Āmidī writes that the 'Arabs "borrowed" an idea [from its usual context in order to give it] to something where it does not belong only on condition that it is near to it or corresponds to it or resembles it in some respect or is one of its causes, so that the "borrowed" word then becomes suitable for the thing it has been "borrowed" for and agrees with its idea.'¹²¹ In the absence of such constraints poetry becomes rather senseless,¹²² and those who ignore these rules will become incomprehensible. Conversely, he maintains that a people may fail to appreciate that a line of poetry is 'extremely beautiful, well formed, and correct' because they 'know neither what is coinable and usable in the way of poetic motifs and "borrowings", nor the ways of expression exceeding the proper meaning of language (*majāzat*).'¹²³ By applying

¹¹⁸ *Kitāb al-badīʿ passim*.

¹¹⁹ See al-Āmidī, *al-Muwāzana bayn Shiʿr Abī Tammām wa-l-Buḥturī*, cited above.

¹²⁰ See below for a further analysis of al-Āmidī's claims. See also M.J. Ajami, 'Amūd al Shiʿr: Legitimation of Tradition,' *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 12, 1981, 30-48.

¹²¹ *Al-Muwāzana bayn Shiʿr Abī Tammām wa-l-Buḥturī*, (edited by A. Sakr, (Cairo, 1961, 1965), 2 Volumes), Volume 1, 250, extract translated by Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*, 38. See also S. Bonebakker in the new *Encyclopedia of Islam* on *Istiʿāra*.

¹²² *Al-Muwāzana*, 253f; al-Āmidī's criticism is of Abū Tammām.

¹²³ *Al-Muwāzana*, *ibid*, Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*, 18.

ancient rules strictly, al-Āmidī seems to deny any creativity the poet might claim on the basis of the novelty in his poetry. Similarly, where critics depend on references to classical models or their analogies, they stifle novelty because those models cannot allow for a new poetic.

However, the above claim conflates the need for standards of intelligibility with conservatism. Al-Āmidī provides a good example.¹²⁴ His references to ancient models are ways of recovering intelligibility. His claims that poetic images should not be far-fetched may be seen as censure against nonsense masquerading as poetic genius.¹²⁵ Poetry must be capable of evoking a universal response, and we may ensure that images make sense by discovering their continuity with classical models. Consequently, we may deny novelty or extravagance to the extent that they render imagery meaningless, so that novelty by itself does not lead us to ascribe creativity.

Moreover, poets do not abjure creativity by accepting such standards of intelligibility, for unless classical forms are incapable of any development at all, poets can be creative by producing works whose novelty of images, ideas, etc., satisfy the forms required by classical poetry. It is these forms that allow us to say that a poem is new and valuable and, so, creative. Novelty by itself is not creativity and the absence of new forms does not make a poem imitative. Rather, the satisfaction of accepted criteria identifies a poem as, say, a classical ode, and a poem is neither less capable of exhibiting creativity just because it is a classical ode nor will lead us to devalue a poet's imagination just because in the poem it is exercised in the service of this form. Just as a cognitive claim is intelligible only if it follows the rules of reasoning and grammar, without its meaning or content being any less creative for being intelligible, so too a poem may follow given formal rules in order to be intelligible without being any less creative.

Indeed, to claim that al-Āmidī's is a poetic traditionalism, because he insists on the role of past models in ensuring intelligibility, and to argue that this is poetic conservatism, is to confuse the requirement of intelligibility with a particular conception of how poems must satisfy that general requirement. Here we can criticize the need for intelligibility, on the grounds that it precludes creativity, only at the risk of introducing arbitrariness in the guise of creative freedom.

Further, we cannot derive any general conclusion about Arabic poetics from this feature of al-Āmidī's particular case. Neither Ibn al-Muʿtazz before him nor al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī following him accepted al-Āmidī's claim that older models provided the *only* satisfactory criteria for intelligi-

¹²⁴ Even though he is a conservative figure in this context.

¹²⁵ *ibid.* Another example of a conservatism in poetical theory is Qudama ibn Jaʿfar, who, in *Naqd Al-Shiʿr*, argues for the way poets must follow given rules if they are to create poetry rather than nonsense. Cf *Kitāb Naqd Al-Shiʿr*, edited by S.A. Bonebakker (Leiden, 1965), 1–10, et. al..

bility *just because they were older*, and both of them proposed other accounts of understanding.¹²⁶

In spite of these criticisms of some of the inferences von Grunebaum draws, his listing remains important. And even if it fails to clarify the distinction and relation between an appreciation of works and an exhibition or constitution of aesthetic discourse, nevertheless its careful reconstruction of critical procedures makes our explanation easier to see. Indeed, his failure to see that appreciation is an exhibition of validity may be the reason for his claim that beauty seems to be something added at will to aesthetic discourse. The claim is true in an important sense, but does not make beauty arbitrary in any way. He correctly sees that ascriptions of beauty are supervenient in the sense that we ascribe them to aesthetic objects, but he misconstrues the primary procedure of constituting aesthetic discourse. That is, al-Jāhīz, Ibn al-Muʿtazz, al-Āmidī, and al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī distinguish aesthetic discourse from prose by the former's use of figurative language. They suggest further that the use of such poetic language can be judged beautiful or ugly or aesthetically uninteresting, for example, by reference to its pleasantness or disagreeableness,¹²⁷ or by seeing *kināya* and *taʿrīḍ* as forms of *maḥāsīn al kalām* or factors which beautify,¹²⁸ or by reference to the soul's calmness and peace.¹²⁹ The latter are ways of judging beauty and we make these judgements only when the object we are considering is an aesthetic one. Thus, claims about beauty are supervenient on aesthetic discourse in that we must identify a discourse as aesthetic before we can call it beautiful, and identifying it as aesthetic does not necessarily imply that it is also beautiful.

Yet the conclusion that a poetic work is beautiful is not arbitrary or simply added at will to aesthetic discourse. Instead, we can characterise a work as an aesthetic object, and so as capable of aesthetic evaluation—rather than construe it as a knowledge claim, a moral imperative, or an expression of social habit—but the decision that it is beautiful remains separate from the claim that it has an aesthetic, moral, or cognitive character. We characterize a work as an aesthetic object because it uses figurative language, for example, but we make the separate judgement, that this use of figurative language is beautiful, on the basis of our response—for example

¹²⁶ In the case of Muʿtazz, this should be clear from the very fact that he puts forward new tools for analyzing poems, and so clearly does not simply accept the claim that older criteria are better because they are older. The same kind of claim may be made for Jurjānī who, in developing distinctions between beauty and aesthetic character, was also adding to and developing the traditional accounts of understanding poetry. Indeed, had our authors not felt some dissatisfaction with the prevalent approaches, they would not have felt any need to put forward their own accounts. Even al-Āmidī must have felt such an unhappiness with his contemporary situation and therefore appealed to more traditional conceptions of poetry; so he too must have recognised innovation, even if he rejected it for the reasons given.

¹²⁷ Al-Jāhīz, *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, e.g. at Volume 1, 61ff.

¹²⁸ Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Kitāb al Badīʿ*, 64.

¹²⁹ Al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī, *al-Wasāʾiṭa*, 320.

by reference to the feelings of calm and peace it occasions in us. Although we rely on a subjective factor in making the judgement that a poem is beautiful, nevertheless, this assessment is not arbitrary, for we can show that it is mistaken where, for example, it is based on misunderstanding a poem. Thus, if the poem generates a feeling of peace, it does so because of its intelligible and rational character, which the subject must understand for the appropriate feeling to occur in him. A response may then be inappropriate or even wrong where it results from misunderstanding the meaning of a poem, its metaphors, images, and so on. All these rational factors show that our response, while subjective, follows rules which refer to the work being considered and its meaningfulness, and so is not simply arbitrary because it is subjective. Rather, the assessment is aesthetic and capable of validity.

Leaving aside for the present issues of the precise relation between the aesthetic and the beautiful, and returning to von Grunebaum's division, we may question both the understanding of Arabic poetics which we have proposed and von Grunebaum's by reference to other explanations of the nature of Arabic poetry. Heinrichs proposes that we understand Arabic poetry by means of four *stichwörter* or key terms: molecularity, the distinction of form (*lafz* or words) from content (*ma'nā* or meaning), traditionalism, and a lack of interest in historical development,¹³⁰ where all four can be seen as 'basic deficiencies' afflicting Arabic poetry.¹³¹ Of course, we can accept these as deficiencies only by contrast with some model of 'proper' poetry, where we can explain the inefficiency of the analytic and poetic tools identified by these key terms. In the absence of any account of 'proper' poetry, we may treat the terms merely as ways of characterising Arabic poetry. As such they must satisfy a neutral standard for any theory: they must be internally consistent, economical, applicable, give insight into the object, and must identify important issues in poetics.

By this neutral stand Heinrichs' four key words become questionable. Thus, he denies that Arabic poetry and theory exhibit any interest in historical development, where the latter, first, involves explaining changes in poetry and style by reference to non-poetic factors and, second, supposes that later changes depend on earlier changes. But if Heinrichs thinks that he discerns a lack of historical interest in their use of comparisons with accepted models to justify present claims,¹³² then he has misidentified their conception of a satisfactory explanation as an aspect of their historical consciousness. Arabic writing on history, including work on the history of literary theory, occurs in texts other than those devoted only to literary the-

¹³⁰ No one of these is given priority over the other, though, as we shall see, in discussing a dichotomy between form and content, the former is given precedence. See W. Heinrichs, *Arabische Dichtung und Griechische Poetik: Ḥāzīm Al-Qarṭājannī's Grundlegung der Poetik mit Hilfe aristotelischer Begriffe*, ZDMG, (Beirut, 1969) and 'Literary Theory, The problem of Its Efficiency,' *Arabic Poetry, Theory and Development*, (Wiesbaden, 1973).

¹³¹ Heinrichs, 'Literary Theory,' 34ff.

¹³² *ibid.*

ory.¹³³ Further, arguably, an historical consciousness is unnecessary to explanations of the nature of literary theory: psychology or epistemology can provide non-historical explanations. To expect that only historical explanations are satisfactory may be like supposing that to grasp the operation of '2+2=4' we must know the history of mathematics. But that claim itself stands in need of an independent justification before it can be brought to criticize Arabic poetics and its conception of satisfactory explanations.

Even if we accept that the issue of validity is separate from a historical consciousness, it may seem we can reformulate Heinrichs' criticism as the claim that Arabic poetics is 'traditionalist.' However, 'traditionalism' as Heinrichs defines it may well depend on misunderstanding the role of philological, grammatical, and rhetorical or thematic rules in Arabic poetry. One such misunderstanding leads us to think of 'traditionalism' as, first, giving the past authority for the wrong reasons, and second, accepting an alien and unargued notion of 'creativity;' and this leads to the claim that Arabic poetics and poetry lacks creativity.

In this case, the authority of Arabists such as Goldziher may underlie accusations of traditionalism.¹³⁴ They accepted a particular conception of the effect of philology on poetic development. To explain the conflict between Umayyad poets, who followed the models of the heroic age, and more modern poetry, which sought an independent advancement, Goldziher argued that early Muslim critics, because of their professional training, held to the principle that pre-Islamic poetry had reached perfection.¹³⁵ They studied old poems to learn the pure tongue, evaluating poetry from this principally grammarian perspective of linguistic usage and misuse. Further, to justify their approach to poetry, philologists claimed the authority of Quranic exegesis and the study of Arabic. They also gave importance to the subject's response to a poem. But they explained these subjective factors also by philological analysis.

Unfortunately, Heinrichs might argue, the very use of grammar to explain the subject raises a problem, for by imposing linguistic rules, it seems, the linguists both decreased room for originality and denigrated, as mere idiosyncrasy, any aspects of a subject's response which philology failed to organise. The latter included features of our responses that varied between subjects, whose very arbitrariness precluded any claims for their validity. Thus, the validity of poetry and our response was codified by using grammar. What it left unordered was entirely subjective and made no claim to validity at all. In effect, these rules operated as norms for poetry,

¹³³ See for example A. A. Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs*, translated by L. I. Conrad, Princeton (1983).

¹³⁴ See for example 'Alte und neue Poesie im Urtheile der arabischen Kritiker,' I. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie*, 122-174. See also Chapter VII, Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, and Gibb, 'Arabic Poet and Arabic Philologist.'

¹³⁵ See 'Alte und neue Poesie im Urtheile der arabischen Kritiker,' I. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie*, 122-174, among other instances.

and these norms, first, still left it open to poets to provide a content, though the latter is only contingent because other content may have suited the form as well. Second, they relegated originality to an inferior position commensurate with the lesser importance of content. Third, the source of these norms lay in ancient models, whose venerability justified their validity. Finally, the poetry which resulted from following these norms was 'traditionalist' because the only innovation usual was the content, and even that was constrained by considerations of appropriateness.¹³⁶

Goldziher is right about the existence of a controversy between the values of pre-Islamic and modern poetry. Ibn Qutaiba recommends one position on the issue; Ibn Rāshīq claims that Aṣma'ī rejected contemporary poetry; Khafājī believed that Jāhīz, Mubarrad, and Buḥturī took a neutral stand. But we may question Goldziher's explanation of the controversy. Bonebakker argues that grammar, philology, and poetry were positively inter-related.¹³⁷ Not only does he show that the tradition Goldziher quotes from may be reinterpreted, but he also argues that influential critics, far from rejecting previous work, were continuing traditions begun in the Second Century of Islam. That is, both groups acknowledged the validity of grammar and philology, and so we cannot explain the opposition between old and new poetry as a matter of accepting or rejecting this philological understanding of language. Further, where critics like Ibn al-Mu'tazz, al-Jurjānī, and others relied on the results of a philological analysis of poetry, there, far from suppressing creativity or originality, philology provided standards for judging poetry and involved a particular conception of creativity. Novelty must satisfy various rules to be valuable and, so, creative. That is, the search for rules was a search for validity.

Although philological analysis was not at issue in the debate between pre-Islamic and later poetry, we must still clarify its role. And we have argued that grammar and philology provides us with a set of poetic rules; but to understand this reference to established linguistic conventions as 'traditionalism' is to confuse the nature and requirements of a satisfactory explanation with the authority of the past and to infer that poetry is better for the venerability of its rules.¹³⁸ The argument supposes that there is something like an established formal account of what poetry is, which is then filled in, so to speak, by later writers. The content of poems may change, but not to an extent that transgresses against the rules for poetry, which we derive by imitation of older forms and rules.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

¹³⁷ See 'Poets and Critics in the Third Century,' in *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, edited by G. v. Grunebaum (Wiesbaden, 1970), 85–111, 'Reflections on the *Kutāb al-badī'*, of Ibn al-Mu'tazz,' *Atti del III Congresso di Studi Arabi e Islamici*, (Naples, 1967), 191–209, and 'Aspects of the History of Literary Rhetoric and Poetics in Arabic Literature' in *Viator*, 1970, 75–95.

¹³⁸ The point was suggested above; however, Bonebakker does not consider this issue directly in these essays.

But this account wrongly understands as imitation of tradition what is really a self-consciousness about poetic conventions and their role in establishing meanings. It fails to recognise the dual aim of critical theory we proposed above, of constituting poetry generally and of understanding or appreciating particular works. In the first role, poetic conventions identify what constitutes poetry. Here there *is* a sense in which poetry is thought better for satisfying established convention, but this is the sense in which if it did not satisfy constitutive conventions it would not be a poem at all nor part of aesthetic practice. And to describe these constitutive rules as conventions is to say that the rules of aesthetic discourse are conventional rather than the result of natural laws or logical necessity, for example. But to construe them as 'traditionalist,' with the connotation that they restrict creativity and are validated by the authority of their origin, is a mistake because we would then have to describe as 'traditionalist' every claim that relied on some given standard of rationality. For by exhibiting the role of these constitutive conventions we provide an explanation of them, just as we apply an accepted standard of logic to ensure that a statement is rational but do not thereby preclude the statement from exhibiting its author's creativity. In saying that poetry is better because it satisfies established conventions we may mean only that the poem is constituted as an aesthetic object just because it satisfies those standards. Similarly, other theories of what constitutes poetry must use some acceptable criteria, and our theory cannot be dismissed as 'traditionalist' just because it too relies on criteria for what counts as poetry.

However, someone wishing to call Arabic poetry 'traditionalist' may insist that we have not answered his point. He says poetics is 'traditionalist' just because it emphasizes the authority of its source. Arabic poetics justifies conventions by tracing their origins in accepted usage or pointing out analogies with the latter and by clarifying consensus because it supposes that these procedures provide a satisfactory explanation of their nature and validity.¹³⁹ And because it thinks explanation must refer to the origin and to analogies with the latter, he accuses it of traditionalism. The key word does not unintentionally confuse imitation of tradition with explanation but reveals that Arabic poetics itself makes such an association. That is, there *are two* issues involved, but the claim is that Arabic poetics answers the question of what validity poetics has by referring to the venerability of its rules. And to give such an answer is to be a traditionalist.

The defence of this key word cannot rest here because it provides no alternative theory that would do the work done by tracing a usage to its accepted model, discovering analogies with the latter, and gaining consensus in response. Moreover, to identify the theory as 'traditionalist' because it traces changes back to their source in an accepted model is to emphasise

¹³⁹ See the discussion above.

one criteria involved while ignoring analogies and consensus in response. Yet this emphasis itself must be defended. We have seen how subjective states of calmness or peace generated consensus in response and were an important feature of the nature of poetry writing and appreciation.¹⁴⁰

Further, we may defend our theorists against the accusation of traditionalism by stressing that these conventions provide flexibility.¹⁴¹ What and how a poet writes when following the constitutive conventions may also be original, insightful, valuable, new, and so on. First, just as a poet may be original even when he produces a sonnet by following the known and set rules for doing so, similarly, a poet can follow rules for constructing *nasīb* without rendering his poem useless. Second, artists can advance poetic conventions. As we suggested, Ibn al-Muʿtazz and al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī questioned accepted rules about the structure and nature of classical poetry. By providing a more detailed vocabulary they allowed us to discern analogies and consensual rules in poetry that were not obvious in the standard critical theory. They deepened our understanding of poetry while, at the same time, following the method of satisfactory explanations which is presently at issue. By exhibiting the rules operant in a work by tracing it to its accepted model, showing analogies with the latter, and gaining a consensus, they showed that even though the older vocabulary of criticism did not grasp them adequately, these rules were already present. This procedure allowed them to develop poetics and its rules.

Third, in this context, to ascribe creativity we would seek some continuity with our ways of appreciating poems so far as this allows us to provide justifications for valuing works. Here writers sometimes justify creativity by showing that a novel procedure still generates a common response in subjects and is creative because it is successful in gaining consensus yet innovative. And this account of creativity is quite compatible with what we have proposed for Arabic poetics. We expect also to analyze the novel procedure and to grasp it through grammatical rules. If the latter is an unacceptable method for assessing a novel procedure, then, as we suggested above, we must be given both some reasons for its failure and some alternative way of assessing novel procedures. Neither of these is provided by ascriptions of 'traditionalism.' Further, critics like al-Āmidī justified creativity by pointing to the origin of a work, proposing that the state of being of a poet and its audience are the basis of claims to aesthetic character and value. Other critics pointed to the origins of technical vocabulary in the repertoire of Arabic literary criticism.¹⁴² These proposals follow the accepted procedures for explanation yet succeed in elaborating and so creating new rules for appreciating poetry.

¹⁴⁰ See above, last section.

¹⁴¹ See the last section.

¹⁴² I have in mind the cases of al-Muʿtazz and al-Jurjānī already cited, though we may also cite here the examples of Bāqillānī, Tabarī, etc..

These cases are attempts to provide genetic explanations of aesthetic value, where we consciously defend the value of works by pointing out how they originate in and advance the history of poetics. But genetic explanations are not 'traditionalist' in that they do not accept rules merely because they are venerable. Nor do they deny creativity. Instead, Heinrichs' notion of 'traditionalism' seems to conflate an unargued notion of creativity with what, on the part of those literary critics, was a methodological self-consciousness about the nature and culture of poetic conventions—a conception by which they defend the validity of contemporary standards by identifying their genesis from an accepted model, identifying its similarities with the latter and the consensus it generates. The latter reveal whether a work is a poem at all and whether it is a good or bad one of its kind. Further, the standard or model, say, of the unity of poems can develop through analogy and consensus, and the latter allow us to emphasise new elements in particular works in order to change radically our perception of poems. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, in proposing a number of new concepts for analyzing poetry, is doing just that, and those who seek to re-legitimate the older forms of poetry try to show that these concepts are already deployed.¹⁴³

At the very least, then, even if we restrict 'traditionalism' to mean merely that we must always take examples from the past seriously as models, we still need to justify this key word by providing a satisfactory explanation of its nature and use. Therefore the key word is neither more basic than nor replaces the genetic explanation we provide by tracing a present instance back to an accepted model, uncovering analogies, and assessing consensus in response. Instead, we can best clarify this key word by saying that Arabic poetics relied on genetic explanations. The latter show what it is for a work to constitute aesthetic discourse, functioning as a model for other works.

Further, by contrast, if by 'traditionalism' we mean that we value examples only because of their origin, then the key word is inadequate because it fails to acknowledge the role of analogy and consensus in response. For these are other justifying criteria that allow us to extend our conception of what is poetic. For example, in instances consensus in response may be more important than identifying the original model when justifying a claim that a poem is beautiful.

We may also question Heinrichs's key distinction between form (*ma'nā*) and content (*lafẓ*). By separating them Heinrichs may be identifying the distinctively aesthetic expressions of meaning in poetry. If so, the distinction is more cumbersome than helpful. It says only that poetry has an aesthetic character—that it has poetic 'form'—yet fails to explain or defend this claim. Further, we have alternative explanations of the aesthetic use of language that stress the distinctive character of the consensus at-

¹⁴³ See M. Ajami 'ʿAmūd al Shiʿr: Legitimization of a Tradition.'

tained, the sort of objects which make up the continuity of the traditions, and the analogies which we may deploy as through *isti^cāra* and *majāz* and their effectiveness. This needs to be explained further.

If we see works as the exhibition of validity, then the distinction between form and content becomes less acute. No doubt the words used, their order, the rhythm, rhyme, and other prosodical factors all determine the meaning of a poem. But this implies neither that meaning and words are independent of each other in a poem, nor that the first is formal and the second passive. Rather, words and meanings relate closely to forms. Poets extend the meanings of words through *majāz* and as *isti^cāra*.¹⁴⁴ If Heinrichs were correct, then poems would establish meanings only because they gave the content an accepted form. The content cannot generate sense by itself, it seems, and the suggestion is that a word realizes poetic meaning when it has a poetic form while a cognitive form provides literal meanings. His distinction suggests that meanings presented in a poetic form may be paraphrased without loss of anything but their poetic form when they are presented in a prosaic form. It is not difficult to discover examples: having argued that *isti^cāra* must be useful to communication, because the purpose of poetic and other discourse is to communicate something,¹⁴⁵ al-Āmidī goes on to propose that the context in which the poet places a trait justifies a usage, making it pleasant and also determining its nature and existence. The sense of a poem using an *isti^cāra* is determined not by the 'form' the word had in its literal or cognitive use but by the order and relation it bears to its new context.¹⁴⁶ Given that 'form,' 'order,' and 'context' refer to the same set of relations, it must seem that form determines meaning, giving the trait its significance.

However, it is not clear that the distinction of form from content is useful in any explanation. For although it serves to mark a meaning as figurative rather than cognitive—we say that a trait has a figurative form and meaning—we still have to *explain* what justifies such an ascription of form. Labelling something 'form' does not by itself explain the nature of the meaning because 'form' is not an explanatory concept: it depends on some more basic explanation. Yet the latter would consist in pointing to analogies and differences a concept in a poem may have with its other uses. But if we explain 'form' by reference to these analogies and differences, then 'form' is not alone in determining meaning. The words we use and the analogies we propose in, say, *isti^cāra*, can also go to determine meaning and 'form' or context. Here, the analogies, contiguities, resemblances, etc., we permit a word will determine its form: cognitive uses are likely to give few

¹⁴⁴ See the section on 'Validation and Exhibition,' above, which considers these concepts in the work of Qutaiba, Jāhiz, and Ibn al-Mu^ctazz.

¹⁴⁵ That is, it promotes beauty or *maḥāsin 'ala al fai'da*.

¹⁴⁶ see al-Āmidī, *Al-Muwāzana*, e.g. Volume 1, 317ff, for some discussion of obscurities which spoil a poem; see also the sections quoted in Heinrichs, *The Hand of the North Wind*.

analogies significance, being concerned with determinable and precise uses of language and words, while poetic uses may allow for a greater range of analogies and may even exploit these similarities. But there does not seem to be any general, comprehensive rule for deciding which set of analogies or resemblances is always native to cognition and which to poetry.

The distinctions between forms and between form and content seem to become ones of degree, if they are useful at all, for the same word may be used in either context without necessarily changing meaning, or the subjects' responses can be different in different cases, and whether a use is poetic or scientific has to be decided in the particular case. Further, although an insightful association of words may be unorthodox by some strict formal standards, yet it may successfully evoke an appropriate consensual response. Here arguably the consensus in response validates the word's use and creates a context for a new use of an old trait. Thus, if it is sensible to talk in these terms at all, content determines form in these cases, and we can defend the validity of meanings by reference to analogy and consensus—which is how all such validity is thought to be justified. The form alone will not validate content. Indeed, we exhibit what the form is, in this identification of context, in the poem itself and justify it by showing that the eccentric use of a trait out of its original context is meaningful and valuable because the critic can show the context the trait wrings out of what could have been a wrong use of language.

In terms of this issue, al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī's account raises similar questions about the usefulness of a distinction between form and content. He understands *isti'āra* by reference to the whole context, not the context previously identified by strict philological rules as the 'form' of a concept. Indeed, it is their ability to escape 'form' that makes linguistic usages poetic. As al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī argues, if *isti'āra* 'were used within the strict limits of verifiable and truthful reality, they would cease to be poetic and belong to a realism outside poetry.'¹⁴⁷ He is conscious also that 'if they were used with unrestricted liberty and unlimited license, they would lead to the corruption of language and the confusion of discourse. The best way of using *isti'āra* is between the two extremes where one contents oneself with what is near and recognizable, and clear and not obscure.'¹⁴⁸ But this sort of judgement depends on the subject's response, not simply on established formal philological rules, and so escapes the distinction of form from content.

Further, by accepting that words in their poetic use escape form, al-Jurjānī implies that not every poetic meaning must be capable of being paraphrased into prose or some other form of language. Yet the possibility of paraphrasing the same content in different forms is essential if we are to

¹⁴⁷ *Al-Wasāṭa*, 323.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

defend the necessity and power of poetic form over the contingency and malleability of content. Both these factors show that for al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī we must examine the use of words and their meanings in each case, to grasp the analogies, resemblances, and contiguities that give words significance. Moreover, we may criticize Heinrichs' reading of Arabic poetics for paying less than due attention to consensus and analogy. By attending principally to the 'formal' nature of *isti'āra*, he plays down a most important factor in poetry—the relation of individuals as subjects to the community.

In any case, by examining two or three theories in this section, we have clarified some features of Pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetics. Of the latter we proposed that literary theorists used *majāz* and *isti'āra* to characterise aesthetic discourse, providing a linguistic analysis of this figurative language while attending to the nature of our response to this linguistic structure to explain claims that works are beautiful. The basis of this analysis lay in the method it shared with grammar and philology, according to which these critical works not only lead us to appreciate particular works, but also to exhibit the aesthetic nature of poetic discourse. In this analysis and exhibition, grammar and philology played a crucial role, apparently providing poetics with its validity. Alternative accounts of Arabic poetics, among other things, failed to see the dual aim of criticism, relied on an alien understanding of creativity, failed to understand the nature and function of the method of proof and explanation involved, and consequently conflated issues of imitation and justification.

Given this characterisation of Arabic poetics, of the role of the subject, and the method involved, we see the context in which Greek philosophy had to succeed. For the outline presented above helps us understand the notion of poetry that was caught up with the revelation and growth of Islam. Features of this conception determined the reception of Aristotle's theses into the Arabic context.

Poetics and Philosophy

While critics relied on grammatical and linguistic analysis to defend their justifications of poetry, philosophers looked to logic to justify the validity provided through explanation by exhibition. As we shall see, Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī examine the role of poets in society, the validity of their utterances, their access to truths, and so on, but provide logic-oriented accounts of agreement in the community on some rational basis. And if the Arabic philosophers' explanation of those concepts is distinctive, the reasons for this are many. Inadequacies in the available translation of the *Poetics*; difficulties in transmission; the particular character of Arabic poetics and its methodology; the desire to justify its conclusions while disagree-

ing with its method; the philosophers tending to identify the *Poetics* as a part of the logical works of the *Organon*; the desire to be philosophers in the Aristotelian mould: all these factors go to explain the Arabic reception of the *Poetics*. And their role made it important to construct a context from which we could better understand the contribution of Arabic poetics and aesthetics to the aristotelian tradition. For if we see differences between Arabic philosophers' and Aristotle's works only as deviations from some central authority, then we misunderstand the former. Instead, by following the work of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sinā on poetics, we can see how they expounded Aristotle's work to explain the nature of beauty, its ability to obtain truth, its basis in a subjective community of feeling, its relation to politics and morality, and issues of interpretation and understanding in a consensual community—issues which were often already present in Arabic poetic theory.

Among the crucial differences between Greek and Arabic conceptions which we must note here is that because they were influenced by Aristotle, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sinā sought a logical universality for poetry that they thought Arabic poetics lacked because it depended on grammar. On these grounds they even thought that some parts of Aristotle's work was unknowable. When Ibn Sinā examines the *Poetics*, he first puts forward his own theory, which is based on Aristotle's logical texts, allows that his concern is with general principles, and reminds the reader that many of Aristotle's examples and descriptions are part of an incomprehensible and different tradition. However, his claims, like those of al-Fārābī, involve a deeper theory about understanding and interpretation by which, because they accepted the validity of Aristotle's logic, they also accepted the general principles underlying Aristotle's work since it depends on logic. And to understand this Arabic Aristotelian tradition, we must see how the philosophers questioned whether grammar was an instrument for establishing meanings. The conclusions they arrived at in this controversy are crucial to the Arabic understanding of poetics and the *Poetics*.

The issues involved appear clearly in a discussion between Abū Bishr Mattā and Abū Sa'īd al-Sīrāfi¹⁴⁹ about the relative merits of logic and grammar. As we shall see in the next chapter, the first defends Greek thought while the second represents Arabic and Muslim practices. That Abū Bishr Mattā was a Nestorian Christian, famous for his translations of Greek philosophy into Arabic, but possibly more familiar with Syriac than either Greek or Arabic, suggests that the discussion is in part totemic. Nevertheless, substantial issues emerge, and just because it seems so fully given over to al-Sīrāfi's side of the argument, the text represents the grammarian's position seriously.

¹⁴⁹ 'On the Merits of Logic and Grammar,' translated by D.S. Margoulith, *Royal Asiatic Society*, 1905, and more recently into German by G. Endress, cited above.

In the sections following our presentation of the debate, we shall consider a number of objections to al-Sirāfi. Not only is his position questionable on its own grounds but also, from a basis in his own theory, al-Fārābī identifies a number of its deficiencies.

The discussion in the next chapter will move our argument forward in the following way. We turned to al-Sirāfi's theory to examine the grammarian account of language and its method of validation by exhibition. In finding fault with that account al-Fārābī rejects the older understanding and now seeks a logical basis for the validity of poetic meanings. He presents this argument in a number of texts, which we examine in Chapter Two. First, he depends on an Aristotelian conception of the imagination. As this also influenced Ibn Sīnā, we consider the three accounts of imagination together. The discussion shows that Ibn Sīnā develops Aristotle's theory some way beyond its original expression. Second, we explain why al-Fārābī conceives of poetic discourse as 'imaginative'. The latter seems to make poetic discourse subjective and raises questions about how logic could provide it with any kind of validity. Al-Fārābī argues that in spite of being imaginative, poetic discourse has a logical validity because it has a syllogistic form. By definition a syllogism involves that if we accept a proposition then we must accede to what ever follows logically from that proposition. And al-Fārābī maintains that the logical form of poetic discourse is similar to the syllogism and has validity because it demands a similar acceptance. This construal of poetic validity in terms of poetic syllogisms is a distinctive feature of the work of al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd.

Construing poetic discourse as imaginative also brings into focus the subject whose imagination is such an important element of the nature and validity of poetic discourse and syllogisms. This leads us to attend to the role of subjects and the power poetry has to generate responses in them. In turn that points to the social and practical effects of poetry, and we examine these in the last part of Chapter Two.

This discussion may lead to something of an anti-climax because it shows that al-Fārābī's theory of poetics is ultimately a failure: he can neither give a satisfactory account of the poetic syllogism nor successfully argue for the relation between subjects and to moral life that he wants. But the weakness of his theory is outweighed by its many virtues. His is the first mature word about poetics and a *logical* poetic validity. He develops the Aristotelian account beyond its original, setting the direction for attempts by later Arabic and European thinkers to provide an *episteme* for poetry. And his concern with the logical and practical aspects of poetic validity evince a recognition of how poetics, poetry, knowledge, and practice are inter-twined. He sees that poetry and the imagination are not simply peripheral to the 'main' business of life but are among the modes of reasoning. His justifications embroil poetic validity within the full scope of

the power of reasoning, linking it with every important part of theory and practice.

Moreover, al-Fārābī's work provides a foundation for Ibn Sīnā's philosophical aesthetics. The latter theory we consider in Part Two. In Chapter Three we look at Ibn Sīnā's account of imagination in more detail. Because he distinguishes between the imagination as the ability to evoke absent particulars and the imagination as the faculty for estimating or a disposition to approach or flee from the object imagined, he avoids a difficulty that faced al-Fārābī. The latter, following the Alexandrine interpretation of Aristotle, identified the two faculties to explain the power and validity of poetry. He argued that subjects acceded to poetry, giving its imaginative images an inter-subjective validity because, when faced with certain images, every subject was disposed to respond in similar ways. However, as Ibn Sīnā distinguishes the two functions of imagination, he has to find a defence of poetic validity that avoids some of the problems besetting al-Fārābī's psychologistic account. In Chapter Three we clarify the explanation he provides by setting out his understanding of imagination and its relation to pleasure and wonder in poetry. Pleasure is part of the formal or necessary part of the poetic syllogism; consequently, its subjective nature does not introduce any arbitrariness into poetic syllogisms—poetic syllogisms are coherent and complete despite the role of imagination, pleasure, and wonder in them.

To make full sense of these issues we must show that the poetic syllogistic form rightly claims completeness and coherence. The argument of Chapter Three explains the poetic syllogism by contrasting it with demonstrative syllogisms. This procedure may seem contrary. In *Kitāb al-Qiyās* Ibn Sīnā is clear that demonstrative and poetic syllogisms have the same form, and a contrast between them seems less than illuminating. However, Ibn Sīnā also recognizes a difference between the two syllogisms. He compares evoking images in poetic syllogisms to the conviction generated by demonstration. The former, *takhyīl* or imaginative representation, supposedly occurs in poetic syllogisms as assent or *taṣdīq* occurs in demonstrative syllogisms. *Taṣdīq* is a matter of necessarily accepting the proposition that follows from the initial premises of the syllogism, and it appears best in demonstrative syllogisms. But of *takhyīl* we can question whether it is syllogistic in form, and whether it can claim any necessity or conviction at all.

On the face of it imagination seems to lack the necessity that demonstrative syllogisms claim because it seems too subjective. Its products are too closely tied to feelings of wonder and pleasure, which are completely subjective because they vary from individual to individual. To show that we can have this expectation of imagination, we first clarify the distinction

between poetic and demonstrative syllogisms.¹⁵⁰ Second, we can take the opposite tack, clarifying how poetic and demonstrative syllogisms *are* similar and showing that imaginative representations *can* sustain a syllogistic despite their distinctive subjective 'content.' Poetry is subjective yet capable of generating conviction. In other words, we see that *takhyīl* is the poetic counterpart of *taṣdīq*.

In Chapter Four we develop the final proof of the completeness of the poetic syllogistic, showing how this depends on the themes involved in poetry. We then present Ibn Sinā's conception of the role of the subject and the manner in which poetry sustains a community of subjects, where poetic validity depends on individual participation. The completeness of the poetic syllogism, it turns out, requires us to consider the kind of community and moral validity sustained by poetic validity. Here we argue that critics wrongly purport that Arabic poetics, especially in Ibn Sinā's version, fails to resolve a tension between a view of poetry as having an end in wonder and pleasure and a conception that recognizes its moral aspects. Ibn Sinā's work yields an argument for the relation between poetry and morality that defends the classical claim for the relation between beauty and goodness.

Indeed, that relation between goodness and beauty forms a depth structure to this book and its arguments. Just as the exegetical method of explanation sought to justify the Islamic conception of a poetry related to truth and to gaining resonance and value in a community of believers,¹⁵¹ similarly, Ibn Sinā shows that poetry is part of logic's concern with truth that also, by its aesthetic value, promotes a community of equal participating subjects. The defence he provides of the relation between beauty, goodness, and community is one from which we still have a lot to learn.

To explore these issues, we shall begin Part One by examining the debate between grammar and logic and shall use that to present al-Fārābī's account of the logical validity of poetic discourse.

¹⁵⁰ The contrast here fits nicely with the translation we will rely on, which renders *taṣdīq* as 'conviction' or 'demonstration' and *takhyīl* as 'imaginative representation.' This emphasizes the very issue that is our concern. See Dahiyat, *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*, 62 and 161, where he translates as 'demonstration' what could be translated as 'conviction.'

¹⁵¹ See above, 'Arabic Poetics before al-Fārābī and Ibn Sinā.'

PART ONE

AL-FARABI, LOGIC AND POETRY

ARABIC GRAMMAR AND GREEK LOGIC

The previous chapter argued that theorists used linguistic or grammatical analyses to assess whether figurative language in poetry was valid or unacceptable. Grammar and linguistic structure provided the standard for deciding whether a poem had a valid meaning and was a poem at all. But the discussion in the last chapter did not assess grammar and linguistic analysis itself. If the latter is to serve as a standard for assessing sense and meaning, we must examine whether it can play that role. While many theorists have supported this role of grammar, not all find it acceptable. Al-Fārābī, Ibn Sinā, and others contend that only logic can serve as a standard for a meaningful use of language. Any occasion where grammar seems to validate meaning in language, they would argue, can be analyzed to show that only logic justifies that valid and meaningful use.

If the logicists are right, then the account of poetic validity we gain by relying on grammar must prove inadequate because grammar fails to justify meanings of any kind. Arguments by exhibition must be unsatisfactory unless we show how they depend on and are justified by logic. And if we cannot justify poetic meanings logically, then poetry is a merely subjective and arbitrary exercise which fails to provide valid meanings. A response to a poem will become similar to liking or disliking the taste of apples: it has no validity and is not open to argument. Consequently, the entire process of appreciating poems, or sharing them with a community of listeners and writers, will become vacuous. By contrast, if we accept the logicist claim and reject the grammatical validity of poetry, we must discover a logical justification for poetry and its meanings. Thereby we can show that poetry has validity—that the process of writing and communicating poetry is rule-governed, meaningful, and not arbitrary.

To make this argument for the soundness of poetry we must first consider the conflict between grammar and logic. That will tell us whether the validity of grammar is defensible; if it falls to logic, then we must consider how to defend the validity of poetry logically. The issues raised in this conflict occur clearly in the debate between Abū Bishr Mattā and Abū Said al-Sīrāfī, which contrasts the validities of logic and grammar.¹ In this discus-

¹ A number of scholars have written on this discussion. The most interesting among these seem to me to include Muhsin Mahdi, 'Logic and Language in Classical Islam,' in G.E. v. Grunebaum, ed., *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, (Wiesbaden, 1970); F.W. Zimmerman, Introduction to *Al-Fārābī's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, (Oxford, 1981), xxi-cl; and Gerhard Endress, *Grammatik und Logik, Arabische Philologie und Griechische Philosophie im Widerstreit*, in *Bochumer Studien Zur Philosophie*, 3, *Sprachphilosophie in Antike und Mittelalter*, (Wiesbaden, 1986). I have learnt much from

sion grammar bears the special and serious sense that allows it to validate linguistic meanings. This also makes it profoundly characteristic of an Arabic form of life.

THE DEBATE BETWEEN MATTĀ AND SĪRĀFĪ

The terms of the discussion as we have them may seem too slight to explain the nature of meaning and sense. Perhaps the discussion presents no well-wrought theory, only the incomplete report from memory of a discussion that, if its descriptions of Mattā's bumbling, blustering, and choking on his saliva are plausible, does not seriously represent Greek logic and more likely serves a polemical function. Yet, because of its context, the report must be taken seriously. Abū Bishr Mattā was one of the best known logicians of his time; the assembly is an august one; and al-Sīrāfī and the vizir are fully conscious of the political importance of the debate. Not so long before, al-Rāzī had convincingly defeated his grammarian opponent in another debate on the same issue, and here now was the foremost representative of the Hellenic tendency, Mattā, in Baghdad, the centre of Arabic and Islamic thought. A victory for grammar would surely redress the defeat inflicted by al-Rāzī. Further, al-Sīrāfī has had an opportunity to reflect on what was said and to revise it when narrating his story,² so that the report is likely to present his position accurately. Above all, al-Sīrāfī's familiarity with *kalām*, his background as a jurist, and his knowledge of the literature on logic and philology,³ all are involved in the position he is defending here.⁴

The importance of the debate is evinced also in the role it plays in Abū Hayyan al-Tawhīdī's *Al-Imtā' wa'l-Mu'ānasa*.⁵ The book contains conversations between the author and the Vizir, Ibn Sidān, that exhibit the proper concerns of a class of educated and intelligent persons. The discussion between Mattā and al-Sīrāfī makes up the events of the eighth night, and is one of the high points of the book because many consider its defence of Arabic grammar and logic crucial to an Arabic and Muslim way of life.

these works and from G. Schoeler, 'Der poetische Syllogismus: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der "logischen" Poetik der Araber,' *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (133, 1983), 43-92.

² Even though al-Sīrāfī claims to have forgotten many details, al-Tawhīdī has consulted other members of the audience. For a fuller account of the context of this debate, see Endress, *Grammatik und Logic*. Margoulith, in 'On the Merits of Logic and Grammar,' has a summary and introduction to his translation which sets the scene.

³ This literature is instanced by the writings of the theologian and philologist, al-Nāshī, which al-Sīrāfī refers to during the debate. Al-Nāshī's writings are discussed in Carl Brockleman, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur, Supplement I*, 188; *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, Volume 2, 128.

⁴ See also al-Suyūṭī, *al-Muzhir*, edited by Jad al-Mawlā, (Cairo, 1949).

⁵ Edited by Ahmad Amin and Ahmad al-Zain (3 vols), 1939-1944, Volume 1, 108-128.

Al Sirāfi on Grammar and Language.

The debate as reported is one sided not only in derogating Mattā but also in questioning only the validity of logic. Al-Sirāfi uses and refers to the method for valid reasoning about grammar, but that method itself is never at issue. He only uses its results to dismiss the claims of logic by showing how grammar is tied inextricably to the Arabic way of life and reasoning.

The debate begins with Mattā's claim that logic is 'an instrument for distinguishing sound speech from unsound.'⁶ All men 'are alike in such matters of the intellect, for four plus four equals eight in all nations.' The suggestion is that by clarifying the workings of logic we understand an instrument so fundamental to thought that it is independent of cultural or natural boundaries. All sound meanings in any language depend ultimately on logic:⁷ for example, translation is made possible because logic allows us to grasp and convey the genuine truth from one language to another—indeed to present the discoveries of 'Greek' logic to Arab thinkers.

Against this al-Sirāfi concerns himself with understanding generally and its conditions, with how we secure meaningful and true statements, rather than with logic alone. From this perspective, he lays claim to a wider conception of reason, and by showing that Mattā's logic is secondary to sense, he intends to limit the domain of logic, curtail its pretensions to universal validity, and affirm that Arabic meaning, sense, and grammar are inescapable. Accordingly, he distinguishes sound from unsound sense by using reason, where the latter has a much wider purview than logic. And as it consists in more than claims of the kind that '4+4=8,' when we try to reduce reason to logic we lose the full richness of our intellectual activities. Logic 'measures one attribute at best, but misses the substance (*jawhar*) of intellect,' for 'not everything in the world admits of being weighed [by logic].'⁸

To explain: we will think a subject is irrational if he consistently affirms both 'p' and 'not p.' Similarly, we may assess the rationality of actions by logic: an irrational subject may be illogical because he consistently and knowingly thwarts his own goals such that, if the principles of his actions and of his goals were articulated, their mutual opposition would resemble a logical self-contradiction. But such examples do not show that logic is most basic, or that our actions and thoughts are irrational where they fail to satisfy logic. For we must also consider the point of any activity, of what gives it sense, and the pragmatic considerations that may not only outweigh logical ones but make the agent's actions understandable. There is too fine a line, sometimes, between hypocrisy and flexibility of character, for exam-

⁶ 'On the Merits of Logic and Grammar,' 112. The following page references are to this translation.

⁷ 'On the Merits of Logic and Grammar,' 113 and 116.

⁸ 113.

ple, for us to assess actions by logic alone, without some deeper account of their sense and context.

Similarly, the use of language and logic depend on conditions of 'grammar, sound, correct expression, correct inflexion, statement, narration, prediction, interrogation, request, desire, exhortation, invocation, appellation, and petition,' all of which 'belong to the same region by virtue of similarity and resemblance.'⁹ Thus, al-Sirāfi goes on to argue, we cannot claim knowledge of any language, and so cannot claim the knowledge provided by language, unless we know the factual beliefs and actions in relation to which language attains sense. Only a grasp deepened by familiarity with the contexts of actual language use will allow us to secure truths through that language. Indeed, that deeper account may show when to demand logical consistency and where some other measure is appropriate to sense. For 'some things dry measure is employed' al-Sirāfi says to support the need for some deeper criteria to decide when logic is appropriate, 'for others liquid measure, for others surface measure, for others rough estimate.'¹⁰

Yet such deeper criteria extend the concept of rationality beyond logic and even underpin the latter's use and validity. For logic by itself is useless in discovering the conditions for truth and falsity: it considers only the connections between different parts of language and cannot help us settle real disputes. It has no power to 'discriminate between error and truth, right and wrong' because, at best, it accounts for the soundness of an argument, not the truth or falsity of its premises.¹¹ As not all the errors we commit are mistakes of logic, its power must be limited; and we need a deeper explanation, of the need and use of logic, that must look into the sense of any speech. It is insufficient to know of a language only 'the noun, verb, and particle' as if 'with that much [logicians] can make shift in expressing ideas which the Greeks have polished.'¹² Rather, 'about these nouns, verbs, and particles you have to know how to employ them and arrange them in the order which the speakers of the language approve.'¹³ And the latter needs much more than a knowledge of logic—it needs an understanding of how language attains sense and a commensurately wider conception of reason.

Al-Sirāfi characterizes this alternative conception of reason when he enlarges on the conditions for successful communication. Reason allows us to comprehend meaning, where the latter depends on language, intention, and purpose. In order to convey his understanding to others, a subject—even a logician—'must perforce employ such words as [first]

⁹ 116.

¹⁰ 113.

¹¹ 127.

¹² 117: Mattā claims that this is all we need.

¹³ *ibid.*

cover his meaning, [second] suit his purpose, and [third] correspond with his intention.¹⁴ All these are important to understanding the 'sense' contained in 'discourse,' this complex 'garment' that is 'got together by degrees.'¹⁵

In pointing to this deeper level, al-Sirāfi is not rejecting logic altogether. In denying a fundamental role to logic he is not arguing against the presence of rules or of some kind of necessity: he is merely rejecting the claim that logic provides the only basic necessary rules for sense. And he holds that the 'logicians' conceit is due to their supposing that ideas could only be learned or made clear by their method, their study, and their labour.¹⁶ Instead, he proposes that grammar plays the role wrongly ascribed to logic. Grammar 'is logic only abstracted from the Arabic language, and logic is Grammar, only rendered intelligible by language.'¹⁷ That is, we should understand grammar as the rules of sense in a language, possessing a necessity only *within* a language; because ultimately all sense is inextricably tied to language and its form of life.

As a result of this association of sense and language, the particular language acquires a profound importance because it is the only available basis for our grasp of any meanings. The 'accidents apprehended by reason, and ideas comprehended thereby, and the investigation of the thoughts that occur, and notions that enter the mind,' all of which Mattā considered the provenance of logic, 'can only be apprehended by language.'¹⁸ This implies that when we use language to refer to objects, our references are always unknowable to those outside that language form.

Al-Sirāfi develops this claim by reference to a conception of intelligible meanings that he owes to Ibn Kullab's

effort to harmonize the Mu^ctazilite doctrine of the conventional character of names and the position of Ahl al Sunnah or the traditionalists who upheld the eternity of divine names and attributes, and especially the eternity of divine 'speech' (*kalām*)—that is the Quran.¹⁹

This conception subscribes to a neo-Platonist position that there is a world of simple and eternal intelligibles whose reflection or shadow we find in the impermanent, fluctuating, and complex world of our sensible experience, where the latter depends on the former through a relation of

¹⁴ 121.

¹⁵ 123. An important distinction proposed here is between the intention of the speaker and the possibilities contained in the language used to 'cover' meaning, while a further issue concerns the purpose served by a use of language. This is not the occasion to examine this distinction, even though the latter becomes important later.

¹⁶ 122.

¹⁷ 113.

¹⁸ 113. Muhsin Mahdi, 'Logic and Language,' proposes that the 'only' in this passage does not imply exclusivity. I find his claim unacceptable.

¹⁹ Muhsin Mahdi, 'Logic and Language,' 51.

similarity. Our ability to relate the two depends on using language, which is by nature conventional. By analyzing the validity of language and the analogical developments it can sustain, we can reason from its grasp of the reflection of the intelligibles, which we obtain through our sense experience, back to the intelligibles themselves. Thus, our grasp of the intelligibles depends on language, while language works with a distinction between 'meaning as such,' denoting the simple and eternal intelligibles, and the 'meaning of speech,' denoting the conventional linguistic grasp of our complex, impermanent, and sensible world. From the second, given our understanding of the nature of language, we may infer conclusions about the nature of intelligibles, and only when we have hold of the intelligibles do we possess meanings.

By bringing in considerations of intelligible meanings, where ordinary experience and language provide mere reflections of intelligible meanings that have to be clarified, al-Sirāfi not only reminds us of the existence of basic unobvious intelligibles. In spite of appearing to accept that $4+4=8$ in all languages, al-Sirāfi has a more radical claim: that meanings are inextricably tied up with a particular language, even when they bear reference to some eternal intelligible that, in theory at least, is available to other languages. We can express this radical claim in the following form. Language is conventional and 'earthly,' given to change, while intelligible meanings are permanent and unchanging.²⁰ Further, references to meanings are inscrutable to those outside a language. This is because, for al-Sirāfi, we cannot really translate from one language to another: the distinction of conventional language from permanent meanings so to speak opens a gap between all the conventional languages, each of which refers to permanent meanings in ways distinctive to itself.²¹ We have no guarantee that the language grasps that intelligible meaning completely²² or that a reference made in one language can be found an exact equivalent in another. Nevertheless, 'knowledge of [the] language is indispensable' because ideas can 'only be apprehended by language.'²³ In other words, we must use language because 'the way to a permanent meaning must start with the meaning available to us in the changing language,'²⁴ but cannot compare between languages to discover their common or comparable grasp of any single intelligible meaning. Any grasp of meaning exists only within a particular language and its form of life.

²⁰ 'On the Merits of Logic and Grammar,' 117.

²¹ Al-Sirāfi argues that 'no one language exactly corresponds with another language in all respects' (118).

²² *ibid.* 'Sense is permanent through time,' while language is of nature, and 'all that is of earth dissolves.' Moreover, 'sound which is compound' as it must be in any language, 'does not transcend the intelligence which is simple' and bears meaning.

²³ 113, italics added.

²⁴ Mahdi, 'Logic and Language,' 73.

This does not imply that any one language has sole access to intelligibles; but it suggests that all the rules of language, being conventional, are neither completely congruent with intelligible meanings nor relate to the latter in the same way. Further, intelligible meanings do not provide anything like a language-independent evidence and reference by which we might compare the effectiveness of different languages. Similarly, we cannot know another language's grasp of intelligibles if we depend only on our own language and some apparent analogies between it and another.

Al-Sirāfi supports his claims about the indispensability of language and inscrutability of reference to outsiders by arguing finally that we must have knowledge of the whole language. In this context, Mattā proposes in a passage disserted above that 'It is sufficient for me to know of your language the noun, verb, and the particle: with that much I can make shift in expressing ideas which the Greeks have polished for me.' But al-Sirāfi disagrees, for 'about these nouns, verbs, and particles you have to know how to employ them and arrange them in the order which the speakers of the language instinctively approve,' suggesting that familiarity with the use of language in asserting truths, grasping meanings, and in communication generally are necessary for us to understand that language fully. The latter, then, is not simply a matter of logic. As we have already suggested, for al-Sirāfi each speaker must 'perforce employ such words as cover his meaning, suit his purpose, and correspond with his intention,'²⁵ none of which logic alone achieves. Indeed, given that we must understand words and meanings in their actual use, logic becomes useless or secondary at most because it tells us nothing of the truth, of how to apply words, gain meanings, narrations, interrogations, and so on.²⁶ To understand the latter, al-Sirāfi maintains, 'logic does not avail [Mattā] at all;' what he needs is familiarity with the language and the form of life it subtends. Moreover,

he who is ignorant of one particle is potentially ignorant of the whole language, and even though he be not entirely ignorant of it, yet, being ignorant of some of it, he may chance to be ignorant of what he wants, and knowledge of what he does not want will not help him.²⁷

Al-Sirāfi's major claim here is not the ordinary one that differences of culture and background imply that we cannot decide which translation or use of language is adequate to the facts because none is uniquely correct. Such claims assume that a lack of synonymy between languages is at most a contingent factor which subjects can overcome by advancing a more pre-

²⁵ 'On the Merits of Logic and Grammar,' 121.

²⁶ Al-Sirāfi maintains that people have never 'settled by ... logic between two opponents, or removed the difference between two.' Logic and its alleged 'power of demonstration' do not provide means for judging the plausibility of beliefs. 'On the Merits of Logic and Grammar,' 126.

²⁷ 119.

cise and universal language or by pointing to the intelligible and unchanging meanings to which language refers. Instead, al-Sirāfi's is a more radical claim about knowing how to move from one language to another, how to effect translations which bear reference to some objective and language-independent matter. For him there are intelligible meanings independent of language, in the sense that language is conventional, natural, and 'capable of decay' whereas intelligible meanings are unchanging and eternal. But the very differences between meanings and language imply, first, that language can never exhaust intelligible meanings and, second, that the sense realized in any language is undetermined by anything like all possible independent evidence and, third, both that the particular language we have is indispensable and its references to meanings are inscrutable to others using their own language.

The importance of language over logic holds also in the area of poetics. Poetry is closely tied to the linguistic community of Arabic speakers. It trades on certainties of an ordinary cognitive language in order to deploy *majāz*, *isti'āra*, images, and other devices which speakers will understand within that linguistic community. At the same time, if we can explain *isti'āra* and poetic meanings by reference to analogy and by exploiting similarities, then we can use poetry to construct access to meanings rather than merely following a linguistic community. Here, then, it has been important to explore the validity of al-Sirāfi's claim for language because this serves our general concern with poetics. We need to understand how we construct access to meaning in language because by explaining how language grapples with truth, we explain poetic meanings within any language.

In this context, it is not surprising that al-Sirāfi should find great confusion in those who, influenced by the study of logic, not only see poetics in the context of a search for truth and knowledge, but also seek to identify in poetry, as they do in cognition, the logical laws which underpin sense. And it becomes easier to understand the outbursts he usually levels against non-Muslim, Greek-influenced, and Arabic-ignorant logicians who profess poetic without knowing it or profess rhetoric while being at the furthest distance from it.²⁸ Instead of collecting and then exegetically commenting on a body of accepted examples to exhibit operant rules, he holds, the new logicians seem intent on inventing logical rules which they ascribe to poetry. Being confused about their examples, because they cannot enter the Arabic form of life, they cannot hope to provide justifications of aesthetic and poetic value by showing these rules in operation. Similarly, the claim to understand the beauty of a Sura of the Quran on the grounds of its truth rather than because of the relation between rhythm and rhymes must seem a gross misunderstanding to anyone schooled in the art of Arabic po-

²⁸ 124. This is explained succinctly by Zimmerman, 'Introduction,' *Al-Fārābī's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, cxxvi.

etry and cognizant of *iʿjāz*. Only those knowledgeable of Arabic and its form of life can conduct the investigation and justification preferred by al-Sirāfi, where the rules of grammar are 'drawn from four sources—imitation, tradition [or transmission (*samāʿ*)], limited lists, and free analogy; following a known rule, but not cases of corruption.'²⁹

The last quotation obviously bears reference to the four-fold method and rules of validation which we set out in the last chapter. Transmission leads us to trace and collect examples of actual model usage, while analogy permits us to accept new usage on the grounds of its similarity to already extant rules in the language community. We can legitimate new rules because they are significantly similar to examples from the body of language. We can analyze every part of language use in this way, characterizing the language through its grammar. And al-Sirāfi elaborates his analogy by identifying discourse as 'a name applied to things which have got together by degrees.' He claims that as language lacks a validity independent of its actual genesis, we cannot found it in some sovereign reason and context-independent logic. Language is like a garment, to which a number of things had to happen:

it was woven after being spun, and its warp will not suffice without its woof, nor the woof without its warp; the composition of the discourse is like the weaving, its elegance resembles the exercise of the fuller's art on the garment; the fineness of the thread resembles the beauty of the sound; and the coarseness of the spinning resembles the harshness of the letters. The sum of the whole is a garment, but only after the performance of all the necessary actions.³⁰

Language and knowledge of language are thus completely tied to use and deployment, and its rules must be acquired from the latter.

Some problems with al-Sirāfi's account.

While al-Sirāfi's may be a radical claim, it is not absurd. There are problems with parts of his arguments, but these are not so closely tied together that they all stand or fall together. Thus, we may argue that he is wrong to think that one must know a language fully or always face the possibility of being mistaken in any claim, for this would also preclude any understanding of Arabic itself, even by native speakers, and could imply that it is impossible to speak a language badly. That is, the conditions which make it impossible for any but an Arabic speaker to participate in that world and language would also preclude different levels of sophistication in the use of

²⁹ 'On the merits of Logic and Grammar,' 122.

³⁰ 123.

language and so would make communication difficult. This needs to be spelled out further.

Al-Sirāfi justifies this claim by proposing that if we only know a language partially, then we are always in danger of making a mistake. At one level this seems like an obvious and undeniable pragmatic truth; but as such it must be useless. It is always possible that we might be mistaken; and when we do not know something fully, then it is always possible that our mistake is due to ignorance. Nevertheless, the possibility that we might be mistaken in any instance does not imply that there is always some chance or percentage of error in every instance in which we use a language we do not know fully. In particular instances we may knowingly use a language correctly even though we only know a language partially. From the general potential for not knowing a language fully al-Sirāfi cannot draw a claim about any particular use possibly being mistaken or every use being mistaken in some small part. That is, he cannot argue that 'he who is ignorant of one particle [of language] is potentially ignorant of the whole language.' This may be true but it is useless in deciding on the correctness or incorrectness of a particular use; and it does not imply that anyone who is partially ignorant of a language is always mistaken in part in every particular use of that language. Rather, instead of relying on some general claim about the potential for error, to criticize the ignorant speaker he will have to identify particular failures in translation and understanding. But this he fails to do. Nor can he provide a general account of such mistakes, for they are varied and potentially countless.

Al-Sirāfi's requirement of wholeness could refer to his claim that language is conventional in that particular sounds, being natural, are only arbitrarily connected with meanings which are permanent. For example, it happens that the sound *bayt* refers to houses though clearly there is nothing intrinsic to *bayt* that results in this relation. Had the formation of Arabic been different, then some other sound could have played the role of *bayt* in establishing its meaning. However, although Arabic relates *bayt* and houses in this conventional way, once convention establishes the system of sounds in Arabic, then within the system *bayt* has a necessary relation to houses, and we cannot understand the word and its meaning unless we can see this fixed and essential role within the totality of language. We could not completely understand the word without reference to the whole language and the role of that sound in its totality—including its distinction from other sounds and meanings in the language. However, this sort of case does not exclude translation; and it is possible to use parts of a language correctly while also recognising that a particular use denotes a total system of language, of which we might as yet still be ignorant, because any and every sound denotes the total system. After all, native speakers also usually do not know a language in its entirety.

Further, a successful explanation of this sort may have other consequences. If sense and meaning are so hermetically sealed within language, it is difficult to see how understanding can work even *within* Arabic. This conclusion is not obvious, but we might analyze it in the following way. The only access we have to transcendent meanings, by this account, is through language. But further, because language is our only access to meanings, we cannot use those transcendent meanings to justify linguistic rules. There is a contingent connection, al-Sirāfi holds, between language rules and transcendent meanings. This is his criticism of Mattā's alleged attempt to identify the rules of logic with meanings generally. So one issue we might raise is to ask just how any language user can be certain that he or another speaker has grasped a transcendent meaning. Here agreement with the language community is insufficient as a usage may be wrong because it fails to grasp a meaning even if it agrees with the community's usage. The final arbitrator of correctness, it may be argued, is whether we have grasped a transcendent meaning; and diverting attention to the relation between subjects and their acceptance or rejection of a usage tells us nothing of the relation between language and meanings. Yet we also do not know how, apart from the use of language, we can grasp those meanings. Moreover, unless we can grasp meanings in some non-linguistic way, it seems, we cannot compare what we have gained in language with the intelligible meanings to know whether or not language has grasped this correct meaning. But if we have such a direct access to meanings, then language itself becomes an inessential means, and cannot be given the importance al-Sirāfi seeks for it. None of these cases, then, supports al-Sirāfi's claim that a language must be known wholly in order to be known entirely correctly.³¹

Al-Sirāfi suggests also that the problem of understanding meanings from outside the linguistic community afflicts unobvious meanings in particular.³² While it is possible to understand ordinary and obvious claims—'this pomegranate is pink,' perhaps, or 'the sun sets behind that hill at this time of year'—it is more difficult and perhaps also impossible to be certain that we can translate from one language to another in the more complicated, unobvious, and abstract cases. In the latter, it seems, we must accept that our understanding of another language is never complete and that there will be parts of language use that outsiders will never understand.

But this too is unclear. If it is possible to translate from one language to another in the case of simple and obvious terms, then it should be possible to translate also the more complicated terms. If not, then we cannot be sure that even a native speaker of a language can understand another when the

³¹ Moreover, if it is only a means, then the claim to have understood meanings is questionable for we cannot be clear from our own use of language to grasp meanings that any other use of language coincides with our use. There is no external standard by which our individual intuitions about meaning can be seen to agree.

³² This is suggested by F.W.Zimmerman, 'Introduction'.

latter speaks of complicated and unobvious truths. This may be explained as follows.

The issue may be set out by considering the case of a native child learning its language. Unless we assume that children are born with knowledge of their language, we must suppose that they learn it over time. Assuming also that the first steps involve simple and obvious meanings and truths, and given that these can be translated from one language to another—as by hypothesis al-Sirāfi accepts—then two children can learn each others' languages as they learn their own. Further, the teacher will have to define any complicated and unobvious truths which the children come to learn, even in their own language, by using the language parts they already know, for without these simple terms, and unless there were some entirely mysterious process by which we grasp languages and meanings, the children have no other means of understanding these unobvious and complicated meanings and truths. So, for example, to show why its grammar is inextricably tied to Arabic, the teacher must use the language forms and words the Arabic speaking child already knows. That is, the theory must be capable of explanation in terms of the simple language, or else the child will not understand the teacher's reasoning.

Here, children may learn the teacher's theory well or badly because they are more or less intelligent, but it will not be because they have access to or use a different language. Now, it may be that only having reached a certain level of accomplishment can these language users hope to reach more complicated and increasingly less obvious truths. But, still, any Arabic speaker will begin with the simple terms and add to these as he continues to learn language and meaning, for the child will learn from a basis in simple terms by adding details until it secures the more complicated and unobvious truths and meanings. But if the Arabic speaker can learn in this way, then, given that al-Sirāfi thinks uncomplicated or obvious truths can be communicated and translated between languages, we may expect that similarly the users of the other language can learn complications of their own and, by breaking them into their simpler components and then developing the more complicated meanings from there, can also understand and translate from one language to another. Their use of their own language and the fact that we can translate obvious truths both go to ensure that we can also translate more complex and unobvious truths. If this were impossible, then children could never learn the unobvious truths; and as few adults were never children, we may expect that adults could not do so either.

In defence of al-Sirāfi we can argue first that children understand not only the simple meanings but also complicated and unobvious truths, but that second the latter are not capable of being translated, so that there is neither a question of elaborating the complicated and unobvious truths in terms of simple and obvious truths nor of translating from the obvious and

simple in one language to the obvious and simple in the other. However, this introduces a qualitative distinction between the types of language in question, as if obvious truths are spoken in a simple language while unobvious truths are spoken in a complicated language and the two are qualitatively different. If so, then we cannot expect to break the complicated into the obvious in order to translate it. But then we cannot expect to break from the complex to the simple in the case of Arabic itself, even when we do not seek to translate it, and that raises issues of how we do understand it in the first place: it is not innate, it cannot be taught except as a complicated language, yet nothing has been said about the nature of a 'language' containing subsets of two qualitatively different kinds of language.

One way to explain how we understand a complicated language is to refer to the form of life involved with that language. Consequently, we can identify another barrier to translation in the inextricable relation of Arabic language and grammar to a form of life. The suggestion is that we use language and linguistic rules, including the complicated usages, responding to our training as we do, agreeing on what the linguistic rules consist in, apply to, and so on, as a result of our presence in the community—where the community may have been otherwise, and our training and rules would have differed commensurately. Thus, given that our rules are a result of various contingent and variable natural predispositions, we likely will find it difficult to understand every part of another contingently different form of life which advances other tendencies and predispositions in the rules its members follow. Although there may be an overlap between the two different linguistic communities and their forms of life, so that in some instances they can understand each other, in other instances they are different and cannot hope to fully grasp the others' rules and language.

Here, no one will have command of both languages, for they would have to possess natural dispositions and a form of life appropriate to each language. But this is possible only if both languages have the same form of life, for only then could the same person possess both languages; and, by hypothesis, the latter is not the case. Consequently, we cannot hope to translate from one language to another, because differences in forms of life prevent anyone from knowing the two languages so well and completely that they can produce a translation guide that covers both languages completely. As a result, the two languages are tied to their own forms of life and are inextricable from the habits, predispositions, ways of garnering truths, pragmatic considerations, usages, shared behaviours, manners of querying, affirming, interrogating, commanding, and so on, on which each language depends. Such overlaps allow common experiences between languages; but as these forms of life do not form a complete system with interdependent parts and a consistent single validating principle, there is no guarantee that an overlap in one area will permit us to understand another part of the language and its form of life.

By this account, presumably where a form of life differs radically from our own, we would not recognise it as a form of life at all. Indeed, except where another form of life is like our own, and therefore except in those features in which it overlapped with ours, we would not credit any other pattern of behaviour with being a form of life, and could not understand the language and rules used. Conversely, where we recognise a form of life as such, we may expect to understand it in some part at least. In the context of the debate, then, by accepting that there is a Greek form of life (even if he thinks that this form of life is now dead) al-Sirāfi also concedes that it does not have a completely different set of rules of language, etc.. And if he is to further his claim that Greek logic is incomprehensible or useless to the Arabic speaker, he needs to show that such logic does not form any part of the overlap between the two languages. The fact that he understands it well enough to dismiss its claims on the basis of his general theory raises the issue that he must specify his general claim about the connection between language and a form of life to show why the use of logic is inappropriate to Arabic. Arguing that we must understand Arabic and Greek by their genesis and form of life does not imply that Greek logic never overlaps with Arabic or that the validity of logic is inappropriate to Arabic. Because he has turned the issue into one of the conditions for meaningful and truthful communication generally, al-Sirāfi can bring in considerations of the form of life and of the pragmatic condition for making or denying true and false statements, and so on. But none of this actually works to show that logic is inappropriate to Arabic, even if we must see the languages in the context of their respective forms of life. The fact that there are differences in forms of life does not by itself show that logic cannot be common to both languages. That he can understand and find logic inadequate surely suggests that it must be a part of the common area between the two languages, and that al-Sirāfi is wrongly generalizing from the connection between language and form of life to deny that we have access to just that to which he clearly does have access.³³

These criticisms are not the only ones we can level against al-Sirāfi's position. Even if Mattā did not raise too many objections during the debate, arguments against al-Sirāfi were not long in coming. Yahyā ibn ʿAdī was among the first to respond, and al-Fārābī and other of Mattā's students too defended logic against the grammarian's claims.

Yahyā ibn ʿAdī and al-Fārābī on al-Sirāfi

Among the earliest opponents to al-Sirāfi was Yahyā ibn ʿAdī, a student of the silenced Mattā. In his essay 'Concerning the Difference between

³³ See Appendix 1.

Philosophical Logic and Arabic Grammar,³⁴ he first explains the differences between logic and grammar systematically. Grammar deals with speech and spoken statements while logic concerns intelligible meaning. Further, both are kinds of art which we define by reference to their subject matter and goals. For example, upholstery uses wood, leather, and other materials to create furniture, and we can deploy a similar distinction between matter and goal to identify and distinguish various arts. So, the subject matter of Arabic grammar is sounds (*alfāz*), regardless of whether these carry meanings, and its goal is the arrangement of these sounds and inflections according to Arabic conventions. Intelligible meanings lie outside the scope of this art in that the grammarian cannot generate or change given meanings. We may construct correct sentences by fulfilling the requirements of grammar, but these rules do not thereby generate meanings, for a grammatically correct sentence can be ambiguous while a grammatically incorrect sentence may produce a clear meaning. A concern with meanings is the domain of logic; but not every meaning can be included here. Ibn ʿAdī argues that only general truth-seeking statements—ones capable of some proof by reference to reality—fall into this domain. It does not extend to a concern with the relation between words and things as such, for the latter is governed by convention and is merely accidental.

By this account, then, al-Sirāfī misunderstands the scope of grammar because he misidentifies its nature as an art. We can examine the use of sounds in language to delineate thought separately and thereby set out its rules. This is the task of grammar. But the relation of ideas in thinking—their truth, falsity, appropriateness or otherwise to reality—is not the concern of grammarians. Al-Sirāfī must suppose that the practice of grammarians includes legislating over meanings, and must be part of what is justified by grammar. But by Ibn ʿAdī's account, even if grammarians have arrogated to themselves this task, and though we may provide historical explanations of their attempts to do so, the move is not justified by the validity or scope of grammar. For this art does not include meanings among its materials or its goal. Only by misunderstanding the nature of art generally can grammarians lay claim to dealing with meanings.

Al-Fārābī on al-Sirāfī

In a similar vein, al-Fārābī delineates the distinction of logic from grammar in the 'Introductory *Risālah* on Logic.'³⁵ He reiterates a version of Mattā's

³⁴ Translated and edited by Gerhard Endress, *Grammatik und Logic*, 270–296. See also Nicholas Rescher, *Studies in Arabic Philosophy*, (Pittsburgh, 1967) for further considerations of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's work on logic. This book also contains a paper on 'Avicenna on the Logic of Questions' which is useful to understanding the 'indicative' method practised by Ibn Sīnā (See Chapter 4, below).

³⁵ Translated by D.M. Dunlop as 'Al-Fārābī's Introductory *Risālah* on Logic,' in *Islamic Quarterly*, 3 (1956–7), 224–235.

definition of logic—‘the art which includes the things which lead the rational faculty towards right thinking, wherever there is the possibility of error, and which indicates all the safeguards against error, wherever a conclusion is to be known by the intellect’³⁶—and describes the differences and parallels between grammar and logic as follows. The status of logic

in relation to the intellect is the status of the art of grammar in relation to language, and just as the science of grammar rectifies the language among people for whose language the grammar has been made, so the science of logic rectifies the intellect, so that it intellects only what is right where there is a possibility of error. Thus, the relation of the science of grammar to the language and the expressions is as the relation of the science of logic to the intellect and the intelligibles, and just as grammar is the touchstone of language where there is the possibility of error of language in regard to the method of expression, so the science of logic is the touchstone of the intellect where there is the possibility of an error in regard to the intelligibles.³⁷

Logic deals with the propositional content of utterances, with the truthfulness or falsity of the assertions we make and the relations we assert between objects and events. Whether we use Arabic to say ‘*al-bayt sghīr*’ or English to say ‘The house is small,’ in both cases logic concerns the relations and assertions being made about the house and its size. Grammar by contrast concerns correct or incorrect expression in Arabic and English. It governs linguistic rules, setting out how we must use the language in which we express ourselves and the order and relation between words. But grammar does not legislate over meanings—over the propositional content conveyed by utterances in any language: perfectly grammatical sentences may have unintelligible meanings. Only logic grasps these meanings. Hence, for al-Fārābī, there may be a parallel, but there are also important distinctions between grammar and logic.

These passages suggest a deeper underlying conflict between al-Fārābī and al-Sīrāfī. It turns on their respective conceptions of philosophy, method, and explanation, and leads al-Fārābī to dismiss the other’s standard method of assessing correct usage of and meaning in language by referring to accepted models. Al-Fārābī expounds his underlying conception of language and logic in various texts,³⁸ in which he maintains this distinction between grammar and logic. He sees grammar as the principal object of a science of language that governs the uses of expressions—

³⁶ *Risālah*, 230; translation amended—see below for al-Fārābī’s distinction of ‘science’ from ‘art.’

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ See Fuad Haddad, ‘al-Fārābī’s Theory of Language,’ *American University of Beirut Festival Book*, (Beirut, 1978), and ‘Al-Fārābī’s views on Logic and its Relation to Grammar,’ *The Islamic Quarterly*, XXX,4,192–207. Both these papers were very helpful in clarifying the nature of al-Fārābī’s theory. See also Fuad Haddad, *Al-Fārābī’s Theory of Communication*, (Washington, 1989).

speech and writing—in a linguistic community and is a matter of historical and social principles, and holds that in logic a concern with intelligible meanings is basic to thought and reason, and, so, common to all human beings. And he argues further that as meanings are determined by logic, grammar and language must always find their final arbitrator in logic so far as our concern is with meaningful communication between human beings. And to clarify these distinctions and relations, we may look to al-Fārābī's explanations of language and logic, then consider more explicitly how grammar is reducible to logic.

The issues referred to above all point to al-Fārābī's dismissal of the basis of al-Sirāfī's attack on logic. To begin with, in relation to the dialectic of this debate, al-Fārābī easily diagnoses al-Sirāfī's tack.³⁹ In addition to the issues we presented earlier, al-Sirāfī argued against Mattā in part by shifting the ground from a concern with logic as an instrument for distinguishing true from false and sound from unsound thought to a concern with the conditions for finding truth and meaning. By this shift, he makes it seem that logic claims to be the *only* means for discovering truth and tricks Mattā into maintaining that logic is indispensable for discovering any truths at all. In turn, this occasions a rhetorical point: if logic were so necessary and unique, then we could not reason without knowing its rules. Consequently, we could never begin to think about the world unless we knew and could formulate the rules of logic; yet we could not know logic except by understanding grammar. We learn grammar in practice, without formulating its rules explicitly prior to their correct use, and al-Sirāfī maintains that we can acquire and deploy the art of grammar without necessarily being able to give an account of the rules of that art.

Al-Fārābī sets out the reply to this claim: if we can gain and use a skill without having first to provide an explicit account of its rules, then we can do without the grammarian's rules as much as we can do without the logicians'. Moreover, to argue as al-Sirāfī seems to,

that if someone practices disputation or mathematics ... he can dispense with a knowledge of the rules of logic ... because such practice enables him to test every statement, argument, or opinion and guides him to the right [conclusion] and to certainty so effectively as to preserve him from any error in other sciences, is like arguing that if someone trains himself by memorizing and frequently reciting poetry and oratory he can, for the instruction of his tongue and in order to avoid solecisms, dispense with the rules of grammar ... because such training enables him to test whether a sentence is correctly or faultily constructed ... Similarly, to argue that logic is superfluous because there can at any moment exist a man so perfectly gifted that, without having studied any logic, he will never miss the right [conclusion] is like arguing that grammar is superfluous because there could be someone who, without having studied any of the

³⁹ I am indebted to F.W.Zimmerman's Introduction to *Al-Fārābī's Commentary and Short Treatise on De Interpretatione* for the points made immediately following.

rules of grammar, always speaks faultlessly. The reply in both cases [i.e. for logic and grammar] is the same.⁴⁰

As the editor adds 'In other words, the question is referred back to the grammarians: in vindicating the need for their own subject, they will vindicate the need for logic.'⁴¹

Al-Fārābī formulates his own approach to logic in various works, including the *Catalogue of the Sciences*,⁴² his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*,⁴³ the 'Introductory *Risālah* on Logic,'⁴⁴ and in *The Utterances Employed in Logic*.⁴⁵ In the *Catalogue of the Sciences* he characterises knowledge by dividing it into five parts, dealing with the sciences of (1) language, (2) logic, (3) mathematics, (4) nature and divinity, (5) politics, jurisprudence, and theology. This comprehensive display of the known sciences and their nature serves the interests of validity: where one part of our knowledge is consistent internally and with objects, and also coheres with other parts in a comprehensive whole, it will satisfy some criteria of success.⁴⁶ Consequently, his organisation of all knowledge into the *Catalogue* also proposes how we must assess the validity and domain of statements belonging to its particular parts.⁴⁷ Accordingly, given that knowledge includes the science of language, his rejection of grammar is only of grammar's claim to legislate over meanings. It is not a total dismissal.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, n1, cxxvi, translated from *Iḥṣā' l-ʿulūm* 58.9–9.8.

⁴¹ *ibid.* It may seem that as expressions are obtained through language, therefore training in grammar, rhetoric, or the other arts of language 'eliminates the need to study logic by giving man the power to examine every statement or proof or opinion and directs his intellect to what is true' (*Catalogue*, 59). But that claim, for al-Fārābī, is as ridiculous as thinking that 'training in poetry and rhetoric and the committing to memory of some literary masterpieces are sufficient to give one a good command of language, and consequently eliminate the need for a study of grammar' (*ibid.*). For we show our command of language and of meanings of expression not by mindlessly repeating what has been said before or by simulating real understanding in the guise of rhetorical devices but by grasping and using logic to make intelligible and true statements.

⁴² *Iḥṣā' al-ʿulūm*, edited by Uthman Amin, 1931.

⁴³ *Al-Fārābī's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, translated and edited by F.W. Zimmerman, (Oxford, 1981).

⁴⁴ Cited above.

⁴⁵ The importance of this text is made clear in Fuad Haddad's citations in his papers on 'Al-Fārābī's Theory of Language.' See also Zimmerman, 'Introduction.'

⁴⁶ This order can be understood to coincide with the Alexandrine development of Aristotle's thought, though it also contains significant divergences from that source. It incorporates the sciences of language and religion, in the form in which they were central to the Islamic tradition, into the Aristotelian classification of the philosophical sciences into the theoretical and practical. For a longer discussion of these and the issues raised in the footnotes following immediately, see M. Mahdi, 'Science, Philosophy and Religion in al-Fārābī's *Enumeration of the Sciences*,' 113–147, in Murdoch and Sylla, eds., *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, (1975), and the Appendix to that paper.

⁴⁷ Cf F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, (Leiden, 1970), *passim*; see also Appendix 2.

⁴⁸ See also *Expressions Used in Logic*, fols. 103–4, cited in Fuad Haddad, 'Al-Fārābī's Theory of Language.'

In gaining knowledge of language, we begin with ordinary words and expressions and the rules governing their use. Al-Fārābī divides the science of language into seven parts which are broadly divisible into two groups. The first deals with the historical principles of words and expressions and the second with laws governing their usage.⁴⁹ The latter may conveniently be divided further into first a concern with the laws governing simple expressions and their construction into composite expressions, and second the rules governing the use of historical principles and laws in writing, reading, and poetry.⁵⁰ The first part of the major division coincides nicely with the traditional analysis and use of older models, where we preserve significant pieces of prose and poetry to study as models of good language use, and establish words, phrases, and what they signify.⁵¹ In the second major part, dealing with the laws governing simple and composite expressions, among other things the science of language sets out the rules governing how to develop root words and expressions, showing how to conjugate, tense, and compose verbs in sentences. It provides rules of this composition, illustrating the kinds of sentences we may form and proposing which structure is most valuable. This part also deals with the rules for writing—for transcribing spoken into written language by following the correct rules of spelling. Consonantly, there are rules for correct reading and pronunciation that determine when written and unwritten letters are pronounced, and these lead to issues of the balances in sentences, good usage, formal conflict, and finally the special rules of poetic language. The latter set out the metres and rhythms available to a language, the rhymes and the correct use of poetic expressions.

This science of language principally identifies the sources of language, setting out rules for the correct usage of its parts. And as al-Fārābī defines grammar as providing standards for correct and incorrect uses of language,⁵² we may expect that the science of language hinges in large part on grammar. Nevertheless, grammar deals with language without legislating over intelligible meanings, governed by logic, that linguistic expressions might refer to and communicate. Further, this relation between grammar, meaning, and logic is complicated because al-Fārābī first insists that languages are conventional,⁵³ so that grammar governs only the rules of a particular language, while intelligible meanings are common to all rational thought, and follow the rules of logic,⁵⁴ yet also, second, maintains that both

⁴⁹ *Catalogue*, 45.

⁵⁰ *Catalogue*, 45–51.

⁵¹ *Catalogue*, 46–7.

⁵² 'Al-Fārābī's Introductory Sections on Logic,' *The Islamic Quarterly*, 2, 1955, 264–82, and *Utterances Employed in Logic*, 57.

⁵³ *Catalogue*, 18–19. Cf also below.

⁵⁴ 'Introductory Sections on Logic,' 267ff.

logic and grammar govern the expressions of language which we use.⁵⁵ His intentions may be set out as follows.

The science of language concerns grammar principally collating the sources of linguistic principles (including established models of past usage), the objects denoted by sounds and letters in any language, the accepted relations between significations, and so on. Such usage constitutes language and is conventional, being part of a form of life in which, say, we understand that particular sounds (*al*, *bayt*, *sghīr*) denote particular objects (house) or relations (of size) and so on. Grammar provides the rules for these conventional uses of sounds, expressions, and words within language.⁵⁶ In human speech, we use sounds by convention in expressions to refer to meanings; in written language, letters represent expressions and convey meanings because they follow agreed conventions.

Here, our language use is invalid when we misuse conventional rules: this is independent of the meanings conveyed because it concerns how we constitute expressions and compose sentences. We may misapply verb forms, offend against the root meanings of words, in poetry use words like 'orange' which have no corresponding rhymes, or add the wrong suffixes and prefixes and so misplace words in sentence structures. Such mistakes follow from our having a grammar which, having studied and analyzed conventional habits, abstracts its rules to provide a standard for correct use.

So far al-Fārābī's understanding of grammar seems to coincide with al-Sirāfī's, who also thought of grammar as setting out the rules for language. However, al-Sirāfī maintained further that by grasping the rules of grammar we establish meanings, so that mistakes in grammar are not simply errors of language use but are more serious symptoms of meaninglessness and irrationality. For him grammar governed meanings, yielding rules for sense and communication within the language community. Language is still conventional here, in that it depends on the habits and preferences of that community rather than on a natural or direct relation to intelligibles, yet it succeeds in dealing with intelligible meanings. However, this direct relation between grammar and meaning does not satisfy al-Fārābī, who maintains not only both that intelligible meanings are not conventional and that they follow the rules of logic, not grammar, but also that where language deals with intelligible meanings, there it follows the rules of grammar *and* logic.⁵⁷ In this context, al-Fārābī argues that 'the meanings of expressions are joined in the soul in the same way that expressions are

⁵⁵ *Catalogue*, p62.

⁵⁶ And sometimes within classes also—Cf. *Utterances Employed in Logic*, 43. In the *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, al-Fārābī analyses linguistic expressions by beginning with the sounds we make in speech and transcribe in writing. Sounds are natural even though their use to articulate expressions is conventional: animals use sounds which may tell us something of them, but these uses are not a convention agreed upon between goats, parrots, and magpies. (al-Fārābī, *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 30–31).

⁵⁷ *Catalogue*, 62.

joined in language; the union of their meanings in the soul resembles the union of expressions in a language.⁵⁸ The suggestion is that if our ordinary speech and writing are meaningful, then conventional language, governed by grammatical rules, must correspond with the meanings composed in the soul, that are common to all rational beings and governed by logic. Thus, to convey meanings, conventional linguistic expressions and their structure must grasp and replicate the logical structure of intelligible meanings. This reference to intelligible meanings, the soul, logic, and language needs to be explained further.

We may begin by considering how we think rationally about intelligible meanings. Like Aristotle, al-Fārābī orders the soul according to its different faculties or powers. First, sense responds to objects and events in the world, allowing them to imprint their shape, colour, solidity, and other qualities upon us.⁵⁹ Next imagination retains and re-presents images of these particulars, both present and absent, that the senses originally brought to the mind. Reason then organizes these images, abstracts similarities and differences, and thereby yields our intellectual knowledge of the objects initially gained in sense experience. Thus, by ordering our experience, reason and intellect make the objects of our experience into intelligibles, so that the intelligible is the form of our rational knowledge of the objects in question.⁶⁰

In other words, through our analysis and intellection of the experience we acquire initially through the senses, we

discover in ourselves through the intelligibles of those natural things [objects] that these beings are many because of the multiplicity of their places; however, we can only gain this conception of them by drawing an analogy between the intelligibles and the corresponding sensible things. But as for us, when we consider the character that these intelligibles assume in ourselves, we find that we conceive of the multiplicity of natural things solely in terms of the multiplicity of what we intellect about them. Thus, what we sense as one thing is conceived by us—in so far as it is intelligible—as many, so that the multiplicity that we conceive by virtue of what we intellect of it becomes similar to the multiplicity of sensible things due to the multiplicity of their place.⁶¹

Our intellect analyses and breaks up the perceived object into its attributes or qualities, thus constituting the intelligible as a collection of attributes, all of which belong together in our grasp of the relevant object be-

⁵⁸ *Utterances Employed in Logic*, 57, (Italics added), cited in Fuad Haddad, 'Al-Fārābī's Theory of Language.' See also 'Introduction to Logic,' where the same point is made.

⁵⁹ This point is made by Haddad, 'Al-Fārābī's Theory of Language,' 332, and is presented succinctly by al-Fārābī in *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, translated and edited by Muhsin Mahdi, (Ithaca, 1973).

⁶⁰ *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, 93–96.

⁶¹ *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, 95.

cause they are abstracted from or articulate features of our initial sense experience of that object.

Although a great deal more may be said about this relation, for the present it is enough to note that intelligibles and their objects are directly related by the mind, and are similar in all human beings. The

thoughts all men understand when expressed in their different languages *are the same* for them. The sense objects which those thoughts are thoughts of are *also common to all*. For whatever individual thing an Indian may have a sensation of—if the same thing is observed by an Arab, he will have the same perception of it as the Indian.⁶²

No conventions enter here, by al-Fārābī's account, for the reception of sense experience and its analysis and ordering are entirely natural. The mind abstracts the attributes of objects, classifying the latter together with others sharing that attribute or distinguishing it from those which differ in the other attributes each possesses. In no case will one mind have a structure or operation that differs at this level from others.⁶³

We can use intelligibles, which the mind obtains through analysis, to make true or false statements, by composing them into propositions. Al-Fārābī distinguishes simple from composite intelligibles, maintaining that we bring simple ones together to make more complicated ones.⁶⁴ Using intelligibles we may assert that a particular quality belongs to an object or deny this claim, and can study the mode of such composition of intelligibles and articulate its rules.⁶⁵ That is, for al-Fārābī knowledge is a matter of making assertions about objects by composing relations between intelligibles. Moreover these relations and assertions follow the rules of logic.⁶⁶ For example, we may relate (or compound) intelligibles according to logical rules, assert categorically that 'The stag-goat is white,' or that 'The stag-goat is not white' (regardless of whether the stag-goat actually exists), or disjunctively that 'The man is white or not white,' or conditionally that 'If it is green, then it is not a man,' and so on. Since our grasp of intelligibles and their abstraction from sense experience is a natural and direct relation, free of convention and the same for subjects in all nations, for al-Fārābī the

⁶² *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 27–8.

⁶³ Of course, there may be more or less intelligent analyses, but these do not depend on differences in the way knowledge is gained or in the kinds of operations carried out by different minds.

⁶⁴ *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 27ff.

⁶⁵ But it is also important to remember that intelligibles need not always be used in this way and that sense perception need not always be directed towards being analyzed into intelligibles in this use. Usually, for al-Fārābī's, we pursue '(1) the soundness of the human body, (2) the soundness of the senses, (3) the soundness of the capacity for knowing how to discern what leads to the soundness of the body and the senses, and (4) the soundness of the power to labour at what leads to their soundness' (*The Philosophy of Aristotle*, 71, 73–4). See Chapter Three below.

⁶⁶ *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 26–7.

assertions or thoughts we get by composing and relating these intelligibles, and the logical relations which we use in composing these thoughts, will all also be the same 'for all nations.'

In this construal of thought and intelligibles, al-Fārābī's conception is not entirely different from al-Sirāfī's. Both think intelligibles are the warrant of meanings. But they differ in the access to intelligibles that each allows to language. For where al-Sirāfī claimed that intelligible meanings were accessible only through a particular conventional language and its rules, where such references are inscrutable to users of other languages, al-Fārābī maintains that language is conventional and contingent, being useful to communicating meanings and assertions but not essential to grasping objects and events and their meanings directly. In other words *language* does not constitute meaning and assertion for al-Fārābī—that being the task of logic—and no single language can claim sole access to meanings. However, given that he thinks conventional languages differ in their structure while logic does not, al-Fārābī must explain how language gains access to intelligible meanings—or, in other terms, how grammar relates to logic.

Al-Fārābī addresses this issue in a number of texts, including *Utterances Employed in Logic*, *Catalogue of the Sciences*, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, and the 'Introductory *Risālah* on Logic.' First, in the *Risālah*, when explaining the art of logic, he writes that 'its name (*manṭiq*, logic) is derived from *nuṭq*, reason, articulate speech.'⁶⁷ This art

gives rules to the rational faculty for the interior speech which is the intelligibles, and rules shared in common by all languages for the exterior speech which is the expression, and directs the rational faculty in both matters at once towards what is right and protects it from error in both of them together.... Grammar shares with it to some extent and differs from it also, because grammar gives rules only for the expressions which are peculiar to a [particular] nation and to the people who use the language, whereas logic gives rules for the expressions which are common to all languages.⁶⁸

Second, by this account, speech and writing relate to logic not just as exterior to interior but also as expression and meaning. In the *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione* and in *Utterances Employed in Logic*, al-Fārābī alludes to the relation between logic and grammar by once again presenting this relation between language and meanings.⁶⁹ For example, 'combination [of intelligibles] in the soul parallels affirmation in speech;

⁶⁷ *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 232–3.

⁶⁸ *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 233.

⁶⁹ As we have already cited *Utterances Employed in Logic*, we may cite the *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 26–7.

separation in the soul parallels negation in speech.⁷⁰ Again the suggestion is that language, conventional and contingent as it is, communicates meanings by using the linguistic tools appropriate to its linguistic community. It corresponds to meanings, its sentences replicate logical and meaningful relations as these exist in the soul, and the laws governing its sentence structures parallel the laws of logic as these govern intelligible meanings.

By this account, the laws of logic govern all intelligible meanings while those of grammar govern the expressions of any single language being used to convey those meanings within a linguistic community. However, given that language attempts to parallel and convey intelligible meanings, because the latter are governed by logic we may expect that language too will be governed by logic so far as it is intelligible. That is, even if logic only governs meanings, which are common to all rational human beings, it must also govern the expressions of particular languages and their grammatical rules because *it* governs the intelligible meanings expressed grammatically. If the grammar of a language does not satisfy the requirements of logic, the language will be meaningless—even if its sentences are grammatically correct. But this raises the issue of just how logic governs language and its expressions. In other words, the relation of grammar to logic may now be construed in terms of the latter, which al-Fārābī addresses in his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*.

Third, for al-Fārābī language is merely a vehicle for conveying meanings. Consequently,

communication is essentially a logical activity, not a linguistic one...[Thus] as long as [language] is capable of performing this function [of being the vehicle for communicating intelligibles] it is kept in use. When it fails, the necessary adjustments must be made. The need for adjustment and the kind of adjustment to be affected are to be determined by logic.⁷¹

It seems that logic governs language and its structure in particular ways. 'The only thing that expressions of all languages have in common is that they are various expressions that are capable of conveying the same meanings.'⁷²

When logic determines grammar we deal with linguistic expressions in two ways primarily. In the first we examine the circumstances which must be satisfied for them to signify intelligibles. For example, expressions may signify misleadingly because the argument forms are wrongly taken as demonstrative when they are rhetorical, sophistical, or poetic.⁷³ In the second way of studying logic, as we saw,

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ Fuad Haddad, 'Al-Fārābī's Theory of Language,' 203.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 13.

expressions are considered as imitating thoughts... Complex expressions here take the place of complex thoughts, since similar expressions attach to them... Principally, the purpose is to explain the composition of thoughts. But since thoughts are difficult to grasp, Aristotle substitutes for them expressions which signify them and studies their composition instead... [and discusses] as much of the similarity between them as is necessary.⁷⁴

Together, these two modes suggest that logic not only examines the structure of propositions but also ensures that their arguments have a real basis. For the latter, to establish whether expressions are representations of real objects, we rely on the theory of perception which we put forward earlier. In combination with the rules and order of logic, our expression of intelligibles provides an account of the epistemological status of our experiences.⁷⁵

If the last paragraphs outlined al-Fārābī's conception of logic, language, and experience, they also suggest where disagreements between al-Fārābī and al-Sirāfī might lie. Al-Fārābī intends that logic, 'for which laws are given,' must include both 'the intelligibles signified by expressions' and the 'expressions that signify intelligibles.'⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the basis of meaning lies in logic not in expressions.⁷⁷ Al-Fārābī conceives of thought and communication as a matter of constructing intelligibles in propositions, discovering the simple and complex expressions which signify the intelligibles, and so conveying them in language. However, the expressions used in signification are conventional⁷⁸ while the propositions themselves depend on the intelligibles.

Had man been given his expressions by nature they would all be the same for all communities, just as the thoughts [the intelligibles] expressed by different

⁷⁴ *ibid*, 13–14.

⁷⁵ Fuad Haddad, 'Al-Fārābī's Theory of Language,' 203.

⁷⁶ *Catalogue*, 59.

⁷⁷ This claim may seem to re-introduce a problem we must be at pains to resolve. It may seem that as expressions are gained through language, therefore training in grammar, rhetoric, or the other arts of language 'eliminates the need to study logic by giving man the power to examine every statement or proof or opinion and directs his intellect to what is true' (*Catalogue*, 59). But that claim, for al-Fārābī, is as ridiculous as thinking that 'training in poetry and rhetoric and the committing to memory of some literary masterpieces are sufficient to give one a good command of language, and consequently eliminate[] the need for a study of grammar' (*ibid*). For we show our command of language and of meanings of expression not by mindlessly repeating what has been said before or by simulating real understanding in the guise of rhetorical devices but by grasping and using logic to make intelligible and true statements. For al-Fārābī a reliance on past models and on the method of discovering their original nature by tracing their origins in an accepted model, where this applies to grammar rather than authoritative moral and religious truth, repeats the same error as sheer imitation without understanding. This issue will be developed further, below.

⁷⁸ *De Interpretatione*, 16a19, 17a2.

languages are the same with all communities, and just as the same objects which these thoughts are thoughts of are also common to all communities.⁷⁹

But, as it happens, expressions are conventional, not a part of natural philosophy, and their grammatical correctness need not result in meaningful communication.

Accordingly, for al-Fārābī, by contrast with al-Sirāfī, grammar not only limits itself to a concern with the general rules of expression, but it cannot tell us anything of the relation between intelligibles. We correct errors in expression by examining how their use has changed rather than by comparing them with the relation between intelligibles. But their sense depends on their ability to convey meanings, and the latter depend on logic. We could use various expressions exemplifying diverse grammatical and linguistic rules in any instance, though if they bear the same meaning they must all bear the same relation to the composite intelligibles used. That is, again by contrast with al-Sirāfī, for al-Fārābī the rules of grammar are at some level conditioned by the structure of the intelligibles and the rules of logic which govern our access to the latter, for in the absence of the logical structure of intelligible propositions and arguments, grammar is useless because it is incapable of providing meaningful expressions. At best language communicates the logical order asserted of intelligibles in propositions; but that too makes meaningfulness a logical matter rather than one of grammar.

Grammar is contingent, so far as diverse languages and usages in linguistic communities are means for conveying meaning. Logic provides the rules for assessing a language and its community because, if language communicates meaningfully, it must satisfy the logical order and relations relevant to intelligibles.⁸⁰ Moreover, logic alone provides certain knowledge.⁸¹ As logic examines the correctness of expressions when they denote and articulate intelligible meanings, it guards against error in grasping the truth. It provides the laws necessary for 'straightening' the mind,⁸² because by forming propositions it identifies the starting point for any inquiry, examines its basis and methods, and clarifies the conditions for securing conviction. That is, it assesses what makes the theoretical and practical arts valid and also warrants the conclusions of inquiry.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 12.

⁸⁰ We can classify grammar and its expressions on the basis of their usefulness in composition. Cf. Fuad Haddad, 'Al-Fārābī's Views on Logic and its Relation to Grammar,' and *Utterances Employed in Logic*, 57, where al-Fārābī reclassifies these linguistic terms by reference to logic. For al-Fārābī whereas the science of language examined grammatical and other rules of expressions, logic deals with what is common to all thought, regardless of national and cultural boundaries.

⁸¹ *Catalogue*, 62.

⁸² *Catalogue*, 52.

This brief account of logic and grammar does not as yet defeat al-Sirāfi's claim—it only explains al-Fārābī's reasons for giving priority to logic. To defeat al-Sirāfi we need to draw out their different stances. For the present we may note that there are a number of other replies and arguments al-Fārābī and others could level against al-Sirāfi. In the following years, al-Sirāfi was engaged in controversy again, for example in 975, when al-Ḥasan al-ʿAmirī of Neshapur reputedly destroyed al-Sirāfi's arguments in public debate.⁸³ But, in a sense, all these attempts to reply to or argue against particular points of al-Sirāfi's claims remain an unsuccessful strategy just because they accept his formulation of issues about the scope of logic. Elsewhere al-Fārābī levels another attack, when his concern is not so much to defend his claims about logic as to dissolve al-Sirāfi's whole purpose by questioning the validity of grammar. Al-Sirāfi justifies the validity of grammar by explaining that its rules are 'drawn from four sources—imitation, tradition, limited lists, and free analogy'⁸⁴—and al-Fārābī argues that these four sources themselves all depend on the rule of logic.

Logic and the Exegetical Method

In the *Short Commentary on the Prior Analytics* al-Fārābī analyzes al-Sirāfi's methodological bases to show their inadequate grounding.⁸⁵ The latter's four sources of grammar are reducible to three—analogy, consensus, and tracing a use back to its original accepted model—which we saw in the exegetical method of validation in poetics. Very roughly, 'imitation of tradition, limited lists, and free analogy' clearly depend on identifying putative linguistic rules and validating them by analyzing their significant similarities to given principles of grammar. In turn, we discover the given principles by examining the range of language usage and abstracting from this complex object its determining rules. Further, these rules, being conventions, work so far as they are accepted—so far as they participate in a consensus involving the language community. In his *Short*

⁸³ Quoted by Endress, 'Logic and Grammar,' 201.

⁸⁴ 'The Merits of Logic and Grammar,' 122.

⁸⁵ There is some dispute about the exact translation of this title. What is clear is that the text examines the *mutakallimūn* methodology. Such problems as occur in Rescher's translation do not affect the argument I wish to make in what follows. For more on these issues, see the review by Al. Sabra, in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 85 (1965), 241–3, and Kwame Gyekye 'Al-Fārābī on the Logic of the Arguments of the Muslim Philosophical Theologians,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 37,1, (1989), 135–143, and 'Al-Fārābī on Analysis and Synthesis' *Apeiron, A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, 6,1 (1972), 33–38. It seems to me that Gyekye, in 'Al-Fārābī on the Logic of the Muslim Philosophical Theologians,' misunderstands the issues al-Fārābī raises against claims to validity made in 'argument by transfer.' By saying that we must be 'tolerant' or 'generous' in dealing with the 'conclusions' of such arguments, al-Fārābī is also pinpointing their weakness and unreliability.

Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics,⁸⁶ al-Fārābī analyses these criteria of the grammatical or exegetical method of validation to show that they are successful only in ways defined and justified by logic.

In Section Seven of the *Commentary* al-Fārābī sets out the pattern of argument involved in induction. He defines the latter as 'the "investigation" of things included within some "matter", in order to show the truth of some judgement about this "matter", by denial or affirmation,'⁸⁷ and argues that we use this method when searching for general truths about any matter. A property ascribed to objects of any one kind must be present in all or most objects of that kind, and investigation of objects to discover the presence or absence of this property involves 'induction.' Further, this mode of investigation is

an argument that has the force of a syllogism ... If someone wished to show that 'Every agent is corporeal,' and he 'investigated' the species of agents, such as the builder, the tailor, and the shoemaker and the like, then [if] he found that every one of these is corporeal, he judges in consequence that 'Every agent is corporeal.' He has shown this by induction. It is composed as follows: 'Every agent is a builder, or a tailor, or a shoe maker, or some other type of agent; and every builder or tailor, etc., is corporeal; so it follows that every agent is corporeal.'⁸⁸

For al-Fārābī, then, we must assess and validate inductive generalisations by phrasing their arguments in a syllogistic form. The latter is the most basic and obvious form of rational argument, and we can validate an inductive generalization only if we can fit our observations and conclusions into a syllogistic form.⁸⁹

We may use al-Fārābī's analysis of the inductive argument form—a refinement that owes more to Arabic science than to Aristotle's *Prior Analytic*—to question al-Sīrāfī's claim for grammar. The latter argued that we investigate language and abstract grammatical rules from ordinary usage, which implies that only the Arabic speaker can articulate these rules because only an Arabic speaker has access to usage. 'For I know the language by birth and inheritance' al-Sīrāfī maintains, 'and I make out the ideas by observation, reflection, scrutiny, and industry.'⁹⁰ But if our

⁸⁶ See especially the Sections the translator designates as Seven and Eight.

⁸⁷ *Short Commentary on the Prior Analytics*, translated and edited by Nicholas Rescher, (Pittsburgh, 1963), 88.

⁸⁸ *A Short Commentary on the Prior Analytics*, 89.

⁸⁹ Here, we need to explain why we can suppose that the syllogistic form is valid and basic to reasoning or argument, but we shall make this argument only later, in the case of Ibn Sīnā, who depends on the same claim.

⁹⁰ 'On the Merits of Logic and Grammar.' This passage seems to me to indicate that al-Sīrāfī is not making the Wittgensteinian claim that language is enmeshed in the form of life and cannot be understood by induction, which involves necessary and sufficient conditions for arriving at various conclusions, but must be understood through participation in the form of life, where we use criterial rather than inductive explanations. Nevertheless, al-Sīrāfī's main

knowledge of the rules of language depends on observation, scrutiny, reflection, and industry, then to become certain about our knowledge, we must also grasp the rules of observation, reflection, scrutiny, and industry, to ensure that they can yield the knowledge we seek. Of course al-Sirāfi would maintain that his approach follows the methods propounded in Quranic exegesis and the study of grammar. For him we use observation, reflection, and scrutiny to trace contemporary usage back to an origin in or analogy with the pattern of Bedouin or Classical usage and thereby justify its present use. That is, scrutiny and observation of linguistic usage too follow the requirements of satisfactory explanation by setting out these accepted models and their analogies.

However, in an important sense, tracing usages back to their originals is comparable to induction. In both we try to abstract general rules from the flux of experience. But in the one case our explanation is satisfactory if it traces a present usage to its origin while in the other we expect explanation to follow the syllogistic form in an inductive argument. That is, observation, scrutiny, and reflection may follow two apparently conflicting requirements: either they satisfy the mode of explanation involved in the exegetical method of tracing usages back to their originals or they satisfy inductive generalisations and syllogistic argument forms. However, now it may seem that both are valid modes of satisfactory explanation. Each rests ultimately on a claim that its basis is obvious, straightforward, and not open to further explanation. Just as induction tries to satisfy the form of the syllogistic because the latter is clear and obviously valid, so too the exegetical method thinks it obvious that a present usage is valid because of its genesis from and analogy with the model of classical usage. Neither approach has or could have any more firm basis than that it is obvious and given: the real issue between them is what counts as a satisfactory explanation, and the latter for both rests on an alleged obviousness. If so, then al-Fārābī cannot assume he has made any progress over al-Sirāfi by turning to logic. Or so it seems.

The comparison between exegetical method and inductive generalization proposed above, we may argue, fails to see that induction and its argument form are basic to the exegetical and grammatical search for original models and that induction is foundational for exegesis. This is because scrutiny, observation, and reflection that trace any usages back to their origins must perform all the procedures that induction legislates over. For example, for al-Sirāfi, in order to trace back a particular usage we must first sift through varieties of speech and usage to discover (to 'abstract') the rules that structure language; only then can we follow that rule back to its origin in some preferred model. But such abstraction depends on inductively generalizing over a number of cases to identify that structural feature

posture, that meanings and language are caught up in a form of life, does seem similar to the Wittgensteinian position.

of language. In other words, the exegetical method of tracing the original itself stands in need of induction to justify the process of abstraction that, based on observation, scrutiny, and reflection, yields the rules we trace to their origin. If tracing a usage back to its origin in an accepted model validates a particular use, it is because this is a rational rule-governed procedure. And, the argument goes, such tracing is a rational procedure because it is a matter of constructing inductive generalisations about language usage. Induction, with its basis in the syllogistic form, provides the method for examining the workings and success of the exegetical method. Therefore we may maintain that logic is fundamental and basic to the exegetical method of justifying any usage by tracing it to its original in a preferred and accepted model.

Indeed, the argument goes on, logic is fundamental also to other aspects of the exegetical method such as its use of analogy and consensus. Of analogy we may begin by asking for clarification: it is supposedly a matter of discerning and following similarities. If a new use resembles an accepted one, then it is permissible for the very reasons that justify the accepted usage. Unfortunately, this understanding ignores a major problem that analogy and similarity are wild—any number of similarities exist between things, few of which are relevant to the kind of derivation which simply discovering analogies will permit. Consequently, to justify the significant analogy, we need criteria that show which analogies are relevant, which can be ignored, and in what respect analogies permit ascribing to one object characteristics which belong to another (similar) object. And, in this context, as al-Fārābī gives primacy to the syllogistic, he argues that logic shows us where analogies work because it exhibits which analogies are relevant. His argument on this issue is put forward in Section Eight, on ‘Inference by “transfer” (i.e. Analogy).’⁹¹

There al-Fārābī identifies his target as ‘the people of our time’⁹²—very likely the *mutakallimūn* whose views on this matter al-Sīrāfī shares. He characterises ‘transfer’ as

that it is known by sensation that a certain ‘matter’ is in a certain condition, and that a certain ‘thing’ is present in a certain ‘matter’; and so the intellect consequently transfers this condition or thing from this [known] matter to some other [unknown] matter similar to it, and thus judges with respect to it [i.e. the other, unknown matter] upon this [known] basis.⁹³

In other words, there are two things (‘matters’, objects, events), say X and Y, which possess a common feature A. We know also that, say, X possesses a property S. From these two claims, we argue by transference that

⁹¹ *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 93ff.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*

since X and Y are similar in possessing A, and as S is present in X, therefore S is present in Y.

However, by so expressing analogy and the inference it permits, we also show clearly that the argument by transference or analogy cannot succeed in this form. Common possession of one characteristic A does not warrant the claim that both X and Y must also possess another similarity S—unless we can set out why A and S are related so that possession of A will imply possession of S. In al-Fārābī's words, 'If we are determined to have the "transfer" be correct, then it is necessary that the "matter" which is similar to the two [compared] objects be investigated.' But, he goes on to explain, it turns out that when we justify a transfer by investigating and discovering the relation between, say, A and S in our example, there the argument by analogy is a syllogism with a universal premise. 'The force of this [inference] becomes [the same as] the force of the arrangement of the syllogism in the first figure.' That is, wherever a transference or argument by analogy is valid, there the inference is a syllogistic one; and conversely 'when a syllogism won't serve, there the "transfer" is an invalid inference.'⁹⁴ In other words, the presence of analogies allows us to make inferences based on relevant similarities just where the inference in fact has a syllogistic form—so a successful argument by analogy is a disguised syllogism. Where the purported inference fails to be or cannot be expressed as a syllogism, there the analogy is wild and no criteria of relevance seem to operate: consequently, the transfer or analogy is invalid.

To clarify this claim, we can consider al-Fārābī's argument by 'transference,' which

occurs for example when one knows by sensation that some corporeal substance, like the animals and similar things, are created, and consequently the intellect transfers the createdness from the animals or plants, and thus judges about the sky and the stars that they are [also] created. But it is only possible that one can 'transfer' [createdness] from the animals to the sky, and thus to impute to it [viz. the sky] the createdness which was found by sensation in the animals if the animals and the sky exhibit a similarity; and not just any agreeing similarity at all, but a similarity in some matter that is *relevant* to the characterisation of the animals as created. That is, there must be a similarity between the animals and the sky in a matter which lends truth to the judgement that createdness pertains to this entire matter, such as 'being contingent,' for example. For if it is known by sensation that animals are created and that they are similar to the sky in respect of being 'contingent,' and [if] the judgement regarding createdness is true about everything that is 'contingent,' then the 'transfer' of createdness from the animals to the sky will be a true one. But if the judgement that it is created is not [assumed as] true of everything 'contingent,' and the sky is 'contingent,' then it is not possible [to make] the 'transference' [of createdness] from the animals to the sky, before [it has been shown that] it is possible

⁹⁴ Editor's footnote, 95.

that createdness actually exists in everything 'contingent.' [The 'transfer'] is bound to the condition which draws [the conclusion about] the sky from the similarity with the animals in a matter relating to the createdness of the animals; because createdness is only found as something actually present in animals due to a connection with 'being contingent,' through some special form of connection. This form of connection is not to be found in [the case of] the sky. Therefore, when the situation is of this kind, then it is not possible at all for the 'transfer' to be maintained. ... If we are determined to have the 'transfer' be correct, then it is necessary that the matter which is similar in the two [compared] objects be investigated. The judgement regarding the createdness of the totality is correct when everything 'contingent' is created. [For then] if the sky is similar to the animals in being 'contingent,' then it necessarily follows that the sky is created. The force of the [inference] becomes [the same as] the force of the arrangement of the syllogism in the first figure, namely: 'The sky is "contingent", and everything "contingent" is created, therefore it follows that the sky is created.'⁹⁵

Once again it appears that we must assess a feature of the exegetical methodology by reference to logic in order to guarantee its success.

In addition to the manner in which identifying analogies and tracing usages back to their origins depend on inductive generalization and syllogisms, we can find a parallel for consensus in the syllogistic form. Just as consensus is a matter of agreement for right reasons among subjects in a community, it may be argued, so too the syllogism invites compliance and conviction for right reasons. However, the right reasons of logic are not only more basic, as we have seen, but also more comprehensive and complete; and the method of logic is preferable for these features. By contrast, reliance on consensus, analogies, and tracing origins leads to issues about their relative priority in explanations and about whether and how the operation of each supports or thwarts its partners.

In any case, to explain the conviction or compliance involved in logic, we may turn to al-Fārābī's exposition of the syllogism in his *Risālah* on Logic. There he proposes that syllogisms are 'employed either in discoursing with another or in a man's bringing about something in his own mind.'⁹⁶ The suggestion is that employing a syllogism brings about a state of mind of conviction as a result of ordering and thinking through propositions. Given that 'a syllogism is a body of discourse made up of premises so constituted that if conjoined there follows from them, essentially and not by accident, some other different thing as the outcome,' where the outcome is a consequence or conclusion,⁹⁷ we may expect that the state of mind which results from discoursing about or thinking through a syllogism is identical with the conclusion of a syllogism. In other words, the state of

⁹⁵ 94–5.

⁹⁶ *Risālah*, 231.

⁹⁷ *Short Commentary on the Prior Analytics*, 59.

mind of conviction is a result of arriving at a conclusion of a syllogism in discourse or thought.

Further, the arts based on using syllogisms are five: 'philosophy, the art of dialectic, the sophistic arts, the art of rhetoric, and the art of poetry.' And we may expect that whatever determines the different natures of these arts will also clarify the kinds of conviction appropriate to each kind of syllogistic art⁹⁸—even if they are all united in being discourse through which we 'bring about something in [the] mind.' Moreover, the rules of logic, which 'gives in each one of the syllogistic arts the special rules by which each one of them is constituted,'⁹⁹ ensure that any resulting state of mind is common to all subjects who engage in the activity of rational discourse. This is because by logic 'whatever is assumed to be in accordance with any particular one of the [syllogistic] arts is examined and distinguished, so as to know whether it is so or not.'¹⁰⁰ Accordingly, by following the rules of logic and their deployment in appropriate syllogisms, we secure a warrant for the state of conviction native to a discourse ordered in syllogisms, and any agreement between subjects that results from this process of thought we gain for the right reasons. In other words, in logic consensus arises from right thinking in syllogisms.

The contrasting sense of consensus as used by the exegetical method could also depend on right reason. That is, it could depend on right reason if we suppose that consensus follows from and depends on examining analogies and tracing origins. But if so, then, as we have seen, since both the latter depend on logic, consensus too must ultimately be justified by logic. Of course, it could be that consensus is a procedure for validating claims about meanings and reasoning independently of origins and analogies with accepted usages. In that case, we may suggest, the consensus would not depend on right reasons so much as on right persons and on agreement between them in the community of believers. That is, it would become necessary just where tracing originals and analogy do not provide sufficiently strong evidence for any particular conclusion, so that consensus among the believers is brought into play.

This suggestion brings up a number of possibilities. We may expect that this kind of consensus is open to change depending on the membership of the community and the issues it faces, so that consensus is not proposed as a basis for some ultimate truth. Further, where the community proposes to accept certain principles of action and belief on the basis of consensus, presumably the choice of its members is not simply arbitrary but is based on reasons—in which case again logic will be central. On the other hand, if the choice is not based on reason, its validity is questionable.

⁹⁸ *Risālah*, Section 3, 231–2.

⁹⁹ *Risālah*, 231.

¹⁰⁰ *Risālah*, 231–2.

In all these cases, reason as logic seems to provide the standard by which to assess consensus.

However, in this context, we might argue that a set of beliefs stemming from a commitment to the Quran, if shared by a community of believers, provides a basis for consensus. The latter will be non-rational, because belief does not possess a cognitive certainty, yet will suffice for those instances where we cannot trace a usage back to its origin in some accepted model nor discover analogies with the latter. Therefore, not every deployment of consensus need be rational, yet its basis in the community members' commitment to the Quran warrants its validity. Unfortunately, this claim does not work as it stands. It assumes that any commitment to the Book will guarantee that kind of unity necessary for consensus. But the kinds of commitment members have can vary, and will determine whether and what kind of relation between subjects results. Indeed, the best way to provide a warranted consensus, we may argue, is by seeking a rational coherence between the beliefs which members adhere to, and the actions they consequently perform, that are compatible with membership of a community of believers. And that coherence, of course, will depend in important respects on using logic and reasoning.

In any case, in its more general use among the *mutakallimūn*, it seems, although 'the legal theory of the ancient schools of law was dominated by the idea of consensus,'¹⁰¹ consensus followed from the pursuit of original accepted usages and analogies with these.¹⁰² That is, as final arbitrator it was a matter of agreeing or disagreeing with evidence discovered through tracing originals and setting out analogies. Consequently, consensus depended on setting out origins and analogies, seeking agreement on the basis of the best, most complete tracing of accepted usages and the most competent elaboration of analogies. If so, then, again, so far as the latter depend on logic, so too consensus depends on logic. Further, given this reliance on logic, we may argue that such agreement must be a matter of consensus among members of the community because the arguments rest on the obvious and basic forms of the syllogism. And to the latter we can only and must simply give agreement, for these are the most basic rules by which we can expect to justify or defend them.

By this account, then, the exegetical or grammatical method is reducible in important parts to logic, which grounds and justifies the former's method. All those procedures in which the exegetical method is successful are also successful in logic whereas where claims are logically invalid, there the exegetical method fails those claims. Such reduction does not show that the exegetical method is mistaken and its insights useless; rather, logic encompasses the method, showing why its conclusions are justified. Analogies, origins in accepted usages, and consensus work to pro-

¹⁰¹ See J. Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, (Oxford, 1979), 82ff.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

vide valid conclusions, and where these conclusions are valid, logic proves their soundness.¹⁰³

This argument between al-Fārābī and al-Sīrāfī is not resolved; indeed, its issues in various versions continue to exercise philosophers at present.¹⁰⁴ In any case, the principal lacunae in al-Fārābī's claims for logic over exegetical or grammatical method would seem to lie in that nothing has been said about the central fact of revelation. The exegetical method seeks to preserve and develop these given truths, uses analogies, and traces origins in an accepted model, or relies on the community of believers because these respect revealed truths and draw out their lessons for application to present circumstances. In other words, the exegetical method is based on the central importance of revelation and is specifically directed at respecting the occasion and authority of the Quran's deliverance to humanity through the Prophet. Yet surely logic, which seeks to assess all claims by the standards of the syllogism, cannot allow such authority to revealed truths, for it can find the latter acceptable only by submitting them to its own standards, and therefore must give human reasoning authority over the authority of God's word. If logic is seen as the basis of the exegetical method, then it seems to imply that so far as the latter simply accepts revelation without assessing its rationality, it is open to question; and a rejection of the exegetical method for itself, or of the conclusions it yields about the behaviour proper to Muslims, in favour of those conclusions justified by logic can also imply rejection of features of revelation, which are accepted unconditionally by Muslims, because unconditional acceptance is anathema to logical reasoning. The only claims accepted unconditionally in logic are the obvious and basic syllogistic, not the truths revealed by God's word.

¹⁰³ Against the first claim, that any discovery of origins involves procedures of scrutiny, reflection, and observation which are best justified through induction, we may argue for al-Sīrāfī that the logician misconstrues language if he identifies it in terms of induction. Although we trace the origins of usages in accepted models by considering the general rules operating in a language, discovery of these rules is not a matter of 'external' observation, by which we generalize from scrutiny of numerous particular cases to a general claim about the structure of that language, but is better understood as a matter of following rules, where the latter involves participating in the language. Induction implies that we gain sufficient and necessary conditions by which to describe a language fully, but it is not clear that any language is open to such precise description. There are no sufficient and necessary conditions. These imply that if X, then there must be Y; but language doesn't work like that, surely, it is looser—the same X may be used in different contexts to suggest various things, and its use in one context does not necessarily imply conclusions about its function elsewhere. Rather than treat it as an object whose characteristics are identified and set out as with a specimen, language must be understood as a practice that needs to be grasped by participating in its rules.

¹⁰⁴ For some of the issues involved the reader may consult L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, 1951), and *Philosophical Grammar* (Oxford, 1970).

Although the relation of logic to revelation is not our main concern, we may pursue the issue because it leads us back to poetics. In response to the claim that logic is antithetical to religion because it cannot accept the authority of revelation, the philosophers' best defence is denial: they need not reject scripture, but only ask that its revelations must be capable of defence and justification by logic. This is far from rejecting divine authority and does not imply that revelation is found inadequate for itself. Instead the philosophers may point to the scriptural injunction to use reason and can maintain that scripture itself constrains us to understand revelation by using our reason. If revelation were closed to our understanding, it would also become irrelevant to our behaviour in consciousness of our humanity. Yet to grasp its force and role in our lives we must employ the capacities we have—those of reason and of logic as the basic method of reasoning. Thus, to apply logic and reason to revealed truths and injunctions, far from embodying a rejection of the authority of the Quran, is to seek to understand those truths, to see what they mean and what they imply for us. Consequently, by subscribing to the validity of logic, we do not so much reject revelation as we give up claims that the exegetical or grammatical method is self-sufficient as a mode of reasoning. We show instead that the validity of grammar is justified by logic. If the exegetical or grammatical method makes claims about the scriptures which are acceptable, then their plausibility will be defensible by logic. Rather than rejecting revelation, logic claims that its own grasp of revealed truths and explanations and of scriptural meanings is better than that procured by grammar because it uses a procedure which is sound.

As the real claim made by logicians is only that their art supersedes the method of grammar, we may expect that their art will not only hope to serve revelation better than it was served by grammar, but that other practices once served by grammar are also better validated by logic. Further, we may now expect that the validity of poetry, which grammar defended, will be established by logic. Indeed, if logic cannot fulfill this task of defending poetry, or rejects aspects of the grammatical validity of poetry, or tries to substitute its own distinctive brand of validity, and characterises poetic validity in some entirely counter-intuitive mode without due justification, then we may have reason to suspect the superiority of logic over grammar for our concerns.

In this context, al-Fārābī dismisses aspects of clericism and religion, classifying them below philosophy in his hierarchy of reason and practice,¹⁰⁵ and asserts that poetic syllogisms are false.¹⁰⁶ Neither claim seems to bode well for the interaction between logic and Islamic thought, suggesting that the former is at least insensitive and more likely antagonistic to the

¹⁰⁵ Cf L.V. Berman, 'Maimonides, The Disciple of al-Fārābī,' *Israel Oriental Studies*; the Appendix to this paper contains a translation of passages from *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*.

¹⁰⁶ *Canons*, in Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 111.

latter. Yet al-Fārābī's position is much more sympathetic to poetry's grasp of truth than this might suggest. And although the case of religious belief is not our principal concern,¹⁰⁷ we shall consider some aspects of al-Fārābī's claims as a model for poetry to suggest, in the next chapter, why he can maintain that poetry is logically false but has a relation to our minds, emotions, and behaviour which make it important to politics and the community of Islam.

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

To approach the issue of the validity of poetry, we may look at the relation between philosophy and theology. al-Fārābī distinguishes the truth (of revelation) from the validity or conviction generated by demonstration. The suggestion is that the truth is available to us, even if conviction about the truth does not depend on demonstration. This distinction tells us something of how poetry works: it can grasp the truth, and though it may not carry the conviction appropriate to demonstrating it, it still generates a community that serves that truth.

To understand more fully al-Fārābī's conception of the relation between religion and philosophy, we must go back to the issue raised in comparing logic and grammar. Logic is not a part of philosophy but is only the tool by which we arrive at philosophical conclusions. It serves as a methodological principle that casts light on the degree of certainty appropriate to different uses of language. The latter differ in degrees of certitude, depending on the kind of syllogism they employ: philosophy depends primarily on demonstration to arrive at conclusions from premises which are known and true, while language appropriate to dialectical, rhetorical, and poetic syllogisms has progressively less certainty.

Further, if we see language as a social principle, then al-Fārābī is also suggesting that philosophical language, yielding certainty, forms the most determinate, coherent and complete kind of community, while poetic language, having less certainty, implicates a less determinate community. In other words, these distinctions mean that because demonstration provides conclusions which are completely sound and well-founded, any use of language to express and secure agreement with these conclusions will be able to generate a community in which, because subjects agree with conclusions that cannot be doubted, we will expect complete and unshakable agreement between subjects. If all subjects were equally capable of reason-

¹⁰⁷ See *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, 172, extract translated by Berman; Mahdi, 'Science, Philosophy and Religion in the *Enumeration of the Sciences*, 121; and al-Fārābī, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 59-92.

ing demonstratively, then over their conclusions there could not be conflict among subjects.

However, not all conclusions are capable of such certainty and not all subjects are always capable of satisfying this ideal of reasoning demonstratively. Although demonstrative certainty provides the ideal that these diverse subjects and conclusions aim towards, they are still capable of appropriate levels of validation. We may say that different kinds of language—rhetorical, religious, poetic—correspond to demonstration in particular and distinctive ways. In a single language such as Arabic, particular uses correspond to appropriate parts of logic—poetic language depends on poetic syllogisms perhaps, while persuasion and coaxing depend on rhetoric. Similarly other practices depend on their appropriate language and what we expect of it. By this conception, it seems that religion is only another kind of interpretation which is commensurately less secure than demonstration even where its conclusions and premises are based on the God-given gift of inspiration and prophecy. We may expect that it will still have to obtain its warrant from logic.

In this context, al-Fārābī distinguishes soundness or validity from truth, and proposes that both religion and philosophy consider the same truth. Neither is less capable of grasping truths about God just because it is or is not demonstratively certain. But his distinction between truth and validity invites a competition between philosophy and religion. He sets out their relation in the *Book of Letters*. Although his proposals are set out somewhat schematically, and while they attend to philosophy and religion rather than to the different uses of language that each involves, we can develop issues relating to the latter by considering the former. Al-Fārābī is clear that 'religion, considered as a human matter, is later in time than philosophy in general.' This conclusion is based on the role he ascribes to religion

since it is aimed at teaching the multitude theoretical and practical things which were deduced in philosophy through ways which facilitate the multitude's understanding of them, either through persuasion, or representation, or through both of them together.¹⁰⁸

That is, sound reasoning and demonstrative arguments are native to 'certain philosophy',¹⁰⁹ which forms a pinnacle of human achievement, and religion only serves to relay the conclusion we reach in philosophy. Or, as he says later, 'philosophy precedes religion in the way that the employer of instruments precedes the instrument in time.'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, edited by Muhsin Mahdi, translated by L. V. Berman, in the Appendix to 'Maimonides, the Disciple of al-Fārābī,' 131.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ 132.

To explain this further in the context of other uses of language, al-Fārābī contrasts the development of religion out of philosophy with 'dialectic and sophistic,' which 'precede philosophy in the way the fruit of the tree precedes its fruit, or in the way that the flower of the tree precedes its fruit.' Indeed, if religion is an instrument used by philosophy, their relation is comparable to that between religion and theology and jurisprudence, where religion precedes as 'the master who employs the servant precedes the servant and as the one who employs the instrument, the instrument.'¹¹¹ By this analogy, religion becomes the servant of certain philosophy, and in spite of its revelation, it must be legitimated by philosophy. In a conflict between the authority of revelation and the validity of philosophy, it seems that for us the latter must prevail.

This is true also of the theologian, who practices what religion teaches. Theology is subordinate to religion and relies on persuasion. But because 'persuasion comes about through premises which are preferred at the beginning of the reflection and are well known, and through enthymemes and examples' or generally 'through rhetorical arguments,' therefore the 'most extreme limit of sureness [the theologian] will reach is considering his deficiency [in reasoning] dialectically.'¹¹² By reflecting on his own task and recognizing the dialectical nature of theology, the theologian may place himself 'among the elite' and is 'distinguished from the multitude.' But, still, al-Fārābī circumscribes the theologian's position: the theologian 'is also one of the elite, but *in relation to the members of that religion only*. The special character of the philosopher, however, exists in relation to all men and to nations.'¹¹³ By implication, theologians, like grammarians, understand and explain particular religions; but their self-reflection and reasoning can only extend to dialectical foundations. This is enough to make them leaders in that religion. If we think of religion and its attendant theology in terms of the relation between subjects that they subtend, then they are accepted or warranted *only* within their own religious community. By contrast, philosophy has a universal validity and, if it yields a community, make possible a universal and coherent one. 'The elite in an absolute sense, therefore, are the philosophers who are philosophers absolutely. All the others who are counted among the elite are only to be counted among them because they have some similarity to the philosophers.'¹¹⁴ Thus, the *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* reinforces the priority of philosophy over religion that we discovered in other texts.¹¹⁵ Philosophy subordinates religion to its criteria

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² 132ff.

¹¹³ 133, italics added.

¹¹⁴ 133.

¹¹⁵ I would contend that the *Philosophy of Aristotle* and the *Kitāb al-Milla wa-Nūṣūṣ Ukharā*, edited by M. Mahdi, (Beirut, 1968) do not seriously challenge this conception.

of validity, and anyone who claims that religion has a sufficient basis and warrant in revelation must stand accused of thinking dialectically only.¹¹⁶

However, this account of the opposition between religion and philosophy is needlessly stark. Al-Fārābī distinguishes validity from truth: he neither claims that religion is untruthful nor maintains that revelation is insufficient warrant for the truthfulness of religious propositions which persuade, instruct the multitude, or provide images, representations, and spectacles for their direction.¹¹⁷ Instead, theology, revelation, and philosophy are conterminal: the theologian,

since he is the servant of religion, and the relationship of religion to philosophy is the same, the relationship of theology to philosophy comes to be the same relationship, since it is to some extent also a servant of philosophy through the intermediary of religion, since it engages in defence of this to show the correctness of that which was shown correct first in philosophy through apodictic demonstrations by means of what is well known in the beginning of reflection in the way of all, so that instruction may be realised in a way common to all.¹¹⁸

Like philosophy, religion and theology use tools appropriate to their domain to persuade the multitude of the 'correct' propositions discovered and delineated in philosophy. Like grammar, religion and theology provide indispensable access to the community, translating truths into terms which its members can grasp; but they do not conflict with philosophy in this process: rather they serve to convey its truths over against the dangerous corruption of mere sophistry and dialectic.¹¹⁹ As Mahdi maintains, al-Fārābī is 'proposing an alliance between religion and demonstrative philosophy in its conflicts with dialectic and sophistry; and philosophy will be supported by religion in its conflict with dialectic and sophistry.'¹²⁰

Yet if they are allied, philosophy retains seniority and, because of its universality, also lays claim to a more comprehensive and unshakable validity. Religion must always be tested by its adherence to truths discovered and expounded in philosophy. Revealed truths remain unwarranted for us until they are provided proof and justification by philosophy. And even if philosophy claims that there need not be any conflict between revealed and rational truths, still where a conflict does arise, philosophers would

¹¹⁶ An illuminating discussion of a number of issues involved here is found in Hans Daiber, 'The Ruler as Philosopher,' *Medelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, (Letterkunde), 49, 4 (1986).

¹¹⁷ *Kūāb al-Ḥurūf*, 131–3, *Philosophy of Aristotle*, 73f, where al-Fārābī shows how sense and imagery and poetry might serve this task.

¹¹⁸ 133.

¹¹⁹ Cf. *Kūāb al-Ḥurūf*, 153–7, for a longer account of the alliance between philosophy and religion that satisfies the demands of demonstrative reasoning. In *Kūāb al-Milla wa-Ḥisūṣ Ukhrā* (eg at 43–4) Al-Fārābī explains the different ways theologians and law-givers have responded to philosophy.

¹²⁰ M. Mahdi, 'Al-Fārābī on Philosophy and Religion,' *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol IV, no.1, 1972, 5–25, 21.

favour philosophy. And where no conflicts over propositions have as yet arisen, some religious propositions could fail their test of philosophical adequacy and so would be dismissed even if they were given in revelation. Moreover, in spite of religion's claim to universality—to uniting all peoples and nations under Allah—al-Fārābī denies it 'the special character of the philosopher.' The latter 'exists in relation to all men and to nations,' and its basis in logic gives it an access to intelligible and universal meanings that religion cannot claim. Consequently, religions and their propositions always remain secondary and dependent on philosophy, *which alone has the capacity to deal with revelation as truth*. Al-Fārābī's case, then, is anti-clerical but not anti-Islamic, for he accepts the truth of revelation but, as a good Muslim, denies any role to priests.

There are other strategies that al-Fārābī might have adopted to avoid such charges. As Ibn Rushd was later to argue, al-Fārābī could maintain that his concern is with humanity rather than divinity in the following sense. Whatever divine wisdom is passed to us, whether by revelation or some other method, we must still understand and follow the rules laid down. The possibility of being religious, of submitting to God's word, is tied up with a larger set of issues and concerns including our ability to choose, by which we are responsible and can be blamed or praised, and our ability to reason through and understand the prescriptions provided in the Quran. Even to follow these instructions rigourously requires that we exercise judgement, understand which rules are appropriate when and to what purpose. *Kalām* too, after all, by using *ḥadīth*, deals with these contextualizing issues, and it relies on analogy, consensus, and tracing usages to their origin in some accepted model just because these embody our rational capacity for action and for following such rules. That is, *kalām* does not set aside the need for judgement, rules, contexts, and reasoning; it merely relies on a particular conception of reasoning; and al-Fārābī may claim that he is simply questioning this account of reasoning by putting forward an alternative. The kind of reasoning that clerics have relied upon, he may argue, is not sufficiently well-grounded, so that even if they arrive at the right conclusions, so far as these are given in the Quran or in the Prophet's instruction and example, nevertheless they do so for the wrong kinds of reasons. To circumvent such misreasoning without denying the truth presented to us in the Quran or in the Prophet's example, and to preclude the misrepresentations which an inadequate mode of reasoning could introduce into Muslim practices, al-Fārābī may suggest, we must use reason properly: we must grasp the use of logic. Thus, by examining philosophy and its basis in logic, he is merely fulfilling the Quranic imperative to use reason and to understand God's word so far as this is possible for human beings. And unless we suppose God less than capable of making Himself understood, we must suppose that the gift of reasoning which he

has given us is adequate to the task of grasping and following His imperatives.

The issue then is merely one of the nature of reason, and not one of the truth or falsity of the Quran's imperatives. Philosophers accept the latter and seek to preserve these truths in the way most appropriate to humanity's capacity for reasoning and belief. Thus, to say that philosophers are concerned with validity only and do not infringe on questions of truth is also to say that they are good Muslims because they accept the truth of the Quran. They claim precedence over clerics only so far as they express and understand those truths in ways that are sound. Philosophy does not legislate over what is true or false—it reveres the truths given through the Prophet—but it does legislate over whether our understanding of these truths is sound.

In all this poetry has a part to play. But its role is not based on any access to philosophical truths that it might claim by virtue of a basis in logic. Instead, at one level it seems that poetry sustains the effectiveness of the persuasive devices used by religion, including some devices used in the popular or vulgar art.¹²¹ But now because poets provide knowledge about the source of languages,¹²² they seem caught within the community instead of providing rules which are universal. Yet this cannot be al-Fārābī's whole opinion, for elsewhere he gives poetry a validity based on logic and so makes it a more powerful and secure instrument than the above suggests. And in the following chapter we shall consider the validity al-Fārābī ascribes to poetry. For the present, we may note his role in arguing for the soundness of logic over grammar and his intention to rely on sound logical reasoning to justify the truths formerly based only on grammar. His claims as we have set them out here provide a foundation for the theories of logic, poetry, and community that we shall see Ibn Sinā and Ibn Rushd propose.

What emerges from this brief look at theology is that its grasp of truth remains unquestioned though al-Fārābī presents us with a theory about the kind and validity of access we have to this truth. Theology may not have a firm foundation for its beliefs, and so cannot justify the truths it claims, but not only do we have a means for grasping the truth of its claims, we also understand that religion's mechanisms for generating acquiescence serve to bind the community together in particular ways. We can characterize this community by its basis in emotion, in irrationally accepted premises, and in its use of a ratiocinative capacity. Philosophy alone will give us a well-founded understanding of our grasp of the truths of revelation. Yet because his account of religion shows how the community is structured, al-Fārābī's claims about theology also provide clues for the structure of the poetic community and syllogism. It shows us how we treat poetry and what we might expect of it because it too relies on our ratiocinative and emo-

¹²¹ *Kiṭāb al-Ḥurūf*, 148, 131.

¹²² *ibid*, 143.

tional nature to generate a community between human beings. To understand that community fully, we must examine the logic of poetic statements and show what validity they sustain.

LOGIC AND POETRY

Al-Fārābī argued that logic warrants the validity of discourse. We can construct logically valid propositions from intelligible meanings and then relate them to form arguments. In this process we compose simple intelligibles—‘Majnun,’ ‘unmarried man,’ or ‘bachelor’—into propositions affirming a logical relation between those intelligibles—‘Majnun is an unmarried man,’ ‘Unmarried men are bachelors’—and order them into a syllogistic form to conclude that ‘Majnun is a bachelor.’ The logical form underlying the latter proposition warrants its validity.

For al-Fārābī the conclusion of a demonstrative syllogism is the most securely validated. The syllogism begins with well-founded premises and leads by a process of strict implication to true conclusions. By contrast, in spite of the conviction which a dialectical syllogism generates, because its premises are not well-founded its conclusions remain uncertain. Dialectic is more persuasive than truthful; it may even generate conviction about truths, but in dialectical syllogisms this conviction remains independent of the truth—even of truths revealed in religion. Not that revealed truths are uncertain, but religion is dialectical and persuasive, rather than demonstrative, and religious discourse can only claim a commensurately limited validity. Demonstration alone gives sound access to truths. It uses language to convey things as they really are rather than suavisely in dialectical, rhetorical, or poetic devices to secure agreement from other subjects.¹ And to justify the truths revealed in religious discourse we must prove them as the conclusions of demonstrative arguments.

Al-Fārābī wants to examine the structure of demonstrative, dialectical, sophistic, or rhetorical statements to learn of their validity, scope, and strength. By attending to the ‘affairs that make up the art of dialectic [for example] and by which its activities become more perfect, excellent, and effective,’² we set out its practical consequences. Similarly other logical forms yield ‘a practical activity by means of the kind of reasoning or syllogism they employ.’³

¹ *Catalogue*, 71; see also above, at the end of the last chapter.

² *Catalogue*, 71; translated by Muhsin Mahdi in ‘Science, Philosophy, and Religion in al-Fārābī’s *Encyclopedia of the Sciences*’, 121.

³ Mahdi, ‘Science, Philosophy, and Religion in al-Fārābī’s *Encyclopedia of the Sciences*,’ 122.

However, although al-Fārābī identifies all of demonstration, dialectic, sophistry, rhetoric, and poetics as the syllogistic arts,⁴ it is not clear what sense we can give to poetics as a syllogistic art, for it turns out that in terms of their logical status poetic statements are 'totally and absolutely false.'⁵ Surely poetry cannot have validity of any consequence if it is always false, and it may be a misnomer to describe poetic discourse as syllogistic at all.

This difficulty points to a wider problem. In different texts al-Fārābī emphasizes various seemingly irreconcilable features of poetry. These features depend on claims about the nature of language, its sources and social role, its relation to logic, the status of religion, the balances of a political community, the nature of political and religious leadership, and so on; yet he does not always clearly tell us how these are inter-connected, and so any argument we construct for him may seem arbitrary. In spite of this diversity, however, arguably his discussions of poetry share certain concerns—centring on the logical status of poetry, its sources in imagination, its production and use, and the community it sustains—which suggest that his diverse positions are compatible. For example, having described poetry as absolutely and completely false,⁶ al-Fārābī still finds poetic discourse meaningful.⁷ His account of imagination links the two positions. To imagine something is to exclude it from existence,⁸ and as poetry is imaginative speech,⁹ nothing imaginative can make a true or false claim about any existing state of affairs, even though the statement may still be meaningful. Further, just that imaginative quality not only makes poetry self-reflective of our mental operations, it also sustains a community between individuals.¹⁰ That is, poetry has different facets and uses, so we need not dismiss al-Fārābī's claims just because they are complex.

Unfortunately, ultimately his theory is unsuccessful. Nevertheless, it teaches us a great deal: it is the first to examine seriously the consequences of the new conceptions of validity for poetry. The issues and connections between concepts which he sets out are crucial to later developments. And even if he does not fully resolve the tension between, on the one hand, a logical and formal validity he discovers for poetry and, on the other hand, the social cohesive force he recognizes poetry has, his detailed examination of the matter make possible Ibn Sīnā's later resolution of the issues. He is a

⁴ He also holds that 'two of these arts, rhetoric and poetics, are arts in this sense as well as crafts (*ṣināʿa* as well as *ṣanʿa*), that is arts of making various kinds of speeches and poems.' See Mahdi, 'Science, Philosophy, and Religion in al-Fārābī's *Encyclopedia of the Sciences*,' *ibid*.

⁵ Al-Fārābī, *Canons*, translated by Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 111. I usually refer to this text as *Canons*.

⁶ *Canons*, 111.

⁷ *Risālah*, 224-6.

⁸ *Al-Fārābī's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, 157.

⁹ *Catalogue of the Sciences*, translated by Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 116.

¹⁰ See *Philosophy of Aristotle in al-Fārābī's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, Translated with an Introduction by Muhsin Mahdi, revised edition, (Ithaca, 1962), 73ff.

watershed figure between the traditional method and the later study of the logic of poetry, and his theory provides the building blocks that others use to construct more stable structures. His detailed study is a great step forward because it yields a deeper conception of poetry and poetics. He uses a method that incorporates society, logic, practice, *episteme*, and the relations between these into an object of consideration. And the cast he gives these issues not only establishes the character of the Arabic Aristotelian theory of poetics that Ibn Sinā works out but also sets the pattern for Ibn Rushd's influence on the European Renaissance. We can approach that theory as follows.

The Context of Poetry

Al-Fārābī thinks two factors are crucial to justifying the validity of poetic statements: that poetic discourse is imaginative and a kind of 'argument by analogy.' By showing what he wants to make of the nature and validity of poetry, we can provide a context for examining these two crucial factors.

In *Fuṣūl al-madani* al-Fārābī identifies six kinds of poetry, all of which presumably share the logical status of poetic discourse.

All poetry has been invented to produce an excellent imaginative impression of the object. It is of six kinds, three of which are praised and three blamed. Of the three which are praised one is that by which are aimed at the improvement of the rational faculty, and that its actions and thought should be directed towards happiness, the production of imaginative impressions of divine matters and good deeds, excellence in providing an imaginative impression of the virtues and approving them, the reprobating of evil deeds and the vices, and holding them in scorn. The second kind is that by which are aimed at the improvement and correction of those accidents of the soul which are related to strength, and the breaking down till they become moderate and cease to be excessive. Such accidents are anger, pride, cruelty, effrontery, love of honour and domination, greed, and the like. Those who possess these qualities are led (sc, by this kind of poetry) to employ them in good, not evil deeds. The third kind aims at the improvement and correction of the accidents of the soul related to weakness and softness, viz. desires, base pleasures, falseness and slackness of soul, pity, fear, anxiety, grief, shame, luxury, softness, and the like, that they may be broken down and cease to be excessive, till they become moderate, and (the possessor) is led to employ them in good, not evil deeds. The three kinds which are blamed are the opposites of the three that are praised. For the former ruin all that the latter correct, bringing it from the moderate state to excess. The different kinds of tunes and songs follow the different kinds of poetry and have the same divisions.¹¹

¹¹ *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, Section 52, 49–50. I have used al-Fārābī *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, *Aphorisms of the Statesman*, edited with an English translation, Introduction and Notes by D.M. Dunlop, (Cambridge, 1961).

To make full sense of these uses of poetry, we must first grasp al-Fārābī's conception of poetry and poetic discourse. He has identified poetry with imagination in this passage, and does so again in other works. In his *Catalogue of the Sciences* he defines poetic discourses as statements composed of elements that 'aim at imaginative assent to a given matter ... and result in seeing it as better or worse, more beautiful or uglier, dignified or base.'¹² These references to imagination tally also with his claim in the *Canons of the Art of Poetry* that an "imitative" statement about an object ... does not let one *imagine* the opposite but what is similar.'¹³ In the latter text he also identifies the objective of poetry as 'impress[ing] the imitations on men's imagination and sense'¹⁴—a refrain that occurs again in *The Philosophy of Aristotle*.¹⁵ In the *Catalogue*, al-Fārābī also explains that when we hear poetic discourses the imaginative representation (*takhyīl*) which occurs in our souls is similar to our experience of an object.¹⁶ That is, imaginative poetic discourses lead to a state of mind comparable to the conviction we feel in understanding demonstrative or other discourse; but assent to poetry is distinctive and properly designated as 'imaginative' because of what we expect of it. As all that depends on what al-Fārābī means by 'imagination;' and as he was influenced by Aristotle and in turn influenced Ibn Sīnā, we may begin by setting out their respective theories.

THE IMAGINATION: ARISTOTLE, AL-FĀRĀBĪ, AND IBN SĪNĀ

Al-Fārābī owes his conception of imagination to Aristotle.¹⁷ Like the Stagirite, he gives imagined images and representations a special status, removed from issues of truth and falsity, where they are still meaningful and can bear reference to both sensations and intelligibles. Aristotle's conception is set out principally in *De Anima* and *De Somniis*, though *De Interpretatione*, *Prior Analytics*, and *Metaphysics* also contain valuable formulations.

From *De Anima*, Book III, Chapter 3, it appears that we must distinguish imagination from sensation and thought although thought depends on imagination¹⁸ and the latter in turn depends on sensation.¹⁹ We cannot

¹² Dahiyat, Introduction to the *Commentary*, 83. See also Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 111–116.

¹³ Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 111.

¹⁴ Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 116.

¹⁵ *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, 73.

¹⁶ There is also a subjective reaction involved here, but we shall leave that aside for the moment.

¹⁷ Not all Arabic philosophers owe as much. As we shall see, Ibn Sīnā develops a notion of imagination independently to the extent that Ibn Rushd criticized him for misappropriating the Greek conception.

¹⁸ *De Anima*, 434a9, cf also *Metaphysics*, 980b28.

¹⁹ *De Anima*, 429a, Aristotle sees imagination as a movement resulting from an exercise of the power of sense; see also *De Anima*, 427a, 14–16.

imagine things without first having sensations of them in some form,²⁰ and we cannot think about objects without bringing them to mind in imagination. The products of the imagination serve thought as the contents of perception,²¹ and the soul never thinks without the image.²² Minimally, then, imagination provides images of absent particulars and makes thought about objects possible.²³ But Aristotle also suggests a stronger relation between imagination and thought in that even when we are thinking about intelligibles and abstractions, which could not appear directly in sensation, we still need images to think.²⁴ Here images stand for or represent intelligibles and the rational operations we carry out on them in thinking, but they do not determine the scope of those operations. Thus, we use images in proving conclusions in Euclidean geometry without supposing that the qualities of a particular image determine the general properties of a triangle. We can analyze the geometric properties of triangles even by imagining a blue metal one.

Although imagination is necessary for thought as the faculty we use to retain and evoke images, it is not itself capable of truth or falsity. Aristotle says on occasion that imagination is false,²⁵ but in these instances he is contrasting the fact that sensations occur in the presence of their object, and so must be 'true,' while images of those sensations can arise in us in the absence of the sensed object. Similarly, in a sense continuous with the absence of a clear present sensation, Aristotle says we use imagination where, say, in seeing a man, our sensations are confused and we cannot clearly identify what we see as a man. Then we are wont to say it seems to be a man, and rely on imagination to supplement whatever sensation does not provide of itself.²⁶ In both these circumstances, the product of imagination does not necessarily coincide with the way the world is at present. We may be able to say that the judgement 'It is a man' is false, but this does not render false the imagination on which the judgement depends.²⁷

More generally, imagination is always capable of a noetic distance from sensation.²⁸ While it depends on sensation for its content, imagination is a separate faculty. Aristotle accepts that imagination operates in the absence of sensation, as in dreaming, where it cannot serve to make true or false statements—or, so to speak, any claim the dreamer makes on the basis

²⁰ *De Anima*, 429a

²¹ *De Anima*, 432b 26–8.

²² *De Anima*, 431a16

²³ E.g. in dreams: See *De Somniis* 428a5–6, where Aristotle says that we have sensuous images in the absence of sensations.

²⁴ *De Anima*, 431a16.

²⁵ *De Anima* 428a10

²⁶ See Malcolm Schofield, 'Aristotle on the Imagination,' *Articles on Aristotle*, 4. *Psychology and Aesthetics*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, Malcolm Schofield, and Richard Sorabji, (London, 1979)103–132.

²⁷ *De Anima*, 428b2.

²⁸ See *De Anima* 3.3.428a 19–26, where Aristotle argues that it is not just sensation and reason, etc..

of images is either false because images are not sensations and do not bear reference to a present reality, or false because a dreamers' sensations merely coincide with experience.²⁹ Thus a man sleeping under a blue quilt may dream that he is sleeping under a blue quilt; but given that there is not a direct causal connection between the quilt and his dream, he cannot truly or with warrant claim, on the basis of the images he has in his dream, that he is in fact sleeping under a blue quilt.³⁰ Thus, imagination lacks a warrant for making true or false claims because its products are not directly owed to present objects and events.³¹ It makes no claims about the latter. Rather, truth and falsity are qualities of judgements, and the latter uses imagination to assert claims about states of affairs in the world by combining and manipulating images.³²

In addition to ascribing it this distinctive non-cognitive nature, Aristotle also uses imagination to explain the self-motion of animals in terms of a practical syllogism. The process of self-motion may occur in the following sequence.

First there is a desire (*orexis*), perhaps a *proairesis*, of some specific kind—to have a drink for example, or to avoid other people's gold. One perceives (or imagines or remembers) a drink or someone else's gold, or whatever the relevant object may be. When the perception (or imagination or memory) occurs while this desire is still present ("when one is actually using his power of perception in connection with an end in view"), it immediately produces the desire (say) to drink the fluid perceived, and this desire generates the action of drinking.³³

Finally, by contrast with sensation, imagination is free: even though we cannot determine the manner of its operation, we can direct its course.

Each of these aspects of imagination finds an echo in al-Fārābī, though not always in the same manner. Where Aristotle relies on imagination to explain the syllogistic and inferential form of occurrences of self motion, al-Fārābī imputes an appetitive aspect to imagination that generates action towards objects. But as Aristotle distinguishes imagination from sensation and reasoning, so al-Fārābī too ascribes it a distinctive position among the internal senses. Like Aristotle, al-Fārābī thinks imagination is necessary to

²⁹ *De Anima*, 428a5–6.

³⁰ See *De Somniis*, 459a

³¹ *De Somniis*, 461b24

³² J.P. Portelli, in *The Concept of Imagination in Aristotle and Avicenna* (PhD thesis, McGill University, 1979), argues that for Aristotle imagination is not creative in the sense of 'constructing a single image out of other images,' even though he seems at times to suggest so. Rather, Portelli argues, the 'creative power belongs to reason and not imagination' (Cf 12ff. I am indebted to Professor Hans Daiber for bringing this thesis to my attention).

³³ John M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, (Indianapolis, 1975), 54. See also D. Black, 'The Imaginative Syllogism in Arabic Philosophy' in *Medieval Philosophy*, 1989, who proposes that the poetic syllogism should be understood on the model of a practical syllogism.

thought; and while Aristotle may give the power of manipulating images to reason and the ability to retain images to imagination,³⁴ al-Fārābī ascribes both powers to imagination. In any case, without entering into the issue of what and how much Arabic philosophers owe to Aristotle,³⁵ we may initially present al-Fārābī's conception of imagination as he sets it out in *The Perfect State* and in *Fuṣūl al-madani*. Of course, these texts concern our use of imagination (and poetry) in constructing a community, and so they will examine only particular aspects of that faculty and its products.³⁶ Nonetheless, what they tell us of imagination is crucial and can be elaborated further by reference to other texts.

In *Fuṣūl al-madani* al-Fārābī names five parts of the soul, of which imagination lies between the sensory and the appetitive while the rational stands above all the others.

The imaginative faculty is that which preserves the traces of the objects of sense after they have passed from the operation of the senses upon them. It combines some of them with others in various combinations and separates them from each other in many different ways, some true, some false, in waking and dreaming both. This faculty and the nutritive may be active in sleep, unlike the rest of the faculties.³⁷

Here he ascribes to imagination the power to retain and to manipulate images, but reserves for the appetitive faculty the power to draw us to things.³⁸ In *The Perfect State* all these functions are ascribed to the faculty

by which [man] retains the imprints of the sensibles in the soul when these sensibles are no longer perceived, this being the faculty of representation [i.e. imagination]. By this faculty he connects some of the sensibles with each other and disconnects others in different connections and disconnections, some being false, some true. An appetition towards the objects of representation is joined with this faculty as well.³⁹

³⁴ See John Portelli, *The Concept of Imagination in Aristotle and Avicenna*, 1.

³⁵ An account of the role of *phantasia/khayāl* in Arabic thought is presented by Wolfgang Heinrichs in 'Die antike Verknüpfung von Phantasia und Dichtung bei den Arabern,' *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 128 (1978), 252–298. The paper suggests that far from the philosophers simply accepting Aristotle's conception wholesale, they adapted the latter to a well developed Arabic tradition.

³⁶ This is congruent with Aristotle's claim that we need to understand imagination only to the extent necessary for virtue and vice.

³⁷ *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, Section 6 C, 30.

³⁸ *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, 'D,' 30.

³⁹ *Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State, Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī's Mabādi 'Ārā Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila, A Revised Text With Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* by Richard Walzer, (Oxford, 1985), Chapter 10, 1, Section IV, 165. See also 169, where al-Fārābī says that representation 'exercises judgement over [the sensibles it retains] for it separates them from each other and connects them with each other in various ways,' and 215, where al-Fārābī also makes clear that representation or imagination can work by imitation.

In both the instances quoted, imagination has a capacity to retain and manipulate images. As this requires us to single out and retain particular features of what sensation brings, imagination must actively discriminate between diverse aspects of sensation. Further, it must also possess the ability to retain, separate out, and join together particular features of the images we acquire through sensation. So, more than the active ability to discriminate, it is also the capacity to reorder those discriminated aspects. Later, in *The Perfect State*, al-Fārābī adds that we discriminate and reorder features of images not only to obtain images of absent particulars but also to represent such things as intelligibles and abstract concepts, psychological features such as tempers, and so on.⁴⁰ More than the ability to imitate, now the imagination is also the capacity to find appropriate images to represent what cannot be intuited.

To imagine [intelligibles, principles of being] is to have imprinted in man's soul their *images, representations of them, or matters that are imitations of them*. This is analogous to what takes place with regard to visible objects, for instance, man. We see him himself, we see a representation of him, we see his image reflected in water and other reflecting substances, and we see the image of the representation of him reflected in water and in other reflecting substances. Our seeing him is like the intellect's cognition of the principles of beings, of happiness, and so forth; *while our seeing the reflection of the man in water and our seeing a representation of him is like imagination, for our seeing a representation of him or our seeing his reflection in a mirror is seeing that which is an imitation of him. Similarly, when we imagine those things, we are in fact having a cognition of matters that are imitations of them rather than a cognition of them themselves.*⁴¹

Clearly this capacity to find images for items that we do not simply obtain through sensation makes imagination a very versatile faculty. Like Aristotle, al-Fārābī holds that imagination is necessary for all thought.⁴² Yet its role in facilitating our mental operations on intelligibles goes some way beyond merely presenting images of absent particulars. For where imagination not only discriminates and manipulates the parts and wholes of images gained in sensation but also finds images appropriate to intelligibles, allowing us to represent what cannot simply be imitated, the standards used in the first differ radically from those appropriate to thought about intelligibles.⁴³

⁴⁰ 215, see the Section on Prophecy and Divination.

⁴¹ 40, Italics added, al-Fārābī, 'The Political Regime,' *Medieval Political Philosophy*, Edited by Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, (Ithaca, 1963). See also *Kiṭāb al-ʿAlfāz*, Sections 42–5, 88–91.

⁴² *Kiṭāb al-ʿAlfāz*, Sections 42–5, 88, 93–5.

⁴³ See also *Intentions of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, by al-Fārābī, where imagination 'abstracts.' D. Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, (Leiden, 1988), 240.

To explain: images are not always iconic in that they do not 'look like' what they are images of. The imagination may retain an image of a visual sensation of a tree, so that we can loosely describe the visual image as 'looking like' the tree. But the imagination also retains images of tactile and olfactory sensations which do not 'look like' their textures and odours; and the ability to discriminate images is a matter of distinguishing the taste of an apple from its texture and both from its colour, depending on our senses and the information they provide. Here, in spite of the qualitative difference between the image and what it is an image of, given that the imagination discriminates and retains images, we can point to our sensory powers as a standard for imagination. But our manipulation of images and their use in thought cannot depend on the same standard. It does not reproduce our experience of an object but seeks to go beyond the particular experience to reproduce something else by manipulating, combining, disconnecting, and realigning aspects of our imagined sensations. Here the standards for successful manipulation will depend on our use of the constructed image rather than simply on how well imagination reproduces our original experience. Al-Fārābī provides one standard when he says that images are useful so far as they allow us to think of intelligibles. In effect images serve as signs present to the mind that remind us of what they signify,⁴⁴ and we may expect that the relation of signs to signifieds depends on the psychology and form of life involved in the use of a particular language to grasp intelligibles.⁴⁵ At other times imagination works to facilitate our conception of objects by providing images resembling the object in some significant respect—for example the captain of a ship, the commander of an army, and the governor of a city resemble each other in the relation they bear to the organizations they lead.⁴⁶ Imagination finds yet another standard in its motive power, generating an 'appetition towards ... objects,'⁴⁷ and is successful so far as it results in an intended movement.

All these standards—and there may be others, depending on the functions we allow imagination in our thought and action—are not provided by imagination itself. Like Aristotle, al-Fārābī explains the imagination by our use of it in assertions, persuasion, and other linguistically and logically denotable modes. He does not distinguish, say, imagination from sensation or a poetic syllogism from a sophistic one by reference to their respective phenomenal properties. Nor does he explain imagination by its physiolog-

⁴⁴ *Kiṭāb al-ʿAlfāz* 88.

⁴⁵ 'It is possible to imitate these things for each group and each nation, using matters that are different in each case...', 'Political Regime,' 41.

⁴⁶ See *Kiṭāb al-ʿAlfāz*, 88.

⁴⁷ *The Perfect State*, 165.

ical location or characteristics.⁴⁸ Instead, he finds the standards for imagination in the linguistic and other behaviour it allows and orders.

By this account, imagination allows us to think about and deal with features of our experience in various ways, governed ultimately by its particular function. For example, images serve as signs for thinking of intelligibles, and so while imagination facilitates conception, so far as this yields true or false statements, it is not itself a matter of conception, and so will not permit us to make true or false claims on the basis of imagination alone. Or, by providing images which resemble an object—by providing a model—it helps us generate an accurate conception of the object; but it is not itself that accurate account in that we do not expect imaginative claims to be accurate, even if they can be precise. Similarly, by associating other images with an object and its image, imagination motivates us towards or away from the object or leads us to accept some given state of affairs, but it is neither a reasoned assent nor has clear title to knowledge of an object.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, unless we want to restrict ‘thought’ and ‘conception’ to statements that are demonstratively true, imagination resembles both because it generates a kind of acquiescence as a result of operations significantly similar to conception and conviction.

But the conviction imagination generates can never equal cognitive conviction. For al-Fārābī imagination cannot generate an accurate cognitive account of an object because it deals only with the representation of things and not with things themselves; therefore it cannot yield the kind of linguistic behaviour that is an utterance of factual statements about what is perceived. In his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, following Aristotle he argues ‘that which is not ... is imagined... For the imagination about [that thing] is not that it exists, but that it is non-existent.’⁵⁰ As he goes on to explain,

if a thing is said to be imagined it is excluded from existence. For our imagining it means that we picture it in the mind without its existing. If we raise in our minds something which exists, we do not imagine it but know it...[I]f something is said to be only imagined, it follows that it is non-existent.⁵¹

Accordingly, by definition what is imagined is something we produce, perhaps by deriving the representation in our minds from our experiences, but which we know to be false so far as what we represent does not actually exist. If it did exist, presumably its presence in our minds would have a

⁴⁸ That the imagination has a particular location in the brain makes no contribution to explaining its function. I am indebted to Malcolm Schofield's paper on ‘Aristotle on Imagination’ for these points about Aristotle's approach.

⁴⁹ The relation of imagination to *taṣdīq* and *tasawwur* is central to Black's thesis, *The Logical Dimensions Of Rhetoric and Poetics*, Cf p303ff.

⁵⁰ *Al-Fārābī's Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 156.

⁵¹ *Al-Fārābī's Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 157.

source in some faculty such as sensation rather than imagination.⁵² Thus, we may produce 'a quasi-likeness of [Homer] derived from <our knowledge of other human> individuals but not from his own features and form. The same applies if after having once seen someone who subsequently died we imagine him afterwards.' For al-Fārābī in these cases 'we now imagine his existence, which he used to have, so that what we imagine now is false, as it does not exist.'⁵³

These claims suggest al-Fārābī restricts imagination to making claims without any ontological commitment to existence, supposing that every proposition which claims truth or falsity must be an implicit claim about an existing or potentially existent state of affairs in the world. However, later al-Fārābī phrases his claim in a different way, and his conception of imagination may seem to have changed. For he says of imagination that

even if 'is' is used in the sense that the picture of <the non-existent thing> exists in the imagination, it is not true to say of it that it exists, because the meaning of 'imagination' in it [*fīhi*], and of saying that it is imagined, *is not that it exists, but the meaning of 'imagination' is that it is non-existent*. That it 'is only imagined' means the same as saying that it *is non-existent* without qualification.⁵⁴

This claim clarifies the special case of what it means to say 'X is *only* imagined:' only then do we deny existence. But by emphasizing that what is only imagined does not exist, al-Fārābī leaves open the possibility of using imagination to make truthful claims about objects which do not exist, as when we speak of someone who has since died. We could speak truthfully about al-Jāhīz, imagining this no longer existing person, and thus could surely imagine what is non-existent—or essay a thought which is a false if it is seen as a claim about al-Jāhīz existing—while also using that existentially false statement to make other verifiable claims.

When we think of intelligibles too, something similar must obtain, for we use imagination to think about them. Consequently, al-Fārābī cannot simply exclude this use of the faculty from making true or false claims and cannot restrict it to claims about non-existent things. The reply to this objection is straightforward: when we use imagination to make verifiable claims, their truth cannot be a result of their imaginative status. In those instances we use imagination to satisfy standards derived from our cognitive interest. For itself, however, imagination avoids such commitments, and al-Fārābī's talk of what occurs '*only* in imagination' clarifies just that distinction between the uses we may make of imagination and the validity of the imagined state of affairs. He understands the phrases 'Homer is imagined' and 'Homer is found [*yūjad*] imagined' as saying that 'his existence *is only*

⁵² Al-Fārābī's *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 157.

⁵³ Al-Fārābī's *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 157.

⁵⁴ Al-Fārābī's *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 157.

in our imagination.⁵⁵ That is, 'in neither case is it true to say of him that he "is found" without qualification. It is false both when "is found" is used as a hypartic verb and when it is used to express that his picture exists in the imagination.'⁵⁶ Consequently, so far as it exists only in the imagination, nothing true follows from it, for whatever is asserted of anything in the imagination is not actually asserted or testable in reality, and indeed is false of reality. In other words, 'true in imagination' is a misnomer for what is false in reality so far as the latter bears connotations of veracity about any existing thing.

Al-Fārābī explains this point through a number of analogies with sight. In the *Canons* he compares imaginative imitations with looking into a mirror, which makes one 'imagine that he is seeing the likeness of a thing.'⁵⁷ And in 'The Political Regime' we saw him propose that

our seeing the reflection of a man in water and our seeing a representation of him is like imagination, for our seeing a representation of him or our seeing his reflection in a mirror is seeing that which is an imitation of him.⁵⁸

These are contrasted with our seeing the man himself, which is 'like the intellect's cognition of the principles of the beings.'⁵⁹ In both cases the imagination and its products are not themselves true or false statements because they are only images or representations of real things. We may also compare al-Fārābī's claim with Aristotle's example of the sun 'looking like' it is only a foot across, which 'embodies an imaginative comparison such as: the sun looks like a foot wide beach ball kicked high in the air (but not *very* like—for the sun looks much higher than that).'⁶⁰ It neither 'looks as if it is no bigger than a foot across, nor as a beachball would look if it were as far away as the sun.'⁶¹ The point is what it *looks* like and we speak of it and deal with our experience as an imaginative projection, with all the constraints this implies about truth and falsity being inappropriate criteria.

Finally, al-Fārābī ascribes to imagination an appetite towards its objects. In *The Catalogue of the Sciences* he says that 'through the imaginative creation (*takhyīl*) which takes place in our souls,' something happens to us which is

similar to what happens when we observe an object resembling another which we loathe. For then we right away imagine this object to be something we

⁵⁵ *Al-Fārābī's Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 157. Italics added.

⁵⁶ *Al-Fārābī's Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 157.

⁵⁷ *Canons*, 111.

⁵⁸ 'The Political Regime,' 40.

⁵⁹ 'The Political Regime,' 40.

⁶⁰ Schofield, 117.

⁶¹ Schofield 117.

loathe, and our spirit feels repelled from it, and thus we avoid it, even if we are certain that it is not in reality as it appears to us.⁶²

This claim does not fit obviously with his earlier assertion that imagination only provides images without any attendant claims to truth or falsity. Given that imagination is only representational, we could expect that an object of imagination will not generate the motivation that accompanies our experience of real objects. The fear we feel at seeing a real tiger is distinct from our response to a paper tiger. Yet, by this account, we may object, the associations that a representation bears seem sufficient to warrant some action by subjects in response to the image.

The objection assumes that we must reason about the truth or falsity of an imaginative statement before we respond to it. That is, we will not feel fear of a representation, and would know it did not prove a real threat, just because the imagination only presents images which, in a manner of speaking, are false. However, for al-Fārābī, to respond to representations we need not reason about the falsity of an image. If imagination generates an appetite towards objects, this is because the faculty operates at a pre-reflective and emotional level where images lead us to or away from objects. Accordingly, al-Fārābī's talk of appetite only develops the absence of noetic value he has ascribed to imagination, relating the latter to the action it produces. As imagination is false, it does not yield knowledge, yet as it still leads us to act, the process will be pre-reflective. Thus imaginative discourse contrasts with sophistry: the latter aims at the soul of the hearer doing the thing after a conviction of truth,⁶³ whereas imagination

aims at the soul of the hearer rising up to seek the thing imagined or flee from it, and be drawn to it or dislike it, *even without a conviction of truth*, just as a man is disgusted with something which, when he sees it, resembles what really calls forth disgust, though he is certain that what he sees is not what calls forth disgust.⁶³

However, although imagination works at this pre-reflective and emotional level, it is still ratiocinative rather than irrational. Our behaviour is appropriate to what we think we see or what a thing is seen to look like. It is not arbitrary in that respect because it depends on grasping what we respond to. Imagination may seem irrational and non-ratiocinative also because of the power of imagination to overpower reason. Al-Fārābī contrasts motivation by imagination with deliberation—with an

excellence in producing an imaginative impression [that] is employed in what causes anger and pleasure, fear and trust, in what softens the soul and hardens it, and in all the passions of the soul. With excellence in producing an imagina-

⁶² *Canons*, 116.

⁶³ *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, Section 51, 49. Italics added.

tive impression the aim is that the man should be moved to do the thing and rise up towards it, even though his knowledge of the thing necessitates the opposite of what is represented to his imagination. Many people, when they love and hate, and choose and avoid, do so by the imagination not deliberation, either because they have not deliberation naturally or have rejected it in their affairs.⁶⁴

But the conflict only occurs within the realm of ratiocinative souls, who feel the conflict of emotion and deliberation, and so does not imply that we reject ratiocination altogether.

In any case, from this brief discussion we learn that imagination is a faculty which yields images and representations that are neither sensations nor cases of reasoning. Imagination not only retains the images obtained from sensation but also discriminates between aspects of those images, separating out and reconnecting those images and their parts to construct new images. By virtue of this ability imagination enters into and facilitates reasoning about intelligibles. But in both cases it does not yield true or false statements because it produces only images and representations of the real thing rather than the objects themselves. Moreover, the faculty of imagination also generates a motivation towards or away from objects by associating them with images and representations of things which evoke diverse emotive reactions. Thus, in essentials, even if there are differences, al-Fārābī reproduces Aristotle's account of imagination, placing the faculty between sense and reason, denying it the power to make true or false statements, but allowing it to retain, discriminate, and manipulate images. He proposes that its standards come from reason and sense, and also holds that the faculty generates an appetite for objects and so motivates action. Overall, al-Fārābī, like Aristotle, maintains the ratiocinative character of imagination and its parts in the human soul.

Ibn Sīnā questions a number of these connections. While he respects the different functions which Aristotle thinks the soul must have if we are to explain thought and action, he agrees with the Stagirite neither in his account of the functions nor in the purposes he makes them serve. Like al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā emphasizes the importance of prophecy and gives a commensurate slant to imagination. Further, he provides a principle for ordering and distinguishing those faculties, and his careful analysis of their differences allows imagination a more determinedly rational role in syllogisms. We shall deal with the last issue more thoroughly in the next chapter. First we must examine how Ibn Sīnā conceives of the imagination as an internal sense.

Ibn Sīnā considers the imagination in various texts, including *Kitāb al-Shifā'*, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, and *Kitāb al-Nafs*. Some discussion also occurs in *Remarks and Admonitions*, where he identifies the basis for accepting

⁶⁴ *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, 49.

'imagined propositions' as premises. Most recent discussion of the internal senses, including imagination, has centred on the *Kitāb al-Najāt*.⁶⁵ There Ibn Sinā distinguishes between the internal senses by reference to modes of abstraction. In an hierarchy where a purely intellectual grasp of intelligibles is the pinnacle of reasoning, but where in crucial respects thought depends on sensations which the body acquires in experience, Ibn Sinā proposes that we progress from sensations to intelligibles by abstracting features of our experience. Each step in this abstraction relies on a distinctive faculty capable of some necessary operation.

Ibn Sinā relegates our perceptions of the external world to the internal senses. The first internal sense is fantasy or *sensus communis*, which provides sensations as the first level of knowledge by abstracting 'the form from matter along with these accidents and its relationship with matter.'⁶⁶ Fantasy responds to the particular, accepting its concrete occurrence with a given form and its material accidents. In other words, sensation is a mental event, in that it is the perception of a tree rather than the tree itself, and is abstracted from matter—the image of a brown tree is not itself brown or covered in bark—yet occurs in the particular, and so is a perception of a particular tree, with all its contingent features or material accidents. Next, to analyze this sensation, to classify and order its formal features and to abstract these from their material accidents, we must both retain the images given by sensation and manipulate them by disconnecting parts and re-aligning them according to their formal or other qualities. But the two functions of retaining and manipulating forms are not identical, even if in the Aristotelian scheme the first is necessary for the second. Moreover, this retentive faculty depends on fantasy for material to retain, for it cannot itself receive sensation; and Ibn Sinā denotes the retentive faculty as 'representation.'

By this distinction Ibn Sinā splits up the imagination as conceived by al-Fārābī. For the latter, imagination included retaining, reproducing, and manipulating images gained in sensation. By distinguishing representation from the other activities, Ibn Sinā raises an important doubt about the coherence of al-Fārābī's conception. His distinction shows that al-Fārābī conceived of imagination as a 'family resemblance' of activities and powers, which are compatible with each other and help make sense of our thought about objects and events, but that the imagination fails as a precise instrument of knowledge. Al-Fārābī's conception may yield an acceptable

⁶⁵ Cf Black, 'The Logical Dimension of Rhetoric and Poetics,' Portelli, *Imagination in Aristotle and Avicenna*, and Summers, *The Judgement of Sense*, all cited above; see also F. Rahman, Introduction and Notes in *Avicenna's Psychology, An English translation of Kitāb al-Najāt, Book II, Chapter VI with Historico-philosophical Notes and Textual Improvements on the Cairo edition*, (Oxford, 1952), and H.A. Wolfson, 'The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew Philosophical Texts,' *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol 28, (1935), 69–133, and 'The Terms *Tasawwur* and *Taṣdīq* in Arabic Philosophy and Their Greek, Latin and Hebrew Equivalents,' *The Moslem World*, Vol 33, (1943), 1–15.

⁶⁶ *Avicenna's Psychology*, 39.

explanation of poetic discourse and its validity, but Ibn Sinā's distinctions question just how to inter-relate those different activities constituting imagination in his predecessor's account. For by distinguishing a retentive faculty from a manipulative power, Ibn Sinā points to a qualitative difference in activities, where conceptual thought is a matter of classifying objects on account of their qualities, while retaining images needs no such power. And so far as faculties signify the different tasks necessary to having experience, Ibn Sinā's distinctions can be shown to imply that al-Fārābī does not have a sufficiently detailed grasp of the epistemological requirements that our psychology must satisfy. We saw that, in the context of his quasi-Aristotelian psychology, al-Fārābī dealt with the epistemological issues involved in gaining knowledge—of carrying out rational operations on intelligibles and of thought and conceptualization as a matter of classifying objects and their qualities—by giving a psychological explanation. He pointed to the faculties we possess, including the faculty of imagination, and gave the latter a number of different tasks. Because the same psychological faculty carried out these different tasks, it seemed, there was no need to examine or explain the inter-relation between the diverse epistemological tasks involved in getting rational knowledge.

In the same context Ibn Sinā seeks more precision. He criticizes al-Fārābī's conception of the imagination by showing that different epistemological functions are involved, which cannot all depend on the same psychological faculty—given that psychological faculties are separate faculties because they carry out different epistemological operations—and that we must distinguish psychological faculties appropriate to those diverse epistemological functions. Accordingly, to conceptualise our experience, to analyze and classify it by its qualities, we must have and re-evolve images of what we experience—so we must have sensation and representation. Next, we must also be able to discriminate and separate out as well as recombine parts of images so that we can classify and conceptualize them—and so must possess imagination and reason. In the case of a green apple, we must be able to analyze its colour, separating this quality from others, or the image from other images, and must classify it with other green things, to show that this concept applies to other objects, or must relate the image to other images of green. That is, the epistemological task of conceptualising and grasping the objects requires the psychological ability to 'combine certain things with others' and 'to separate some things from others as it chooses.'⁶⁷ This activity depends on abstracting and realigning features of represented images. Both these tasks rely on the same ability to manipulate parts and whole of images, so they do not need two distinct faculties. And Ibn Sinā denotes this epistemological function, which is preliminary and necessary to conceptualisation, as the 'imagination.' By means of the latter we can produce images of objects we have not seen in fact, constructing them out

⁶⁷ *Avicenna's Psychology*, 31.

of parts of experience, and can also generate images for intelligibles and prophecies.⁶⁸

Following sensation, representation, and imagination, the fourth faculty Ibn Sinā identifies is *wahm* or estimation. This perceives non-sensible 'intentions that exist in the individual sensible objects.'⁶⁹ For example, a sheep flees from a wolf because it estimates that the predator may do it harm or, similarly, cares for its young because it estimates a non-material quality of need in the young it perceives.⁷⁰ Such estimation is other than representation or imagination, though we might speculate that imagination can construct images for estimation to construe. Moreover, as estimation only perceives intentions, it does not retain these perceptions, which becomes the task of a fifth faculty—retention—which, like representation, saves these estimations.

Of these last two faculties we should note that neither necessarily depends on imagination.⁷¹ Estimation need only rely on representations, and so the faculty that retains *wahm* too will need representation only. Nevertheless imagination can also affect estimation and, we may suppose, will provide material for retention too. Moreover, in a sense imagination, estimation, and retention are all varieties of practical reason, where estimation and retention generate action while imagination works to realise prophecies. Ibn Sinā holds that practical reason uses imagination 'to deduce plans concerning transitory things and to deduce human arts.'⁷² Both tasks of deducing human arts and plans concerning transitory things need imagination to construe and explore possibilities. Arts and transitory things involve both finding solutions to particular problems and exercising skill, which depend on our conceiving and exploring the different possibilities present in given material, and require us to manipulate images etc..

Similarly, a prophet must translate his direct access to intelligibles for the masses to understand. His inspiration is not open to rational analysis

⁶⁸ Cf *Avicenna's Psychology*, 35ff. Note also that Ibn Sinā elsewhere (Section II Chapter 6, *Avicenna's Psychology*) suggests a different order for these faculties, so that imagination comes to serve representation and is dependent on the *sensus communis*, I propose that this new classification only represented a genetic account of the psychological faculties and their relation in responding to prophecies. The latter must be communicated into our ordinary experience or become ineffective moral imperatives incapable of being followed. Accordingly, the imagination produces symbols, images, and words to convey the prophet's insights; and for these to be effective, they must resemble and make sense in our actual experience—given in representation—and must not disrupt estimation. Here, to realize insights, the imagination must accept representations and what is given to its retentive capacity, yet must produce new images, derived from sensation, for it cannot simply rely on the old given forms. By producing new images from ordinary sensation, such that the images are similar enough to yet new to the retentive faculty, imagination both uses *sensus communis* and serves representation.

⁶⁹ *Avicenna's Psychology*, 31.

⁷⁰ *Avicenna's Psychology*, 31.

⁷¹ See also 'On the Soul' in Gutas, *Avicenna and The Aristotelian Tradition*.

⁷² *Avicenna's Psychology*, 32. See also Portelli, 'Imagination in Aristotle and Avicenna,' 54. The latter seems to me to misconstrue the need for imagination here.

but 'overflows into the imagination,'⁷³ which finds appropriate images and words to communicate the Prophet's insights. To do so, imagination must manipulate given representations, ordering them to suit the special Divine spirit that ordinary mortals lack and which are probably not embodied in ordinary mortals' representations. And both these tasks, of deducing the arts and communicating the Prophet's insights, will need representations and imagination, for where insight and plan are not related to our ordinary experience, they lose their effectiveness. Similarly, they need estimation, without which any implications and intentions embodied in plans remain unknown. Moreover, imagination is useful to our 'practice' of reasoning because it makes thought about intelligibles available to those less than fully capable of abstract reasoning.

Finally, Ibn Sinā distinguishes between sensitive and rational imagination, showing that the operation of imagination that concerns us occurs within the domain of human reasoning. Sensitive imagination belongs to animals while rational imagination, we may suggest, comprises the ratiocinative faculty whose exercise and deployment suits estimation and, ultimately, reasoning about intelligibles. While animals have estimation, they lack reason, and for them imagination can never embody intelligibles or communicate them to other members of the community, and so on.⁷⁴ Only a rational imagination, such as human beings possess, needs and can make these connections.

We shall consider Ibn Sinā's account of the imagination again in the next chapter. For the present, this brief discussion tells us something of the conceptions of imagination and its correlates that Aristotle, al-Fārābī, and Ibn Sinā favoured. This prepares us to return to al-Fārābī's conception of poetics and his talk of 'assent' and 'syllogisms,' armed now with some better sense of what he means by imagination.

⁷³ *Avicenna's Psychology*, 36.

⁷⁴ See Wolfson on sensitive and rational imagination in 'Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic and Hebrew Philosophical Texts' and Portelli *Imagination in Aristotle and Avicenna*, Chapter 3, for a discussion of Ibn Sinā's conception of imagination. In comparing Ibn Sinā to Aristotle, quoting Gilson, he also points out that the fourth mode of abstraction that operates on the intellect is not 'picking out something' but is an emanation (Cf 90,n9). I have not entered into the question of how much and what Ibn Sinā or al-Fārābī owe to Aristotle because both Arabic philosophers are working within the structure of Aristotelian thought. Ibn Sinā is certainly more independent than al-Fārābī. As a matter of principle he relies on his own intuition (See Gutas, op.cit: this is true not just of his work on poetics) and feels the epistemological issues more acutely; but for all his development of these concepts, his basis arguably remains Aristotelian. Whether and how far this comparison with the Stagirite is important or in need of being detailed is for others to decide. See for example the discussion in Portelli, *Imagination in Aristotle and Avicenna*, and Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, for a fairly thorough account of their relation in terms of poetics and philosophy respectively.

FROM IMAGINATION TO POETIC DISCOURSE

In *The Catalogue of the Sciences* al-Fārābī defines poetic discourses in terms of imagination as

those [discourses] which consist of elements with the function of [generating imaginative assent] to a circumstance or characteristic, good or bad, of the object one speaks about, such as beauty, ugliness, loftiness, baseness, or any other similar to these.⁷⁵

That is, he does not define the 'poetic' simply by reference to aesthetic qualities such as beauty but rather stresses our reactions to other qualities too, based on the operation of imagination. This basis needs further explanation; for while poetic discourses are imaginative, it does not follow that the use of imagination in a discourse makes it poetic. As we saw, even thought about intelligibles depends on this faculty.⁷⁶

If the fact that poetic discourses are imaginative does not distinguish them from others, we may ask what does. In answer al-Fārābī explains that 'poetic discourses may be classified according either to their rhythmic meters or their poetic concepts.'⁷⁷ For him these are open to an analysis in which we can learn about their nature and purpose by studying the operations we carry out with them. An analysis of their

metrical rhythms ... is a study that corresponds to the musician and prosodist according to the language in which the discourses are composed and the kind of music used in them. Their classification from the point of view of the poetic concepts used is made in the form of a detailed analysis, and thus corresponds to the expert in allusions, the interpreter of poetic compositions, the investigator of poetic concepts and the student of poetry of the various nations and in different schools.⁷⁸

Central to poetic discourse is its use of poetic devices in communication, where they have a form and manner comparable to playing music. The poetic concepts or devices that give poetry its 'satiric, panegyric, competitive, enigmatic, comic, lyrical, descriptive,' and other forms, all appear 'in books not difficult to come by and which make it unnecessary to discuss them at too great length.' And while we can examine these inde-

⁷⁵ *Canons*, 116. I have substituted 'generating imaginative assent' for 'creating an illusion' in Cantarino's translation because the latter seems to emphasise a concern with truth and the veridical aspects of imitation rather than the play of imagination that is central to this branch of Arabic poetics. (See also Heinrichs, *Antike Verknüpfung*). Dahiyat provides a translation similar to mine in his edition and translation of *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*.

⁷⁶ See *Kitāb al-ʿAlfāz*, Section 90–1.

⁷⁷ *Canons*, 112.

⁷⁸ *Canons*, 112.

pendently of the imaginative nature of poetic discourse, we need to explain the latter if the use of the former is to have any validity.

To show how poetic discourses work, al-Fārābī examines how they generate subjects' imaginative assent to a 'circumstance or characteristic ... of the object one speaks about.'⁷⁹ His explanation of our responses depends on both the manipulative power of imagination and its appetite. Poetic discourse brings to mind an image or imagined representation that lacks truth value and is constructed out of sensations we had and retained but which still have an effect upon us. 'When we hear poetic discourse, something happens to us.' At a pre-rational but ratiocinative level, the image and its parts still carry some connotations, and al-Fārābī hints that these associations relate to our original experience of objects. Something happens to us 'through the imaginative creation [representation, *takhyīl*] which takes place in our souls.' For example, if a person we hated always wore a particular kind of robe such that we associated these robes with him and our dislike, then 'when we observe an object resembling [these clothes] which we loathe,' then we will transfer our dislike of the man to whomever is wearing similar robes. 'For we right away imagine these objects to be something we loathe, and our spirit feels repelled from it, and thus we avoid it, even if we are certain that it is not in reality as it appears to us.'⁸⁰ In other words, we associate feelings, say of distaste, with objects in our experience, and then 'imagine' that other objects resembling the first are similar to the first object also in being distasteful. Similarly in poetic discourse we construct images or representations, inter-relating feelings appropriate to or associated with diverse parts of the constructed image, and thereby generate a (perhaps calculated) response in subjects. When subjects hear that discourse the appetitive power of imagination repels or attracts them to the image.⁸¹ The imaginative associations we accept are our imaginative assent. Moreover, as we saw earlier, this attraction or repulsion can take different forms, including pleasure in beauty or feelings of loftiness or baseness.⁸²

In the *Canons* al-Fārābī expands on this claim by reference to similes and comparisons, which are themselves comparable to syllogisms. Poets who 'excel in similes and comparisons' by reason of their familiarity with

⁷⁹ *Canons*, 116.

⁸⁰ *Catalogue*, in Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 118.

⁸¹ 'Poetic discourses... influence our imagination, even though we know the object not to be thus, in the same way as when we are certain that the object is as the discourse has shown it to be to us. And quite often man's actions follow what he imagines more than what he knows or believes. Indeed, his opinion or knowledge is frequently contrary to what he imagines, and yet his action in the matter goes in accordance with his imagination, not with his belief or even his knowledge, as happens to us when we contemplate mimetic representations of things or things similar to others' *Canons*, 116.

⁸² And elsewhere al-Fārābī both relates these feelings with particular poetic devices of imaginative poetic composition and contends that they have an hierarchy which follows from the moral purpose they serve.

the art of poetry 'truly deserve the name of "syllogizing" poets,' he proposes, and then explains the success of this syllogizing in quasi-logical terms. A poet

compares A with B and B with C because there is a close proper and known resemblance between A and B, and the same between B and C, he then goes on to arrange the speech about this comparison in such a manner as to impress upon the mind of the listener and the reciters the resemblance between A and C, although in principle it is a remote one.⁸³

The explanation is instructive: it says that imaginative assent 'impress[es] upon the mind of the listener and the reciters the resemblance between A and C.'⁸⁴ The poetic syllogism succeeds by bringing the subject to see or acquiesce to the resemblance (on the basis of an *imaginative conception of the premises*) proposed in a simile or comparison.⁸⁵

Further, al-Fārābī may not have clarified the 'degree of excellence' of poetic comparisons. He accepts that they can depend on 'skill in the art, to the point where [the poet] is able to present two greatly different objects as though they resembled each other, through the addition of some elements as are known to poets'⁸⁶ or on possession of an 'excellent gift for making comparisons and similes.' But this explanation displays the nature of poetic syllogisms. And although he has not clearly identified the acquiescence involved in this syllogism, we may propose that this agreement consists in the feelings referred to in *Catalogue of the Sciences*. Indeed al-Fārābī's talk of syllogisms and comparisons sets out the logic of those feelings. And to consider whether his explanation is successful, we may now return to consider 'poetic syllogisms,' to see how well the psychological account he has given of poetic discourse fits with its logical status.

FROM POETIC DISCOURSE TO POETIC SYLLOGISMS

In addition to rhythmic meters and poetic devices, poetic discourse uses imaginative speech, associating images and representations to garner feelings. Their imaginative nature prevents these statements from claiming truth or falsity yet, because they are ratiocinative and appetitive, allows them to generate intelligible responses. So we may know that the existence of unicorns is 'totally and utterly false' but can still understand and appreciate a poem in which virgins subdue them.

⁸³ *Canons*, 115.

⁸⁴ *Canons*, 115.

⁸⁵ We shall return to this issue later, once we see where it is supposed to lead.

⁸⁶ *Canons*, 115.

The imaginative nature of poetic discourse is crucial to the three main occasions in which al-Fārābī seeks to distinguish poetic from other syllogisms.⁸⁷ One occurs in the 'Introductory *Risālah* on Logic.'⁸⁸

A First characterisation of Poetic Discourse.

In the 'Introductory *Risālah* on Logic' al-Fārābī argues as follows.

Syllogism is employed either in discoursing with another or in a man's bringing out something in his own mind. It is characteristic of philosophy to employ syllogism in both matters, while the rest of the five [syllogistic arts] each employs much syllogism in discoursing with another. Philosophical discourse is called demonstrative. It seeks to teach and make clear the truth in the things which are such that they afford certain knowledge. Dialectical discourse seeks to overcome the interlocutor in the things that are known and notorious. Sophistic discourse seeks to overcome the interlocutor by a supposed victory in the things which are thought ostensibly to be known, without being so. The aim is to draw the interlocutor and hearer into error, likewise falsification and trickery, and that the speaker should produce the opinion of himself that he is one who possesses wisdom and knowledge, without being so. Therefore the name of the art is derived from the false wisdom which is thought to be wisdom without being so, viz. wisdom and falsification. Rhetorical discourse seeks to satisfy the hearer by what will partially content his soul, without reaching certainty. Poetical discourse seeks to represent the object and suggest it in speech, as the art of sculpture represents the different kinds of animals and other objects by bodily labours.⁸⁹

The extract makes clear some features of poetry. As one of the five non-demonstrative arts, poetry uses syllogisms in 'discoursing with another.' It is essentially communicative rather than a matter of 'a man's bringing out something in his own mind.' Being communicative in this way, poetry is also social. Given that imagination is communicative and pre-rational but ratiocinative, imaginative poetic discourses can work to 'bring about something in another mind,' though the change will result from its ratiocinative features rather than simply from its pre-rational appetite. Accordingly, the syllogistic nature of poetic discourse depends on the power of imagination to retain and manipulate representations. It actively discriminates diverse parts of the representations and realigns them in accordance with ratiocinative standards. That representations and images are meaningful is seen in our appropriate reactions, showing that for al-Fārābī meaningfulness denotes the way we act (rather than some quality

⁸⁷ This holds even if they do not entirely remove doubts about whether poetic discourse is syllogistic at all.

⁸⁸ The chronology of his attempts is not vital to explaining them.

⁸⁹ *Risālah*, 231.

of experience itself). As al-Fārābī identifies syllogisms by that ratiocinative power, we can see why he wants to include poetic discourse among the syllogisms, and in the *Canons* he reaffirms that poetic discourse 'belongs to a certain kind of syllogism or what follows a syllogism.'⁹⁰

But the rest of al-Fārābī's description of poetical discourses is unclear. The intention to represent objects could make poetic discourse like demonstration to the extent that both represent objects correctly. According to the theory al-Fārābī favours, words stand for intelligibles which, in turn, result from and bear a direct relation to objects. When composed in statements or judgements, these words bear a grammatically sound order which is appropriate to the logical relations between intelligibles that, in turn, affirm the relevant relation between objects and events. And so far as poetry and cognition both use words to represent intelligibles and objects, they are alike. Indeed, any use of the five syllogistic forms for 'discoursing with another' depends on representing intelligibles and their objects in speech, and even cognitive claims are representational because they differ from and, as speech, stand for intelligibles of things. Once we accept a distinction between discourse and reality, and maintain that discourses represent reality, the most successful of which is demonstration and the least is poetry, then poetry is not any more representational because it is discourse. Consequently, we do not successfully distinguish poetic discourse by its representing and suggesting objects.⁹¹ Similarly, by comparing poetic discourse to the art of sculpture, which 'represents different kinds of animals and other objects,' al-Fārābī fails to distinguish poetry from other kinds of representation.

Given this role of representation, if al-Fārābī maintains that poetic discourse 'represent[s] objects and things,' he must not simply mean that it represents where others do something else, but that it involves a particular kind of representation. And clearly the kind of representation involved depends on the nature of poetic discourse or language and its validity in syllogistic form. Al-Fārābī expands a little on poetry's ability to 'represent the object and suggest it in speech' in the *Canons of the Art of Poetry*, which is another occasion where he distinguishes poetic discourse from other syllogisms.

A Second Characterisation of Poetic Discourse.

In the *Canons of the Art of Poetry* al-Fārābī identifies poetic discourses negatively as not demonstrative, nor argumentative, nor rhetorical, nor so-phistic,⁹² and positively as imitative, logically false, yet meaningful. His ar-

⁹⁰ *Canons*, 111.

⁹¹ But as we shall see later, that is in fact just what we do.

⁹² *Canons*, 111.

gument is set out as a set of distinctions, the first of which turns on meaningfulness.

Phonetic compounds are either meaningful or not. The meaningful phonetic compounds can be found isolated or in composition. Those in composition may or may not form statements. Of these statements, some are categorical and some are not. Of the categorical ones, some are true and some are false. Of the false ones, some bring to the minds of the listeners the object referred to as a direct statement, while others bring to their minds the *imitation of the object*. Those are the poetic discourses.⁹³

Having established his concern with meaningful speech—phonetic compounds—first al-Fārābī distinguishes, say, the utterances of a parrot or goat⁹⁴ from ordinary rational human speech by reference to the latter's possession of meaning. Second, he holds that we establish meanings by making assertions in statements or judgements and by the direct reference which phonetic compounds or words—'mortal,' 'bachelor,' 'man,' 'unmarried'—bear to intelligibles.⁹⁵ In this case, third, discourse concerns statements in which we make assertions by ordering words according to grammatical and logical rules that capture the intelligible relations which we want to signify.

To this account, fourth, al-Fārābī adds the idea of a categorical statement. In his 'Paraphrase of the Categories' and '*Short Commentary on the Prior Analytics*' he defines a categorical statement as 'one in which a judgement is affirmed and definitely affirmed, be it affirmatively or negatively; for example, the statements "Zaid walks" and "Amr is not going."⁹⁶ By contrast, conditional statements are hypotheticals, saying that 'if the sun has risen, it is day' or setting other conditions such as 'when' or 'where,' or expressing a disjunct 'It is either night or day.' Fifth, al-Fārābī goes on to distinguish between those categorical statements which are true from those which are false, and to point to a feature of their nature as statements. Now, whether a categorical statement is true or false, it must propose a relation between intelligibles or it becomes merely meaningless. And while categorical statements therefore bring to mind the objects and events being affirmed, not every bringing to mind correctly conceives of the state of those objects and events. Thus, we may state that 'The pomegranate is a blue fruit,' and so bring to mind the appropriate intelligibles, yet find that 'the

⁹³ *Canons*, 110, italics added. This classification and another we shall discuss below owe a great deal to the tradition of classification found in various texts on logic. Cf. the discussion on the Alexanderine tradition of Ammonius and the Anonymous Logic in Ebbesen, S., *Commentaries and Commentators on Aristotle's Sophistici Elenchi. A Study of Post-Aristotelian Ancient and Medieval Writings on Fallacies*, (Volumes 1–3), (Leiden, 1981).

⁹⁴ See al-Fārābī's *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione* for al-Fārābī's interpretation of these passages.

⁹⁵ See Chapter Two, above.

⁹⁶ *Al-Fārābī's Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 53.

object referred to as a direct statement' is not in fact blue. While only by bringing the intelligibles and their objects to mind do we succeed in making a statement, nevertheless not every such bringing to mind yields a true statement. The false statements bring to mind the objects and characteristics referred to, but the relation does not obtain in fact even if it is affirmed in thought.

Nor is this the only way that statements can be false. Sixth, al-Fārābī maintains that poetic discourses bring to mind the 'imitation of the object.' Apparently some statements are false not merely because they affirm what is not the case in the world but are false also because what they affirm is not a claim about the world so much as an 'imitation of the object.' That is, while in terms of truth and falsity they must be false, because what they affirm is not the case, nevertheless these poetic discourses are only 'apparently affirmative' because they merely 'imitat[e] an object.'

Although al-Fārābī elsewhere explains that 'imitation' has a close relation to imagination, he has failed to characterise poetic discourse adequately in this part of the *Canons*. We learn from his set of distinctions that poetic statements are meaningful and categorical. But that does not tell us much beyond the place poetic discourse has in the pantheon of true or false statements. Here al-Fārābī seems to bring in poetic discourses as an afterthought: their status does not follow from the distinctions he has made earlier. The specific reasons why poetic statements are false depends on more than just the fact they are not direct statements. But he does not examine those specific reasons in this set of distinctions. He does not explain the rules for secondary, indirect, or apparently affirmative statements. Therefore he leaves our understanding of poetic discourses incomplete because we do not know what kind of false statement they are. Nevertheless, from al-Fārābī's two sets of distinctions we learn that poetic discourse is communicative, representational or imitative, meaningful yet logically or noetically false. By comparing poetry with cognitive discourse he also suggests that poetic discourse is categorical yet, in spite of its representational nature, is also syllogistic in some manner.

A supposition underlying all these connections is that poetic discourse has to do with the imagination so far as the latter is involved in representation and imitation. And its imaginative character may explain that poetic discourse is peculiarly false. For al-Fārābī 'that which is not ... is imagined ... for the imagination about it not that it exists but that it is non-existent.'⁹⁷ This suggests that poetic discourse yields only representations or images rather than claims about real things. In other words, poetic discourse works to bring about something in another mind not by presenting true or false claims but by seeking 'to represent the object and suggest it in speech, as the art of sculpture represents the different kinds of animal and

⁹⁷ Al-Fārābī's *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, 157.

other objects by bodily labours.⁹⁸ Like sculpture, movement, and other forms of expression, imaginative speech brings to mind only the 'imitation of the objects,' giving them appetitive and other associations they do not have in reality.

These quotations suggest that the falsity of poetic discourse follows simply from its imaginative nature. For we now understand that it is categorical but false for reasons other than for making untrue claims about states of affairs in the world. Rather, poetic discourse is false because, being imaginative, it makes no claims about the world at all but restricts itself to a particular domain. Its objects do not have any part in the contingent or necessary chain of efficient or formal causes and events in reality that lead us to search out and explain the diverse natures of existing things. As they exist only in imagination, we cannot consider poetic representations for the effective connections they might have with ordinary objects and events in reality. At best, what happens 'through the imaginative creation [*takhyīl*] which takes place in our souls' is 'similar to what happens when we observe an object resembling another.'⁹⁹ But the explanation of both these events will differ, for the one occurs in imagination and is a result of the way our minds operate. And to signify this distinctive feature of imaginative poetic discourses, al-Fārābī identifies them as imitative, showing that they may resemble but are not thereby a part of the events and objects which make up reality. Being imaginative, poetic imitations or representations are false yet categorical—and false yet do not possess an interest in corresponding with states of affairs in the world.¹⁰⁰

A Third Characterisation of Poetic Discourse.

Arguably if poetic discourse is imaginative, absolutely false, yet appreciable, it can be so only because it is representational; and the latter provides the third mode of characterising poetic discourse. To describe this discourse legitimately as bringing about something in another mind and as imaginative, we must show that the connections we make, the imaginative construction and construal that obtain, the appetite it generates, and its meaningfulness, are valid rather than simple psychological associations. And it is valid, we may argue, because it is analogical:

poetic discourse is the one which is neither demonstrative, nor argumentative, nor rhetorical, nor sophistic. And yet it belongs to a certain kind of syllogism or what follows the syllogism. By "follows" I mean deduction, image, intuition, or something similar with the same force as analogy.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ *Risalah*, 231.

⁹⁹ *Canons*, 116.

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix 3.

¹⁰¹ *Canons*, 111.

That is, poetic discourse is syllogistic because it uses representations or images in a deductive but analogical form, and to understand the discourse more fully, we must explain its representational analogical form.¹⁰²

In the *Canons* al-Fārābī affirms that categorical statements are

either analogical or not. The analogical [statement] is such either potentially or in reality. The potential one is such either through deduction or by representation. Representation is mostly used in the art of poetry. Thus it is clear that poetic discourse is a representation.¹⁰³

As we saw in the last chapter, he argued that a successful analogy or argument by transfer depends on a syllogistic inference. And it appears now that this inference may refer to an actual or possible state of affairs.

So much may be acceptable; but al-Fārābī has also claimed that we obtain the potential analogical statement either by deduction or by representation. The first reaffirms that successful transfer or analogy uses a syllogism in which the middle term is of the form 'All As are Bs,' so that we can express the analogical statement in terms of a Barbara syllogism. In the *Commentary on the Prior Analytic*, al-Fārābī chastises 'people of our time' for mistaking the character of argument by analogy. As we saw in the last chapter, these arguments are reducible to a syllogistic form and only work where we have a middle premise that relates the two analogous elements.

If we are determined to have the 'transfer' be correct, then it is necessary that the 'matter' which is similar in the two [compared] objects be investigated. .. the force of this [influence] becomes [the same as] the force of the arrangement of the syllogism in the first figure...¹⁰⁴

But in the *Canons* al-Fārābī also contrasts the deduction and syllogism implicit in analogies with potential analogies which depend on representations. And to explain that imaginative poetic discourse is valid because it is representational, he must first show how representations yield potential analogical statements and second show how they are 'imitative of objects.' The second issue is less of a problem: we have already dealt with how imagination imitates objects; and in this instance the difference between imita-

¹⁰² One instance where al-Fārābī develops his conception of poetic discourse occurs in the *Canons*. Here he maintains that 'discourses are either absolutely and totally true or absolutely and totally false, or mostly true and partially false, or mostly true and partially false, or the opposite, or with truth and falsity being of equal importance.' Discourses absolutely and totally true are 'demonstrative,' those which are mostly true are 'argumentative,' those which are equally true and false are 'rhetorical,' those which are mostly false are 'sophistic,' and those which are totally and absolutely false are 'poetical' (*Canons*, 111). As he does not set out an alternative classification of analogies to parallel 'discourse in general,' we may assume that his given order applies in relevant ways to both 'analogies and discourses in general.'

¹⁰³ *Canons*, 115.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Fārābī's *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 95.

tion and representation is more one of translation than philosophy.¹⁰⁵ The first issue must be considered further.

Al-Fārābī introduced the syllogistic and representational nature of poetic discourse in the *Canons*, describing similes and comparisons as 'syllogizing.' In this process, a poet

compares A with B and B with C because there is a close proper and known resemblance between A and B, and the same between B and C; he then goes on to arrange the speech about this comparison in such a manner as to impress upon the mind of the listener and reciter the resemblance between A and C, although in principle it is a remote one.

This account of 'argument by representation' presumably borrows from argument by analogy or transfer, though they cannot be identified because the analogy can be made by deduction or representation.¹⁰⁶ The latter distinction suggests the following description.¹⁰⁷

Al-Fārābī's discussions of the different kinds of transfer result in four '*special principles* of the four syllogistic "arts" which warrant the acceptance of statements. These are the principles from which the statements are composed which Aristotle called "convincing syllogisms."¹⁰⁸ Further, the conviction resulting from these statements is legitimate because their syllogistic structure can 'go back to' or is reducible to

the syllogisms which [Aristotle] enumerated in the first part [of the *Prior Analytic*]. These are the words in the text: 'Not only the dialectical and the demonstrative syllogisms are [characterised] by the figures which were spoken about, but also the rhetorical and the "convincing."'

To explain: we know that al-Fārābī holds analogy and transfer are successful when they are syllogistic.¹⁰⁹ He now adds, first, that statements are usually established by analyzing their syllogistic form to show that they result from the following four premises and argument forms:

- (i) [The first] of them is the universal which it is stipulated to be a universal, (ii) [the second] of them is the universal which is substituted for an intended particular, (iii) [the third] of them is the particular which is substituted for the in-

¹⁰⁵ Where it is important philosophically, it marks a distinction between sophistry and poetry which makes the latter representational rather than imitative.

¹⁰⁶ *Canons*, 111.

¹⁰⁷ Whether the analogy is constituted by analysis or synthesis, by 'raising' or by 'finding,' our concern at present is with the conviction it generates. Al-Fārābī's talk of raising and finding are discussions of how the universal premise of a transfer is established (*Al-Fārābī's Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 108).

¹⁰⁸ *Al-Fārābī's Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 112.

¹⁰⁹ We obtain their universal premises by 'raising' or 'finding' and use analysis or synthesis.

tended universal, and (iv) [the fourth] of them is the example [i.e. a particular substituted for a particular].¹¹⁰

That is, a proof by transfer is a syllogistic process of reasoning in which we compare two universals and substitute them for each other or compare a universal with a particular by substituting the universal for a particular, or compare a particular with a universal by substituting the particular for the universal, or compare and substitute a particular for another particular. The transfer occurs when we compare the second element, be it universal or particular, with the first by substituting for it in the statement. Thus tigers have connotations which we subvert by relating them to paper tigers, substituting the insubstantiality of expressions painted on paper for the animal's ferocity.

In any case, the last of those four principles seems particularly suited to explaining the validity of poetic discourse. The success of poetry in finding and proposing analogies is most effective when it inter-relates two particulars without implying that they are necessarily or always related—that their relation is neither causally nor demonstratively warranted, nor yields a universal generalization even though the inter-relation is acceptable to all subjects in spite of being particular. For example, a poetic statement that compares the seeds of a pomegranate with rubies may succeed in one instance, where their translucence is at issue, but fail where their hardness is compared. In other words, the use of examples is exemplary in that it embodies a particular instance which others may follow in constructing their own examples, but the instance does not generate other comparisons in other poems by a demonstrative necessity. A comparison between fruit and gems that succeeds in one poem does not suggest how we must construct all such comparisons.

Al-Fārābī gives a more precise account of the use of examples later in this text. He writes that

[e]xamples occur when two 'matters' are taken that resemble each other [in some way], about one of which [something] is judged to the effect that it is characterised by some 'thing' which is to be a resemblance with the other 'matter,' and there is silence about this other. That one of the two about which the judgement is known is the *example* for the one about which the judgement is not known.¹¹¹

Examples work by considering two objects that resemble each other in some respect, say because both possess a property P, from which we extrapolate that since they possess property P in common, both must also possess another property Q.

¹¹⁰ Al-Fārābī's *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 112.

¹¹¹ Al-Fārābī's *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 125–6.

As a second step in explaining the nature of examples, al-Fārābī amplifies this minimal statement by providing a standard of relevance and, as a third step, shows that we can reduce examples to a syllogism of the first form. We need the relevancy condition in order to distinguish a good from a bad example: not any initial resemblance between two objects will plausibly warrant our inferring a further resemblance. The translucence of flies' wings is not crucial to comparing 'As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, they kill us for their sport.'¹¹² Rather, for examples to succeed, we must identify the similarities which are relevant to inferring an enlightening comparison, and therefore we need some criteria for relevance.

When considering the role of a relevancy condition, al-Fārābī initially puts forward some abstract reasoning. In the case of 'exemplary proofs,' where we substitute a thing for another, he argues that

when it is the case that this 'matter' which is treated by the judgement is as though it has been substituted for the 'thing' which is the point of resemblance, then 'example' is almost identical with a connection between the particular 'matter' which is put in the place of a universal, and [then] one knows the truth of the judgement about the 'thing' which is the [point of] resemblance in the [same] way in which a universal is known which is put in place of a particular. If this is shown to be true, one obtains a universal premise. And if it is shown that something is included within the subject of this [universal] premises, [then] the judgement which is judged about it [i.e. the universal] would be 'transferred' by the [reasoning by] "example" to that [particular] thing. The syllogism for this reasoning is composed in the first figure.¹¹³

We substitute terms in examples as if they correspond with a generalization. Where we recognise that, say, 'this X is Y' and 'this X is A,' we treat these assertions of particular identities as instantiations of a universal such as 'All Ys are As.' In other words, we think that we can extrapolate from 'this X is Y' to 'this Y is A' because we treat 'this X is Y' as an instantiation of the universal claim that every Y is A. This allows us to infer from 'this X is Y' that 'this X is A' because any Y is A. Accordingly, the example, in which we relate and substitute particular for particular, succeeds only because we can accept a generalization such as 'All Ys are As.' For in the absence of this generalization, there is no restriction on what features of objects are significant and allow substitution, and so any analogy would be permissible. But then we could not legitimate any examples as good or bad because any similarity would be the basis of some analogy, and we would never be sure we had understood the point of any example. By contrast, if a generalization serves as the relevancy condition, then we can easily see that 'exemplary' inferences have first figure syllogistic forms. They rely on the

¹¹² William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act IV, Scene 1.

¹¹³ Al-Fārābī's *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 126.

generalization that 'All Ys are As' and the claim that 'this X is Y' to infer that this particular X must be A.

Al-Fārābī clarifies this abstract account further when he compares wheat and rice. Using the proposition 'The selling of wheat for wheat in unequal quantities is prohibited,' he shows how arguments by example succeed by proposing that we can substitute 'wheat' for 'rice' only if both wheat and rice embody some relevant generalization.

For wheat is only exemplary for rice when it is shown true that the prohibition is only judged about it [i.e. rice] in view of the 'thing' which is a [point of] resemblance between rice and wheat, namely, edibility or measurability [for instance].¹¹⁴

Because wheat and rice are measurable edibles or 'instantiate measurability and edibility,' each can exemplify the prohibition against selling unequal quantities and can serve as an example for the other. Without the generalization 'Every measurable edible must be sold in equal quantities' we would not know which class of objects could count as examples. Things neither measurable nor edible—pleasures or satisfactions, for example—cannot exemplify this prohibition and therefore cannot serve as examples in the way rice and wheat can. Once we know the relevant universal, we can assess which examples are good and which bad, for the former will successfully instantiate the universal whereas the latter will not. A statement that relies on abstract qualities like happiness or pleasure will not serve well as an example of the prohibition we mentioned above because it is not clear how they instantiated the universal.

Al-Fārābī insists also that we must

practice laxity to some extent in showing the truth of a universal [judgement] in these [syllogistic] 'arts.' Otherwise, one will not attain the intended [goal]. Thus the matter in which the example resembles the other 'matter' may be only represented in the imagination, without the example [actually known to have this resemblance], so that a universal premise is obtained from that, and from the judgement which is judged about that example.¹¹⁵

Examples do not succeed as syllogisms only when they depend on a true universalizable relation between the "matter" of the example and what resembles it. Nor need the imagined proposition necessarily be universal. Sometimes the matter

¹¹⁴ Al-Fārābī's *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 126–7.

¹¹⁵ Al-Fārābī's *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 127. See also Gyekye, 'Al-Fārābī on the Arguments of the Muslim Theologians,' who presents but does not develop a different account of this passage.

is [merely] imagined in the mind as connected with the example, so that the judgement about the 'thing' in respect to which the resemblance obtains is [accepted as] true, it [i.e. the 'matter'] being [thus] connected with the example [in imagination]. If [the case] be of this sort, one does not in actuality attain a universal premise at all, but [rather] the premise for an inference by 'example,' which is particular, except that the force of this premise is the force of a universal premise, so that it renders true, for this reason, a 'transfer' to the 'matter' which falls under the 'thing' in respect to which its resemblance [to the example] obtains.¹¹⁶

To begin with, we must note that in the passage al-Fārābī distinguishes the syllogistic proof by example from the non-syllogistic *premise* of a proof by example and attends principally the latter. Further, by introducing the imagination at these points, al-Fārābī adds to the criteria for successful examples. First, the enabling premise may be universal but is only imagined—or may be 'true only in imagination.' Second, the enabling premise may not be universal at all, yet it is imagined and we associate its elements so closely in the imagination that they carry as much force for subjects as universal premises do. That is, the imagination has a power to supply universals *or* a force of conviction that serves as a universal premise. In the second case, al-Fārābī maintains, because of the nature of the imagination subjects acquiesce to its represented similarities and comparisons as completely as they do to universal premises. Thus, although the inferential structure based on an imaginative comparison or representation involves only a particular association, and does not strictly have a syllogistic form because it lacks a universal middle premise, nevertheless the inferential structure has the same force because its particular middle premise is acceptable. That is, according to al-Fārābī, Aristotle

maintained that inference by 'example' [proper], and transfer by a [universalized] 'example' are two kinds [of inference] such as we have outlined. He said that the latter is strictly a syllogism, and that the former does not take place by a syllogism, but has the force of a syllogism.¹¹⁷

Given that imagination can provide a universal premise or a particular combinative representation, and given what we have seen of imagination, the imaginative associations at issue go to form premises in something like the following way. In the case of a universal premise completed in imagination, presumably the faculty associates, say, books with representations signifying wisdom so that we accept a claim that all books contain wisdom. This association then serves as a 'universal' premise in the universalized

¹¹⁶ Al-Fārābī's *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 127.

¹¹⁷ Al-Fārābī's *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 129.

argument by example. Similarly, in the cases which the translator has labelled 'proper' examples, where we directly substitute particular for particular without benefit of a universal premise, the imagination constructs representations, associating two particulars so effectively that we accept that construction, treating it as an unquestionable unity, which generates a strong motivation, and therefore accept that the resulting inference has the power to secure our acquiescence as if it were a legitimate and warranted syllogism. In both cases, because we concede the initial conceptualisation or its representation, we also accept the result as if it were a syllogism. In the second case, the only real warrant is our ready acceptance of the imaginative construct.

In the last paragraphs we have explained why a relevance condition is necessary and how the universal statement or a universally accepted association answers to that need. We must also explain why the logic of examples must be reducible to the first figure syllogistic form to be intelligible. It is an issue we shall consider more thoroughly when discussing Ibn Sīnā's work, but can introduce here. Like Aristotle, al-Fārābī recognizes that the first figure syllogistic form is intuitively and obviously valid. In a syllogism, when we posit that some state of affairs obtains, then something else—another state of affairs—necessarily follows from the first. Thus, if 'All Xs are Ys' and 'All Ys are As,' then it would follow that 'All Xs must be As.' The relation between Xs and As is obvious and acceptable. We might, for example, explain that the claim 'All Xs are As' is an assertion of identity, saying that whatever is X is also Y. By this means we can make sense of the relations between Ys and As or Xs and As, perhaps even pointing out that we can contrast identity with distinction and difference. But, while it is obviously valid, the assertion of identity is not open to further explanation. There is nothing more basic out of which we construct it, for an assertion of identity is itself more basic.

In this sense, were some agent to deny a given assertion of identity, we could question his rationality even though we could not prove the assertion of identity further by reducing it to some more basic operations. The first figure syllogism and its assertion of identity thus provide a basic, valid, obvious and irrefutable exercise of our capacity for thinking clearly. And because it provides such a standard, we can use it to assess other instances of our reasoning. To discover whether looser forms of reasoning, such as dialectic, sophistry, rhetoric, and poetics are serviceable, we examine the logical processes they involve and test how well they coincide with the obvious and valid first figure syllogistic form. Even if the inferences involved in those less formal modes of reasoning are not *obviously* valid, if we can analyze them and show that they depend on the obvious and valid first figure form, then we will have proven that these less formal inferences are valid. If inferences cannot be reduced to the obvious syllogistic form, then their validity remains unclear.

From this understanding of proofs by example and their basis in the first figure syllogism it seems to follow that poetry is syllogistic by example. Poetic discourse consists of similes and comparisons, whose rationality and sense we analyze by showing that they are the conclusions of a kind of syllogism—of argument by example—that has an imaginative universal or particular as its main premise and the first figure syllogism as its ultimate form. Moreover, we saw that imagination constructs the associated representations which are present in examples. Therefore, first, the resulting statement can never be actual but must be only potential; and, second, because it is only an association of particulars, it cannot be strictly deductive and based on universal premises but must succeed only on the basis of representations. Yet third because the subject must understand the associations acquiesce to their meanings, the statement is categorical and its inferential structure ‘has the force of a syllogism.’

Thus, we may legitimate poetic discourse as rationally acceptable, even if it is not true, because we can analyze it to display a first form syllogism or a quasi-syllogistic form lying at its basis. We can compare ‘A with B and B with C because there is a close, proper and known resemblance between A and B and the same between B and C.’ We do not have to construe the relations as universal premises (saying that all As are Bs or all Bs are Cs) in order to accept them. The poet may then essay a further comparison, by ‘arrang[ing] the speech about this comparison in such a manner as to impress upon the mind of the listener and reciters the resemblance between A and C, although in principle it is a remote one.’¹¹⁸ The association of A and C proposed by the poets in their similes or comparisons—in their poetic discourse—are ones we can warrant by analyzing them into their component parts—A and B, B and C—and showing how they follow the structure or have the force of a syllogistic proof by example from accepted premises. This analysis shows whether instances of discourse are successfully poetic or not; and al-Fārābī also suggests that we assess poets by their insight in making optimally remote but maximally convincing comparisons in their discourse. He argues that

the degree of excellence in similes may also vary. This may be either because of the subject matter itself and because the comparison is close and suitable, or because of the poet’s great skill in the art, to the point that he is able to present two greatly different objects as though they resembled each other, through the addition of some elements as are known to poets. ... A great ability in this art is required to create such impressions.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ *Canons*, 115, translations slightly amended.

¹¹⁹ *Canons*, 115. Al-Fārābī’s claim echoes first Aristotle’s description of quick wittedness as ‘hitting the middle term immediately’ (*Posterior Analytics*, 89b34) and second Aristotle’s suggestion that the ability to discover comparisons (which are comparable to syllogisms with a middle term) is a sign ‘of *euphuia* [genius], since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars’ (*Poetics*, 1459a).

Poetic Discourse

In these sections we have set out al-Fārābī's conception of imagination and shown what it means to identify poetic discourse as imaginative. In addition to the use of poetic devices, poetic discourse works at a pre-rational but ratiocinative level by generating assent or acquiescence to proposed associations between the different ideas and objects put forward in imagination. The imagination constructs images which, because they are not true or false claims, we do not assess by their correspondence with objects and events in the world. Instead, we grasp and justify the subject's acquiescence to imaginative associations formed by using poetic devices by reference to the syllogistic form. Thus, poetic discourse as a logical form is imaginative in premises, where the latter are not constrained by an interest in corresponding with reality (even if imaginative images must at some level arise from sensations had in experience), and the conviction that it generates is commensurately syllogistic because it results from argument by example. Accordingly, poetic discourse and syllogism differ from demonstration, dialectic, rhetoric, and sophistry because not only do the latter share an interest in gaining conviction based on truth or falsity while poetic syllogisms are 'completely and absolutely false,' but also poetic discourse is imaginative or imitative yet meaningful. Moreover, poetic discourse is still syllogistic, it seems, because it relies on arguments by example.

This conception of poetic discourse is open to a number of objections, a few of which we shall consider later in this chapter. Before we come to those problems we shall set out consequences al-Fārābī draws from this account, for he believes that poetry is an art also in the sense that it is a craft: that is, an art of making various kinds of poem.¹²⁰ This makes poetry self-reflective of our activity and abilities, giving it a power to educate and en-culture us.¹²¹ We shall consider this aspect of poetic discourse further in the next section.

THE ROLE OF POETRY

In the 'Introductory *Risālah* on Logic' al-Fārābī gives poetry a special status. Commentators have argued that rhetoric and poetics are syllogistic arts as well as crafts (*ṣināʿa* as well as *ṣanʿa*) that is, the art of making various kinds of speeches and poems.¹²² While this may be true, al-Fārābī also finds the art of poetry distinctive for other reasons. He explains the particular status of poetry as follows.

¹²⁰ Muhsin Mahdi in 'Science, Philosophy, and Religion in al-Fārābī's *Encyclopedia of the Sciences*,' 121.

¹²¹ See the quotation from *Fuṣūl al-Madani* disserted at the beginning of this chapter.

¹²² *ibid.*

The relation of the art of poetry to the other syllogistic arts is as the relation of sculpture to the other practical arts, and as the relation of chess playing to the skillful conduct of armies. Similarly those who represent with their bodies, limbs, and voices represent many things in what they do. What the poet suggests in things by his words is like what the sculptor of a man suggests in the man and he who represents the other animals of the animals he represents, and like what the chess player suggests of military actions.¹²³

The quotation concerns the art of poetry rather than the nature of poetic discourse, and we may distinguish the logical or syllogistic forms that tells us of the nature of poetic discourse from the practical activity it yields. This practical activity has rules that we can exercise more or less perfectly, excellently, and effectively,¹²⁴ and it is made possible because of the nature of poetic discourse, its scope and the form of its validity. Al-Fārābī also maintains that because poetic discourse is imaginative it concerns representations for themselves rather than any cognitive or other purpose they may serve in an argument.¹²⁵ Both these factors make poetry self-reflective of our activity, and even though poetry does not *explain* anything, neither truly or well nor badly or falsely, nevertheless it *shows* us a great deal.

In comparing the art of poetry with other arts, al-Fārābī proposed that poetry is like chess playing is to the conduct of armies or sculpture is to the other practical arts. If we take medicine as an example of a practical art, whose purpose is to heal, then sculpture shares with medicine a knowledge of musculature, physiognomy, and perhaps a diagnostic skill. We use the latter to identify an illness by examining a patient's colouring, stance, and other outer physical characteristics. For example, blood-shot eyes and a livid tongue may indicate hypertension when combined with a particular way of holding the body at rest and movement, while a tendency to particular facial expressions may reveal not only a bout of dyspepsia but also a dyspeptic personality. This diagnostic study of the body, this knowledge of the relation of physiognomy to psychology, can be taught among the rules of the art of medicine as part of the diagnostic training given to physicians.

¹²³ *Risālah*, 231.

¹²⁴ In her thesis on 'The Logical Dimensions of Rhetoric and Poetics: Aspects of Non-Demonstrative Reasoning in Medieval Arabic Philosophy,' University of Toronto, 1987, 363–378, Dr D.L. Black develops this reference to the 'practical' in a different way, arguing that the force of poetic syllogism is comparable to that of the practical syllogism. I shall not go into this issue in any detail here, for my concern is with the validity of its logical force as a theoretical syllogism. Dr Black holds that the issue of validity is not what engages our philosophers at this point. That seems to dismiss their logical arguments too quickly; and in this and the following chapters I hope to show that a great deal may be said about the issue of the validity of poetic syllogisms. Of course, this does not preclude the role of poetry in practical syllogisms—but the latter needs to be argued for on the grounds of more than analogy. Black, Cf especially 368–373.

¹²⁵ See *Philosophy of Aristotle*, 73.

Further, the psychological and temperamental features which bodily characteristics signify in this art, the relation between outer body and inner soul, may also have another use. A sculptor may rely on these rules and significances to produce a piece of marble that not only looks like his subject physical feature for physical feature but also uses those physical features to give insight into the subject's character. An angle given to the head, a stance for the body, a balance between limbs, and so on, can depict a particular psychological character. In other words, the piece of sculpture exemplifies aspects of the subject, allowing us to see the stone as we would the subject in certain respects. And while there are limits on how fully a piece of marble allows this, we expect that sculptors are good or bad depending on how well they exercise this art when dealing with the stone.¹²⁶ In much the same way, we can describe the relation of chess playing to the skillful conduct of armies by comparing the use of units of given power and mobility, deployed according to chosen strategies to gain ends similar to but far from identical with real-life battles and manoeuvres. In both sculpture and chess, particular features, thought central to an activity, are made available within certain constraints; or again 'those who represent with their bodies, limbs and voices represent many things in what they do.'¹²⁷ There may be a number of other factors involved in this relation of body to what is represented and of sculpture or chess to physiognomy and war but, most importantly, their resemblance allows us to display central features of 'what is resembled' without incurring the dire results of manipulating real elements.

That display and operation of rules, al-Fārābī goes on to suggest, is the business of poetry:

What the poet suggests in things by his words is like what the sculpture of a man suggests in the man and he who represents the other animals of the animals which he represents, and like what the chess player suggests of military actions.¹²⁸

Accordingly, whereas the diverse arts deploy the scope and validity appropriate to their syllogistic, poetry *displays the rules* at work in all those arts by embodying them in something else *so that their operation is clear* though their real consequences do not follow. For example, the use of rhetoric in a political context to persuade a group to some action will depend in reality on the speaker actually providing 'what will partially content [the group's] soul[s], without reaching certainty.'¹²⁹ A poet can embody

¹²⁶ They may exercise it, for example, by producing works that resemble the subject in physical and psychological character, or by producing figures and shapes exhibiting a balance we enjoy.

¹²⁷ *Risālah*, 231.

¹²⁸ *Risālah*, *ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Risālah*, *ibid.*

that deployment of rhetorical discourse and its appropriate syllogistic validity in the events narrated in a poem, so that rhetorical discourse and its operation can be seen without it being necessary to engage in and attain the conviction appropriate to rhetorical discourse. Just as we do not have to fight real wars, to spill blood, or kill people in order to play chess and reproduce the strategies that operate in war, or as we can rely on resemblances to produce a sculpture of some individual, or can use our bodies, limbs and voices to signify many things without having to be those many things, similarly poetry can exhibit the operation of the rules of other syllogistic arts without itself having to be one of them. In this way, poetry seems reflective of the syllogistic arts whose operation characterises our rational and emotive powers.

Thus, as poetry is only imitative of reasoning in this regard—in one sense it only represents those operations—it consists in a particular manner of reasoning. By explaining that poetic discourse is imaginative, al-Fārābī implies that poetry either lacks concern with truth or is false. Poetic discourse consists in statements which are meaningful and which, while neither true nor false, at best *show* the connections it seeks to make. By identifying the relation of poetic to other syllogistic arts, al-Fārābī describes some of its features. These are fairly complicated because, on the basis of its ability to reproduce significant thought in art, al-Fārābī ascribes to poets and their audience an ability to become familiar with the nature of reason by displaying its various operations and rules in poetry. It succeeds not by generating conviction about a state of affairs but by enabling other subjects to act and engage in particular responses to works in which various modes of reasoning are displayed.

That is, poetry is self-reflective in spite of its basis in imaginative representations. The simple and essentially correct reason for this is that poetic discourse, being constituted of imaginative representations, cannot be true of the world for the reasons given above, but does reveal something of the minds that construct those representations. By constructing diverse things in imagination and by manipulating and re-ordering these representations, we learn about the mental activity involved in comprehension. Thus poems, myths, and stories are not valued for their truth content but because understanding them yields a pleasure in apprehending that shows us also the nature of such apprehending.

Al-Fārābī explains this self reflective power of poetry further in other contexts, where he shows that poetry improves the rational faculty, breaks the hold of viciousness, and tempers our evil tendencies.¹³⁰ In *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, he proposes that the imaginative nature of poetic discourses allows us to consider representations or imitations for themselves; they are not considered for any cognitive purpose or for any other knowledge we might obtain by placing events in the formal, final, and other

¹³⁰ See the quotation from *Fuṣūl al-Madani* disserted at the beginning of this chapter.

causes. His argument depends on a couple of suppositions. First, in the *Canons* al-Fārābī argues that the art of poetry and the decorative arts are similar.

Although both differ in the materials used in their art, their forms, actions, and objectives are not different; or we may say that between the agents, forms, and objectives of the two there is a certain similarity. Since the poetic art operates with words and the other with colours, there is a difference between the two. Yet their actions tend to establish a likeness and their objective is to impress the imitations upon men's imagination and senses.¹³¹

In spite of their use of distinctive materials, a decorative object such as scenery is comparable to poetry. Given that their objectives are not different, we may suppose that both seek a kind of acquiescence from the subject; as their agents are similar, we may suppose that both are ratiocinative in being addressed to and constructed by rational and feeling creatures like ourselves; and because they share forms, we may expect that they obtain acquiescence by providing imaginative representations rather than by discursive, dialectical or rhetorical discourse. For example, scenery can represent a bright landscape of distant mountains, such as do not exist in reality, that makes a dark room lighter and inculcates a feeling of joy in subjects. Another example is the Mughal use of the sound of steadily trickling water to bring serenity to a garden. Similarly, the choice of rhythm, imagery, and subject in a poem generate an appropriate response.

Basic to both arts is that they order representations of events and objects imaginatively to generate a response. Second, in *The Philosophy of Aristotle* al-Fārābī draws out some implications of our interest in representations for themselves.¹³² Although he talks here of 'statues, elegant sceneries, objects delightful to hear or smell,' still, as we have just seen, he compares these to poetry, and what he says of the former will apply also to poetic discourse. Moreover, in related passages he suggests we listen to 'myths, stories, histories of people' much as we appreciate poetry. In all these cases, the object is an imaginative construct which we appreciate for the associations and order it gives to the represented events and objects it contains. Clearly our capacity for reasoning, for grasping meanings and associations, continues to play a vital role in our response in all these cases.

On the basis of these two claims al-Fārābī argues that aesthetic response does not exhibit an interest in the existence of objects or in making truth-valid claims about objects. There are a number of steps to his argument. In the context of the *Philosophy of Aristotle*, al-Fārābī is talking of the senses, although his claims will also apply to imaginative representations and to their use in gaining

¹³¹ *Canons*, 116.

¹³² See *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, 73ff.

four things that everyone pursues from the onset and considers desirable and good... (1) the soundness of the human body, (2) the soundness of the senses, (3) the soundness of the capacity for knowing how to discern what leads to the soundness of the body and the senses, and (4) the soundness of the power to labour at what leads to their soundness.

But in addition to desiring these four,

the soul desires to understand the causes of sensible things, of what is observed in the heavens and on earth, and of what man sees in his own soul and the state in which he finds it. He desires to know the truth of what insinuates itself into souls and comes to the mind, be it a thing that insinuates itself into a man's own soul or something that has insinuated itself into the soul of someone else who has informed him of it. Now such things do not belong to any of these four; knowledge of them is not useful for the soundness of any of the four or with regard to anything else or for the sake of anything else, apart from knowing the thing and resting upon the knowledge of it. Yet when man understands any of them, he finds it pleasant and delights in it. The firmer and nearer to certainty his knowledge, the greater his rejoicing and his pleasure with his apprehension.¹³³

These two interests, in practical knowledge or in theory and science, provide the broad parameters for understanding our activities. And in relation to these interests, our senses and imagination may serve to 'discern what is useful ...in these four pursuits' or

to apprehend and know what is not useful for any of those four things—for instance, statues, elegant sceneries, objects delightful to hear or smell, and objects pleasurable to touch—for nothing else besides having them as pleasurable objects of sense perception.

A concern with aesthetic values thus seems part of the domain of theoretical knowledge. Further we have argued that our response to poetry is comparable to our apprehension of statues, elegant sceneries, objects delightful to hear, and so on. Like statues considered only for themselves rather than for what they are statues of, like elegant sceneries which are appreciated for their order and balance rather than only for any reality they depict, in poetic discourse we attend to the representation for itself rather than for its truth content. That is, the representation must be imaginative because any other status would render it part of an interest in truth. Moreover, given the broad and exhaustive division between theory and practice, aesthetic values belong in the former domain because they treat

¹³³ *Philosophy of Aristotle*, 71–2.

imagined objects for themselves rather than for some pragmatic service to the four pursuits of practical knowledge.¹³⁴

Al-Fārābī explains that inclusion of aesthetic value in theory further when he talks of the ‘fit’ between what is apprehended and our powers of apprehension. It seems that we delight in or gain pleasure from statues, elegant sceneries, objects delightful to hear and smell. Even at the level of the senses and imagination, we may distinguish theoretical from practical interests; but al-Fārābī explains our pleasure in a way that both links and separates theory from practice. He argues that “‘pleasurable” means nothing more than that one is apprehending most excellently a most excellent object of apprehension; for there cannot be pleasure without apprehension.”¹³⁵ His suggestion is that pleasure arises from apprehending an object such that first our faculties work in their most optimal manner and second the object apprehended bears its own perfection: where the perfect object fits our powers of apprehending so that the latter are working as perfectly as they can, there we have an optimal fit and we experience pleasure.¹³⁶

But such pleasure is not all. For if the fit depends on the optimal use of faculties then, clearly, although we do not perceive in order to develop or enhance the soundness of our power of the senses, nevertheless, their perfection is involved. Even so our interest is not in pursuing or enhancing their perfection for any purpose beyond understanding and appreciating their power and soundness. That is, it is still part of theory. Indeed, as he goes on to explain,

there are, besides the knowledge of sensible things, other cognitions obtained by sense perception that man may desire although he confines himself to knowing and apprehending and to the pleasure he experiences in apprehending them.

His concern is not only with the object for its embodying the optimal operation of faculties in relation to objects, but also is not directed at making truth claims. For instance, men listen to ‘the myths, stories, histories of people ... to these four things.’¹³⁷ Our concern with myths and stories, as with poetry, is not with their truth but with the order and shape of the narrative, with grasping myths, histories, and poems for themselves. In these cases, poems, stories, and myths are valued not for the information they contain—though we may read them for that too—but for the mental activity they generate in comprehension. Because our concern is not directed at truth seeking claims about the world and existent objects and

¹³⁴ Poetry *may* be capable of other uses, but these depend on the nature of poetic discourse which, for itself, can be included in theory.

¹³⁵ *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, 73.

¹³⁶ In making this claim, al-Fārābī is echoing a version of Aristotle’s claim that pleasure is a kind of suitability or fit between sense and what is sensed.

¹³⁷ *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, 73.

events, we consider poems for what they reveal about the operation of our mental faculties and our power for comprehension generally. For

the more excellent and perfect in himself the man who comprehends, the more perfect and complete his pleasure in his apprehension. Therefore these, too, are cognitions sought only for the sake of apprehension and the pleasure of apprehension.¹³⁸

Our very ability to apprehend, the very use of our faculties, is at issue here, not the truths about nature or history we may comprehend; and we must understand poetry as the 'object' apprehended for this self-reflective component. Just as an aesthetic interest leads us to treat objects for themselves rather than for some service they may render the four pursuits of practical knowledge, so too, it now becomes clear, to treat the objects for themselves is to consider them for what they reveal about the subject and its apprehension rather than to suppose we are interested in the truth about objects in the world. Of course 'men may use [poems, histories, etc.] on the ground that they are also useful with respect to those four [pursuits, but] it is only accidentally that he who intends pleasure uses them for the sake of any of these four [pursuits].'¹³⁹ Consequently, both an interest in objects for themselves and a self-reflective concern with narratives and poems for the pleasure of apprehension identify poetry and its discourse as a part of theoretical reason. And both are possible only because poetic discourse is imaginative and so does not seek truth or falsity.

These factors together also clarify the distinction of poetry from sophistry.¹⁴⁰ As it is a part of logic we may expect that a concern with sophistry will also be a part of theoretical knowledge, or at least a prolegomena to the latter. This fact by itself does not distinguish sophistry from poetic discourse. Similarly, the fact that each may give rise to pleasure is not a mark of their distinction. However, the source of pleasure in each case serves to show that they differ. For if any pleasure attaches to sophistry, it is related to its ability to generate conviction, and so to suit whatever larger purpose a belief serves, while pleasure in poetry arises simply from apprehension and the perfect fit between the latter and the apprehender. Further, while poetry is self-reflective of the mental activity of apprehension, sophistry must disguise the process by which it succeeds in deluding its audience. And finally, poetry does not share sophistry's concern for truth seeking and the existence of the object, so far as the latter must be consid-

¹³⁸ *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, *ibid.*

¹³⁹ *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, 73-4.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Fārābī returns to this distinction twice, once in *Risālah* and again in *Fuṣūl*. The distinction is important to him, I suggest, because he can show here that even apparently identical syllogisms are crucially different. If even sophistry, the least truthful of syllogisms, differs from poetics, how much more must the other syllogistic forms differ? Indeed, their distinction from the poetic syllogism is a qualitative one.

ered even by a practice that seeks to delude its audience into believing that something is the case.

With this background in mind, we can see how poetry has the power to 'improve the rational faculty' and to 'correct the accidents of the soul' relating to both its weaknesses and its strengths.¹⁴¹ For the self-reflectiveness of poetry and the pleasurable fit between objects and subject both go to correct the soul where it is tempted away from strength in responding to perfection in objects or tempted toward weakness by responding with less than its due perfection to the object. First, poetry puts forward the figures and images of happiness, presents divine matters and good deeds for our appreciation, providing 'an imaginative impression of the virtues and approving them' while also 'reprobating ... evil deeds and the vices, ... holding them in scorn.'¹⁴²

But its power does not lie only in presenting us with ideologically sound representations of evil and good, instructing us through the actions of our heroes into how we should act. Poetry is not merely a set of parables expressed in fictional form and using poetic devices. Rather, second, al-Fārābī is arguing that the self-reflectiveness of poetry cuts deeper than presenting us with an alternative and ideal world of perfect behaviour and life. Poetry is self-reflective because it shows us how we operate generally, and poets succeed not just when they promote good through the content of poetry but when the exercise of their poetic art addresses and examines the very mechanisms by which we apprehend objects and events at all. The poems we construct display our familiarity and ability to deal with the operations of mind that make us what we are. For example, in securing conviction for the images we proffer, it is of little use to produce images sanctified by moral or political considerations if their production depends on the most crude techniques. These will have a minor impact because they fail to consider and display the fullest familiarity with the operation of our reason itself, for a crude technique will only have an effect on a crude audience. By contrast, a sophisticated understanding of the mind's operation, displayed in a sophisticated use of images, poetic devices, and poetic discourses, will be the more powerful and effective in bringing ratiocinative if pre-reflective subjects to respond to works. And in the subjects' own more sophisticated understanding of complex works we will see a deeper development of rational faculties and their capacity for moderate values. Of course poetry will not be effective in the way that demonstration or rhetoric might be, but it can be distinctively powerful.

¹⁴¹ *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, 49–50.

¹⁴² *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, 49–50.

PROBLEMS WITH AL-FĀRĀBĪ'S ACCOUNT

If the last sections give substance to al-Fārābī's claim for poetic discourse and explain the role and power he ascribes to poetry, they also indicate why his theory ultimately fails. There are many problems with his account; but as the inferential structure of poetic discourse is crucial to the role he gives to poetry, difficulties with al-Fārābī's explanations of that structure will cut deepest into his conception of poetry, and so we shall address this issue.

At first, al-Fārābī's explanation of poetic discourses seems inadequate to its object. Talk of syllogisms in poetry seems acceptable but of limited usefulness. In the *Canons* he does not use 'syllogism' to talk of the logical status of poetry but to classify poets. Some poets 'have an excellent gift for making comparisons and similes... they employ this gift without even being acquainted with the art of poetry as it should be, but are confined to their excellent natural disposition and bent only for what they are set to do.' Although these poets have a 'natural disposition and ready nature' for composing poetry, and while they use comparisons and similes, yet they 'are not "syllogizing" in the real sense of the word, for they lack a perfect deliberation and careful consideration in the art.'¹⁴³

Syllogizing refers us to the careful construction of similes and comparisons, and any poet who produces poetry in the absence of this construction yet 'says he is syllogizing poetically does so only because of the activity he displays as a poet.' In the same vein, al-Fārābī reserves the title of 'syllogizing poets' for those who 'excel in similes and comparisons' because they are 'truly and fully familiar with the poetic art to the point that none of its specific aspects or rules escapes them in whatever type of poetry in which they exert their abilities.'¹⁴⁴ At the same time, he denies the title of 'syllogizing poets' to people who have no independent talent for producing similes and comparisons but instead copy what other poets have done. These mechanical writers lack 'understanding of the causes of the art,' and most often 'commit slips and errors.' Syllogizing thus applies to the manner in which people exercise the art of poetry, and as such says nothing about its logical status.

But al-Fārābī does go on to say that 'the best *poetry*... is that which is produced spontaneously.'¹⁴⁵ As only the poets with a natural disposition and the syllogizing poets produce poetry spontaneously, we may infer that their *poetry* is considered best because they produce syllogisms spontaneously. Like Aristotle, who analyzed quick-wittedness as the ability to hit upon the middle term of a syllogism immediately,¹⁴⁶ and compared this

¹⁴³ *Canons*, 114.

¹⁴⁴ *Canons*, 114.

¹⁴⁵ *Canons*, 114, italics added.

¹⁴⁶ *Prior Analytics*, 89b34

favourably with the poet's ability to discover comparisons as 'the greatest thing by far,'¹⁴⁷ al-Fārābī too praises the ability to syllogize because this makes for the best kind of poetry. But this suggests that syllogizing is crucial to poetry because syllogisms and their comparisons are what constitute poetry. In other words, the comparisons and similes present in poetry are valid because they are syllogistic, and the natural poets are best because they produce syllogisms spontaneously. And if the latter is true, then his hierarchy of poets according to their syllogizing is an extension of his conception of poetry as syllogistic.

Yet just this claim raises some problems. We could happily say that poetry is syllogistic if it consisted only of comparisons and similes, and could explain the validity of all poetry by showing how comparisons and similes are valid syllogistically. But comparisons and similes are only two among the many poetic devices, concepts, and compositive forms available to poets, and al-Fārābī has not argued that comparisons and similes are the most basic poetic form. If he were to argue that all other poetic devices and compositive forms, all poetic discourse, were reducible to these forms, he could then suppose that his arguments justifying poetic syllogisms also legitimated poetic discourse generally. But this he fails to do; nor is it a reasonable assumption. For although he may have followed Aristotle in favouring metaphors, similes and such comparisons as basic to poetic meanings, first these do not exhaust the possible poetic forms, and second the mechanisms by which comparisons work in poetic syllogisms are not identical with the mechanisms by which comparisons work in, say, onomatopoeia, allegory, satire, or *Ainos*. And each of these stands in need of its own justification. While they may all be reducible to *some* syllogistic form—this must be the case for any reasonable statement, at least according to Aristotelian theory, and is not true of poetry only—other forms may be reducible to other kinds of syllogism and these need not support al-Fārābī's claims for poetry and poetic discourse. In the absence of argument for any of these possibilities, we may know al-Fārābī's preference but find it unacceptable because it is unargued.

Not only has al-Fārābī failed to justify his emphasis on simile and comparison to the exclusion of other poetic discourses, but he has not clearly justified the syllogistic form of this kind of imaginative statement. The problem is that he does not clearly distinguish psychology from epistemology in the case of poetic comparisons and so cannot claim to have escaped sheer subjectivity or shown that poetic discourse is valid rather than arbitrary. This problem occurs when we try to explain how comparisons work. If subjects must first compare A with B and B with C because there 'is a close, proper, and known resemblance between A and B and the same between B and C,' and second must recognise the resemblance between A and C, then the success of poetic discourse depends on securing

¹⁴⁷ *Poetics*, 1459a

and *being able to expect* assent to the comparison. If acquiescence is only psychological, and by nature varies from subject to subject, then we cannot *expect* agreement and will get it *only* in those contingent cases where the subjects' psychology coincides—and this chance agreement does not warrant the claim that poetic discourse is valid. This may be explained further as follows.

We tried to explain acquiescence to poetry by reference to argument by example, suggesting that poetry contains comparisons we can understand and accept because the elements in comparison are examples whose similarity we can see. But that claim is not obviously defensible. Arguments by example can be made by using examples proper or by using 'universalized examples.'¹⁴⁸ The first substitutes a particular for another particular. In an example we may accept, first, that a given object is translucent pink, and note, second, that it is precious; third, the seeds of a pomegranate are translucent pink and, on the basis of these comparisons, fourth, thinking of the seeds of the pomegranate as we would the original object, we conclude that the seeds are like the object in being precious. We can set out this argument formally as: This A is T; This A is C; This B is a T; and therefore This B is a C.¹⁴⁹ As it is an example proper, the elements in comparison neither support nor depend on generalisations. We do not have to think that every translucent pink object is precious for the argument to work, nor is it necessary that every pomegranate have such seeds. Even though it may happen that every ruby is precious and translucent pink, and that the given object is a ruby, the argument by example does not depend on these generalisations. And just because the argument only works in the particular instance, if it works at all, we cannot extrapolate this argument to apply to other cases and instances. In another case, where the hardness of the given object is crucial to the argument by example, a comparison with pomegranate seeds may be inappropriate because the latter are not hard. As the second and third premises now concern hardness rather than translucence, not only do we expect that things other than seeds will fit the argument, but they will yield other conclusions. In effect, arguments by example are particular.

However, if these arguments are particular, then we can neither derive techniques from an example to explain and justify other examples, nor can we apply derivative techniques to explain our particular example. The success or failure of the example rests in the example alone. We may try to explain the first premise, that the object is precious, by pointing out that it is a ruby, and try to explain the second premise by comparing the colour of the ruby to *attar*, and so on, but such comparisons cannot make the argument, and

¹⁴⁸ Al-Fārābī's *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, 112–30.

¹⁴⁹ The formalization is suggested by the translator—See fn 53, p128. By this schema, 'This A is a T' is 'This object is translucent pink;' 'This A is C' is 'This object is precious'; 'This B is T' is 'The seeds of this pomegranate are translucent pink;' and the conclusion 'This B is a C' is 'The seeds of this pomegranate are precious.'

even if they succeed in themselves, will fail to explain arguments by example. That is, we can try to explain that the object is precious by comparing it with other precious objects, but the only instances in which the value of objects will *prove* the value of the particular is where we depend on some generalization such as 'All rubies are precious' or 'Everyone *must* find rubies precious.' Here, from the first generalization we could infer that since 'this object is a ruby,' 'it is precious,' and we could get a subject to concede that the first premise of the argument by example is acceptable because it follows from the given generalization. But in the context of poetic discourse, the generalization need provide nothing by way of justification for the first premise. This is because that premise can be true even if the generalization does not hold. Instead, the object may be precious for being well cut, or cool to touch, or shiny, or any number of other reasons rather than for being a ruby. In other words, the first premise is not capable of being justified by some supporting argument that depends on some other generalization. Indeed, if it were, the argument would cease to be an argument by example proper because its first premise would no longer be expressible as a particular. That is, if we could justify the validity of the premise by deriving it from some other generalization, then we would not have any problem explaining why the first premise worked, but then the whole argument would not work as an argument by example proper because it would be another kind of syllogism.¹⁵⁰ In an argument by example proper, the premises are expressed as particulars—'This object is precious,' 'It is translucent pink'—because we eschew attempts to find generalizations to defend them for that is inappropriate to arguments by example proper.

If we cannot prove premises, then we cannot rely on them either. That is, if poetic discourse is constituted by arguments by example proper, and if the premises of these arguments cannot be justified in the standard way by deriving them from other generalisations or categories, then all we can do is simply accept or reject premises, where the basis for this acceptance or rejection remains obscure. But if the poetic syllogism is arbitrary in this way, then poetic discourse will be arbitrary so far as it depends on this syllogistic form of argument by example proper, and so will not have legitimacy. If one subject is unable to find an object precious because it is cool to the touch, then he will not find the resulting conclusions effective, and poetic discourse will become variable and dependent on particular subjects. But as validity implies an expectation we can have of how *any* subject *must* respond, if the effectiveness of poetic discourse varies with the responding subject, then the discourse must be less than valid. At best, then, we may suppose, poetic comparisons are not syllogistic and the success of a

¹⁵⁰ Similarly, if we suppose that everyone must find rubies precious, we may prove that the particular object must be valuable; but that only pushes the argument further back, in that we must explain what justifies the generalization, and still does not support the first premise as the particular claim in an argument by example.

poetic comparison depends on our individual psychology because that determines whether we accept the 'premises' of a comparison and, in turn, determines responses to a poem.

Al-Fārābī deals with this issue when he says that the 'degree of excellence in similes may ... vary.' He explains that this variation results either from

the subject matter itself and because the comparison is close and suitable, or because of the poet's skill in the art, to the point where he is able to present two greatly different objects as though they resembled each other, through some addition of elements as are known to poets.¹⁵¹

If he describes this variation as a matter of degree of excellence, al-Fārābī must suppose that the validity of poetic discourse is secure, even if the way it is exploited varies because of individual differences. Yet the very factors he points to, the persuasiveness of the comparisons poets essay, and their skill in promoting those comparisons, do not so much show the degree of excellence poets attain as raise issues about what allows a resemblance to work and be valid. Given the problems we saw with explaining the validity of poetic discourse and its syllogistic form, we may expect that the acceptance of resemblances and comparisons is a matter of psychology rather than epistemology, is variable rather than certain, and can be arbitrary rather than valid. Consequently, 'excellence in similes' will vary not just because of the poets' skill but also because the skillful poet must produce similes and comparisons that subjects will accept regardless of variations in psychology. Some poets are better at finding the image that reaches every subject's psychology, perhaps; but, still, because it is a matter of psychology, the validity of poetic discourse remains insecure.

Or so the objection might run. One defence against it is to point out that it does not work against arguments by universalized examples or examples by transfer, and a second is that it conflates issues of psychology with the status of poetic premises. To set out the second defence: pointing out that premises are not guaranteed shows only that we are concerned with poetry. Only successful demonstrative syllogisms have true premises; all the other syllogistic forms are degrees away from that level of certainty precisely because their premises are less than true. By explaining the sources of premises we find in those other syllogistic forms, whether they lie in our psychology or social habits, whether they are acquired in experience, or whatever, we do not add anything to the validity of the syllogistic form.

Instead, where the objection derides the premises of the argument by example proper because these are uncertain, it may simply be using criteria appropriate to accepting demonstrative arguments and misapplying them

¹⁵¹ *Canons*, 115.

to the premises of poetic discourse. Poetic premises cannot be justified from any more basic foundation but are accepted because they grab the imagination; and to expect poetic premises to have an epistemological validity that gives them a universality and necessity that only demonstrative premises possess is to use inappropriate criteria to understand poetry. Moreover, to dismiss the premises as 'merely psychological' because they do not have that demonstrative certainty is to conflate an explanation of their lack of certainty with an explanation of the source of those premises. Poetic discourse depends on imaginative premises, has a commensurately limited certainty, and an appropriate power to affect other subjects at a pre-rational level. Its syllogistic form is valid because it is an argument by example, and the premises of that argument are imaginative.

This reply deflects the objection but does not defeat it. The objection can be rephrased to say that poetic discourse cannot be valid if it has the syllogistic form of an argument by example. The latter form is faulty and the source of its weakness is that it conflates psychology and epistemology. Moreover, it conflates the two because it relies on a particular conception of the imagination. As that conception is involved also in 'example by transfer' or 'universalized examples,' justifications of poetic discourse that depend on the latter will be unsuccessful too. Here we can argue that the syllogistic form of an argument by example is unsuccessful because it is mostly vacuous. It does not add anything to an accidental concatenation of images, and so bears no conviction. If the resulting image works at all, it effects us at a pre-rational level, by the power of imagination, where the responses of diverse individuals may coincide but do not have any validity. If the premises of the argument by example are imaginative, then the argument will not have premises capable of truth or falsity. At best it is an assertion of identity between different objects which yet cannot be justified as corresponding with reality.

In other words, we do not test the validity of the assertions which make up poetic premises by seeing whether they correspond to an objective states of affairs. Instead, the only grounds for accepting them lie in our subjective responses because the associations are imaginative ones. We may find that 'A is B' and 'B is C' because 'there is a close, proper and known resemblance between them,' but that resemblance is only accidental—one accepted in imagination out of whatever habits this faculty has evolved and not because of any truth validity. Similarly, in the argument by example, the premises are only imaginative associations, and while we must think and, perhaps, conceptualize to understand them, neither our conception of the premises nor our acquiescence to the conclusion necessarily results from such conceptualization. Given that in syllogisms when one claim is posited then another follows 'essentially and not by accident,'¹⁵² then poetic discourse is not one of the syllogistic arts. The syllogistic form of this dis-

¹⁵² 59, al-Fārābī, *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics*.

course, the necessity by which premises are related to yield another statement, is only a matter of the vagaries of the imagination, for the rationalization present and our conceptualisation of objects and events by themselves do not determine the associations we make. Only when one object is associated with another in our imagination do we move from the one to the other and accept that A is T and A is C or that B is T. Consequently, the form of the syllogism, the lines of force of rational connections and the necessity they claim, which are vital in discourse governed by an interest in truth, in poetic discourse only embodies the force of imaginative associations. If one object is associated with another in imagination, and if that association leads to a further association, that is only a result of appetite at a pre-rational level. To express those associations in terms of a symbol system, suggesting they have a force we usually accord to the relation between premises and conclusion, is surely only to disguise an arbitrary set of connections behind an acceptable face.

Of course, we can articulate the associations in question so that they resemble the first figure syllogistic form, but where the latter embody obvious and valid relations, arguments by example proper and by universalized example only embody imaginative associations. By nature these vary from subject to subject, some of whom may feel an appetite relating two elements while others may not. They are at best matters of psychology, with all the connotations of arbitrariness which that bears. In other words, the syllogistic form of poetic discourse is at best a misnomer for imaginative associations which are psychological and variable. If subjects make the same associations, that is only a coincidence. Poetic discourses cannot be valid over all subjects, and our acquiescence is best explained as a matter of psychology only.

Another problem afflicting al-Fārābī's account of poetic discourse is that he does not clearly explain the relation between acquiescence and pleasure in apprehension. Our assent to comparisons and similes constitutes poetic discourse, and al-Fārābī was seen to argue that beauty, ugliness, and loftiness were all appropriate to those comparisons. Although he does not link these responses with pleasure, at first it seems we can identify them by saying that beauty etc are appropriate responses to imaginative poetic statements and have a basis in pleasure. Yet it is difficult to see why our diverse responses should all be reducible to or share a basis in pleasure. Al-Fārābī stresses our reactions, articulating assent in terms of beauty, ugliness, loftiness, and baseness; all of these connote the emotive and moralistic qualities we discern in the representation of objects, where these generate appetitive movement towards or away from objects. Pleasure seems unnecessary to this account, even though we may perhaps describe our assent as to 'a circumstance or characteristic ... of the object ... such as beauty, ugliness, loftiness, baseness, or other similar to these.'¹⁵³ He has not

¹⁵³ *Catalogue*, in Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 116.

argued that pleasure is similar to these; and as 'pleasure' is not one of the qualities, discernible in objects, that through associations yields appetitive actions, we need some detailed explanation of the interconnection between pleasure and, say, a 'circumstance or characteristic ... such a baseness,' showing how these qualitatively different kinds of experience are linked, before we can reduce baseness, loftiness, beauty, and ugliness to pleasure.

Another problem with linking the two is this: pleasure is not among the mechanisms for generating imaginative assent. The latter constitutes poetic discourse. Pleasure becomes an issue when we consider the art of poetry and its role in producing and maintaining a self-reflective domain. It marks the fit between the order of an object of imagination and our use of faculties in apprehension. It seems to follow on from our use of faculties in giving assent rather than being a part of that assent.

Nor can we see easily where pleasure might fit in the imaginative assent due to poetic discourse. We might argue that the first claim, that pleasure seems unnecessary to our imaginative assent to the beauty, loftiness, ugliness, or baseness of an object, conflates poetic discourse with other kinds of imaginative statements. In that passage in the *Catalogue of the Sciences*, the argument might go, al-Fārābī is defending imaginative statements *generally* by saying that they involve assent to 'a circumstance ... such as beauty, ugliness' etc. Given that he also associates pleasure with our response to scenery, sculpture, etc., which are all beautiful in some way, arguably he can distinguish aesthetically valuable or beautiful poetic discourses from other imaginative statements by saying that poetic statements are the ones which generate assent by giving rise to pleasure through their constitution of elements because the order of the elements suits our capacity for apprehension. That is, like other imaginative statements, poetic discourse consists of elements which bring about assent, but they differ from others in that the constitution of elements suits and stimulates the apprehensive capacities for themselves rather than for the particular objects of apprehension, and so assent is pleasurable. Where assent is pleasurable, we think the object beautiful. Further, where assent is displeasurable, the object is ugly, and where assent to the object is to its loftiness or baseness, the object is sublime or ridiculous. In any case, by this account, pleasure is an intrinsic part of poetic discourse, and not simply something added separately when we consider the role of poetic discourse.

The main problem with this theory is that al-Fārābī does not subscribe to it. He says clearly that *poetic* discourses concern 'beauty, ugliness, loftiness, or baseness or any other similar to these' rather than maintaining that imaginative statements generally involve these considerations. And from what we have seen, he does not argue to relate the two parts of his thinking about the validity of poetic discourse and the role of aesthetic value. Nevertheless, it is useful to put forward the kind of resolution we set out in

the last paragraph, for it reflects the line Ibn Sinā takes. By distinguishing imagination from *wahm* and *phantasia*, the latter liberates the faculty from appetite. This means that he cannot give imagination or imaginative statements the force al-Fārābī gives them through appetite but has to find them some other validity. And Ibn Sinā finds that validity through the pleasure subjects feel in grasping the meanings of imaginative statements.

In effect Ibn Sinā uses and develops the Aristotelian conception of poetics and poetic validity. But the building blocks of his theory first appear in the theory al-Fārābī enunciated. Even if the latter did not succeed in expounding them fully and coherently, almost all the parts of a more successful theory are present, and Ibn Sinā finds a place for these parts in constructing his own theory of the validity and social purpose of poetry. For example, he distinguishes linguistic from logical validity. Linguistic rules are the province of the grammarian while, by contrast, logic deals with sense and semantics and considers what it is for poetry to be imaginative speech. The utterances composed in poetry are rhythmic, commensurate, and rhymed; but 'measure is the concern of the musicologist, .. and the prosodist .. [while] .. the rhymist considers rhyme.'¹⁵⁴ Only the logician explains how imaginative speech in poetry generates assent in the soul, and so logic alone guarantees the meaningfulness of poetic speech.

The soul's assent to imaginative speech, even in the absence of veridical conviction, points to the existence of an underlying conception of poetic validity. Al-Fārābī maintains that poetry is constituted by 'totally and absolutely false' representational discourse.¹⁵⁵ Ibn Sinā is more circumspect, insisting that we should not 'pay attention to what has been said, namely that the demonstrative syllogisms are necessary, that the dialectical ones are possible in most cases, that the rhetorical ones are possible in equal cases, that they involve neither inclination nor rarity, and that poetical ones are false and impossible. This is not the [proper] consideration; nor did [Aristotle] indicate it'.¹⁵⁶ Instead, Ibn Sinā uses the comparison between different kinds of syllogism to identify a non-veridical and imaginative poetic syllogism and a commensurate poetic validity.

The last proposal signals another difference. Al-Fārābī emphasises that 'poetic syllogizing' and a contrasting naive construction of images were part of the work of constructing poetry.¹⁵⁷ While some people might produce exciting and superior poetic concepts through some natural disposition, they

¹⁵⁴ 1, Introductory, I, 61, Ibn Sinā, *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*. In this and the following notes, this *Commentary* will be identified by, first, the Chapter in the *Commentary*, followed by the Chapter in the *Poetics* which it discusses, followed by the paragraph of the *Commentary*, and finally the page in the Dahiyat translation where the passage occurs.

¹⁵⁵ *Canons*, 111.

¹⁵⁶ Ibn Sinā, *Remarks and Admonitions*, Logic, 149.

¹⁵⁷ *Canons*, 111.

employ this gift without even being acquainted with the art of poetry as it should be...[because]...they lack a perfect deliberation and careful consideration in the art, and whoever [of these natural poets] says he is 'syllogizing poetically' does so only because of the activity he displays as a poet.¹⁵⁸

Syllogizing, then, describes one deliberative process by which poetry is constructed. But as poetry can also result from exercising a natural gift, presumably the value of poetry is not determined by this 'syllogizing' alone, and must rest on some other factors than the syllogizing or dispositional process by which they were produced. However, as we saw, al-Fārābī's account of the poetic syllogism as argument by example is unsuccessful.

Ibn Sīnā will take these elements more seriously, freeing them of psychological associations to argue that all poetry is constituted by explicit or implicit syllogisms, which justify the validity of poems. In other words, Ibn Sīnā argues that our understanding of poems carries other and more authority than a mere expression of personal preferences because its logical form is syllogistic. Therefore poetry can claim an objectivity or compulsion similar to demonstrative syllogisms. This does not preclude all other senses of 'poetic syllogizing' for Ibn Sīnā, and he uses the term to explain our construction of poetry with particular themes; nevertheless, he does also provide a detailed theory justifying the syllogistic validity of poetry.

If these changes occur between al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, neither is any less Aristotelian. And in the next chapter we shall examine Ibn Sīnā's conception of the poetic syllogism to see how the Aristotelian impetus is developed some way beyond its original. What we have seen of al-Fārābī shows that although he does not successfully relate the logical form of poetic discourse to its political and social role, still he brings poetics to a previously unclaimed level of philosophical maturity. He sets out the issues—of validity, pleasure, response, and social action—showing the wide range of issues involved in poetics. This set of problems was to engage Ibn Sīnā and, through him, would influence European aesthetics.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ *Canons*, 111.

¹⁵⁹ See David Summers, *The Judgement of Sense*, for a fuller account of the relations between al-Fārābī and European thinkers.

PART TWO

AVICENNA'S COMMENTARY ON ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS*

FROM POETIC IMAGINATION TO POETIC SYLLOGISM

Ibn Sinā wants to explain the nature of poetry by justifying one conception of its power and validity.¹ For example, the poet al-Muzani writes that ‘the horses of youth and its trappings have been removed.’ His metaphor evokes thoughts of the vivacity and insouciance of youth now lost in temperate old age. Though different readers may gain diverse images from these phrases, we should be surprised if the images did not all have some similar resonances at their base. Our expectation is justified because we think the metaphor meaningful and therefore valid for all subjects. And while it may be difficult to articulate precisely what that meaning is, it seems clear that unless all the readers shared some central core of ideas, they will have misunderstood the poem. Similarly, other meanings are inappropriate, so that someone who construes ‘its trappings have been removed’ merely as an escape from captivity would have misunderstood the poem or have read it only in translation.

These claims about poems may seem acceptable, yet it is far from clear what justifies our certainty about meanings. The phrases are not literally true: youth is not a horse nor must it possess a horse. If considered as a veridical claim, it is clearly false. It may even so confuse the mix of its elements as to be meaningless, for youth and horses belong to such completely different categories that arguably we do not know how to relate them in a sentence having truth content. Nor does grammar guarantee the meanings of those phrases. At best its rules govern the functions of parts of sentences, and a grammatically sound utterance can be unsound in sense. Further, neither rhythm nor rhyme generates meaning for poetic phrases. Yet, for all that, poetic phrases do seem just right. The words composing them say something which we expect others will also understand and enjoy. At times Ibn Sinā even implies that we judge people by whether and how they grasp poetry. An insensitivity to the meanings of tragedy can be a moral failure, and the vulgar are more likely to be moved by epic than tragedy.² Nevertheless, it remains unclear that poetry can claim such meaningfulness or that the latter gives poetry its power over us.

In fact, by describing poetry as imaginative speech, Ibn Sinā explains poetic validity. First, recognising that meaning rather than rhythm, rhyme, or metre, is the primary element of poetry, he associates poetic validity with a ratiocinative part of ourselves which has to do with thinking and manipu-

¹ See Appendix 4.

² Chapter X, XXVI, 8,120. We shall return to this issue in the next chapter.

lating mental images.³ Second, an association with imagination introduces issues of the audience's state of mind, and allows Ibn Sīnā to compare the states induced by poetry with the conviction produced by demonstrative arguments. This comparison can then be filled out by showing, third, that poetic meanings and the conclusions of demonstrative syllogisms share both a logical structure and resulting states of mind, and therefore, fourth, that poetry has validity. Further, this conclusion has other implications concerning the nature and role of subjectivity and the moral character of poetic form.

To pursue these issues, in the following parts of this chapter we will briefly present Ibn Sīnā's conception of imagination, clarify how it constitutes poetic speech, set out the state of mind involved, and then argue that poetry acquires validity through its logical form of the poetic syllogism. In the following chapter we shall consider the subjectivity and moral quality of poetry.

IBN SĪNĀ AND THE IMAGINATION

Ibn Sīnā's definition of poetry as imaginative speech⁴ obviously depends on his conception of the imagination. We saw that his explanation of the concept supports an etymological relation between 'imagination' and 'imaginative representations' that is crucial to poetic discourse. He develops this notion also in his *Commentary on De Anima*,⁵ but outlines it succinctly in the Sixth Chapter of Book II of *Kitāb al-Najāt*. There Ibn Sīnā identifies imagination as the ability to reproduce sensory experiences as mental images, even in the absence of the objects which would have caused these experiences, and in combinations and forms significantly different from our original experience of them. This activity is crucial to human thought and is present in diverse phenomena including thinking, imagining, calculating, dreaming, remembering, wishing, and so on.

The Faculty of Imagination

Ibn Sīnā's interest in the imagination occurs in the context of his concern with understanding the nature of human reason. The latter, in turn, is part of his interest in discovering the forms of moral goodness and of the exercise of theoretical intellect in a contemplative life. As a part of this conception, Ibn Sīnā holds that we possess a special spiritual capacity that distin-

³ This is not to reject the emotions and the non-rational, though, for feelings of pleasure and displeasure are associated with poetry through the mediation of imagination.

⁴ Chapter 1, Introductory, I, 61.

⁵ *Avicenna's De Anima*, edited by F. Rahman (Oxford, 1956).

guishes us from animals and is the object cultivated in the arts, sciences, and noble actions.⁶

We may understand the nature of this capacity by examining our cognitive activity which, in turn, tells us of Ibn Sīnā's theory of the imagination. We saw that in the *Kitāb al-Najāt* Ibn Sīnā distinguishes animal nature from human intelligence by saying that we possess a 'rational imagination,' by virtue of our ability to apperceive, that differs from the animal 'sensitive imagination.' The 'rational imagination' of the human soul is a faculty whose function, first, is 'to combine certain things in the faculty of representation, and so to separate some things from others as it chooses.'⁷ Representation, he explains, 'preserves what the *sensus communis* has received from the individual five senses, even in the absence of sensible objects.'⁸ That is, while the faculty of representation brings images before the mind, even in the absence of the objects of which they are representations, the imagination abstracts from these representations, manipulating them and adding to or subtracting from them to produce newer representations.

Second, Ibn Sīnā maintains that the imagination always deals with particulars.⁹ As a result, third, in addition to being an active but characteristic manipulation of representations, imagination can also be a matter of interpretation.¹⁰ To explain: there is an important sense in which, for example, sense perception is true while imagination is not. Aristotle proposed that it is unusual to talk of what we see distinctly as merely 'appearing' to us. Rather, we speak of things 'appearing thus-and-so' only when sensory perception seem to fail us and we interpret what we see, for example by saying 'it looks like a man.'¹¹ Here, to 'see' the figure as a man, we must exercise imagination.¹² However, although imagination supplements sense ex-

⁶ In the *Commentary on De Anima*, 1.4, Ibn Sīnā identifies this distinctive capacity with reason. See Martin Kemp 'From "Mimesis" to "Fantasia": The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genius in the Visual Arts.' *Viator*, 8, 1977.

⁷ *Avicenna's Psychology*, 31.

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ See Appendix 5.

¹⁰ From the discussion in *Avicenna's Psychology* it becomes clear that imagination differs from sense perception because it can produce images even in the absence of the object. It differs also from representation in that the latter only conserved images given through perception whereas imagination is able to manipulate them (*Avicenna's Psychology*, 31ff). So, although all three deal with similar material (and these differences are accounted for in *Najāt* in terms of abstraction and at *De Anima* 165ff in terms of a contrast between substratum and form), there are differences in form and in closeness to experience. These differences have other implications.

¹¹ Cf Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV, 5, 1010b1-14; *De Anima* III, 3, 428a5-16, especially 428a12-15.

¹² Such an exercise is not the function of the faculty of sense perception. In dealing with this issue, Aristotle ascribes the task to imagination and its dealing with *phantasai*. Indeed, we saw that Aristotle's conception of imagination is wider than Ibn Sīnā's, for the former included under this rubric a number of different functions which Ibn Sīnā, following the requirements of epistemology, ascribes to distinct faculties. Thus, where Ibn Sīnā distinguishes the faculties of representation, imagination, and estimation, Aristotle included all these within

perience, the two faculties are distinctive. We saw Ibn Sinā maintain that imagination not only abstracts from both sense and representation, adding and subtracting parts of images, but also produces new ones that do not have any existing object of which they are sense impressions. We can imagine a Roc, constructing it out of representations of white birds and large objects, without supposing that such a creature must exist. To this image we can add elements drawn also from aural, tactile, and olfactory representations, or our imagination may construct images in which, say, smell or feel is more important than visual appearance.¹³ We can only produce images of what representation received originally from the senses, and so the object must still be a particular.¹⁴

But the possibility that the subject can produce diverse combinations introduces lacunae between image and reality. For imagination neither reproduces what we see distinctly, nor simply ameliorates the weaknesses of sense perception. Rather, the subject's imagination reproduces a composite image made up from its experiences. Moreover, as the imagination here deals only with a particular, none of the general properties of the object—the causal laws it is subject to and its general characteristics—are at issue. Accordingly, this product of the imagination escapes such determinate qualifications, and the order of the image invites both a reference to the subject who reproduces and composes the image and also a concern with the elements composed into that image. Thus, we must understand images by grasping the order and relation of their parts *and* investigating their source in the *subject's* abstraction and combination of these parts.

These references to the subject and the composition of images are crucial to Ibn Sinā's theory of poetics. But that is not their only function in his works. In his *Commentary on De Anima* he points out that by considering images the mind prepares itself for dealing with intelligibles.¹⁵ He also writes that 'when images alone are present and not the external sensible, they affect the rational soul like present perceptions. Similarly, when the rational soul, with the help of *wahm* [estimation] creates images, it is affected

the same rubric as different aspects of imagination's dealings with *phantasai*. Nevertheless, in spite of these differences, both Aristotle and Ibn Sinā separate the task of sense perception from what Ibn Sinā calls 'imagination.'

¹³ See Appendix 6.

¹⁴ The discussion in Ibn Sinā's *Commentary on De Anima*, 190–1, is not clear on this, and can be construed as saying that the imagination is passive because it has no power to change a given image. However, Ibn Sinā is here contrasting imagination with intellect. Being therefore more concerned with differences than with similarities, he fails to make clear just how imagination can manipulate images. Moreover the point of the contrast, I suggest again, is to differentiate the structures of the imagination and the intellect. Once this intention is made clear, we can see that of course imagination relies on content given by the sense, and so must reproduce what it has received, but it need not do so by reproducing all and every part and quality of its original sensations. It can reproduce the image of a green square, even though its original sensation may have been of a green flag and the black outline of a square, and it does not have to produce an image of a flag every time it produces an image of green.

¹⁵ Cf. for example *Commentary on the De Anima*, 235–7, on *khayāl*; Cf. also *Avicenna's Psychology*, Chapter XI, 55–6, and *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, III, 7.431a17.

by them, thus giving rise to a [belief]–process.¹⁶ Later he argues that through its compositions the imagination represents high truths in figurative forms.¹⁷ However, before turning to the use we can make of imagination, we must first consider the related faculty of estimation.

The Faculty of Estimation

Estimation is another function of the imagination in Aristotle's works that Ibn Sīnā, in his own work, identifies as a separate faculty. It assesses non-material attributes of objects and their images, which it abstracts from matter.¹⁸ Thus, it shares some of the structure of the imagination, because it deals with particulars, but estimation also abstracts further in that it ascribes non-material qualities such as agreeableness and aversion to images. In other words, while the imagination manipulates images, *estimation* judges the agreeableness or otherwise of its content and generates desire or aversion. Though the content of imagination results from composing elements from sensory experience, its activity need not thereby impose any 'non-material' qualities.

As a faculty of judgement, estimation operates 'by way of an imaginative impulse without its judgement being (rationally) proven.'¹⁹ Ibn Sīnā explains it further by comparing human and animal capacities. Thus, whereas animal estimation may associate pleasure with an image because of past experience or by 'an instinctive interpretation of the image by the soul,'²⁰ the rational soul in addition not only suffers appetitive states such as shame, laughter, etc., which are peculiar to human beings, but also brings our estimation of the products of the imagination under the governance of a practical faculty. This latter is 'the principle of movement of the human body, which urges it to individual actions characterised by deliberation and in accordance with purposive considerations.'²¹ And Ibn Sīnā adds

¹⁶ Quoted in Rahman's Commentary in *Avicenna's Psychology*, 80. Rahman translates *wahm* as imagination, but as Portelli rightly points out, *wahm* and imagination are two different faculties for Ibn Sīnā because they have different epistemic functions. See Chapter 2, above.

¹⁷ 174–6 and 249; In *Ibn Sīnā's Commentary on De Anima* and *Avicenna's Psychology*, he also exploits this faculty to explain the workings of prophecy. In spite of differences between the diverse faculties, Ibn Sīnā is also clear that they work together—See below on the interaction between imagination and *wahm* in the poetic syllogism.

¹⁸ However, it 'does not abstract the form from all accidents of matter, because it apprehends in its individuality and according to its particular matter and its attachments to sensible images are conditioned by material accidents with the cooperation of representation' (*Avicenna's Psychology*, 40).

¹⁹ Quoted in Rahman's Commentary to *Avicenna's Psychology*, 82. My discussion of *wahm* is owed to Rahman though I accept Portelli's charge that Rahman wrongly identifies *wahm* as imagination.

²⁰ *Avicenna's Psychology*, 82–3.

²¹ *Avicenna's Psychology*, 32.

that its relation to 'imagination and estimation is that it uses the faculty to deduce plans concerning transitory things and to deduce human arts.'

This last set of claims raises a number of issues, one of which concerns the distinction between animal and rational imagination. Ibn Sinā usually refers to the first—sensitive (animal) imagination—as *mutakhayyil* and to the second—rational or deliberative imagination—as *mufakkir*. The second bears connotations of thought and rationality while the first is closer to the sense of a mere image. Such differences do not imply that there is an unbridgeable gulf between these senses. First, humans and animals have a number of faculties in common: animals too can perceive, remember, and find images pleasurable or painful, and so far as we identify the use of imagination in these activities as *mutakhayyil*, we may expect that humans also possess that capacity. The difference is that humans also have intellectual capacities which animals lack, and to understand completely any human use of imagination to manipulate *mutakhayyil*, this faculty must be placed in the larger explanatory context of the rational soul. Accordingly, human *mutakhayyil* may bear connotations derived from this context which are not available to the sensitive imagination of animals; and we can identify the human rational imagination as *mufakkir* in order both to distinguish its role in animal behaviour and to indicate its connection with intellect. But we need not thereby suggest that humans lack the sensitive imagination which animals also possess. Instead, by grasping the role of imagination in practical and theoretical intellectual activities, it can be made clear just what connection *mutakhayyil* bears to *mufakkir*.

This leads to a second matter: that there must be some such connection between *mutakhayyil* and *mufakkir* Ibn Sinā makes clear by a number of things. For example, he follows Aristotle in accepting that all thought involves imaging. This is to say that the use of *takhyil* is inescapable, even in the most abstract thought, though it does not imply that thought must always be about particulars. The suggestion Ibn Sinā makes is that we use images in order to think about and with universals, so that our interest is not so much in images for the particulars they are as it is in images because they facilitate thought. Similarly, in figurative language we construct images for poems and aphorisms. These also involve the use of *mutakhayyil*, but as Ibn Sinā will be seen to say, this use of *mutakhayyil* is part of the exercise of our reason. For poetic images possess a logical validity and are part of that ratiocinative activity which includes demonstrative thought, dialectic, and all the other parts of logic. Thus, in all these kinds of thought, *mutakhayyil* is not excluded; and by associating the distinctions of animal from human souls and *mutakhayyil* and *mufakkir*, Ibn Sinā does not imply that the two distinctions either coincide or are exhaustive and exclusive.²²

²² Indeed, his account of the animal soul is among the more obscure parts of his work, and although sensitive imagination is ascribed to animals also, it would be mistaken to

Even if *mutakhayyil* and *mufakkir* are not subject to an unbridgeable gulf, we still need to see how imagination enters into reasoning. Ibn Sīnā proposes we use imagination when deducing 'plans concerning transitory things' and 'human arts.' When we reason pragmatically, as in the arts of painting and building, and think how best to use given materials in accordance with the rules of those arts, we can experiment in imagination by manipulating images of the material.²³ Similarly, in thinking rationally, first the imagination brings forward particular images from which the intellect sifts out inessentials in order to identify universals; second, the intellect discovers relations between the simple universals presented in particulars and can construe them as propositions claiming truth values.²⁴ Further, by providing a series of particular cases the imagination makes it possible for the intellect, third, to extract inductive generalisations and, fourth, claims about historical traditions.²⁵

However, more than merely cases of imagination aiding reason, these examples succeed because they are instances in which reason determines the imagination. For the latter to enter into reasoning, we must explain how the intellect gives significance to special features of images. We may argue that in the absence of this ability to single out some aspects of images we could not clearly recognise an imaginative product as part of a plan. Nor would we see it as an instance which serves as a universal, or as party to relations between universals, as a member of an inductive generalization, or as possessing a given logical structure, and so on. An ability to focus on some features and disregard others is essential if we are to understand how an image serves, say, a historical tradition. Thus, not every detail of a printed page, such as the quality of its paper, script, size, colour, etc., need be important to identifying how a poem participated in the pre-Islamic tradition. Of course, the imagination is the mechanism we use to focus attention by subtracting parts of representations, highlighting others, etc., but this mechanism has to have guidelines. For Ibn Sīnā, the intellect provides such rules through its use of concepts and syllogisms in thinking correctly.²⁶ And in the next section we shall begin to see how imagination functions in poetry under the guide-lines provided by the poetic syllogism.

exclude it from amongst the human faculties just because of obscurities in its use in explaining animal behaviour.

²³ Ibn Sīnā is concerned with the role of animal faculties here rather than with imagination as such, but the claims he makes are also applicable to imagination because that is one of the animal faculties involved.

²⁴ It is important to note here that the logical structure of a proposition need not show itself in the image but has to be abstracted from the represented particular. Indeed, where a proposition is not obvious there the intellect generates a proposition by producing a middle term and so constructing a syllogism.

²⁵ See Ibn Sīnā's *Commentary on De Anima*, 182–6.

²⁶ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*. (I have used *Ibn Sīnā Remarks and Admonitions, Part One: Logic*, translated by S.C.Inati, (Toronto, 1984), in what follows. Page references are to this translation). There are also irrational sources which determine the imagination, such as instinct, divine inspiration, and intense past experiences (See *Commentary on De Anima*,

In any case, this section has been concerned with Ibn Sinā's conception of imagination. A number of criticisms can be levelled against him—his use of 'abstraction' to distinguish different faculties is highly questionable, and we may disagree with his insights into the nature of mental operations—though at present it is unnecessary to do so. One set of criticisms will identify inadequacies in his theory, arguing that it conflates some issues or ignores other senses which we have since seen are separable or intrinsic to imagination. Given that Ibn Sinā is struggling with an idiom which had only recently been set out by Aristotle, though it had its counter-parts in Arabic thought, and that this idiom was to influence a broad range of theories in Arabic, Medieval and Renaissance Europe, it is not surprising that Ibn Sinā's conception contains problems. How significant these problems are, we will discover only by seeing what he wishes to make of his concept; and so we must consider the role of imaginative representations in figurative and poetic language.

IMAGINATION IN POETRY

At first it seems that Ibn Sinā's *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle* contains his own theory as well as his explanation of the Aristotelian text: his own conclusions are set out in Chapter 1 and his explanations in the following parts.²⁷

This distinction does not and is not intended to disguise what Ibn Sinā owes to or brings to his reading of Aristotle, for both parts owe a great deal to the *Poetics* and other Aristotelian works. In spite of this qualification, the above distinction is misguided, for the first chapter of Ibn Sinā's *Commentary* is not so much a distinctive theory as it is a study of the *Poetics* from the viewpoint of the Aristotelian *corpus*. It supplements that text with reflections on the logical status of poetic discourse and on the variety of forms and themes available to it. The *Poetics* itself contains little reflection on these subjects,²⁸ but in the context of the *Organon*, which is where Ibn Sinā would have placed it, such issues become paramount, for this context makes the *Poetics* part of Logic. It becomes an element of a comprehensive

183–5). And to understand fully Ibn Sinā's conception of the imagination, we would have to attend to these determinations. But that task would take us some distance from our concern with poetics, because it would require us to consider the role of imagination in prophecy and prophetic inspiration, where the imagination functions in a distinctive manner. As our interest is in Ibn Sinā's theory of poetics, instead of considering the details of his theory of prophecy, we may simply focus on the use of imagination in constructing poetry and figurative language generally. This will cause us to refer to the primary syllogistic forms and to the irrational sources of images, but such references need only occur within a context, and we need not enter into the larger task of providing and arguing for every detail in the relation of imagination to demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical, sophistic, or inspired discourse. As it is, the role of the imagination in figurative language raises quite enough issues.

²⁷ See Dahiyyat, 'Critical Study of the *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*,' 29.

²⁸ See Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London, 1986), Chapters 1–2.

theory about the nature of our capacity for reason, which includes all the forms of viable human discourse. In this context, a commentary on any one of the logical texts must explain its part in the larger, comprehensive theory. Where philosophers cannot explain its participation by using material from within that text itself, they have to clarify the text by drawing on the larger theory. This clarification Ibn Sinā provides in the first chapter of his *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle* by bringing to the text a concern with logical status and validity. Thus, in one sense, that first chapter is Ibn Sinā's theory in so far as it contains his extrapolation from a larger theory of logic to issues in the *Poetics*. But, in another sense, it is still very much a part of Aristotelian thinking because Ibn Sinā is using its tools and vocabulary to satisfy a demand which that very theory makes.²⁹

As we shall see in some detail later, Ibn Sinā wants to establish that poetic utterances have an independent validity. Initially, he seems intent on proving this by distinguishing poetic speech from its cognitive counterpart, but it soon becomes clear that, in spite of important differences between them, poetic and demonstrative utterances share a logical structure. The major difference turns on the roles of wonder and pleasure in poetic utterances, which have no counterpart in objective statements. The latter abjure all such subjective references, the former do not; but it is important to see that where pleasure is involved in poetic utterances and the latter claim validity, there wonder and pleasure have a particular role to play. For example, we gain pleasure from two sources from 'imitations' because they correspond to reality and from satisfying our love of harmony and melodies. For Ibn Sinā, these pleasures cause us to create poetry. But the pleasures we get from creating poetry are distinct from another role Ibn Sinā gives to wonder and pleasure in establishing the validity of poetic utterances. This latter pleasure is the basis for securing an 'imaginative assent' or 'compliance,' involving a sense of 'imaginative imitation' that does not simply seek to copy reality. Such compliance parallels the objectivity of demonstrative, objective statements, and Ibn Sinā explains their similarity by putting forward a notion of poetic form that he associates with 'poetic syllogisms' and 'poetic premises.' As we shall see, these associations raise further issues.

As a first step in his explanation of poetic discourse, Ibn Sinā distinguishes it from science and knowledge. 'Poetry is imaginative speech to which the soul yields, accepting and rejecting matters without pondering, reason, or choice. In brief, it responds psychologically rather than ratiocinatively, whether the utterance is demonstrative or not.'³⁰ The nature or structure of the imagination does not change here, though, in this context, Ibn Sinā uses 'imaginative representation' (*takhyīl*) and 'imitation' (*muḥākā*) if not always interchangeably, then in a combination which

²⁹ As we shall see, his use of al-Fārābī's *Canons* also fits within the same story.

³⁰ I,2,61-2.

suggests he wants to emphasise particular features of their nature. In *al-Najāt* and *al-Nafy*, the imagination was the ability to bring to mind and manipulate images of absent particulars.³¹ By describing poetic imagination as 'imitation,' Ibn Sīnā is emphasizing the aspect of imagination that allows us to consider and manipulate images for themselves, without regard to their references to sense experiences of reality. This may seem counter-intuitive for two reasons: first, Ibn Sīnā has already shown that imagination is distinguished from sense, and so adds little by calling it imitation. This is true to some extent, but the notion of 'imitation' serves to emphasise that the alignment which imagination bears to its sensitive origin can be distinguished from the other uses which can be made of that faculty.

Second, it seems that 'imitation' must have an original, and surely this invites precisely that concern with the relation of image to object which we have just denied. But, in fact, Ibn Sīnā goes on to explain that imitation is a matter of 'giving the likeness of a thing, not the thing itself.'³² This underlies a distinction from objects of experience—the ultimate source of the representations manipulated by imagination. The suggestion is that by relating imagination to imitation in poetry, Ibn Sīnā is de-emphasizing the relation to objects and emphasizing our contemplation of the qualities of images. Similarly, Ibn Sīnā holds that in poetry imitation succeeds by using melody, sense, and measure to provide images. This possibility shows that imitation is neither simply copying precisely nor restricted in its means or manner by the need for such copying.³³ Further, he claims that imitation is pleasurable for itself, and allows that even if we have not perceived the original, and so cannot enjoy the relation of portrayed forms to their originals, nevertheless we would still 'delight in the form itself—its manner, composition, and so forth.'³⁴ Again, clearly his interest is not simply in copying. This is suggested also when he proposes that images and imitation possess an element of wonder that truth lacks,³⁵ and while it is necessary to explain this further, as it stands it suffices to show both that imitative imagination contrasts with truth and that its corrigible relation to reality is not at issue. The examples suggest that even in imitation—or perhaps especially there—our concern is with the representations themselves.

In effect, by so freeing imitation from reality Ibn Sīnā specifies the general conception of imagination he proposed earlier. He argued there that we must think of the products of imagination in terms of their composition

³¹ This central sense is related to estimation, and so is also involved with judgement in thinking. The relation between imagination and judgement seems to be that of thinking to the disposition or act of judgement which is the result, and the suggestion is that imagination is a faculty which provides images or mental representations whose use in any judgement results in a disposition. This last factor is the basis for Ibn Sīnā's ascription of wonder and awe, as we shall see later.

³² II, I.3, 71.

³³ 3, IV.1–3, 77–8.

³⁴ 3, IV.3, 78.

³⁵ *ibid.*

and of the subject who constructed those images rather than in terms of their source in perception. Now, he has explained something of what that means in the context of poetry. Imagination provides 'imitations' which we understand are composed, and so have a manner of composition, order, and form. Further, imitations do not refer merely to their source in sensation and the 'thing' but only present 'the likeness of a thing.' Moreover, because we use imagination in poetry, our concern with the composition of the image is with its form and order for itself rather than for its correspondence with reality. Ibn Sinā has yet to explain the imagination's reference to the subject.

In clarifying the distinction of cognition from imagination, Ibn Sinā stresses 'the utterance itself' over what is spoken of.³⁶ He explains this distinctive aesthetic use by arguing that four elements go to make an utterance imaginative. These elements

are (i) those related to the temporal duration and quantity of the utterance, i.e., its measure, (ii) those related to the sound of the utterance, (iii) those related to the sense [or meaning] of the utterance, (iv) those hesitating between sound and sense.³⁷

Although Ibn Sinā's explanation of the third element is the main topic of this chapter, it is possible to conjecture what he has to say of the other three. Both time and sound may refer to the musical properties of poems such as metre, intonation, and cadence: Arabic poetry depends on establishing and maintaining a beat by ordering words so that recitation involves not just rhymes at the ends of lines but also a consistent metre. Meaning is also important to this order, but the elements of sound and beat affect meanings. Elsewhere Ibn Sinā declares that particular metres suit ecstasy, while others suit impressiveness, and yet others fit charm.³⁸ The second set of elements concerns linguistic expressions, the fluency or purity of speech, and the best use of appropriate figures of speech. These interests also enter under the last heading, and elsewhere Ibn Sinā explains that to judge the quality of an utterance, we assess how rich in thought it contrives to be without any loss in expression.³⁹ More importantly, this use of tone and sound does not follow a cognitive interest. Scientific truths are sometimes expressed in such metred utterances, but there we would attend to the matter being referred to rather than to the utterance for itself. When in poetry we attend to the utterance for sense, we seek meaning out from 'the relation

³⁶ I. Introductory.4,63.

³⁷ 1, Introductory.6, 64. But see also below.

³⁸ See the discussion of *Fī Ma'āni Kūāb al-Shi'r* in G. Schoeler, 'The Poetic Syllogism' ('Der poetische Syllogismus: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der 'logischen' Poetik der Araber,' *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 1983, Volume 122, pp43–92).

³⁹ *Fī Ma'āni*, 23, quoted in Schoeler.

among the parts' of the phrase,⁴⁰ rather than from a veridical relation of utterance to object.

Sense is poetic when it is striking and original. We shall return to this third element by exhibiting other features of Ibn Sinā's account of imaginative imitations. He explains their non-veridical character further by saying that 'images and imitations are neither limited nor fixed ... what is proper to poetry is that which is invented and created.'⁴¹ Whereas the intellect's interest in grasping experience ultimately determines the cognitive imagination, with imitation in poetry we consider images for their being created, and so understand them by reference to the poet rather than to the object alone. Such creativity will differ from cognitive imagination in that it need not be determined by the process of knowledge beginning with sense and passing through representation to the imagination. The suggestion is that poetic imagination is freed of the relation to original sense experience not simply because it can manipulate representations but also because subjects can invent or create images without being constrained by the intellect's cognitive interests.

Where earlier we identified a reference to the subject in the imagination's manipulation of images,⁴² now in the poetic imagination and the creation of images we broaden that reference to the subject at the same time as we weaken references to real objects and events of experience. But we do not thereby reject the claims imagination makes to validity. Imagination is poetic because it creates images and because it involves a concern with the utterance itself, with its balances, and its sense or meaning. We do not acquire the latter simply by a reference to reality, and so do not understand them solely through a veridical relation to objects. Instead, we grasp them by reference to the relations of parts of the utterance to each other and by reference to the subjects—poet and audience—who create and understand those compositions.

Although we have been at pains to distinguish poetic imagination from its cognitive counterpart, we must not suppose that imaginative imitations bear no reference at all to our cognition of reality. And by explaining that relation we will clarify further Ibn Sinā's conception of poetic discourse. Certainly, Ibn Sinā seems to identify poetic speech by contrasting it with demonstration and analysis. The 'clearest and most desirable speech' is achieved by 'direct statement made up of authentic and standard language.'⁴³ We can codify its use of concepts and symbols and give determinate correspondence with the world in a system of scientific reasoning. In its use we consider not 'the utterance itself' but the 'matter being con-

⁴⁰ 1, Introductory.8,64.

⁴¹ 1, Introductory.5, 63.

⁴² Cf. above.

⁴³ 7, XXII.8,115.

veyed,⁴⁴ and accept or reject claims 'due to the realization that the thing is what it is said to be.'⁴⁵

Yet cognitive and poetic utterances are not exhaustively distinct: it seems at first that the 'demonstrative is different from the imaginative, for an utterance may serve to prove the truth (of something) without exciting emotion.' However, as Ibn Sinā goes on to argue, 'if said again in a different way, [that same utterance] may often effect emotions without conviction occurring as well.'⁴⁶ That is, although demonstration and poetry differ in the criteria they satisfy, the same utterance can satisfy either set of criteria—although each use provokes distinct kinds of response. Moreover, most importantly, poetry and analysis share a structure of utterance and response. Ibn Sinā proposed that 'the soul yields [to imaginative speech], accepting or rejecting matters without pondering, reasoning, or choice.'⁴⁷

Although he sets out the contrast with cognition by denying the presence of a process of reasoning, Ibn Sinā is not claiming that poetry is non-intellectual or purely emotive. He has made a commitment by which possession of a 'spiritual' or 'intellectual' capacity, sometimes identified with reason, is distinctive of human beings. So he cannot relegate poetry to a non-intellectual status without also excluding it from the humanities. And in saying that the soul *yields*, Ibn Sinā is trying to give poetry a rational though non-cognitive force. Poetry concerns that part which makes us rational beings, and though we do not accept or reject matters by reasoning demonstratively, we are not passive in the way that animals are subject to stimuli. Even if it is not compliance to a demonstrative argument, *yielding* denotes an active intellectual ability and, in our response to poetry, may correctly be seen as an 'imaginative assent' in which we yield to a valid utterance. In this rule-governed and valid assent, poetry resembles demonstration and analysis. This claim needs to be explained further.

Imaginative Assent and Pleasure

Ibn Sinā writes that imaginative assent 'is a kind of compliance due to the wonder (*ta^cajjub*) and pleasure (*ladhdha*) that are caused by the utterance itself... [it] results from the utterance itself...'⁴⁸ If the source of this response lies in the utterance itself, it must arise from the imaginative representations it consists in. Ibn Sinā holds that these 'possess an element of wonder that truth lacks.'⁴⁹ They also generate feelings of pleasure.

⁴⁴ I, Introductory.4, 63.

⁴⁵ I, Introductory.4, 63.

⁴⁶ I, Introductory.2, 62.

⁴⁷ 1, Introductory.2, 61–2.

⁴⁸ I, Introductory.4, 63.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

Now, an association between pleasure, wonder, and imagination has a long history, stretching from Classical to present times. It is easily accepted that we read or listen to poetry, drama, novels, and music because these give us pleasure. There may be other purposes also served by these works, but these do not replace or substitute for pleasure. However, it is difficult to explain why we maintain that link between aesthetic value and pleasure or what its scope should be. Pleasure is subjective, variable, and fleeting, and its part in our relation to works does not seem to sustain the seriousness with which we listen to poetry or music.⁵⁰ Here, in a serious sense, we can no more explain why we feel pleasure in works of art than we can account for the concepts we have. We cannot expect to think beyond aesthetic pleasure, to explain it in more basic terms, for there does not seem to be anything more basic. Instead, it seems, at best we can only explore what it means to make this association between pleasure and works, and by producing a theory or a rounded set of generalisations which cover and organise our numerous particular insights into works of art and aesthetic activity, we can exhibit the usefulness of accepting that crucial connection.

In relating poetry to pleasurable awe, Ibn Sinā is taking up something close to this last option. The association may seem to require explanation through some more basic concepts, and Ibn Sinā may seem to provide this, but he mostly only relates pleasure and wonder to other parts of his theory. And to understand his proposed links between poetry, pleasure, and awe, we must first return to the issue of imitation and the roles played by pleasure. For pleasure enters into Ibn Sinā's theory in at least one other way that we must distinguish from pleasure in 'imaginative assent.' He points out that other relation between poetry and pleasure when he says that pleasure in imitation is a cause of our producing poetry, and we must examine that relation.

We said earlier that imitation is used naturally in a pairing to counterpoise with 'original' but that Ibn Sinā's use stresses our interest in the representation for itself. This second use does not make the first sense irrelevant to the theory, for the interest in the original re-emerges in the chapter 'On the Origin and Development of Poetry and Its Kinds.'⁵¹ There, Ibn Sinā notes that imitation causes pleasure, and clearly he is using 'imitation' to counterpoise and refer to an 'original.' He cites as 'evidence that imitation is delightful' the fact that we 'are pleased by contemplating the portrayed forms of hateful and disgusting animals which [we] would avoid if

⁵⁰ Perhaps pleasure is not our principal interest in poems, even if it initially draws us to them. Yet any other interest will not concern the utterance itself. For example, we may want the result of utterances—the insight they yield, the benefits they bring—and so may see the utterance as a means to an end beyond the balance of sense, words, and phrases. But if the utterance is only a means, then our pleasure in it is only contingent. Other means may satisfy that end, and so be more valuable, or where the utterance fails to satisfy an end, it will not be pleasurable. In either case, the utterance itself is not of interest, and in this the position differs from that of Ibn Sinā, for whom the utterance itself is essential and of interest.

⁵¹ 3, IV.1, 77–8.

seen in actuality.⁵² Moreover, he identifies such pleasure in imitation as one of the causes of poetry, and we may infer that we can identify this pleasure with the pleasurable awe which constitutes imaginative assent.

One picture which emerges from these inter-relations goes something like this: we create poetry because we find pleasure and astonishment in producing and dealing with poetic 'imitations.' This kind of imitation, which strives to conform to reality, invites surprise and astonishment when it compares well with its object, and in this role—in *wagf*— is a standard part of traditional Arabic poetics. Here, we give imaginative assent to a poem because we obtain pleasure from a successful imitation. Such pleasure is distinctive of poetry because it involves imitations. These have a peculiar position, somewhere between reality and mere fancy: the ontological distance between an image and its original explains, first, the element of wonder that an imitation possesses but which the truth lacks.⁵³ Its nature as an imitation prevents it from becoming a 'recognised truth ... devoid of novelty' because it is always something other than an original. Such a relation to the original is ever present, but the reference to the latter is never realised because the imitation can never become the original. And this tantalizing position is the source of our wonder or awe, for the imitation 'is and is not' the recognised truth.

Second, its peculiar status goes to make our response distinctively aesthetic. Because it is an imitation—a mere image—it is free of the ordinary pleasure which we might have attained from its original; therefore it generates an 'imaginative assent' rather than one dependent on our actual experience of pleasure in the original. Yet because it could not be an imitation if it lost its reference to the original, the pleasure occasioned by the imitation is not simply arbitrary. It is based on a rule derived from the original object, and so is quite properly described as 'assent.' In this way, poetry may be explained in terms of a pleasurable awe that constitutes our imaginative assent to imitations.

Such a picture may be attractive, but it has a number of drawbacks, not least of which is that it does not quite coincide with Ibn Sīnā's claims. Among the major problems is this: for imitations to succeed here, we cannot suppress their relation to the original. Yet whenever we see them as imitations, so to speak, we also deprive them of their independent force. For if we stress that 'imitation' is counterpoised to and, therefore, also related to an 'original,' then we are forced to consider the imitation for its relation to reality, rather than for itself, and to find the imitation wanting. We relegate imitations to some realm where, because they are not real, they do not participate effectively in our actions and their consequences. If we assent to them, it is in the imagination, and they cannot rival demonstration or dialectic in causing real actions and actual dispositions.

⁵² 7, XXII.8, 115.

⁵³ 1, Introductory.3, 62

Further, so far as our concern is with Ibn Sīnā's explanation of poetic validity as a part of logic, if we relegate imitations and imaginative assent to an unreal realm we deprive them of any independent validity. Poetics can no longer stand as a part of logic, but must depend for its limited authority on what it can derive from a resemblance to logic, empirical knowledge, and rational validity. Accordingly, the term 'poetic syllogism' does not denote a term of logic but is a tool for identifying analogies between poetry and scientific discourse. Yet the analogy does not rest on a validity that both can claim: logic has necessity, poetry does not, though it is analogous to demonstration. But we cannot prove that poetry is valid because of its analogy to objective and demonstrative discourse, because analogies may rest on *any* similarity. As they are wild in this way we must qualify them to distinguish important from peripheral analogies. Yet, in order for this distinction to apply to analogies, it must depend on something more basic than the analogies themselves, and so the latter are not the basis for proving the validity of poetry. And whatever that more basic rule is, it will justify validity—though we do not at all know what that might be.

Instead of making poetic validity parasitic on logic, Ibn Sīnā sees poetics as a part of logic. As it is one among the logical texts of the *Organon*, by understanding its nature we add to the comprehensive picture of valid human reasoning and discourse that Ibn Sīnā, following Aristotle, is putting forward. More immediately, the account criticized above confuses two different senses of imitation and ascribes one sense a role that Ibn Sīnā does not. Imitation, in the sense that stresses a relation of contrast with an original, may well be pleasurable, but in that sense is only one of the 'causes that make the human mind create Poetry.'⁵⁴ Imitation is delightful to men, but 'what is delightful is not [the] form nor what is portrayed but its being a precise imitation of something else.'⁵⁵ This precise imitation clearly has to do with copying and so with what is conveyed rather than simply with 'the utterance for itself.' And while such successful copying gives us pleasure, we cannot identify it with the pleasurable awe that evokes imaginative assent. The latter must concern the utterance for itself, its balances and meanings, and will not deal with its success as a copy. For as Ibn Sīnā makes clear, our interest in imaginative representations, in an utterance for itself, differs from our concern with and pleasure in an imitation for its relation to the original. 'Men ... find great delight in portrayed forms if they can well relate these to their originals,' and such pleasure has its standard of success in how well the imitation approximates to the original. But as Ibn Sīnā goes on to point out, even if they have not perceived the originals, people can delight in 'the form [of the imitation] itself—its manner, composition, and so forth.'⁵⁶ This latter pleasure cannot have the same standards

⁵⁴ 3, IV.I, 77–8.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

of success as the former because, by hypothesis, we have not perceived the original and so cannot measure the imitation against it. In terms of those standards of success in copying, where we 'have not perceived [the originals] before, [our] pleasure could not be complete, but approximate.'⁵⁷ Yet we are able to delight in the form itself—in the balanced manner, the sense or meaning composed, and so forth, of the imitation itself.

Pleasure in imitation and in validity

Pleasure in creating poetry and our pleasurable imaginative assent are related but different.⁵⁸ The two occurrences of pleasure explain different things. One explains why we create poetry. There may be a number of such causes, each of which trades on evoking pleasure in us. Ibn Sinā mentions not only our pleasure in copying but also 'men's natural love of harmonious composition and melodies.'⁵⁹ But these causes why we create poetry, the delight we derive from copying reality or appreciating harmonies, by themselves are not, and cannot justify, the imaginative assent we give to poetic discourse. Delight in copying reality or appreciating harmony tell us why we create poetry, they do not explain what justifies our assent to the poetry we construct. Even if *creating* poetry did not cause pleasure, we could *assent* to poems for the pleasure *they themselves* gave, and even if such assent did not involve pleasure, we might enjoy creating poems.

Despite the last point, an objector may argue that pleasure in creating poetry and pleasure in assenting to it are not always different in that our pleasure in harmonious combination or melodies and our pleasurable imaginative assent to harmoniously composed utterances can be coterminal. In poetry we assent to the sense composed in the utterance, and so our love of harmony and our imaginative assent are both satisfied by the utterance and its balances. Further, the fact that they are coterminal suggests also that we can plausibly identify a pleasure we get from satisfying our love of harmony with the pleasure and wonder on the basis of which we comply with or give imaginative assent to a balanced or meaningful poetic utterance. But if we can identify the two, then poetry does not clearly have a ra-

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ This need not involve us in identifying different kinds of pleasure. Nor need there be two kinds of 'imitation,' if these are supposed to be qualitatively different kinds of mental entity. Imitations are imaginative representations in the soul regardless of whether we stress their relation to the original or stress their distinction from objects, and they retain their nature whether we apply to them standards of success in copying or whether we apply standards of gaining a successful balance of parts. Similarly, pleasure is pleasure whether it arises from copying or appreciating balances. It is just that we must distinguish between the things we find pleasurable: a pleasure in copying is not a pleasure in appreciating balances. Ibn Sinā does suggest that our pleasure in these two activities is related, for he proposes that delight in form approximates to pleasure in copying, but this suggestion is not developed.

⁵⁹ 3, IV.4, 79.

tional validity: it may be liked only because it satisfies a desire for harmony, and the utterance itself, its meaningfulness, rational content, and imagery, become only secondary concerns. Our primary concern can be with any combination of sounds, textures, and metres found in the 'poem;' therefore, the imaginative power of poetry becomes ineffectual in securing assent. If so, then all the syllogistic and rational power Ibn Sīnā wants to ascribe to poetry becomes impossible or useless.

In this context, clearly we cannot make a parallel case for identifying pleasure in copying with the basis for imaginative assent. Even at this general level it is apparent that a balance within the utterance can be procured at the expense of failing to make a faithful copy. By hypothesis, our concern with the utterance is not for itself but for its relation to an original. Consequently, pleasure in successfully copying is only contingently related to the pleasure we get from procuring a balance. While copying precisely and attaining a balance may both depend on the same mechanism of the imagination—such as composing, manipulating, adding, and subtracting parts of images—nevertheless because manipulation in copying has its goal in exactness to something outside the imagination or the utterance itself, it need not be appropriate to the requirements of rhythm, intonation, cadence, and creation of sense in the utterance which are needed in poetic imaginative assent. Therefore the two pleasures are distinctive.

In any case, there are two causes that lead us to create poetry, both of which give us pleasure. Copying yields a pleasure that is not restricted to poetry, and need not always result from poems or utterances we appreciate for themselves. If appreciation is an imaginative assent based on feelings of pleasure in the balances in an utterance, then the contingent relation of pleasure-in-copying to poetry suggests that pleasure in copying is not the basis of imaginative assent. The other cause of poetry is our natural love of harmony. As imaginative assent depends on appreciating balances in utterances, it is possible that assent to the utterance is coterminous with the pleasure we get from satisfying our natural love of harmony, and the two may be identified with deleterious effects for any claim to syllogistic validity for poetry.

To counter this identification, we must show that a justification of assent and its basis in harmony will differ from our explanation of how a pleasure in harmony causes poetry making. We can show this by arguing that the pleasure in harmony that leads us to create poetry in fact depends on our pleasurable poetic imaginative assent. To begin with, clearly, Ibn Sīnā has not explained why we love, and so get pleasure from, a harmonious combination or melody. It is his insight that we do: there is little more to say in explanation. And instead of trying to find a more basic set of concepts and faculties that explain why we feel pleasure in harmony, Ibn Sīnā fills out this conception by distinguishing it from other sources of poetry and their attendant pleasures. Nor is it easy to deny this insight, for if we re-

ject it, we also deny that we can have any interest in poetry at all.⁶⁰ Instead we must show that just as copying is a cause of poetry and not the basis of its validity, so too our love of harmony is only a cause. Now, pleasure in harmony is not restricted to poetry or poetic imagination. Ibn Sinā does not elaborate the issue to any great extent, but from what he says we may expect that other harmonious combinations will also satisfy that love and give rise to pleasure. Thus, things as diverse as achieving a balanced unity between countries, or forming a harmonious community out of individuals, will also satisfy our natural love for harmony. Thus, if our love of harmony can be satisfied by *any* material in some appropriate combination, then if we want to distinguish the causes of poetry from the causes of other harmonies, we must point to some factor, in addition to harmony generally, whose presence explains why we are attracted to creating poetry.

Ibn Sinā provides an answer by distinguishing poetic imaginative representations from other uses of the imagination. However, Ibn Sinā also argues that in poetry imaginative assent results from feelings of pleasure *and* wonder or awe: it is 'a compliance due to wonder *and* pleasure that are caused by the utterance itself'⁶¹ and, in dealing with wonder, imaginative assent differs from the sheer pleasure associated with creating poetry. That is, assent to and creating poetry differ in that the first has commerce with pleasure *and* wonder while the second only yields pleasure, and to make full sense of imaginative assent in poetry, we have to explain the role of pleasure *and* wonder. Moreover, the role of pleasure and wonder in imaginative assent differs from the part played by pleasure in creating poetry: basically wonder *arises from* assent, and so the pleasure in satisfying the desire to create poetry can only follow from our pleasurable *and* wondrous assent. Our assent is a pleasure in a harmony obtained because of the meaningfulness of the elements in combination in that poetic syllogism. The order of the elements of the poem is harmonious because it has the form of a poetic syllogism, and so, if any pleasure in creating poetry accrues to the fact that it is a harmony, that pleasure in creating can only result from the syllogistic form the poem has, where our consent or assent to its logical form is itself a feeling of pleasure in the meaning of the poem. Consequently, assent does not depend on pleasure we might get from creating poetry but instead, pleasure in creating poetry depends on the pleasurable assent that poetry claims. If we must understand the imaginative assent we give to poetic utterances in the ways suggested by reference to premises and poetic syllogisms, then once again, even at this general level, it seems that wonder cannot be identified with the pleasure we get from satisfying a love of harmonious combinations. The latter was one of the causes

⁶⁰ There may be causes for poetry other than pleasure in harmony, such as the moral purpose of poetry, etc., but these are not what Ibn Sinā suggests, and if we reject the role of poetry, we will also reject Ibn Sinā's conception of poetry.

⁶¹ 1, Introductory.4, 63.

of creating poetry and, like the other cause, the pleasure it gives rise to in this role fails to justify our imaginative assent to poetic utterances. Pleasure from a love of harmony is merely formal—it does not turn on the nature of the elements involved, only on their inter-relation. Any harmony will be pleasurable, including one of meaningless sounds. Wonder, by contrast, turns on the elements in relation. It depends on understanding what is related and on what sense is thereby established. If we did not grasp the meanings constructed, invented, or created, we could not feel wonder or give assent.

However, we can justify this claim fully only by showing that imaginative assent has a logical syllogistic structure where our assent is a pleasure in a harmony obtained because of the meaningfulness of the elements in combination in that poetic syllogism. And we can defend this claim about pleasure in assent by first setting out the notion of imitation that is involved in considering poetry and then drawing out Ibn Sinā's conception of the relation between wonder and pleasure. Following that we shall explain the role of imitation, pleasure, and wonder in the poetic syllogism.

The sense of imitation we are concerned with, here, is what we referred to earlier as 'imaginative imitation.' Ibn Sinā does not say so explicitly in the relevant passage,⁶² but that he is attending first to the imitation of a thing that may be true or untrue, and second to the fact that 'human beings are more amenable to imaginative representation than to conviction,' both suggest he is opposing imitation to reality and is not concerned with precisely copying some segment of reality. In any case, we know Ibn Sinā writes that 'imitation has an element of wonder that truth lacks.' As he goes on to explain, 'the reason is that a recognised truth is evident and devoid of novelty, while an unknown truth is neglected.' It is important to note that the contrast is not between truth and falsity but between novelty and already knowing or finding evident. Ibn Sinā is using 'truth' for 'known and evident facts;' he associated 'wonder' initially with what has been 'neglected,' and later refers it to 'that which is invented or created.'⁶³ We feel wonder in an utterance, it seems, because it is unknown and novel, and in poetry this is because we created it. Images and imitations here 'are neither limited nor fixed,'⁶⁴ but this does not make them false or incapable of truth.

The fact that this contrast is not intended to abolish poetry to the realm of nonsense or falsity reinforces our supposition that wonder is still associated with sense or meanings. Although poetry does not share in the cognitive interest guiding analytic thought, for poetic language 'does not pertain to understanding but rather to wonder—it makes the speech pleasant and

⁶² I, Introductory.3, 62.

⁶³ 1, Introductory.5, 63.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

dignified'⁶⁵—nevertheless, it is still speech that concerns us. That is, for us to feel wonder, the utterance must still be meaningful, even if it is invented and created, and even though we do not judge it in terms of truth or falsity. So poetic or wondrous utterances do not escape the requirement of being rational and comprehensible. Rather, the last quotation shows that poetry addresses itself to our nature; and, instead of seeking veridical claims about what is 'recognised and immediate' in the world of nature, poetic utterances deal with an affect on subjects, who feel wonder or pleasurable awe.

Pleasure and Wonder

For Ibn Sinā wonder is a pleasurable or distressful emotion. It is a fascination, a pleasurable or displeasurable sense of amazement in something recognised but incompletely understood. In Aristotle's work wonder was a prelude to seeking out the explanation of some event or object, and could connote a theoretical contemplation that was pleasurable in itself. 'It is owing to wonder that men now begin and at first began to philosophize. [A] man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for myth is composed of wonders).' All men begin 'by wondering that things are as they are, as they do about self moving marionettes, or about solstices or the incommensurability of the diagonal of a square with the side.'⁶⁶

Full knowledge, which we hope to achieve eventually, seems to have its beginnings in our experience of the particulars we see and appreciate but do not understand. The particulars are not 'evident' because we cannot explain them, but we can appreciate them for themselves. Thus, as we saw, in writing of the philosophy of Aristotle, al-Fārābī proposes we can delight in using our senses even when they do not serve any other purpose. We can appreciate 'statues, elegant sceneries, objects delightful to hear and to smell, and objects pleasurable to touch—for nothing else besides having them as pleasurable objects of sense perception.'⁶⁷ Similarly, we may delight in discovering that some things we experience in sense and imagination can fit well with knowledge. Focusing on our modes of apprehension and knowledge rather than on the individual particulars which we perceive or explain, the fit between sense and knowledge leads us to delight in 'the myths, stories, histories of peoples, and the histories of nations, that man narrates and to which we listen solely for the delight they give.'⁶⁸ To this he adds that

⁶⁵ 7, XXII.8, 115.

⁶⁶ *Metaphysics*, 983a14ff.

⁶⁷ Al-Fārābī, *The Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, 73.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

looking at imitators and listening to imitative statements, listening to poems, and going over what one comprehends of the poems and the myths he recites or reads, are used by the man who delights in them and is comforted by them only for his pleasure in what he comprehends.⁶⁹

Both accounts of pleasure seem to rely on the Aristotelian conception of pleasure, as a fit between sense and what is sensed,⁷⁰ which al-Fārābī took up in his claim that pleasure involves 'apprehending most excellently a most excellent object of apprehension.'⁷¹ Moreover, the discovery that there is such a fit—a realization that quite naturally becomes a search for explanations—is also the occasion for wonder and a search for explanations.

Ibn Sīnā accepts and promotes these interconnections. He too thinks that wonder suggests a feeling of anticipating full explanations. The connotation of 'reasoning out the explanation' that is present in Aristotle's account of wonder and in al-Fārābī's conception of self-sufficient pleasure has a parallel in Ibn Sīnā's work, where wonder comes within the compass of reason. This feeling accompanies the pleasure of apprehension because the latter also addresses the fit between imagination and intellect. It is rational because, as wonder is a response to a balance, we must understand the elements in the balance to appreciate their relation. This appreciation is a matter of pleasure and awe. But where Aristotle saw such wonder as the first step towards a larger goal, so that pleasure and awe pointed beyond wonder to the later stages of full understanding, Ibn Sīnā does not see it as merely a step in the right direction. Like al-Fārābī, he gives weight to pleasurable awe for itself, and identifies its basis and nature as an independent experience: rather than merely a means to further knowledge, it results from an interest we take in the object or imitation for itself *while also* seeing its relation to knowledge. In the case of poetic utterances, pleasurable awe is our response to the meaningful harmony in their composition, and we must see it as a qualitatively distinct experience even if it has parallels with and eventually may even depend on demonstrative certainty.⁷² Here, because Ibn Sīnā wants to define its distinctive nature, he not only compares

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Aristotle's discussions of pleasure are collated and analyzed expertly by J.C.B. Gosling and C.C.W. Taylor in *The Greeks on Pleasure*, (Oxford, 1982).

⁷¹ Al-Fārābī, *Philosophy of Aristotle*, 73.

⁷² Even if it were claimed that Ibn Sīnā follows Aristotle in seeing wonder as a first step towards full understanding, it could be argued that wonder does not thereby simply become an inferior form of knowledge. That is, wonder is not made into some quantitatively lesser kind of knowledge which comes to be mixed in with a desire for a full pleasurable theoretical contemplation, and can only be understood by reducing full knowledge to some lesser kind of thing which is 'poetic'; rather, wonder operates by its own rules, in which the experience of pleasurable awe is occasioned by a harmony of meanings.

wonder with what is evident and known but also strives to fit it within a logic of poetic syllogisms.

Yet Ibn Sinā is not entirely given to thinking of wonder only as a *pleasurable awe*, for when considering the 'imagined propositions' which serve as premises to poetic syllogisms, he argues that they have as their disposition feelings of pleasure or distress. The example he gives, of 'honey is vomited bile,' hardly suffuses the hearer with a sense of comfort, but Ibn Sinā still identifies this disposition as wonder. Moreover, he proposes that the disposition is external to assent. The latter bears connotations of 'imaginative assent,' and as both this and wonder are of interest to us, we shall have to give more attention to the passage mentioned.

In the 'Sixth Method' of *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, Ibn Sinā's immediate concern is with 'the types of propositions employed by syllogisers.'⁷³ But much of what he says about 'imagined propositions' is comparable to the discussion in the *Commentary* where he sets out four elements which make an utterance poetic.

Some writers have argued that both texts deal with exactly the same matter.⁷⁴ The claim will not be disputed in any detail here, though we must set out some cautions: in the *Commentary on the Poetics*, because Ibn Sinā is dealing with poetic utterances generally, he does not clearly state whether his descriptions apply to premises or conclusions in poetic syllogisms. Indeed, he does not raise the latter distinction explicitly in that text, except insofar as the first chapter sets out his conclusion that poetry has a peculiar logical status, for only when dealing with logic does he need to examine his theory of poetics from the perspective of its syllogistic.

When we turn to the *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, in the Sixth Method we find Ibn Sinā analyzing kinds of propositions to identify how they are accepted as premises in syllogisms. But his full purpose is made known only in the Ninth Method, where he makes plain that every type of discourse depends on a distinctive kind of premise. Accordingly, poetic discourse—dependent upon poetic syllogisms and poetic validity—also needs a particular kind of premise. Thus, when Ibn Sinā examines the nature of the 'imagined proposition' in the Sixth Method, he is trying to describe the *premises* of poetic syllogisms and to explain why we accept them. His concern is with premises, not with the syllogisms as such or as yet. For Ibn Sinā, the meaningfulness and validity of poetic utterances depends on their logical structure—the poetic syllogistic—and an account of the latter will incorporate claims about poetic premises. This needs further explanation.

In the Sixth Method Ibn Sinā identifies imagined propositions as ones which 'when they are stated, ... leave in the soul an astonishing effect of distress or pleasure.' As an example, he says, 'honey is vomited bile' influ-

⁷³ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 118.

⁷⁴ For example, Schoeler links the two explicitly.

ences the soul because of the fact that 'honey resembles bile, something which makes the soul reject honey and pull away from it.'⁷⁵ Wonder (astonishment) here involves forming a non-veridical association with an utterance that results in the subject being drawn to or away from the object of the proposition. And he elaborates that such

a moving imagined statement depends on the element of astonishment [wonder] which it produces either by [1] the [quality of the form of the statement], [2] the force of its truth, [3] the force of its notoriety or [4] the goodness of its resemblance. But we reserve the name 'imagined propositions' for those which leave an effect [on the soul] by resemblance. These may move the soul by disposition external to assent.⁷⁶

First, in at least the central case of imagined propositions wonder is the disposition, resulting from grasping the proposition, that causes us to act; but the dispositional effect is 'external to' and cannot be identified with 'assent.' Therefore, the occurrence of the feeling of wonder will not explain the source of 'imaginative assent.' By separating wonder as disposition from imaginative assent, Ibn Sinā also avoids a problem that afflicted al-Fārābī's account of poetic syllogisms. The former distinguished imagination from estimation or *wahm*, arguing that the first is the ability to produce images while the second is our assessment of non-material qualities of objects and images. Estimation produces desire or aversion and a corresponding movement towards or away from objects. In the case of wonder, the distinction between imagination and estimation works in the following way: the imagination composes images and estimation then assesses these images for their non-material properties, leading to movement towards or

⁷⁵ *Remarks and Admonitions, Logic*, 127.

⁷⁶ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 128, italics added. I have amended [1] in the Inati translation. Schoeler's translation of this passage differs in sense and style. To paraphrase from the German, Schoeler writes that 'wonder can be the result of (1) The quality of the form of the statement, (2) The strength of its truth, (3) The strength of its general acceptance, and (4) The beauty of its imitation.' It is (1) and (4) that differ most from the rendering proposed by Inati. Schoeler's (1) is more self-explanatory, and its association between wonder and proposition seems more plausible. Inati's translation might be thought also to raise some confusion. To identify the source of wonder by reference to 'goodness of disposition' – Inati's (1) – when 'wonder' or 'astonishment' is the disposition is to confuse matters. Even if 'goodness' of disposition is understood through its connotations of 'force' and 'effectiveness,' the disposition's forcefulness or effectiveness is unlikely to be the source of the disposition (i.e. wonder). Inati could be suggesting that only a forceful disposition can give rise to wonder whereas other dispositions are weaker and less like astonishment. Arguably, this is an extrapolation onto Ibn Sinā's theory. On the other hand, Schoeler's (4) seems to take too much of Ibn Sinā's theory for granted in saying that wonder has its source in 'the beauty of its imitation.' Because these are the sources of wonder, and as the latter, in turn, is a basis for our claim that the poetic utterance is distinguished from demonstrative and other utterances, so we may expect that beauty is a quality ascribed to the poetic utterance that results rather than being a quality of the 'imagined propositions,' used as premises, from which we gain the poetic syllogism that, in turn, constitutes the poetic utterance we find beautiful. Instead, the 'goodness of its resemblance' may be understood as a reference to things like aptness, brilliance, insightfulness, appropriateness, and so on, of the comparisons contained in the imagined propositions.

away from them. Although the two are connected, imagination and estimation remain separate faculties for Ibn Sīnā, and any assent we give to the first cannot be identified with the desire or aversion produced by the second *even if* the desire or aversion has as its object the images composed by the imagination. Because al-Fārābī failed to distinguish these two faculties, he came to identify imaginative assent with the desire or aversion produced by *wahm* (which for him was part of imagination). Consequently, because estimation was variable between subjects and not quite rational, al-Fārābī could not defend the intersubjective validity of poetic syllogisms or statements. By contrast, because Ibn Sīnā distinguishes between imagination and *wahm*, he can both ascribe a disposition, a desire or aversion, to the product of the imagination and also seek a separate justification for 'imaginative assent.' Thus, he can say *not only* that an imagined statement can generate wonder as a disposition—presumably by estimating the product of imagination—because of its form, force, or resemblance, though really resemblance is central to imaginative statements, but *also* that this feeling of wonder is not the same as the assent appropriate to imaginative statements. The latter he will explain by reference to poetic syllogisms.

Second, as we call 'imagined propositions' those which evoke wonder as a disposition because of some resemblance, it is important to know whether the resemblance is between the proposition and some original lying outside or between the object compared (the *primum comparationis*, or *musabbah*) and the object compared to (the *secundum comparationis* or *musabbah-bihi*) in the proposition itself. Clearly, the resemblance between proposition and reality is the relation either of truth or of *wasf*, and as we saw earlier, neither sense is really a part of Ibn Sīnā's theory. Resemblance between objects compared and compared to in the proposition is much more appropriate to the example of 'honey is vomited bile,' where we use some similarity between their appearances to evoke a displeasurable awe. We do not test the imagined proposition by the truth of any relation between objects that it asserts, and so do not think it is literally true. It depends rather on a generalization—'Everything which is yellow and has a certain texture is like vomited bile'—whose measure lies in its striking comparisons. For Ibn Sīnā, the fact that the comparison gets and holds our attention, through our grasp of the resemblance, is reason for saying we assent to it. It may be bold, appropriate, startling, winning, and so on, and will evoke our assent because it seems 'just right.' There are no necessary rules for constructing such resemblances. Putative poets may train themselves by studying exemplars, practicing comparisons, or carrying out technical exercises and learning various linguistic tricks, but none of these can guarantee that they will produce brilliant, apt, striking, or 'just right' comparisons. In some cases individuals simply have this gift. Moreover, the wonder we feel in the comparison, by which we dislike honey because of its associations, is a result of our finding the comparison

'just right.' That is, again, the disposition is a consequence of our assent to the resemblance in the comparison, and therefore 'external to assent.'⁷⁷ We do not think the comparison striking, novel, and exemplary because we feel wonder but, rather, are led to wonder because we assent to the comparison even though it seems illogical or untrue.

Arguably, Ibn Sīnā is subverting the traditional poetic *wasf*—the astonishment we feel at discovering that our imitation coincides with reality. He has freed 'imitation' and 'resemblance' of any need to correspond to reality, and he has explained wonder as a feeling of pleasure or distress that attaches to our assent to 'imaginative propositions' rather than to the veridical relation of images to reality. Moreover, he has proposed that we substitute the aptness of comparisons within the proposition for a similarity to reality as the measure for imagined propositions or imitations in his sense. In so arguing, Ibn Sīnā has also retained the connection between reason and wonder that Aristotle established and al-Fārābī developed, for feelings of wonder occur only with our assent to a comparison, which occurs only when we find its parts meaningful and their relations significant.

Third, given that wonder depends on assent, the example of 'honey is vomited bile' exemplifies the fourth manner of producing assent. Ibn Sīnā opposes this to the other three. Wonder is produced '*either* by [1] the [quality of the form of the statement], [2] the force of its truth, [3] the force of its notoriety *or* by [4] the goodness of its resemblance,'⁷⁸ and also 'we reserve the name "imagined proposition"' for those propositions which, like [4], 'leave an effect [on the soul] by resemblance.' Although we shall not define the poetic syllogism until later, we may suggest that such imagined propositions have a special status because they usually go to form the major premise in a poetic syllogism, and our non-veridical assent to them goes to identify them as the resemblance—suggesting propositions which are peculiar to poetic syllogisms. Of course, the minor premises also are not always considered for their veracity. Ibn Sīnā's three criteria—the pattern of its form, the force of its truth, or the force of its notoriety—show clearly that assent is given to these premises for a variety of reasons. A false claim may secure assent because it is generally accepted, in the way that people may use a false theory about human action because it coincides with some other prejudices even though it is false, and we may assent to an established and central truth because it is central to our lives rather than because it is true. An example Ibn Sīnā gives is 'N.N. is fair of face.' We can construe this as a matter of opinion, which may be generally accepted ('Laila is lovely, and not only to Majnun'), but it is not a true statement of the kind that 'All metals expand on heating.' Another example is of a currently favoured proverb that is generally thought to contain an important truth. However, assent to these premises will not cause wonder because

⁷⁷ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 128.

⁷⁸ *ibid.* Italics added.

generally they embody conventional associations and so are unlikely to be startling and original. Arguably, this is Ibn Sīnā's reason for distinguishing between them and reserving the title of 'imagined propositions' for the major premises.

Fourth, it may seem that wonder is a subjective psychological state that varies from subject to subject depending on his or her familiarity with known, recognised, and immediate truths. Whereas one subject is likely to feel wonder because he does not know some recognised and evident truth, another subject will not feel wonder because she is already familiar with the same truth. Especially if we must understand the content in order to feel wonder, the feeling of wonder is a variable psychological state determined in the individual by the knowledge, experience, etc., he or she has of the elements in an utterance. As it is variable in this way, it cannot be the basis for a valid assent which, as compliance to the utterance, resembles the case of rule governed and generalizable cognitive conviction.

Problems like the latter show best the folly of taking 'wonder' to be a psychological state, for it is ill understood as 'mere' subjectivity. Rather, we can contrast wonder or pleasurable awe with 'known and evident facts,' and understand this as reaffirming a difference in logical status. If imitation has an element of wonder which truth lacks, it is not because wonder is a subjective and variable pleasure but because recognised and evident truths are based on demonstrative truths while poetic utterances have another justification. Demonstrative conclusions are known and evident: their premises are based on unquestionable foundations, they follow clear and ultimately self-evident inferential rules and they lead to undeniable conclusions. Meanings are determinate and subject to objective testing. Analytic thought, 'the clearest and most desirable state of affairs, is achieved by direct statement, made up of language which is authentic and standard' because its concepts are used consistently and correctly not only to define and identify objects but also to make assertions. Through the use of these concepts in syllogisms, knowledge requires compliance with the conclusion of an argument and so brings about conviction in subjects 'due to the realization that the thing is what it is said to be.'⁷⁹

That is, in an important sense, logic and knowledge compel our agreement to the evident and proven nature of things. If the premises are correct because they use appropriate definitions and concepts, and the argument is valid, then the conclusion must follow. A subject cannot accept the premises and the validity of an argument yet deny the conclusion without showing himself to be mistaken or irrational. Similarly, knowledge claims can be assessed by comparison with objects and events existing in a world independently of subjects. A rational subject cannot accept given grounds of evidence yet reject the relevant conclusion: the grounds are the basis from which, by some given inferential rule, we gain the conclusions

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

for which they are evidence. The relation of premises or evidence to the conclusion exerts a compulsion in both cases, in that the relation holds independently of the desires of the subject, and the premises and conclusion must be acceded to by any rational and cognizant being. This is what objectivity consists in, and it is possible to reject a subject's claim, where it fails to tally with an objective state of affairs, because truth depends on the way the world is, not on subjects or how they want it to be. Accordingly, compliance with the conclusion of a demonstrative argument characterises cognitive conviction. Further, cognitive and logical conviction consider the 'matter being conveyed' rather than the utterance itself. The language used is attended to as a means for grasping some feature of the objects to which it refers. The utterance succeeds by virtue of the content it articulates and which subjects accede to: it is not appreciated for its balance or inner harmony, and must abjure all invention and creativity.

When Ibn Sinā talks of recognised truths being evident, he is referring to our ability to place them in the objective syllogistic structure of proof and disproof outlined above. From this understanding of conviction, objectivity, and compulsion, he goes on to contend that poetry is effective because it has a comparable logical structure. But although it shares this structure, poetry does not share in the cognitive interest guiding analytic thought. Poetic language 'does not pertain to understanding but rather to wonder—it makes the speech pleasant and dignified.'⁸⁰ The last reference shows that poetry is directed at our nature—and the pleasure and awe we feel—rather than to any knowledge of reality. But instead of using the fact that it is directed towards feelings to dismiss poetry as a subjective, emotive, and arbitrary exercise, Ibn Sinā wants to defend the claim that poetry has a logical structure and a commensurate validity. Instead of seeking a measure for poetic utterances in states of affairs in the world, which we do in seeking cognitive truths or in avoiding untruths, in poetry we seek a measure for our utterances in the feelings of pleasure and awe evoked in our response to the harmonious balance of sense which they contain. Pleasure and wonder are criteria for grasping meanings and appreciating balances in poetic utterances. Where the realization, that the world is as demonstrative arguments had claimed, was the basis of conviction and compliance with demonstratively known and evident truths, the occurrence of feelings of pleasurable awe when we correctly grasp the meanings and balances of a poetic syllogism is the occasion for compliance as imaginative assent. Pleasure and wonder are no more merely psychological states than cognitive conviction, and are not any more subjective, variable, and uselessly idiosyncratic. Rather, they are the measure for grasping utterances, considered for themselves, for the balance of their senses. Wonder and pleasure do not occur unless we appreciate the balances in an utter-

⁸⁰ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 115. Note the moral connotations of poetic speech.

ance, and we do not establish the latter relation until we understand the meanings that compose the utterance.

This account of wonder and imagination leads to the following problems. The explanations proposed above conceive of wonder as an epiphenomenon of assent to *premises*. But Ibn Sinā also says clearly that we give assent or compliance to poetic utterances 'due to wonder and pleasure.'⁸¹ First, pleasure and awe are here the *basis* of imaginative assent, not the result, and second Ibn Sinā wants to involve *pleasure* only, saying nothing of the distress in wonder we might expect in our assent to premises. To explain these differences, we must show how imaginative assent to the logical structure—the poetic syllogism—of the poetic utterance involves wonder essentially. To do so we must go on to make clear how poetic utterances are explained by poetic syllogisms.

*From Pleasure and Wonder to the Poetic Syllogism:
premises and conclusions*

To explain this further, we may look at the way feelings of pleasure and wonder are evoked. Ibn Sinā has said that we attend to the utterance itself, so that the important relation is one 'among the parts' of the utterance and we should 'delight in the form itself—its manner, composition, and so forth.'⁸² We may take 'the horses of youth' as the figurative expression to be explained. Ibn Sinā can point out that its meaning is constructed out of two terms—'horses' and 'youth'—which are independently capable of literal use.⁸³ To find the figurative expression meaningful, we must recognize resemblances between its two elements: it compares the vivacity and insouciance of youth to a horse, ascribing to the former a sense, derived from the latter, of wildness that must be trained to be ridden. Ibn Sinā claims that this metaphorical comparison is like the conclusion of a syllogism. In both cases we must exercise our rational ability. By juxtaposing the literal terms, we invite a comparison that gives rise to a meaning which synthesizes elements from both terms. Just as an argument begins with premises which provide a context through some common element in comparison (Zyad is

⁸¹ 1, Introductory.4, 63.

⁸² 3, IV.3, 78.

⁸³ But it should be made clear that 'metaphor' does not display all the relevant aspects of figurative language. For one thing, even in the Greek original, Aristotle considers comparison, substitution, and analogy as varieties of metaphor. So any general conclusion arrived at about 'metaphor' must be developed further to show how these varieties will function. For another thing, Arabic poetics uses *majāz* and *isti'āra*, among other concepts, to analyze poetic language, and it is clear that 'metaphor' is not adequate to all these terms. In addition, Ibn Sinā has a complex account of poetic and figurative construction to which metaphor would be an inadequate label. Nevertheless, 'metaphor' does reveal some central aspects of validity and so may be pursued here for the light it casts on this issue—but with the caveat that our conclusions will have to be supported and deepened later.

a *man*; All *men* are mortal) to result in a new claim (Zyad is mortal), so a comparison between elements—'horse' and 'youth'—suggests a further sense or meaning that is the metaphor, just as if it were the conclusion of a syllogism that compared a mix of true premises and valid argument.

To explain his conception of the logical forms of figurative language, in *Remarks and Admonitions : Logic*, Ibn Sinā asserts that

poetical syllogisms are composed of imagined propositions, inasmuch as their imagined aspect is considered, be they true or false. In short, they are composed of premises, inasmuch as these premises have a certain disposition and composition, which the soul receives by virtue of their resemblance or by virtue of their truth. [That is as long as] there is nothing to prevent this [reception]. And metre enhances this [reception].⁸⁴

In this late work Ibn Sinā provides only a fairly short summary of his conclusions about logic and a few admonitions against typical errors. A briefer summary, which adds little except a reference to emotions, is proposed in the *Essay on Logic*.⁸⁵ In the *Kitāb al-Qiyās* we find a longer exposition of the poetic syllogism.⁸⁶

The poetic syllogism,

although it does not make any assertions which claim truth, instead seeks to evoke a representation, [and] seems nevertheless to make an assertion claiming truth. So far as it is poetry, it is not said to be false, when the premises are used as if they were accepted [*musallama*]. For example, when one says 'N.N. is a moon' because he is fair of face, then one concludes as follows: N.N. is fair of face. Everyone who is fair of face is a moon. Therefore N.N. is a moon. There also applies to this statement that if one accepts what is in it, then an assertion follows from it. But the poet does not at all want this conclusion to be believed, even if he *seems* to, so far as he is a poet; rather, his aim is to suggest through his conclusion that the soul [of the audience] finds the object of praise to be fair. Likewise, when [the poet] states: 'A rose in the anus of a mule, in the middle of which dung is visible,' it is as if he has said: everything which is in this way the dung of a mule is filthy and dirty. Even though it is a syllogism the poet in no way intends to state that his opinion [statement] is correct, rather he wants the soul to feel disgust for that which the statement is about.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 148; see also 127.

⁸⁵ See *Avicenna's Treatise on Logic*, translation and edition by F. Zabeeh (The Hague, 1971).

⁸⁶ See also Part IV of *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 57–8.

⁸⁷ *Kitāb al-Qiyās*, edited by S. Zayd Cairo, 1964), 57. The passage is quoted in full in G. Schoeler, 'Der poetische Syllogismus,' and I am indebted to Schoeler's discussion for a number of points about Ibn Sinā's theory. The reader may also consult Ibn Sinā's earlier writing on poetics, *Kitāb al-majmūʿ*, edited by Sālim Salīm, (Cairo, 1969).

Ibn Sinā is claiming that whether their structure is explicitly expressed or merely implicit, poetic utterances have a logical form which follows the pattern of demonstrative reasoning. Any combination of terms in a poetic utterance, composed in whatever poetic device, if it is meaningful, can be analyzed and its logical structure displayed. Indeed, it is only because it has this logical structure, among other features, that the poetic utterance is meaningful. In the passage cited Ibn Sinā seems content to display examples of logical structure in the 'Barbara' mood. It is possible also to use a Celarent mood, and in the *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle* he uses both as the fundamental mechanism to identify five poetic forms that structure poetic meanings.

However, this talk of Barbara and Celarent moods should not disguise the distinctive character of poetic syllogisms. Ibn Sinā's example of an explicit syllogism is 'N.N. is a moon;' the structure of this metaphor is easily proposed: it is a conclusion. The minor premise, that 'N.N. is fair of face,' and the major premise that 'Everyone fair of face is a moon,' lead to the conclusion that 'N.N. is a moon.' Other metaphors will have a similar structure, being capable of analysis into premises which parallel these. Some may be more complicated, and figurative language generally may involve other kinds of poetic forms in addition, or may contain more than one poetic syllogism, but the ordinary syllogisms in their Barbara and Celarent moods remain important.

In any case, the major premise appears to have the form of a statement of identity, though in fact it only affirms a similarity. Clearly everyone who is fair of face is not a moon, even if it is possible, in a given cultural context, to see a resemblance. The problem is that as the comparison contained in the metaphor—the conclusion—is not strikingly different from the similarity proposed in the major premise, we do not seem to have advanced very far in understanding and justifying the use of metaphors by analyzing them to display their logical structure.

It seems that both the premises and the conclusion are infected by the same lacunae even though the suggestion was that 'N.N. is a moon' affirms a similarity which we can analyze by showing that it has the logical structure of a poetic syllogism. In other words, at first 'N.N. is a moon' or 'the horses of youth' seem incomprehensible. They proclaim a resemblance as if it were an identity, and we do not know how to interpret them meaningfully. To solve this difficulty, we suggested, Ibn Sinā proposes that such metaphors are meaningful as the conclusions of poetic syllogisms, and that we must understand them by analyzing the premises from which, as syllogistic conclusions, they were constructed. This will show us something of their meanings and why they are valid. But when we carry out this analysis, it turns out that the premises themselves contain the kind of comparison they were supposed to resolve. The major premise of 'N.N. is a moon' makes a comparison which is not true and seems to assert an identity when,

at best, it only affirms a similarity. In other words, the poetic syllogism contains a premise which latter itself proclaims a resemblance as an identity and so presumably also stands in need of analysis into logical structure to explain its affirmation of the similarity. Accordingly, as the premise itself stands in need of explanation, and as Ibn Sinā has proposed we explain these statements by treating them as syllogistic conclusions, it seems that we must analyze the premise into a subset of further premises.

This analytic process need not lead to an infinite regress. For Ibn Sinā we may argue that a poet's success depends on his or her ability to make meanings clear by providing representations whose comparison is effective. However, one way of making this argument leads to problems. We might be tempted to argue that the effectiveness of poetic comparisons is similar to the truth and validity of the conclusion of a syllogism; therefore, just as cognitive syllogisms arrive at their undeniable results by combining true premises in a valid argument we must accept, similarly, poetic or figurative language combines literal terms to yield a meaning that the audience can appreciate. Accordingly, to explain the metaphor we identify its literal terms. The metaphor is effective and persuasive when its comparisons seem apt just as a conclusion is satisfactory when its premises are true and its argument valid.

However, while an objective syllogistic conclusion is satisfactory by virtue of its grasp of a state of affairs, it seems that what makes for the aptness of a comparison raises a problem. For if we must explain a metaphor by identifying its literal terms, then we gain its meaning by reducing it to its cognitive component. In other words, we find the metaphor meaningful by paraphrasing it into literal terms, and therefore into statements capable of truth and falsity, because that is how we grasp any literal term. Consonantly, we determine its aptness in just the way in which we assess knowledge claims. Thus, arguably a metaphor is apt when the comparisons it contains are true. So 'the horses of youth' is an apt metaphor because horses need training just as youth does. But this reduction makes metaphors nothing more than disguised true statements. And if this understanding of the claim is correct, then Ibn Sinā must give up his attempt to discover a distinctive validity for poetry through its similarity to demonstrative syllogisms because poetry is not merely similar to but is reducible to the truth or falsity of its literal terms. He must accept that its validity is not distinctive and that his account of poetry as a distinctively subjective and free creativity etc., is a failure.

We can reject this objection by pointing to our earlier account of poetic premises. We assent to them because the resemblances and comparisons they contain are striking, original, hold our attention, and so on. Instead of analyzing these comparisons into known and evident truths which, so to speak, belie the wonder we feel at discovering a premise that is 'just right,' we assent to premises despite their truth or falsity. Ibn Sinā

maintains that we do not need to go further in analyzing the basis of poetic premises. Poetic 'arguments,' like other deductions, must start from somewhere, and their premises are the basic units of a poetic syllogistic. There is nothing else more basic in terms of which we can explain why 'the horses of youth' or 'N.N. is a moon' seem to work except by saying that their premises seem 'just right.' It may seem that we could explain the premises further by clarifying their logical nature, but that only leads us to show how a poetic premise relates to other basic logical concepts, it does not explain this premise in some other more basic terms outside logic.

Nor can we expect to explain the poetic premise by translating it into a more literal language, for clarity attained through literal terms at best also dissipates the urgent and cumulative sense of a metaphor or figurative term, so that a reduction to such cognition is not a gain in poetic sensibility. An attempt to reduce poetic utterances to veridical claims in order to provide them with some foundation supposes that poetic assent could not suffice by itself. But that assumption stands in need of justification. For us to seek a basis for assent to poetic premises in literal truth is to reject poetic assent without argument and, instead of accepting that this sensibility exists and is a part of our humanity, to assume without argument that literal truth is the only satisfactory state of assent or conviction. Ibn Sinā accepts neither of these claims, though he does see the need to argue for a logic for poetic utterances in order to explain why poetic premises and syllogisms possess validity.

In providing that explanation, Ibn Sinā has different things to say of premises and conclusions, and while he associates the first with wonder, which can be pleasurable or distressful, he thinks that the second more clearly concerns pleasure. Wonder is the *result* of assent to *premises* whereas pleasure and wonder are the *bases* of imaginative *assent*. He writes that we give imaginative assent to poetic utterances 'due to wonder and pleasure.' We considered the case of wonder earlier, where we saw it resulted from our assent to poetic premises. As these premises enter into poetic syllogisms, Ibn Sinā suggests, wonder will attach to syllogistic *conclusions* because their meanings result from *premises* which occasion wonder. Accordingly, in the poetic utterance an experience of wonder serves as a symptom of the poetic or aesthetic nature of its premises, and signals or is a criterion for saying that imaginative assent is the appropriate compliance in this case. That is, wonder attaching to poetic premises is a basis for imaginative assent.

Now, wonder itself consists in pleasure *or* distress, and this dual character prevents us from identifying it with the pleasure that forms the second basis for compliance. For one thing, the suggestion is that wonder characterises our assent to premises only, while imaginative assent is due to pleasure in the utterance considered as a syllogistic conclusion. For another, we have already been introduced to the idea of our love of harmony and

the pleasure we get from satisfying that love. Poetic forms, of course, embody relations between parts of speech and so are modes of balance and harmony in poetic utterances. But these claims suggest an anomaly: if we assent to premises because of the relation they assert, we may also expect to assent to conclusions which similarly assert certain non-veridical relations between elements. The latter may be more complex, but they are not essentially different from premises because, after all, they have a logical relation determined by syllogistic forms. If there is this similarity, however, then both premises and conclusions must be the occasion for wonder, and nothing justifies us in saying that the former involve wonder while the latter involve pleasure only.

In a sense, this claim is correct. It identifies an important similarity between premise and conclusion. But it fails to take account of important differences. One difference is that we do not simply assent to conclusions: rather, conclusions are conclusions just because we arrive at them by following a required route. The route and its rules give validity to the conclusion, and we accept the latter because we acknowledge that the poetic and syllogistic forms have been satisfied. Assent to premises does not follow such a route and is not justified in any commensurate way. Because premises are basic, we accept them only on their own terms and we do not reduce them to some other more fundamental claims. If they could be so reduced, they would not be the premises to an argument or syllogism. And because premises have this logical role, they cannot contain the balances and harmonies available in conclusions. This does not exclude premises from determining conclusions, but it does suggest that their distinctive role will inform our response to them. Another difference is that wonder is a *result* of assent to a premise; wonder and pleasure are the *basis* of imaginative assent to an utterance considered as a conclusion. Even if we could wonder because of our assent to the balances in a conclusion, this occurrence of wonder would not explain the feeling of pleasure which is the basis of our imaginative assent to these balances in the first place. So, we may well wonder at poetry, but Ibn Sinā does not elaborate such a claim in his theory, and the theory he does develop makes imaginative assent depend on pleasure *and* wonder.

To explain this claim we must show the part pleasure plays in generating imaginative assent. We saw Ibn Sinā maintain that we have a natural love of harmony and that we expect pleasure from satisfying that love. We have seen also that poetic utterances are composed of elements. The order of elements does not follow and is not intended to correspond to reality, and the success of such figurative language is not assessed by reference to the truth or falsity of its literal terms. Rather, our concern is with the utterance for itself—with the inter-relation of elements *within* the utterance.

There are other considerations we might raise about this internal inter-relation. Just as not every demonstrative syllogistic proof will exhibit

the genius of its author, and some syllogisms may be more efficient or less insightful, similarly, poetic syllogisms and poetic forms may be deployed with different degrees of effectiveness. We assess the effectiveness of the poetic syllogism by considering the relation between its elements. Poetic conclusions consist of meaningful elements, and to appreciate the inter-relation of elements is at least to understand the meaning that emerges from the order of elements. This meaning, such order of elements, may be harmonious, and Ibn Sīnā's claim is that an occurrence of harmony satisfies our love for harmony and so occasions pleasure. In other words, this occurrence of pleasure is a signal of the harmonious relation between elements, and the suggestion is that poetic discourse is effective because it occasions pleasure in harmony. Here pleasure is subjective without becoming arbitrary for, first, we do not consider *any* feelings of pleasure appropriate, only those which result from a harmony between meaningful elements. Second, as harmony results from a combination of elements that has syllogistic validity, the pleasure in harmony that we feel resides in a logically valid relation of elements and is not merely subjective and idiosyncratic. That is, so far as our concern is with poetry, to appreciate an harmonious relation between elements we must understand those elements; poetic form relates the elements, and a poetic syllogistic form sustains that deployment of form and elements; therefore, the feeling of pleasure results from *that* set of elements with *that* valid meaning, and we may expect that every subject capable of understanding the meaning and of experiencing pleasure will respond appropriately. Pleasure is appropriate to that deployment of elements and, conversely, we may expect to know that we have gained an harmonious balance between meaningful poetic terms in a poetic form when we feel pleasure.⁸⁸ Further, we saw that our assent to the terms or elements in the harmony—i.e., the poetic premises—occasions wonder. So, our appreciation of harmony involves not only a meaningful syllogistic order but also pleasure and wonder, even if the latter have related but distinct sources. As we obtain pleasure through a harmonious and syllogistically justifiable order, and feel wonder when we assent to the premises that are related in that order, the occurrence of pleasure and wonder lead us to assent to the poetic utterance.

The poetic utterance here has correctly gauged our participation in a community of feeling. The balance of elements in a poem results from the meanings and imaginative imitations present in harmony in that work, and it is capable of being appropriate or inappropriate there. As a part of this approach, we assess a poet's ability by the skill with which he establishes this balance and the originality and brilliance of the comparisons he proposes; and the audience exhibits its sensitivity in the pleasure it feels in grasping poetic utterances and their inner harmony. We may expect that

⁸⁸ We might mistakenly think the pleasure is appropriate when it is not, but the incongruity between pleasure and that meaning can be made clear by education, persuasion, etc..

the riskier but still successful comparisons and harmony ventured by the poet will draw praise, for we feel pleasure and awe when the greatest poets take their magnificent risks with imagery and form yet still attain comparisons which we understand.

In Summary

We began this section by considering poetic imagination, seeking to distinguish it from a cognitive use of imagination. It became clear that poetic imagination was 'imitative,' but Ibn Sīnā gave this a special sense showing that it was distant from merely copying reality. And rather than stress the imitation's relation to some objects in reality, he emphasized inter-relations which imaginative representations bore 'in the utterance itself.' Although we have been at pains to distinguish poetic imagination from its cognitive counterpart, we also proposed that the two bore significant similarities because of their logical structure and the relations they could enter. Cognitive imagination gained its validity from both correctly applying to objects and from its part in demonstrative proofs deploying syllogistic forms, and we suggested that Ibn Sīnā proposes a similar set of relations and logical structure for poetic imagination and utterances. Here, Ibn Sīnā argues for the important role of pleasure and wonder in securing a ratiocinative compliance to poetic utterances. This raised some complications: our dealings with poetic utterances generate pleasure in a number of ways, not all of which have to do with our ratiocinative compliance to poetic utterances. Two sources of pleasure, in imitation and in appreciating harmony, were causes of our creating poetry, and did not clearly have a part in justifying the validity of the poetic utterances we create. To clarify the role of pleasure in explaining validity, Ibn Sīnā says that our compliance to poetry is due to pleasure and wonder, and, to clarify the different logical elements in poetry, he points to the relation of poetic premises to syllogisms. In this account, he maintains that poetic premises give rise to wonder. Next, we examined the nature and role of poetic syllogisms: here pleasure was a criterion for giving imaginative assent to a harmony between poetic elements that was established by using a poetic form that in turn acquired validity through its syllogistic form. As such a harmony is pleasurable, an occurrence of pleasure can be construed as a criterion for gaining a harmony. Further, as the relation between elements was determined by a poetic form that claimed validity, the harmony itself was ultimately justified by a poetic syllogistic. Moreover, the elements in harmony, being premises, also generated feelings of wonder. Thus, wonder and pleasure were distinct but related elements on the basis of which we gave imaginative assent to poetic utterances.

This account of the relation between pleasure and validity depends entirely on supposing that we can validate the poetic syllogistic. In the next section we shall examine that supposition.

POETIC AND DEMONSTRATIVE SYLLOGISMS

Ibn Sinā wants to justify the validity of poetry by arguing that figurative or poetic language is comparable to discursive language and informal reasoning in that both are valid and meaningful because they depend on a syllogistic structure. Accordingly, to justify the validity of poetic meanings, we may explain a poetic syllogism by examining the validity of demonstrative syllogisms. The structure and nature of the latter will tell us of what we must look for in order to explain and justify the former.

Syllogisms

Ibn Sinā discusses the nature of syllogisms in diverse texts. It is outside the scope of this section to consider all the details of Ibn Sinā's arguments and explication, and it is more sensible to examine such details of the nature of demonstrative and poetic syllogism as will both ground the theory and show where it needs development.

Ibn Sinā initially identifies the syllogism as 'a discourse composed of statements. If the propositions which the syllogism involves are admitted, this by itself necessarily leads to another statement.'⁸⁹ But then he clarifies his interest in the *relation* between propositions by saying

it is not a condition of [this kind of proof] to have admitted propositions in order that it be a syllogism. Rather, its condition is such that, if its propositions are admitted, then another statement necessarily follows from them. This is the condition for its being a syllogism.⁹⁰

The necessity with which one statement follows from another, of course, parallels Aristotle's definition of syllogisms as a 'discourse in which, certain things being posited, something other than what is posited follows of necessity from their being so.'⁹¹

Consonantly, Ibn Sinā's comparison of figurative language with logical necessity stresses the rational and meaning-dependent nature of conviction in both cases.⁹² We saw that the deployment of poetic syllogisms

⁸⁹ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 130.

⁹⁰ *Remarks and admonitions, Logic*, 131.

⁹¹ Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, Chapter 1, 24b16. I have used an unpublished translation by Professor Robert Price.

⁹² This point is well developed by Georg Schoeler, 'Der poetische Syllogismus' 46–7.

makes poetic works meaningful and successful. These poetic syllogisms are

composed of imagined propositions, in as much as their imagined aspect is considered, be they true or false. In short, they are composed of premises [having] a certain disposition and composition, which the soul receives by virtue of their resemblance or [their] truth.⁹³

Although both kinds of syllogism instantiate a similar 'comparison between premises,' the poetic case uses 'premises inspired by emotion.' And, as we saw, he extends this reference to the emotions by saying that we give compliance or imaginative assent to a poetic syllogism due to the pleasure and wonder which we feel in response to understanding a poem and thereby appreciating the harmony of its elements. Our concern is with the meanings given to poetic premises when their synthesis, structured by poetic forms or devices, gives rise to pleasure and wonder in a process which is comparable to the conviction we secure in understanding and accepting the demonstrative syllogism.

Ibn Sinā writes that we not only conceive of and assent to propositions⁹⁴ but we also accept the conclusions of proofs using the propositions as premises.⁹⁵ Cognitive conviction turns on, first, grasping meanings and so identifying the terms in the premise of an argument; second, knowing that their use in premises is appropriate to the object, so that, third, given the validity of the proof, fourth, the assertion they go to form is true. Similarly, where metaphorical or figurative language leads us to perceive resemblances and identities of meanings, the syllogistic form is at work. We understand the meaning of 'the evening of life' because we can grasp the juxtaposition of the span of day with the span of life. But, in poetry, we understand meanings in order to generate assent through experiences of pleasure rather than by regarding the truth or falsity of the relations apparently asserted in the terms of the poetic syllogism. Thus, our metaphor works because of its syllogistic structure, yet not because life really is identical with a day but because the associations suggested by the comparison evoke a particular response in us.

We must deepen this brief review of the comparison between poetic and demonstrative or cognitive syllogisms by explaining their necessity and validity. We can define logical necessity by saying that conclusions must follow if we accept the premises and relate them by semantical and syntactical relations to the conclusion. '[I]f its propositions [premises] are admit-

⁹³ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 148.

⁹⁴ Cf. for example, *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 118–128.

⁹⁵ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 148. In addition to the syllogism, Ibn Sinā also discusses two other kinds of proof—induction and analogy—but both these depend on syllogisms, and the latter underpin all the other proofs (Cf *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 130ff).

ted, then another statement necessarily follows from them.⁹⁶ The logical necessity operating here, Aristotle thought, was primitive and obvious, and so needed no explanation or defence beyond exhibiting its exercise in particular cases. The thought behind this maneuver, briefly, is this: We ask for explanations in order to clarify meanings. For example, we may clarify 'Zayd is mortal' by explaining that it is the conclusion of two premises that 'Zyad is a man' and 'All men are mortal.' But these premises seem to need further clarification to show what it is for a statement to serve as the premise of a syllogism or to explain what it means to say that 'Zayd is a man.' We may explain the latter by defining 'man' by reference to terms that are better known, or more easily understood, or more precise. But when we define 'man' as 'a featherless bi-ped,' of course it seems possible to ask for the definition to be explained further. So, we can explain that a 'bi-ped' is 'any animate creature that usually walks on two legs,' and so on. Aristotle maintains that such clarification cannot proceed infinitely. At some point, our explanations must come to a stop, usually in the basic categories and terms which we must accept if we are even to ask for clarification. As Ibn Sinā argues, 'if every conception requires a prior conception, then such a state of affairs would lead either to regression or circularity.'⁹⁷ These basic terms and concepts cannot be explained further because all explanation and thought proceeds by accepting their validity. We might label these as first principles: they must be known directly, without being explained in terms of some more basic definitions, for if they could be so defined, they would not be first principles.

The first principles, for Aristotle, included both the concepts which make up the categories and the logical rules which structure all thought.⁹⁸ Ibn Sinā identifies the basic concepts in the following way: 'The ideas of "the existent", "the thing", and "the necessary" are impressed in the soul in a primary way, this impression not requiring better known things to bring it about.' Similarly,

⁹⁶ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 131. The relation between premises is determined by the syllogism, and that remains constant in all these diverse kinds of proof. But the basis for accepting or positing premises will differ, depending on whether we are dealing with poetic premises, rhetorical ones, or demonstrative ones. These are the difference that go to distinguish different kinds of syllogisms from each other.

⁹⁷ *Metaphysics of al-Shifā*, Book 1, Chapter 5, 30, quoted by Michael M. Manura, in his translation and commentary in 'Avicenna on Primary Concepts in the *Metaphysics* of his *al-Shifā*' in *Logic Islamikos: Studia Islamica in honorem Georgii Michales Wickens*, edited by R.M. Savory and Dionisius A. Agius, *Papers in Medieval Studies*, 6, (Toronto, 1984), 219-239, 233.

⁹⁸ In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle invokes the need to avoid *apaideusia*—and its resulting isolation for the rational community—by accepting the law of non-contradiction for meaningful discourse between rational and cognizant beings. An excellent account of the issues involving philosophical logic in Aristotle's *Prior and Posterior Analytics* is provided by Jonathan Lear in *Aristotle and Logical Theory* (Cambridge, 1984). I am indebted to this book for clarifying the role of a number of arguments which Ibn Sinā, in following Aristotle, also accepts.

in the category of judgement[s]... there are primary principles, in themselves found to be true, causing [in turn] assent to the truth of other [propositions]. If these primary propositions do not come to mind or if the expression designating them is not understood, then it would be impossible to know whatever is known through them...'

Among judgements, these 'primary intelligibles' include obvious and primitive logical truths.⁹⁹ The suggestion is that these logical truths, being the basis for all other explanations and reasoning, cannot be proved by any further set of propositions, but must be known directly, for themselves, and so must be obvious and primitive. On the basis of these logical truths, demonstrative syllogisms, relying on the use of primary concepts and definitions to grasp objects and to assert relations in premises, are the most certain, while the other kinds of syllogism are varying degrees away from demonstration in certainty.¹⁰⁰

However, a defence by reference to primitiveness and obviousness, even if it works for demonstration, need not work for poetic syllogisms because the latter depend only on a similarity with the former. What is obvious in the case of logical necessity needs explanation and justification when used in poetic syllogisms. Of course, a defence of the former may give us clues of how to defend the latter.¹⁰¹ Ibn Sinā defends the primitive and obvious nature of logical validity by displaying the syllogistic forms in examples, where their mechanism is clear, and then arguing that the exhibited forms are adequate for formalizing all deductive arguments, whether formal or informal. Given their primitive and obvious character, this is the only way to proceed, for we cannot expect to explain them by 'impart[ing] knowledge not [already] present in the natural intelligence, but [can] merely draw attention to the comprehension of what [any] speaker intends and upholds.'¹⁰² Further, he maintains that of the syllogistic forms, 'the first division, called "the first figure", had been found perfect with much goodness—in as much as its syllogistic character, i.e., the necessity of yielding to a conclusion, is evident in itself and not in need of a proof.' Naturally, 'the converse of this division has been found remote from our nature.'¹⁰³ Because his first figure is basic, we cannot expect to prove it. It consists of four perfect and self-evident syllogistic conclusions:¹⁰⁴ (1) All As are Cs;¹⁰⁵ (2) No A are C;¹⁰⁶ (3) Some A are C;¹⁰⁷ (4) Some C are not A.¹⁰⁸ Next, we

⁹⁹ Ibn Sinā, *Metaphysics*, 219, Mamura translations

¹⁰⁰ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 140–150.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² Ibn Sinā, *Metaphysics*, 222, Mamura translation.

¹⁰³ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 134.

¹⁰⁴ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 135–7.

¹⁰⁵ This is Barbara mood: All A are B; all B are C; therefore all A are C.

¹⁰⁶ This is the Celarent mood: All A are B; no B is C; therefore no A is C

¹⁰⁷ This is the Darii mood: Some A are B; all B are C; therefore some A are C.

may propose that all non-formal and imperfect deductions, including the second and third figures Ibn Sinā goes on to set out—therefore, any deduction—can be converted into perfect and obvious deductions in one or more of these four syllogistic forms. For example, the moods of the second figure are explained by comparison with the first figure. Thus, the 'first mood of the second figure is something like the phrase "Every B is a C, nothing of A is B, therefore nothing of C is A".' To prove the validity of this argument, Ibn Sinā converts it into a mood of the first figure. Accordingly, 'Since we convert the major, making it "Nothing of B is A", and then add to it the minor premise, thus forming the second mood of the first figure[, the] conclusion is of the mode of the major premise.'¹⁰⁹

The procedure Ibn Sinā follows in these passages shows that the variety of formal arguments we use involve at their basis, as the test of their coherence and validity, the syllogistic forms of the first figure and its four moods. Similarly, non-formal deductions, of the kind present in our ordinary reasoning, bear a logical structure that may not be obvious, but if they are to count as reasoning, their procedures must be capable of being formalized, and so ultimately must rest on the obvious and primitive first figure. Moreover, if all non-formal and imperfect deductions depend on the perfect and self-evident first figure, then we can gain any conclusion only by using premises which link terms in the conclusion through a middle term in at least one of the four forms. That is, at least one of the four forms will apply in all deductions, and will validate the deduction in which it occurs. So, to prove the validity of any non-formal deduction, it is necessary only to clarify which of the four syllogistic conclusions or forms of the first figure lies at its basis, for its four syllogistic forms are obviously valid and are primitive. To justify the non-formal syllogism, we need only to convert it or express it so that we exhibit the presence of the formal and obvious syllogistic at its basis. Consequently, the four syllogistic forms provide a complete and consistent set of rules for any deduction and so serve as criteria for validity.

Poetic Device and Syllogism

Ibn Sinā explains the above claims in his writings on logic,¹¹⁰ and we may hold that in his examination of poetic or figurative language and devices in

¹⁰⁸ This is the Ferio mood: Some A are B; no B are C; therefore some A are not C.

¹⁰⁹ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 139.

¹¹⁰ See *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, for example the Seventh method (130–143) for a succinct statement of a number of these arguments. Other of Ibn Sinā's logical works bear out these claims. For example, *Burhān, al-Burhān*, edited by A. 'Afīfī (revised edition by I. Madkour), (Cairo, 1956)), and the passages from al-Shifa translated in *The Propositional Logic of Avicenna*, translated by N. Shehaby, (Dodrecht and Boston, 1973), *passim*. For other approaches to these issues, see Lear, cited above, and Heinrichs (1969), cited above.

his *Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics* he intends to argue analogously to conclusions about their nature, formation, and validity. There, for Ibn Sinā, 'the elements which make an utterance imaginative,' and therefore poetic, include sound and sense, and involve a relation between parts that 'is either proportional or contrastive, and both proportion and contrast are either complete or incomplete. All this is either according to wording or meaning....' Ibn Sinā adds to this claim when he considers that these constructions result from using five poetic forms or 'devices of artifice.'¹¹¹

We can set out the relations involved here as follows. Ibn Sinā thinks the poetic forms and devices are exhaustive: 'every artifice occurs in terms of a certain relation of parts,'¹¹² he argues, so that all poetry follows their order.¹¹³ And if all poetic discourse has validity because it is structured by poetic syllogisms, regardless of whether we are conscious of that logical structure, then it is an easy step to associate poetic forms or devices with poetic syllogistic forms by saying that poetic devices or forms are the linguistic structure of a poetic discourse that is justified ultimately because it has a poetic syllogistic at its basis. That is, the forms of poetic construction, dependent on a poetic syllogistic, generate new and figurative meanings through contrast and proportion. One form of construction according to contrast, for example, involves words that do not

merely differ from one another in terms of sound but also in terms of meaning, i.e., the meaning that it commonly has. The form of this type exists in two or more words of which one means something and the other means its opposite, what is supposed to be its opposite or contrary, or what is proportional to, related to and connected with its opposite, e.g., *sawād* (blackness) which also means 'arable land,' *bayāḍ* (whiteness and wasteland), *rahmah* (mercy), *jahannam* (hell) and all such words.¹¹⁴

In other words, Ibn Sinā's claim is that all figurative language shares in the structure and construction set out under the rubric of meanings gained by poetic forms and justified by the poetic syllogistic. This structure may not always be obvious any more than the syllogistic forms are always obviously present in informal deductions, and so may need to be made clear; but they can be supposed present. Further, just as we justify the logical necessity of a syllogistic conclusion by displaying the obviously valid forms at

¹¹¹ 1, Introductory.9-15, 64-66.

¹¹² 1, Introductory.9-15, 64-66.

¹¹³ We might claim that the five devices he sets out are not exhaustive, and so we cannot know they are reducible to the poetic syllogistic. We shall consider this criticism in two contexts: the open-endedness in our construction of poetic devices we shall examine by reference to the open-endedness of our constitution of themes. Of poetic devices or forms, it is clear that they must work by proportion or contrast and, as we shall argue, they cannot present a threat of incompleteness because our experience of pleasure and awe in meaning prevents us from producing meanings *ad infinitum*. The defence of poetic forms is presented further in Chapter Four, 'Forms, Themes, and the Completeness of the Syllogism.'

¹¹⁴ 1, Introductory.15, 66.

its basis, we justify the necessity of poetic conclusions by exhibiting the presence of syllogistic forms.

Accordingly, of the poem itself we may say that although in the figurative device we compare meaningful elements to muster a pleasurable harmony, nevertheless, poetic forms or devices must relate to demonstration and syllogism in some significant way to be valid. Given the examples of imperfect and non-formal deductions, we may expect that such similarity will consist in being reducible to the first figure of deduction and, further, in depending on premises which are accepted in ways parallel to our acceptance of demonstrative, dialectical, or rhetorical premises. That is, Ibn Sīnā's discussion of poetic forms is not just a summary listing of figures of speech and thought, but serves the more serious aim of defending their necessity and validity by showing that the variety of poetic devices we use depend ultimately for their success on having something like the four perfect, obvious, and primitive syllogistic forms at their basis. Similarly, examples of informal reasoning depend on obvious syllogistic forms. Thus, in keeping with this analogy, Ibn Sīnā defends his claim for poetic syllogisms by saying that the only way to gain poetic meanings is by using terms in a synthesis that follows the poetic devices or figurative forms which he has displayed. Such a procedure has obvious parallels with the exhibition of the valid forms of demonstrative reasoning syllogisms. In both we try to show that the basic syllogistic is inescapable.

We have already seen examples of this syllogistic structure in examining metaphors and analyzing the premises which go into constituting poetic utterances. We construe metaphors as poetic syllogistic conclusions, and explain their meaning by reference to that logical structure. Further, metaphors are not the only kind of poetic device available to poets writing in Arabic, and Ibn Sīnā identifies poetic or figurative forms or devices in the *Commentary*; accordingly, we may expect that just as metaphors have a logical structure that allows us to grasp them as syllogistic conclusions, similarly the poetic forms will have a logical structure in which poetic premises will give rise to poetic syllogistic conclusions. This is because Ibn Sīnā not only proposes that poetic validity depends on the poetic syllogistic, but he also proposes a particular relation of language to logic.

Because there is a certain relation between expression and concept, and [because] some states of expressions often affect some states of concepts, the logician must also pay attention to the non-restricted aspect of the expression insofar as that [aspect] is not restricted to the language of one group of people rather than that of another except rarely.¹¹⁵

Given that the poetic devices which generate meanings need not be restricted to Arabic, even though their deployment in Arabic poetry will be

¹¹⁵ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 48.

particular to that language, we may expect to study them as poetic devices or rules for obtaining poetic meanings generally.

Ibn Sīnā suggests this also by speaking equivocally of 'words and meanings,' acknowledging that wording becomes important in how we construe meanings and vice-versa; and although we have yet to argue fully for the logical status of poetic devices, it must be clear that their validity ultimately will turn on their logical structure rather than merely on their linguistic structure. Conversely, in understanding poetic devices, it will not suffice if we argue for the validity of the poetic syllogistic by identifying its similarity to demonstrative and other kinds of syllogism yet ignore altogether the distinctive discourse of poetry and poetic devices. Rather, we will have to clarify their distinctive logical structures.

A critic of our procedure may argue that beyond the task of showing the presence of these poetic forms and their parallels with demonstrative syllogism, we also need to show exactly how the deployment of poetic devices shares in the obvious and evident forms of the first figure. Ultimately, the argument goes, whatever other parallels we may find between the devices or forms and the syllogistic, only when we specify how poetic forms depend on the obvious and primitive syllogistic forms do we also justify their validity.

However, this claim misconstrues the role of the poetic syllogistic and its relation to demonstration. Ibn Sīnā distinguishes different kinds of syllogism by pointing to the variety of premises, with their distinctive logical and epistemological statuses, that are brought within the same logical structure of syllogistic proof. Demonstrative proofs have premises that must be accepted; dialectical syllogisms are composed of widely known propositions; rhetorical syllogisms of presumed propositions; and so on.¹¹⁶ But such differences in premises fail to make them any the less syllogisms, for they all share in the same proof structure identified in these three different syllogistic figures, all of which, ultimately, if valid, must be reducible to the first figure. To be valid as a syllogistic then, the poetic forms must parallel the rules and proof procedures that make a syllogism a syllogism. But having this formal structure of proof does not make a poetic syllogism into a demonstrative one, and we do not need a further argument, beyond pointing out that the poetic syllogistic can satisfy the requirements of the syllogistic proof procedure, to show that the poetic syllogistic is a syllogistic. All kinds of syllogisms—including the dialectical, the rhetorical, and the poetic—are not demonstrative for reasons of their premises, but they are all syllogisms because they share in the obvious and primitive syllogistic.

To show how poetic syllogisms can possess validity, we do not need to argue that they are demonstrative in some measure but must see whether and how poetic forms satisfy the requirements of syllogistic proof procedures and thereby parallel the first figure syllogistic. And to show this par-

¹¹⁶ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 148.

allel, we may consider how poetic forms cope with objections which threaten the use and validity of syllogisms generally.

Ibn Sinā does not himself explicitly make an argument relating poetic forms to poetic syllogisms. Indeed, there are occasions where he seems to deny that poetic utterances use forms or syllogisms, as when he argues that some poems are so immediately pleasant that we do not need an artifice to make them plausible.¹¹⁷ But this does not exclude the need for poetic syllogisms. It is far from clear that a spontaneously produced poem lacks a poetic device just because of the way it was produced.¹¹⁸ And there are other reasons for construing the case as we have just proposed. If we can defend the validity of the poetic syllogistic, then that will legitimate our claim that we have justified the general validity of poetic devices by showing their possibility in logic.

To make this argument for validity, we shall rely on issues raised in *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, where Ibn Sinā insists we understand poetic syllogisms as we outlined them above and shall consider again below. Now, *Remarks and Admonitions* uses the 'indicative' method, in which Ibn Sinā provides answers to issues, but does not argue for them systematically because he expects readers to engage with the text and arrive at the conclusions in the right way by themselves.¹¹⁹ As the text intentionally includes lacunae, readers must produce arguments, for which they may rely on premises and conclusions drawn from other parts of Ibn Sinā's works. Like al-Fārābī's, Ibn Sinā's reflections on poetics relate the latter to other issues of theory and practice. And in providing our account of the poetic syllogism and its foundation of poetic devices we are producing an argument that relies on other parts of Ibn Sinā's works and yields the conclusions he favours. In doing so, we are following the practice he expects and, without using premises alien to his work, are seeking to defend his conclusions. Ibn Sinā may not explicitly relate poetic devices and forms to the forms of the poetic syllogism. Nevertheless, he says both that all figurative or poetic language depends on using these poetic forms and that the validity of poetry depends on and can be analyzed into the form of the poetic

¹¹⁷ see Dahiyat, 64, and *Kitāb al-Majmūʿ Kitāb al-Shi'r*, 15–16.

¹¹⁸ Certainly we praise poets sometimes for writing poems spontaneously, carrying out the poetic equivalent of 'intuitively reckoning out the middle term.' But that does not preclude poetic devices or syllogisms. Because our concern in those cases is with the process of *producing* a work, we do not directly attend to its structure or validity. But without that structure the poem would cease to be a poem altogether. For regardless of how it was produced and even if we are not reflective about its structure when we appreciate it spontaneously, without some logical structure, it would be nonsensical. See Chapter Five, below, for a further discussion of this issue.

¹¹⁹ See *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 46, and Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works*, Volume IV *Islamic Philosophy and Theology, Texts and Studies*, edited by Hans Daiber (Leiden, 1988), 307–10. For other aspects of Ibn Sinā's practice of logic, see 'Avicenna and the Logic of Questions' in Nicholas Rescher, *Studies in Arabic Philosophy*, 48–53, and N. Rescher, *The Development of Arabic Logic*, (Pittsburgh, 1964), 149ff.

sylogistic.¹²⁰ Just as the meanings contained in standard and authentic language must satisfy logic, so too the meanings gained by the use of poetic devices cannot escape the rules of logic. But where demonstrative language has some measure in the way the world is, poetic discourse has its measure in our feelings of pleasure in the harmony between meaningful elements that we obtain by the use of poetic devices. Neither is less capable of logical validity for all that, but their comparison does leave us with the problem of expounding Ibn Sinā's conception of the relation between poetic device and syllogism.

The Completeness of the Poetic Syllogistic

To justify the validity of the poetic syllogistic, we may question the claim, that the success of any poetic utterance depends on a poetic syllogistic, by rejecting the assumption that *every* poetic meaning can be expressed in terms of a poetic syllogism: that is, we raise the issue of the *completeness* of the poetic syllogistic.

We can explain the issue by reference to a similar problem that occurs elsewhere. In the case of logical necessity, we assess the completeness of a proof procedure by seeing how completely it can grasp and exhibit *all* the logical consequences of a set of premises. If the use of the four syllogistic forms yields a procedure for proof, allowing us to move legitimately from a set of premises through inferences to a conclusion, then that proof procedure would be thought reliable if it accounted for *all* the possibilities contained in the premises and showed that the conclusion arose from those premises. For this, the proof procedure must be finite, and must be capable of incorporating all the logically possible variables resulting from the premises. But if the *proof procedure*, first, were itself infinite or, second, inadequate to all the possibilities contained in the premises, then the procedure would be impossible to complete or its completion would be inadequate to the premises. To take the second possibility—of the procedure being inadequate to the premises—a procedure that could not account for all the possibilities in a set of premises would be unreliable just because we could never use it with the certainty that we had completely grasped all the implications of the premises. Some implications, which intuitively we might expect to follow from the premises, would not be incorporated in the proof procedure, and if we were to accept the implications it would have to be because we did not rely on the procedure.

This sort of inadequacy will be considered again below, and we need not consider it further here. The first possibility raises other issues: conclusions resulting from the use of a procedure which was infinitely long could always be doubted because we could never know that any part of the pro-

¹²⁰ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 148.

cedure was being followed correctly. This is because the procedure itself could not be completed, and its full details would remain unknown; so any use of it would be based on faith that the as-yet-untested parts of the procedure did not contain any contradictions or that it did not thwart itself. If it is infinite, it is incomplete, and so ultimately cannot be known to be valid. Therefore, any proofs based on that procedure would also remain questionable and unreliable.

A defence of the infinitely long proof procedure may be suggested as follows: it is true that the as-yet-untested parts of a proof procedure may be contradictory, but that need not lead us to doubt all the procedure including those parts we may have used without problems. It is always possible that the parts we have used may turn out to be mistaken because some other part of the procedure could later turn out contradictory or self-defeating. But such incoherence will only consist of particular errors, identified as the problems arise. And even if such errors were identified, their existence does not show us that the untested parts of the procedure are generally unsatisfactory, and so we have no warrant for the claim that generally the proof procedure must be considered unreliable, even in the parts we have used without problems, until we establish the reliability of the whole. That is, if there is unreliability, that will have to be shown as and when it occurs. We cannot infer from the fact that it is possible for us to make mistakes to the conclusion that some part of every step, including the ones we have already taken, must be mistaken. It is equally possible that some part of the procedure is correct; we do not have to show how that part fits with the whole in order to rely on that part.

This defence misconstrues the nature of the problems of completeness and the role of a proof procedure in arguments. The procedure sets out the rules for securing particular proofs. If the procedure is itself mistaken, then the conclusions arising from the use of that procedure will be unreliable just because they depend on the mistaken proof procedure. If the conclusions are thought right, it can only be for reasons other than their following a mistaken procedure, for a mistaken procedure can yield truths only by accident, not by design. If a procedure remains infinite, then it cannot be completed, and so cannot be known to be satisfactory. Consequently, any proof based on that procedure will be infected by a doubt that afflicts the procedure: we cannot know that the proof is reliable because we can never know that its procedure is acceptable. If the procedure were not known in its entirety, we could not know that it was satisfactory, and so we could not know that its deployment in particular arguments was successful. Thus, its success depends on completeness, for only when it is complete is it known in its entirety.

Even if the proof procedure is finite, there are yet other ways in which its completeness is threatened. Aristotle dealt with the threat to the completeness of his proof procedure by first displaying the four syllogistic

forms and then arguing that every deduction must link its terms in one of these ways.¹²¹ We saw Ibn Sinā make a similar claim for the first figure, but further, to defend this claim, he also puts forward two arguments.¹²² First, we can consider a complex set of premises. Its complexity raises the possibility that we cannot grasp all the logical consequences of all the possible premises and so our procedure may prove inadequate to understanding or ordering any argument based on those premises. Second, there may be an infinite number of such premises, so that our proof using the suggested procedure may never come to an end. In either case, because we have no guarantee that the procedure can cope with all the possibilities contained in the premises, we cannot be certain about any conclusions we arrive at using that proof procedure.

Against these possibilities, for Ibn Sinā we can propose that a deduction with a large number of premises can be converted into a series of inferences having only two steps in one of the syllogistic forms. Further, as this leaves open the possibility that there may be no end to the number of inferences in this 'two-step' series, Ibn Sinā argues that the process of two step inferences ends when all the premises of a syllogism are shown to be principles or axioms which we cannot be required or expected to prove—that the proofs must have an end when we reach those axioms and principles, and so cannot be infinitely long. This argument is expressed in the claims that, first, the premises of a two-step inference cannot both involve only particulars, second, that it is possible to demonstrate that the universal premises are ultimately necessary ones, and third, that the minor premise must ultimately rest on or be an axiom.¹²³ Thus, the basis of a proof in axioms or principles, the ability to dissolve a set of complex premises into a set made up of a series of simple premises, and the use of syllogistic forms, are together taken to show that logical necessity is adequate to the full range of possible knowledge and demonstrative or cognitive deductions. The complexity of a set of premises is not a barrier to the deduction because a complex set is held to be qualitatively the same as a series of simple inferences, so that nothing of the sense of the complex set is lost when it is analyzed and re-expressed as a series of simple inferences.

¹²¹ *Prior Analytics*, cited in Lear *Aristotle and Logical Theory*; these arguments have their counterparts in Ibn Sinā's writings.

¹²² e.g. *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 135; at 48 and 49 he argues that knowledge of the composite needs knowledge of the parts, and that the unknown must correspond to the known.

¹²³ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 134–143, where Ibn Sinā shows how proofs must depend on the first figure; 118–128, where he sets out the different kinds of premises or propositions; and 148–153, where he explains the operation of syllogistic proofs. To demonstrate that the universal premises are ultimately necessary ones and must depend on axioms, we can turn to the *Metaphysics* where, as we saw, Ibn Sinā argued that all thought must depend on the categories and the principles of logic. Any argument must rest on principles and axioms because all thought must do so.

Such an argument for the completeness of a syllogistic may provide clues for defending the validity of poetic syllogisms. However, it is not clear that the analogies with poetic syllogisms are strong enough to warrant poetic validity. There do not seem to be clear principles operating in poetics, and the ability to simplify complex inferences into a series of simple ones seems inappropriate in poetry.¹²⁴ Because poetic sense is cumulative and synthetic rather than analytic, we cannot assume that everything that follows from a complex combination of terms will also follow from a series of simpler constructions. Nuances and meanings are generated by complex constructions and frequently lost on being translated into simpler constructions.

In spite of such differences, we can defend Ibn Sinā's poetic syllogistic against the threat of incompleteness. The poetic syllogistic does not claim completeness in the way that a demonstrative syllogism does, but poetry does provide grounds for satisfactory agreement. Instead of guaranteeing that proofs are finite simply by pointing to basic principles or by identifying axioms in poetic syllogisms, Ibn Sinā proposes that the construction of meanings in figurative language involves a relation between terms that, when it is harmonious, occasions pleasure when we grasp it. Thus, in the poetic syllogism, in spite of the absence of principles and axioms, the pleasure occasioned by harmony serves to guard against incompleteness by showing that its forms and terms must be finite.¹²⁵ Just as logical necessity would be inadequate if we could never be sure that the proofs were finite and capable of being completed, similarly if a figurative use of language involved so complex a set of terms that its mix were infinite, then we could have no certainty that the meaning which resulted from using the poetic syllogistic forms was adequate to all the possibilities in that mix of terms, and a grasp of meanings that depended on using those forms could never be known to be successful. But, just as, among other things, we pointed to the basis of logical proofs in axioms to show that the proofs must be finite, similarly we may point to the occurrence of pleasure to argue that there is a limit to the terms and premises involved in a poetic syllogism, for the terms are related in a harmony that occasions pleasure and wonder. As pleasure depends on the grasp of meanings, and assuming that we cannot hold an infinite number of terms in balance,¹²⁶ the occurrence of pleasure serves to show that the mix of terms is not infinite and that the threat of incompleteness is dissolved. Further, a harmony between infinite numbers of elements is an implausible event: a harmony, or balance, presupposes some sense of

¹²⁴ For problems with reducing a set of complex premises into a series of simple ones, see T. Smiley, 'What is a Syllogism?', *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 1972.

¹²⁵ That is, the poetic devices have their standard in our feelings of pleasure and awe.

¹²⁶ The claim that we cannot hold an infinite number of terms in balance is defended further below. Aristotle defends the claim indirectly by arguing that nature is never open to infinite predication; therefore it is unnecessary to defend syllogisms against the possibility of infinite predication.

a whole, so that the elements can be held in relation within the whole and found to have an harmony. The existence of an infinite number of elements would at best render partial or temporary any claim to have attained a balance between elements.

In this context, wonder in assenting to premises also puts a limit to the openness of poetic syllogisms.¹²⁷ For poetic syllogisms cannot be proven indefinitely, as if, whenever we came to some premise we could suppose it must be capable of being clarified further. If such were the case, then again, any syllogism would be unsure of completeness because it would extend infinitely in the direction of its increasingly detailed premises. The occurrence of wonder, as a result of assent to premises, so to speak puts a stop to that infinite regress because wonder signals our acceptance of the premises for itself. There is no need then to look for further support for that premise from more detailed premises.

We explained Ibn Sinā's association of pleasure and harmony between poetic elements by pointing to the origins of pleasure in the soul.¹²⁸ Such an association we said has a long history, extending from Classical to modern times. Ibn Sinā is not the first nor the last to make it, and the best defence of the claim that harmony is pleasurable is that it allows us to juxtapose and organise our numerous insights about aesthetic activity and response into a comprehensive theory. Thus, we could use the coherence and comprehensiveness of the resulting theory to justify associating harmony with pleasure, rather than the link being first given some independent foundation for the theory to work. This will lead us to find the absence of pleasure in harmony counter-intuitive, and in need of explanation by reference to obstacles in the way of appreciation, rather than to seek explanations of the presence of pleasure and awe.

Once this is accepted, then the second requirement of completeness in poetic syllogisms may also be explained through its analogy with the demonstrative syllogistic. In the case of logical necessity, it was argued that every complex set of premises in a deduction can be reduced to a set of simple two-step deductions using one of the four syllogistic conclusions. However, this ability to simplify seems questionable in logic¹²⁹ and is surely inappropriate to poetry. Because poetic sense is cumulative, and we attain poetic nuances, for example, through complexities in construction—poetry is synthetic rather than analytic¹³⁰—therefore we cannot assume that everything that follows from or is suggested by a complex set of terms will also follow from or be suggested by a series of simpler constructions. And

¹²⁷ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, at 127–8, Ibn Sinā asserts that our assent to poetic premises gives rise to a feeling of wonder. See also 1, Introductory. 1–16, 61–8.

¹²⁸ 1, Introductory.8, 64 and 1, 2.11, 74.

¹²⁹ T. Smiley, 'What is a Syllogism?', *Journal of Philosophical Logic*.

¹³⁰ Ibn Sinā proposes this contrast of poetic thought with 'analytic' scientific discourse when arguing that analytic thought is the clearest and most desirable state of affairs. Cf 7, XXII.8, 115.

this again raises the issue of completeness: the construction of metaphors may require a complex combination of terms that cannot be reduced to simpler constructions which, without any loss of overall meaning, can then be grasped by using one of the five forms of poetic syllogistic. That is, the syllogistic may be unreliable because the syllogistic forms may be unable to preserve the sense of a set of complex combinations.

Ibn Sinā resolves this problem by identifying the themes guiding the deployment of figurative language.¹³¹ He writes that

every theme [has] its particular measure, and each measure was given a name... One of these kinds of poetry was called *Tragedy*. It has an exquisite and pleasant measure and contains the commemoration of goodness, moral excellence, and the outstanding traits.¹³²

Other themes include Dithyramb, Comedy, Iambic, Drama, Didactic, *Anthus*, Heroic Epic, Satyric, Poemata, *Amphi Genesoes*, and Acoustic. More than rules for constructing figurative language, these embody something about the ways we attain figurative or poetic conclusions. Just as all proofs of logic must be simplified into two-step versions of syllogistic forms, similarly first all figurative language must involve the poetic devices, reducible to the poetic syllogistic, which articulate contrastive and proportional relations between terms, and second, these must be deployed in ways which give rise to one of the above themes. Therefore, even if there is no guarantee that the terms in a poetic syllogism are capable of being simplified, they are still amenable to being organised by showing which themes are their guiding principles.

To say that every theme has its own measure and name is for Ibn Sinā to say that its relation of terms instantiates the use of particular syllogistic forms. For example, tragedy uses musical notes for 'lamentation and elegy' and involves associated contrasts and proportions, which differ from the sorts of proportion and contrast appropriate to comedy.¹³³ And just as simplification to syllogistic forms guarded against the threat of incompleteness, similarly, the deployment of themes having a basis in the poetic devices and syllogistic forms guards against the threat of incompleteness by determining whether combinations of terms are appropriate or adequate.

We can criticize this role of themes generally and in particular in Ibn Sinā's use. Generally, it seems to fail to establish that we will always be able to understand figurative language because it neither shows that or how themes result from poetic syllogisms nor shows that no other themes are possible. For if other themes are possible, then the ones picked out will not

¹³¹ The arguments given for themes also apply to poetic devices if we think the latter are open ended. If we accept that Ibn Sinā's listing of devices is exhaustive, then the problem of their completeness does not arise.

¹³² 1, Introductory.1–15, 61–8.

¹³³ 1, Introductory.8.64 and 1, 2.11, 74.

organise *all* possible combinations of terms; and if some combinations do not rest on the syllogistic form, we cannot know that the latter is the basis for all combinations of terms. That is, the proofs offered in such syllogistic forms and themes fail to be finite and complete because, first, the number of themes cannot be restricted without curtailing the senses we may realize by inventing and using new figures of speech and language—therefore it disallows creativity. Second, the argument has not shown that the relation of theme to syllogistic form is determinate, and we need a further account of proof here, to know that the given uses of language belong to one theme rather than another.

However, these objections fail against the claims made by Ibn Sīnā. We want to include poetic syllogisms within the bounds of rational activity, and to the first objection need only reply that though the themes pursued may change, and new ones be produced, to decide whether putative cases are poetic themes we only need to give reasons, defend our claims and accept or reject their status on reasonable grounds. The characterisation of themes is open to argument, but this defence of poetic syllogisms by defence of themes need not itself be a matter of poetry. So, of course we cannot exclude the development of new themes, but unless the critic argues that new themes are incapable of justification and will depend on something other than the syllogistic forms, the production of new themes will not refute the completeness of the poetic syllogistic or show that its forms are vacuous. There is neither circularity nor contradiction in arguing that poetic syllogisms must have completeness because they rest on themes which organise the products of poetic devices, and then accepting that the themes are open to rational defence and development. We can add to the number of themes, perhaps by identifying a 'post-tragic epic,' but we must defend this addition by argument; and it does not detract from the validity of the syllogistic that we must provide such a defence. The themes and forms, once established by the given rules, will exhaust all figurative language, and so we can claim validity for poetic syllogisms by pointing out that they structure the given themes and devices. Although we can establish new themes, arguing that something formerly found irrelevant must be incorporated into our scheme as an organising principle, still we are not establishing a new status for themes by doing so, and the character of the order secured by syllogistic forms and themes—their logical status—remains unchanged. Thus, the syllogistic can be complete.

We may still question the assumption that new and old themes depend on the syllogistic forms. The relation of theme to form presumably differs from that between syllogistic forms and poetic devices. Yet it is far from clear in Ibn Sīnā's writings on the *Poetics* what he takes their relation to be; and if there is a determinate relation between forms and themes, then again the creative development of new themes would seem to become impossible. If so, then either we have only a restrictive sense of creativity or using

the themes does not ensure that all possible senses resulting from the relation of terms have been grasped. And if the latter is the case then we have failed to defend the validity of the poetic syllogistic.

The only reply to an objection like this is one that repeats and explains what has already been said. There is an important sense in which we cannot restrict the themes without doing damage to one usual notion of creativity, and there is an important sense in which the absence of all restrictions on the development of new themes will rob us of all guarantee that the poetic syllogistic forms are exhaustive of and comprehensive over all poetic and figurative language. As a result of the latter, the syllogistic cannot claim validity. But there is a way to have both: to leave open the possibility of discovering new themes and also to claim that the themes we have together with the syllogistic forms we use can bring completeness to the poetic syllogistic.

We can realize this possibility if we argue that our discovery and justification of new themes is a rational process—that while we may add to the themes we have, we do so for good reasons, and the themes serve to order and organise the combination of terms in figurative language. The poetic devices or forms determine the combinations which are possible, and the themes guide the ways we can advance these combinations. Nor does this offend against creativity: if new work is not nonsensical, we must be able to understand and appreciate it, and therefore the work must satisfy reason and feeling. The suggestion is that poetic devices and syllogistic forms provide the criteria by which we judge the meaning and rationality of the aesthetic use of language. Satisfying these criteria no more suppresses creativity than a use of logic prevents us from making discoveries, inventions, or new arguments. In all these cases we impose rules as a means of making communication and understanding possible. Without them we would have merely nonsensical strings of words instead of the creative works we seek. Of course, this leaves us with the task of explaining how a theme is related to and defined in terms of the poetic forms.

To make the relation hinted at above more plausible, we must at least suggest how we might validate new themes, for if that involves the five poetic forms or devices set out by Ibn Sinā, we need to understand how the latter go to construct the former. That is the issue we are required to consider by the second objection raised above. If we cannot provide an answer here, then the poetic syllogistic is made inadequate, for we can no longer be certain that it can grasp all the possible new combinations and meanings of terms.

To begin answering this objection, we must note that if an explanation of the basis of themes validates poetic syllogisms, then we cannot expect to use examples of poetry to prove that a new theme is valid or an old one invalid. As themes organise figurative or poetic language, the latter cannot independently prove the power of the themes. We may suggest, instead,

that the relation of themes to terms is one of part to whole rather than of instance to generalization. The relation depends on using proportion and contrast rather than on necessary and sufficient conditions. We do not have sufficient and necessary conditions by which we can show that a particular phrase or combination of terms according to a given device has the characteristics that make it, say, tragic or comic. The same words or phrases occur in either theme, and from the occurrence of the phrase we cannot deduce the theme being deployed. Nor would a theme be falsified, so to speak, if we reject its application because it is inappropriate to some part of the set of terms and their combination. Rather than reject the *theme* as *false*, we would withdraw our claim that a set of phrases instantiated a particular theme and begin to search for another theme that was more suitable. In this sense, themes as such are not at risk when they are used to organise the combinations of terms that result from any use of poetic devices, and they are not refuted for their inadequacy to a particular use of phrases: this is because they do not depend on sufficient and necessary conditions for their application. Figurative language does not, in that sense, determine the theme. Rather, we choose or reject claims for the validity of a putative theme by considering its similarity to or continuity with other themes, its consistency, simplicity, comprehensiveness, and so on. The mix of terms does not prove the theme which organises it, but a recalcitrant term may indicate the need for a new theme by suggesting an extended meaning. Nevertheless, the justification of the new theme is pursued through considerations of continuity, simplicity, etc., for these are the criteria for themes.

Clearly we must explain these claims further. So far we have paid attention mostly to poetic validity. Ibn Sīnā might also use Aristotle's distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom, and the notion of *technē* associated with the latter, to account for themes and thereby supplement the *epistēmē* of poetic validity. For the present, the outline given above suggests how he can defend the use of themes, and by doing so it serves to counter the objection that poetic syllogisms cannot claim completeness or coherence. As the latter claim is our concern, we may leave for another occasion the question of how *technē* validates themes.

There was a threat to completeness because there was a possibility that the poetic syllogistic forms were inadequate to all the meanings that could possibly be generated in figurative language. If we could produce new and strange figurative meanings that could not be grasped by the given themes, it would suggest that the order provided by the poetic syllogistic, the poetic forms or devices, and themes was incomplete. But, as we proposed above, the relation of meanings to themes was not a determinate one governed by necessary and sufficient conditions through which, where certain poetic devices and meanings were present, we could infer to a particular theme. Rather, as theme and form or device not only ordered meanings but also claimed validity on their own grounds of consistency, simplicity, and so on,

they were capable of an independent and rational justification. So we may use and develop themes without supposing that our need for new themes proves that poetic syllogistic forms can never be complete or valid. Thus, our conclusion must be that even though poetic syllogisms depend on an experience of pleasure and on a cumulation of meanings, they are capable of validity because they have a completeness which makes them comprehensive over all figurative language.

Another objection to claims for completeness is that if we can create new poetic devices, then we must leave the set of poetic forms open and cannot argue that every poetic meaning will be expressed in one of the five forms. Creative development is possible only if we can appreciate works without relying on the given five forms, for if we are restricted to the latter we have no means for identifying a new form in the new work we appreciate. Therefore, further, it must be possible to have some basic extra-analytic appreciation of figurative language, which allows us to respond to a work without relying on the devices or forms already available. But if an extra-analytic appreciation is possible, then linguistic analysis is contingent at best and its role in understanding aesthetic responses is made questionable. Moreover, if we can give an extra-analytic response to works, we may 'spontaneously' appreciate and produce works.

To these objections, we may reply that Ibn Sīnā does not deny the role of creativity. By his account, it is possible to construct new meanings, though we must construct them by synthesizing terms using appropriate devices.¹³⁴ There is a range of meanings we can construct in this way, and a claim to creativity in the use of figurative language is not refuted by pointing out that we use only the five listed by Ibn Sīnā. Similarly, utterances using logic cannot be decried because they depend on syllogistic conclusions. These rules make a work understandable: a created poem must be open to our rational grasp, and it does not become less creative when we understand it. Moreover, it is not clear what the more basic, extra-analytic appreciation of figurative language, which was suggested above, could consist in. An extra-analytic appreciation would not clearly be an assent occasioned by a particular work. If it is not the meaning, contrasts, or proportion of a work that we appreciate, it is not clear what connection our appreciation could have with that object. An 'extra-analytic' appreciation must also be arbitrary to the poem characterised as a figurative and meaningful use of language—unless the theory proposes to explain how a poem generates assent which yet does not depend on its rational character. But if the objector is putting forward the latter claim, then his does not work as an objection to Ibn Sīnā's theory so much as it expresses adherence to an alternative theory. It would work as an objection only if it proved impossible to expound Ibn Sīnā's association of pleasure and meaning and if the alternative theory could explain that inadequacy in Ibn Sīnā's theory.

¹³⁴ This seems to me the purpose of his relating poetic forms and logical syllogistic forms.

In summary: we began by comparing demonstrative and poetic syllogisms to see whether the first yielded any clues for defending the validity of the second. For Aristotle and Ibn Sinā, logical necessity was obvious and primitive and it lacked and did not need any more basic underlying principles that justified its validity. However, we mounted an indirect defence of validity by arguing against attacks that questioned the adequacy of the four syllogistic forms in which the basis of logical validity was expressed. These attacks held that the four syllogistic forms were unreliable because we could not know that they included every principle of valid inference. An infinite number of non-formal deductions are possible, some with very complex sets of premises, and unless we have some guarantee that the syllogistic forms can order every possible non-formal and formal deduction, we cannot comfortably suppose that a proof procedure using the four forms has grasped all the logical possibilities contained in its premises. To defend the validity of this syllogistic, Ibn Sinā denied that the complexity or possible infinitude of the number of premises can serve as an objection to the claim that we have identified logical validity and its forms.

That brief presentation and defence of the syllogism provided a model for understanding the validity of poetic syllogisms. In a similar move, Ibn Sinā first exhibited the forms of the poetic syllogistic. However, he could not then provide for these syllogisms the defence given to their parallel case because poetic syllogisms have a distinctive character. Poetic meanings are cumulative, and the sense realized from a complex of terms will not be preserved if we try to translate the complex into a series of simple meanings, perhaps constructed by applying the forms of the poetic syllogistic. To overcome the threat of incompleteness raised here, we can construe Ibn Sinā as proposing that these cumulative meanings can be ordered under various themes, and their reliability thereby preserved. Similarly, faced with the possibility that there may be no end to the relation between terms in poetic device and its poetic syllogistic, Ibn Sinā pointed to the pleasure and awe that results from our appreciation of an harmony constituted from poetic premises and suggested that these feelings serve to limit the possibility of an infinite or endless combination of terms in poetic devices and their resultant meanings; thereby, the experience of pleasure and wonder protects the poetic syllogistic from incompleteness, for the combination of terms to yield meanings is governed by the pleasure and wonder we feel in understanding the terms in combination.

By this account, it is important to note, pleasure and wonder are a part of the *formal* structure of the poetic syllogistic, being essential to the completeness of the syllogistic and so to its validity.¹³⁵ These feelings are not just

¹³⁵ My use of 'formal' may seem problematic, especially as it is incorrect as a term of Arabic logic. My use here indicates that pleasure and wonder belong to the necessary features

factors added externally or arbitrarily, but serve to show that poetic syllogisms have a distinctive nature. The nature and role of these experiences of pleasure and wonder are crucial in other ways too, for they show why arguments justifying the *logical* or *formal* validity of poetry not only involve an essential reference to the subject's *participation* in aesthetic activity but also bar *morally* unjustifiable content from poetry. These factors, in turn, reveal important aspects of the community that is formed through aesthetic appreciation and activity. We can begin to explain these claims by first rounding off the issues in this chapter, for now that it is clearer just what sort of validity poetry can claim, and what it is based upon, we can compare imaginative speech with the role of imagination in the pursuit of knowledge, and thereby set out the epistemological power and function of poetry. Once this is clarified, we can turn to the other issues of poetics, subject, and society.

IMAGINATION, POETRY, AND KNOWLEDGE

Ibn Sinā gives the imagination a peripheral place within the field of knowledge. To the extent that poetry is imaginative, it claims a commensurate relation to knowledge, though its concern with feelings rather than truth suggests for the poetic imagination a place at the periphery of the imagination's commerce with rationality. This relation will also determine poetry's position in the long advance of human development towards the ultimate end of a theoretical contemplation of the world: it remains at the beginnings of the effort to rationality.

That is, from the perspective of knowledge and cognitive conviction we relegate poetry to a peripheral position because it depends on the imagination. The picture lying at the basis of this claim about the utility of imagination is something like as follows. Ibn Sinā appears to accept a Greek tradition, which we presented in an earlier chapter on the debate between al-Sirafi and Abū Bishr Mattā, by which we can distinguish a corporeal world, grasped by the sense, from an immaterial and eternal world that we understand intellectually. Only in the individual human soul do these worlds meet when, through perception, imagination, and estimation, the soul acquires sense experience that we organize when the intelligible world, by rendering actual a potential intellect, gives those sensual experiences a valid order. We do not attain knowledge simply by empirical expe-

of the poetic syllogism. Usually in Arabic logic 'formal' refers simply to the syllogistic form which all of demonstration, rhetoric, and poetics share. In *Qiyās* Avicenna says that all these syllogisms are participants in the syllogistic form, most of their differences arising from their matters. By this account, pleasure and wonder would be part of the *material* of poetic syllogisms, yet necessary. As I have formulated the issue in terms of contemporary logic, I have equated 'logical' with 'formal.' The point about the role of pleasure and wonder remains that they play a necessary role, whether we talk of it as 'formal' or 'material but essential.'

rience but through actualizing the intellect.¹³⁶ It seems that while we can grasp particulars by manipulating and retaining sense experiences in the imagination and memory respectively, this grasp is qualitatively distinct from knowledge. The former provides a means for reaching knowledge, but knowledge itself must be characterised in a distinctive way. It is not merely a grasp of particulars, a response to a changing flux of experience and events; knowledge is the assertion and acceptance of general claims, irreducible to any particular, and independent of any particular sensation or bodily experience.

Of course intellect depends on sensation, but only contingently (*bi'l 'arāq*), never in essence (*bi'l-dhat*).¹³⁷ Images arise from sensations, and the intellect uses them to gain incomposite universals which, in turn, can be combined to form definitions, premises, and syllogisms.¹³⁸ But the basis of apprehension in sensation, even though it can also both provide premises and recognise exemplary instantiations of universals, is only a contingent and sometimes dispensable basis for genuinely grasping a universal. Real knowledge, the sort we can be certain of and rely on, is never acquired from sense experience alone. Indeed, some people have strong enough intellectual faculties to have no need for sensory perception, and even those less gifted with this intellectual ability can still develop their ability to a point where sense experience becomes unnecessary. Everyone, it seems, can gain some universals relating to the empirical world without using sense, imagination, or estimation.¹³⁹ These latter provide contingent aid to a knowledge only obtained fully by the intellect.

Whether our assent (*taṣdīq*) results from sensation by means of accident, 'individual syllogism' (*qiyās juzī*), induction or explanatory experience, it is still the responsibility of the intellect to fashion a universal, abstracting it, in explanatory experience, for example, from a constant conjunction in repeated occurrences. To this abstracted intelligible universal, sensation and its particulars will never have complete access, for the latter are never adequate to the generalization. Nevertheless, there is a faculty of 'active imagination' which comes closer to intellect in its ability to manipulate and represent images so that they may more clearly point to universals. By this account, presumably, we can distinguish an assertion such as 'the black cat sat on the red carpet' from 'the black cat is two inches from the edge of the red carpet' by constructing images to draw attention to

¹³⁶ See Ibn Sīnā, *Avicenna's 'De Anima'* (edited by F. Rahman, Oxford, 1959), Book 1, Chapter 1; Book II, Chapter 2; Book IV, Chapters 1–3, and H. A. Davidson, 'Alfarabi and Avicenna on the Active Intellect,' *Viator*, 3(1972), 109–178.

¹³⁷ See *al-Burhān (al-Manṭiq*, Volume 5), edited with an Introduction by A. 'Afifi (Cairo, 1956), 220–227.

¹³⁸ 'The Terms *Tasawwar* and *Taṣdīq* in Arabic Philosophy and Their Greek, Latin, and Hebrew Equivalents,' H.A. Wolfson.

¹³⁹ *Avicenna's Psychology*, 35–7.

specific features.¹⁴⁰ However close it comes to the intellect by instantiating and making communicable a knowledge claim, the imagination remains tied to particulars and cannot by itself make the kind of universal statements which knowledge might consist in. Accordingly, arguing that imagination remains ever inadequate as a form of knowledge is compatible with the claim that imagination is indispensable to thought. For it may be indispensable in the sense of explaining the process and rules of thought without being necessary to a legitimation of the knowledge we get through thought and reasoning. In the latter regard, we may consistently argue, it is less than effective.

In addition to this placing of imagination we may remind ourselves of the non-cognitive impact sought by a poetic imagination. For Ibn Sinā, we cannot identify this use of imagination with analytic thought and its search for a clear statement of truths which we can justify through demonstrative syllogisms. By contrast, imaginative syllogisms are, first, dependent for their premises on an assent that results in a feeling of wonder, and, second, are themselves assented to because of the pleasure occasioned by understanding the harmony of their elements. This assent to premises is not irrational: it could be the prelude to the discovery of a new truth. Ibn Sinā was seen to suggest that the feeling of wonder arises from our sense that the connections between antecedent and consequent proposed in the premises were 'apt' or 'just right' even though they were not true. Poets were valued as much for the striking comparisons they invented and set out as for the harmony they attained in the poem itself, and we may suggest that this striking quality was not a matter of truth or cognition so much as it is a matter of being interesting in some indefinable way.

In keeping with this non-cognitive use, we cannot hope to convince other subjects to agree to our assent to a premises by pointing to its correspondence with the truth. The end of persuasion is that of enabling other subjects to secure the same feeling of wonder. In relation to the whole poem, the end of any persuasion is at best to enable the other to feel pleasure in the harmony of elements. But such pleasure is clearly not a matter of cognition as such. It does not turn on the truth or falsity of premises and assertions such that other subjects can be compelled to give rational compliance to some argument and conclusion so that they experience a feeling of pleasure as a result. Instead, the whole procedure of using poetic premises and imaginative assent shows that the aesthetic use of imagination may be rational but it is far from seeking or being ascribed a cognitive validity. And this makes the aesthetic use of imagination even more peripheral to theoretical contemplation, for at best it is at a remove from knowl-

¹⁴⁰ 'A Decisive Example of the Influence of Psychological Doctrines in Islamic Science and Culture: Some Relationships between Ibn Sinā's Psychology, Other branches of his Thought, and Islamic teachings' by Robert E. Hall, presented at the *First International Symposium for the History of Arabic Science*, Aleppo, April, 1976.

edge that is even further than the cognitive use of imagination. As we have seen, for Ibn Sīnā, the latter is already qualitatively distinct from knowledge.

Expressed in this way, poetry must seem unimportant: compared to science it is a meagre source of knowledge; compared to politics it sustains only a weak kind of social cohesion; by contrast to practical reason, it relies on emotion and pleasure and does not presage a very self-conscious or autonomous form of behaviour or moral awareness. Yet that appearance is false. Ibn Sīnā seems well aware of the importance of poetry to Arabic culture and life. It provides perhaps the most effective secular cohesive social force, and in the *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle* Ibn Sīnā explores the power of poetry in this role. For all the appearance that poetry is unimportant by contrast with science, politics, and practice, nevertheless Ibn Sīnā, like al-Fārābī before him, relates poetry to theory and practice in a way that recognizes and makes important claims for the power and purpose of poetry in binding individuals together in the community of the Virtuous City. Given the role of poetry within Arabic culture, Ibn Sīnā's analysis becomes a powerful instrument for understanding one important force at work in the community's self-identification and development. Regardless of the weakness of poetry as an agency for achieving knowledge or morality, its limitations there are counterbalanced by the power it exercises in the public domain and the seriousness with which we must consider it in understanding how social life operates. A philosopher who wants to bring about a state where all individuals, so far as possible, may live a good life, would be foolish to ignore how effectively poetry has maintained cohesion among individuals and groups in Arabic culture.

In the next chapter we shall consider Ibn Sīnā's conception of the power poetry has in maintaining society and its relation between individuals. This shows again how his work on poetics relates closely to conclusions he explores in his other commentaries. It brings into focus a number of issues centring around a concern with living a good life. To the latter poetry contributes a moral unity, leading us to live under moral rules that are coterminous with those gained from the Quran—which is the deepest end we can have.

POETICS AND SOCIETY

In the preceding chapter we did not deal fully with an important aspect of the validity of poetic syllogisms. We have still to clarify the rules governing the relation of themes to poetic forms or devices, for if we cannot explain these rules, we shall fail to defend the completeness of poetic syllogisms, and consequently will not justify their validity.

To understand the rules governing the relation of themes to forms, we proposed, we must explain poetry in terms of *techne* and *poesis* rather than *episteme* alone. This proposal leads us to consider further aspects of Ibn Sinā's theory. First, we must clarify some implications of the *episteme*-oriented account given in the last chapter, to show that poetic validity implicates a particular emphasis on subjects. This emphasis will make clear that Ibn Sinā is not merely left with a 'tension between (1) an essentially lyrical and formalist view of poetry...[which sees] the end of poetry as primarily wonder and pleasure, and (2) a view that stresses the moral bent of poetry, its social function.'¹ Instead, his theory incorporates both factors without contradiction. Second, in clarifying the 'moral bent of poetry, its social function,' we can show that subjects are engaged through poetry in diverse ways. Third, we can clarify these 'diverse ways' by reference to the themes guiding poetry. This is not to identify themes with social relations; but because their association suggests what considerations enter into constructing poetry with given themes, it shows we can justify the completeness of poetic syllogisms.

To exhibit these moral and social features of poetic validity, we shall first consider the role of the subject's pleasure in poetry. Poetic or figurative language satisfies us not because we could paraphrase its meanings into literal terms but because meaning was embodied in 'imaginative imitations' that contained a harmony. A grasp of this harmony occasioned pleasure, which signalled the success of the poetic syllogism constituting any poem. Consequently, not only did such success involve our rational capacities in understanding the elements of figurative language, but also, as we saw in the last chapter, pleasure was among the formal properties of the poetic syllogism.

The formal role of pleasure, given its subjectivity, leads us to consider the role of the subject. In turn that will show us the relation between subjects that poetry sustains. Further, when we examine Ibn Sinā's account of the latter, we see that our rule-governed construction of works having themes and forms militates towards using different themes to provide

¹ Dahiyat, 'Critical Study of Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle, 58.

commensurate relations between the members of its audience. And in order to explain the latter fully, we will have to resolve the issue of the validity of poetic syllogisms that we left hanging towards the end of the last chapter.

POETICS AND PLEASURE

At this point it may be useful to summarize some of the extended arguments of the last chapter, consolidating its results around the issues governing themes and poetic forms. We saw that pleasure is a formal feature of poetic syllogisms. Ibn Sīnā supposes that pleasure here has a rational component and requires us to examine what it is to be in a pleasurable state, or to consider its referent—the object that is giving us pleasure—or to look at the reason for pleasure—what grounds we have for it. For example, we feel pleasure or distress on assenting to a striking poetic premise: the feelings arise from attending to the object; and the pleasure we gain from harmony, which is the basis of our assent to the poetic syllogism, depends on appreciating the harmony in the object by understanding its elements and their relation. Thus, pleasure neither occurs in isolation, nor is merely an automatic and blind reflex, but has a rational element. Cognition and understanding are essential to pleasure because the latter results from the subject's beliefs, cognitions, and relation to objects. When we feel pleasure in a work, it is not simply a blind impulse, but depends on understanding the work and its structure or order;² consequently pleasure and pain in poetry are open to persuasion, conviction, and appropriateness to an object, and are subject to logic.³ Pleasure in the object arises from the ratiocinative character of works, and is available to anyone who similarly grasps the object.

Such a focus on its rational component does not make pleasure into something objective. Ibn Sīnā insists that poetic discourse differs from objective scientific language precisely in the roles of pleasure and the subject. Analytic thought is the clearest form of reasoning. It is achieved by 'direct statement ... made up of authentic and standard language.'⁴ We can codify its use of concepts and give these determinate correspondences with the world in a system of scientific reasoning. Through their use, knowledge requires compliance with the conclusion of an argument and so brings about

² We may mistake the latter, because we have false beliefs about the work and will misconstrue the harmonious relation it contains, and there our response will be unjustified. But, conversely, our response may also be justified by reference to the qualities of the object, and so will be reasonable.

³ This reasonable character of pleasure links the latter not only with cognition but also to moral behaviour—as we shall see. Cf also *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105b19–1106a13; 1104b13–14; 1106b16–17, where Aristotle argues that the virtuous man is properly disposed towards emotional response.

⁴ 7, XXII.8, 115.

conviction in subjects 'due to the realization that the thing is what it is said to be.'⁵ Thus, in an important sense, logic and knowledge compel our agreement. If the premises are correct, use appropriate definitions and concepts, and the argument is valid, then the conclusion must follow. A subject cannot accept the premises and the validity of an argument yet deny the conclusion without showing himself to be mistaken or irrational.

Similarly, we assess knowledge claims by comparison with objects and events existing in a world independently of subjects. From their basis in experience, and given the validity of arguments, we can infer from what is known to what is unknown. A rational subject cannot accept the grounds of evidence yet reject the relevant conclusion: the grounds are the basis from which, by some given inferential rule, we gain the conclusions for which they are evidence. The relation of premises or evidence to the conclusion exerts a compulsion in both cases, in that the relation holds independently of the desires of the subject, and any rational and cognizant being must accede to the conclusion. This is what objectivity consists in, and it is possible to reject a subject's claim, where it fails to tally with an objective state of affairs, because truth depends on the way the world is, not on the subject or how he wants it to be. Accordingly, compliance with the conclusion of a demonstrative argument characterises cognitive conviction.

Further, cognitive and logical conviction consider 'the matter being conveyed' rather than the utterance being used. The language used is important only as a means of grasping some feature of the objects to which it refers. The utterance succeeds by virtue of the content it articulates and which subjects assent to: it is not appreciated for its balance or inner harmony, and it must abjure all invention and creativity.

From this understanding of conviction, objectivity, and compulsion, Ibn Sīnā went on to contend that poetry is effective because it has a comparable logical structure, so that the aesthetic use of language has a parallel way of evoking conviction. However, he also denies to this discourse a share in the cognitive interest that underlies analytic thought. Literary and poetic language 'does not pertain to understanding but rather to wonder—it makes the speech pleasant and dignified.'⁶ Rather than seek true or false generalisations about what 'is recognised and immediate in the world,' the aesthetic use of language denotes our affective capacity; and the subjective response of pleasure and awe, generated in our appreciation of works, characterises aesthetic or 'imaginative compliance.'

As they share a comparable structure with demonstrative syllogisms, poetic syllogisms yield something which is other than an expression of personal preference alone and more than just a feeling of pleasure. This is because in figurative language we construct meanings, and this activity is both

⁵ 1, Introductory.4, 63.

⁶ 7, XXII.8, 115.

rational and pleasurable: we are pleased with the constructed meanings when they bear an harmony between elements; and to experience that pleasure we have to exercise our reason in understanding the elements. That is, pleasure results from the rational process of comparing the meanings of terms involved, and we understand meanings, without concern for their truth or falsity, by attending to the balance of terms a poet procures by using poetic devices. We consider only how well the balance of terms or form, considered as a conclusion, gauges our capacity for pleasure. Accordingly, poets or writers show their ability in their skill both in gaining this balance through comparison, proportion, and contrast, and in the originality of the comparisons they propose. Consonantly, the audience exhibits its sensitivity by its facility for appreciating the author's skill in constructing figurative and other meanings. And, as we said, we may expect that the riskier but still successful metaphor or image ventured by the poet will draw praise, for we feel wonder and pleasure when the greatest poets take their magnificent risks with imagery and style yet still attain meaningful comparisons.

Further, because it is occasioned by this balance of rational materials, pleasure is not merely subjective, like the preference of sweet over sour tastes, and is related to its object, yet is not objective in simply being a quality possessed by the object. The balance which generates pleasure is a result of the meanings, images, imaginative imitations, and harmony which are present in the work, and it is capable of both being understood and being appropriate or inappropriate. Moreover, the syllogistic character of the construction of meanings emphasizes the rational component of this aesthetic response, which, in turn, goes to support our expectation that others will give 'imaginative' assent to a particular work.

Pleasure and the Subject

The character and role of our subjective responses of pleasure and awe leads us to consider the subject in Ibn Sinā's conception of poetic subjectivity. Imaginative imitations in poetry facilitate pleasure and awe in gaining a correspondence between subjects as feeling and thinking beings. To explain: clearly, poetry is subjective in that it depends on the affective character of persons. Further, poetry treats the subject as the end of aesthetic discourse, for the success of this language—our attaining a feeling of pleasure as the conclusion of a poetic syllogism—depends on the sensitivity of the subject. In this sense, because it addresses the subject essentially, aesthetic language imitates subjects. They are treated as thinking and feeling ends for poetry, where subjects gain a common response to works through mutually appreciable images, symbols, etc., in line with the syllogistic forms, poetic devices, and themes.

That is, the subject is the lynch-pin of poetic activity, and poetry is intersubjective in that it depends on generating a community of feeling between subjects. In our appreciating and making poetry, poetic discourse treats the subject as the end of the process of construction, for the success of figurative language and our attaining the conclusion of a syllogism depend on the sensitivity of the subject. Whereas the success of a cognitive or logical argument was in an important sense independent of the subject because it carried a rational force to which the subject had to submit either because of the way the world was or because of the relation between concepts, in the poetic syllogism the only real criteria for success is the subject and his or her feelings of pleasure and awe. While it is possible to dismiss a subject's logical or empirical claims as false or self contradictory because they do not correspond with the nature of concepts or with the nature of the world, poetry carries a different force. As the subject's feelings of pleasure or awe are crucial formally to the validity of the syllogism, those feelings provide the final ground for accepting or rejecting an aesthetic use of language. The subject has to validate the syllogism by having the appropriate feelings. But this has other consequences.

The most important result of this understanding of the role of the subject and its feelings of pleasure is that poetry can only succeed by bringing the subject to give agreement to the poetic syllogism it contains by responding in an appropriate way, for the ultimate ground for appreciating a poem is the subject's own experience of pleasure. From this other things follow: only the occurrence of this feeling will allow the subject to succeed in appreciating an aesthetic use of language, and only the occurrence of pleasure can validate agreement or assent to the aesthetic use of language. A subject appreciates a work when he or she has the appropriate feeling in response, not when someone else does so. In this sense, the poem imitates the person in being directed essentially at his or her own nature. Consequently, the occasioning of pleasure in one subject cannot be the basis for accepting or rejecting another's claim for the aesthetic use of language. The frequency, facility, or seriousness with which others respond to a work cannot be any evidential basis for the subject's own conviction over a poetic syllogism, for the only ground for his own conviction is his own experience of pleasure. That is, subjects cannot assert of others, on the basis of their own feelings, that others should appreciate a piece of literary or poetic discourse. Similarly, others cannot dismiss a subject's claims as false on the grounds of their own lack of pleasure. Only the subjects' *own* feelings are the basis for their own judgements. Their feelings cannot validate any claims about others' responses, which those others must have for themselves, individually. Discussion may occur here, of course, but because of the subjective nature of conviction, it can only succeed by persuading another subject, perhaps by pointing to features and nuances he or she may have missed or misunderstood, that it is appropriate to feel pleasure. But in all this, subjects

must still be treated as rational and feeling beings who can only independently *give* assent to a work when they feel pleasure in it. Thus, poetry is intersubjective in the dual sense of depending on the subject's common feelings and of having to treat the subject as he or she is in rational, emotional, and affective nature.

But this raises a further issue. If we must consider the subject in this context, then because the success of a poem depends ultimately on the feelings of pleasure which subjects have and which lead them to assent to the work, to grasp fully the validity of the poetic syllogism and the assent it generates we must examine the subject as that which makes works successful by giving assent.

POETRY AND THE NATURE OF THE SUBJECT

Ibn Sinā's claims about the subject involve a theory of what a whole person consists in, determining what poetry is addressed to, in the subject, and how we incorporate poetry and our response into a community of feeling. At various points in the text, he asserts that poetry implicates a reference to the subject. In writing of the origins of poetry-making, he urges that

poetry making originated according to the instinct and natural talent of every individual [poet] *and according to his moral character and habit. Of them, he who was nobler was disposed to the imitation of noble actions and their likes, and he who was of a baser soul was disposed to invective.*⁷

Indeed, this characterization applies to more than the subject who produces poetry; we may also consider the nature of subjects represented in works and those who appreciate these poems. Later in the same chapter, Ibn Sinā identifies another theme by reference to the *work* when he says that 'comedy is meant as an imitation of that which is very base,' of that 'which is immoral and is intended for ridicule and mocking... The comic is an account [or imitation] of meanness and a propensity for the despicable.'⁸ He enlarges this description of the work by explaining how poets gain these qualities. For example, we can examine the use of masks in plays, where their

appearance is changed for ridicule by combining three attributes, that is (1) ugliness, because it is necessary to change from the natural shape to contempt; (2) bad-temper, because it is meant to portray a general lack of esteem towards someone and an appearance of prejudice against him—thus the bad-tempered mask is a shape the mocker needs; and (3) freedom from any sign of grief; not as in anger—for an angry man's facial expression shows the

⁷ 3, IV.5, 79; italics added.

⁸ 3, VI-2.14, 82-3.

combination of both pain and grief, while a mocker's facial expression is gay and merry—neither dispirited, sad, nor pained.⁹

These descriptions rely on reading the mask as if it were a face with expressions appropriate to the character of a soul but, nevertheless, this character is ascribed to the work which uses these masks.

This interest in the work also imposes certain requirements, stemming from the needs of its intended audience, which constrain the poet's construction of the work. So, for example, 'when satirizing the wicked as individuals, [the poets] used to include noble and praiseworthy actions in order to make wickedness even baser by comparison.'¹⁰ These constraints serve the needs of the audience: the reason why satire sets up so bold a contrast between nobility and wickedness is that 'he who states that iniquity is a vice and stops there would not leave the same effect on the soul as when he adds that probity is a sublime and irreproachable life.'¹¹

Further, Ibn Sinā proposes that comedy is not 'a thing that requires the care of serious, virtuous and knowledgeable men,' suggesting that not only must we constrain the aesthetic object in various ways in order to gain a particular effect on the soul, but also that certain qualities in the subject are appropriate to particular kinds of work. Clearly, then, the suggestion is that the nature of the successful poem, whose meaning is constituted by the poetic syllogistic and that depends formally on the subject's experience of pleasure in a harmony of elements, remains incompletely understood if we do not also examine the nature of the subject whose experience warrants the poem's validity. In addition, Ibn Sinā suggests that we must describe the subject in moral terms—of nobility, baseness, wickedness, sublimity, irreproachability, meanness, a propensity for the despicable, seriousness, virtuousness, and knowledge.¹²

Arguably, the conception of the subject we have just outlined underlies Ibn Sinā's claim that Arabic poetry differs from its Greek counter-part because of their respective references to the person. He writes that the

Greeks did not primarily occupy themselves with the imitation of persons, as did the Arabs.... The Arabs used to compose poetry for two purposes: (i) to affect the soul by presenting a given matter that moves it in the direction of an action or an emotion; and (ii) for pleasure alone—everything was imitated for the pleasure of its imitation. On the other hand, the Greeks intended, by means of speech, to induce or prevent action. Sometimes, they did this by means of

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Ibn Sinā here echoes Aristotle's claim that 'spectators are of two kinds—one free and educated, the other a vulgar crowd composed of mechanics, labourers and the like Music... correspond[s to the mind]; for as [peoples'] minds are perverted from the natural state, so there are perverted modes and highly strung and unnaturally coloured melodies. A man receives pleasure from what is natural to him... ' *Politics*, 1341b32–1342a27.

oratory, sometimes by means of poetry. Thus poetic imitation, as they practiced it, was confined to actions and emotions—and to persons in so far as they have those actions and emotions.¹³

We can clarify this contrasting approach to subjects by setting out the distinctive 'physiology' involved in each conception.¹⁴ The Greek conception of the subject connects outward action and inner nature so that only some part of inner nature is relevant to explaining certain actions. For example, Ibn Sinā's suggestion, that Greek poetry is mostly rhetorical and directed towards using a non-demonstrative rational persuasive technique to bring about certain emotional states and behaviour, involves a conception of persons' choices, affects, and actions, that is commensurate with the character ascribed to Greek poetry. In the *Rhetoric*, for example, Aristotle argues that

no art considers the individual... Rhetoric will not consider what is plausible to an individual such as Socrates or Hippias, but what is so to such-and-such a people, as does the dialectic. For this does not reason from chance views.¹⁵

He contrasts paying attention to the nature of each individual with attending only to features which the subject has in common with others. The rhetorical device must persuade a subject, yet such persuasion is directed not at random individuals but to types of individuals and relevant parts of their physiology. Consequently, we must order our study of rhetorical procedures by considering some features of our motive and active capacity as relevant and others as irrelevant. As a result, where such arts as rhetoric aim for universality, as they must do to claim syllogistic validity, they abstract from particular individual reactions on the basis of criteria such as, for example, that the reactions are of the majority, and so of interest, or are the reactions of some especially gifted individual or group.¹⁶

This 'abstraction from the individual' distinguishes rhetoric from poetry, but poetry too addresses only part of the individual. Certainly, poetry differs from rhetoric in its emphasis on the subject, who must *give* assent to the poetic syllogism. But given the above account of how rhetoric denotes the subject—or what of the subject it denotes—and given that the person must grasp poetry in order to find it persuasive, the concern with persons

¹³ 2, II.11, 74

¹⁴ The term 'physiognomy' and its use are borrowed from Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators, Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450* (Oxford, 1971), 83, 85. Baxandall uses it to describe the mechanics of expressive creativity, which are 'spelled out in terms of Aristotelian faculties—nous, psyche, phantasia—and an Aristotelian physiology,' 83.

¹⁵ *Rhetoric*, A2, 1356b30–6.

¹⁶ See *Topics*, A1, 100b21–3; this issue is discussed in J.D.G. Evans, *Aristotle's Concept of Dialectic*, (Cambridge, 1977), 76f, 79ff. I follow Dahiyat and others in seeing the influence of the *Rhetoric* on Ibn Sinā's *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*.

involved here will similarly depend on a particular physiognomy, by which only certain parts of the person's soul are engaged in the actions and emotions relevant to aesthetic activity. The whole individual, possessed of rational, emotive, and affective parts, it seems, is not needed to explain this rhetorical efficacy of poetry. Thus, where cognitive judgements seek a correspondence with states of affairs in the world and therefore carry an objective conviction, they also require the subject to abjure creativity and to set aside emotional preferences or pleasure for the sake of a search for truth. From the point of view of subjects this requirement implies a concern with his cognitive abilities rather than with their capacity for generating an emotional response: that is, our interest is in certain features of the subject in the case of cognitive judgements but with other features in the case of poetic claims.

A consequence of this conception of Greek poetry and drama, as imitating persons only so far as it is necessary to use them in embodying or illustrating that which will move people to action or emotion, is that our principal interest will be in the action and its moral quality and only secondarily, if at all, with a character or personality as a source of those actions. Again the suggestion is that Greek poetry concerns itself only with the features of the subject it needs to explain motivations and emotional states. It does not consider what we might now identify as a personality and its tribulations. This has implications for the way we see a work, its construction, and its reception, that may be suggested as follows.

For example, in relation to the work itself, presumably where we want to inculcate a respect for the law, there we represent people on the stage or in verse so that their actions embody behaviour showing why the law is inescapable. To misuse an example, Oedipus appears on the stage as part of a sequence of actions to illustrate the force of moral or other necessity. The order of events in the play clarifies this purpose, revealing details of the life and personality of Oedipus only if they bear on this point of the play. Our concern is not with Oedipus as a person, possessed of idiosyncrasies and a history independent of the events in the play, but is with only the features relevant to the drama. As a character, the person is unimportant, for our only concern is with the *persona* caught up in the flow of events represented on the stage.

Further, the kind of focus present here is also true of the audience and the playwright. Thus, similarly, we may expect that the playwright addresses the moral and motive capacity of subjects in the audience and not subjects as they are in their particular collections of habits, desires, and so on. Accordingly, the imitative activity of the play and its audience conforms to the moral and ameliorative or deprecatory purpose that all imitation serves. That is, the conception of subjects suggested here sees them only in terms of their capacity for such actions and emotions—as capable of accepting praise or blame. The playwright, for example, does not need to

seduce and attract his audience to the play; rather, the suggestion might be, the audience comes to the play because of the ameliorative and deprecatory—the moral—qualities and issues involved in going to the theatre. These qualities and issues are, so to speak, a foundation which both the audience and the playwright rely on and take for granted. For given that the play focuses only on the *persona*, and gains this focus by means of imitations, and that imitation is ameliorative or deprecatory, then, as the latter are value laden, the focus on the *persona* is a focus on moral qualities of persons. Given this moral tenor of the theatre, we could argue that those who fail to join the audience are guilty of insensitivity towards its moral purpose. And by relying on this moral tenor, the playwright addresses only those parts of his audience's intellectual and affective capacities that can engage with the moral concerns governing the theatre. Consonantly, by their insensitivity to the play or poem, people show themselves morally culpable; and if a play fails to win an audience, it could be because of a moral failure on the part of its audience rather than an artistic failure by the playwright.

By contrast with this conception of Greek poetry, Ibn Sinā maintains, Arabic poetry stresses that although the conception of subjects developed in Greek poetry is central, nevertheless it is not definitive of human beings or of poetry. He implies that Arabic poetry considers the whole person, including the person's capacity for pleasure, persuasion, and reason. And he contends that Arabic poets compose poetry for itself and therefore, so far as it is imitative, because the pleasure and awe that it occasions allow subjects to participate in the community of feeling.

We cannot identify such poetry and its audience with the conception of the subject implicated in Ibn Sinā's understanding of Greek poetry, for at one level Arabic poetry need not serve a moral purpose in order to claim validity. Indeed, Arabic poetry has a distinctive attitude to the subject: namely, as Ibn Sinā suggests, it will 'occupy itself with the imitation of persons.' Consequently, poets cannot simply rely on a moral tenor of poetry that focuses only on certain features of a person. They have to take account of the audience as it is, with its given idiosyncrasies, and have to attract it to the poem—usually through devices used in the *nasīb*.¹⁷ This additional non-moral component of poetry, as we saw, Ibn Sinā identified as the second purpose of Arabic poetry: that it was produced 'for pleasure alone—everything was imitated for the pleasure of its imitation.' Here, in this role, we must separate out from imitation the ameliorative and deprecatory connotations usually ascribed it, for these belong to another purpose of poetry—'to affect the soul by presenting a given matter that moves it in the direction of an action or emotion.'

Yet poetry serves *this* latter purpose only when, through their ameliorative or deprecatory quality, imitations move subjects to action and emo-

¹⁷ See Chapter 2, above.

tion. That is, imitations can be considered for both their motive power and for their nature as imitations. Ibn Sinā expands on the motive and emotive role of poetry when he indicates that the subject, its qualities, and its response, have a specific relation to the object. As a pleasurable response must be *given*, the suggestion is, subjects with a particular character respond in particular ways to objects of particular kinds: satire attracts response from those who are base, nobility of soul is necessary to appreciate tragedy, and so on.¹⁸ And whatever claims Ibn Sinā makes by reference to types of person and object, underlying the particular relation between, say, satire and meanness of spirit, there is a more general claim about the moral quality of any work. That is, for the particular association between satire and meanness or tragedy and nobility to make sense, we must suppose that there is a plausible general account of the relation between the aesthetic and moral validity of works.

However, this relation cannot simply be that between the moral quality and the content of a work, as if we might argue that, in addition to the aesthetic validity of a poem, we must consider the moral approbation or blame we ascribe to it because of its content. Thus, for example, the form of a love poem might invite its author to be deeply frank about his feelings. But while such honesty remains decorous when the subject is love, it may be completely indecorous when the theme is lust. In its latter guise the same poem could be rejected by its audience for its immoral content even though its formal structure, the facility with which the author gives expression to the convolutions of sense and emotion wrought by lust, and the order of ideas, images, and thoughts are all excellent. Accordingly, by this conception of Arabic poetry, there are two grounds for validity, one formal and poetic, the other moral and governing the content. The first is a restriction that makes the poem a poem, the second is a restriction which makes the poem acceptable in polite society.

Fortunately for the power and range of Arabic poetry, this way of making the distinction seems to rely on restrictions which are more Victorian than Medieval. Nor do they correspond with Ibn Sinā's account of poetic validity. First, the poetic syllogism, which is the basis of poetic validity, is made up of terms in relation such that their meaning *is* what is yielded by their relation. It is not as if there is some independent content which is then given a certain form. The 'content' is intransitive in that we cannot suppose it always capable of being paraphrased into some other content without loss of meaning. Rather, the two—form and meaning—are interdependent and do not need separate and independent justifications. Pleasure in the poem results from the rational process of comparing meanings to grasp the sense that develops, and this pleasurable awe is part of the 'formal' character of poetry. As we gain pleasure through appreciating the harmony between terms, which are meaningful words and expressions,

¹⁸ Commentary, examples cited above.

consequently, where the occurrence of pleasure is essential to the validity of the forms of the poetic syllogistic, there we may expect that the meanings or sense are also essential to the formal validity of a poem using that poetic syllogistic. And it is difficult to see what room there is, in this description, for a distinction between a logically valid poetic form and a content made up of a material that claims moral validity.

In other words, if we rely on the distinction between logical and moral validity to explain the difference of form from content, we will make the relation between a work's aesthetic validity and moral content merely contingent. It will become possible to say that a poem is beautiful but evil because we judge the two—its moral quality and its aesthetic validity—by separate criteria. If so, then we could argue that a poem is satiric yet not mean-spirited, for satire is a theme, and constitutes the form of the poem and gives its parts their order, while its being mean-spirited is a result of its deprecatory content, and we may judge the two separately. Yet Ibn Sīnā clearly does not want to allow for that sort of contingency. He wants to conclude that a stricter and necessary relation exists between them. For him, tragedy, comedy, or satire are themes of the works *and therefore* part of their form: they constitute the work, providing an order and arrangement of parts that gives it the meaning it has *and makes* the content of the work what it is. And Ibn Sīnā's claim is that whatever makes the work tragic or satiric also gives it a moral quality *necessarily*, for he says clearly that tragedy requires a nobility of spirit while satire depends on a baseness or meanness of spirit which allow us to ascribe moral qualities to them. Accordingly, it is not possible for a poem to be beautiful *yet* evil, satiric *but* generous in spirit, or tragic *but* ignoble.¹⁹

The Question of Moral Validity

The argument given above still allows that there are important issues of moral validity for us to consider. It concludes only that we cannot resolve them by reference to a distinction between form and content. However, it is not clear how Ibn Sīnā can argue to the conclusion he wants, for by distinguishing between the formal and moral character of Arabic poetry he makes it more difficult to understand their inter-relation. He has argued for the validity of our pleasurable and ratiocinative response to poems by setting out the formal properties of the poetic syllogistic. This argument

¹⁹ Ibn Sīnā's position is more complicated than this suggests. There are instances in the *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle* where he says explicitly that poetic representations may coincide with the truth. But they are also often false if said as poetic utterances but true as cognitive claims (Dahiyat, 64)—they are different from cognitive claims (e.g. *Remarks and Admonitions, Logic*, 128). These instances, however, must be set besides ones where he ascribes moral qualities to poems, as we have just seen, and so recognizes the relation between poetry and morality. See also the last section of this chapter.

also implicates a role for the subject. But Ibn Sinā has now gone on to make claims for the latter that logical validity does not justify. For he thinks poetry moves particular, morally judgable audiences towards or away from morally valid behaviour. This supposes we can determine whether any subject and its action is morally justified. Yet the logical account of poetry and the poetic syllogistic does not clearly justify that notion of moral validity. Nor is it clear how that account of validity could defend a claim to moral value or validity. Yet, if we cannot clarify the relation between the moral and logical validity of poetry, then Ibn Sinā's claim that tragedy is by nature noble or satire by nature base becomes incomprehensible. We no longer have any grounds for accepting such claims.

Ibn Sinā's stress on the subject gives us a clue to how we may resolve this difficulty. As poetic validity depends on assent given by the subject, who is also capable of being judged good or bad, the subject's role seems pivotal. And for Ibn Sinā the role of the subject and the peculiar inter-subjective validity of poetry suggest that we cannot deploy moral *or* logical poetic validity separately, where the first might lead us to reject a poem even though it satisfies all the requirements of the second, or *vice-versa*. There cannot really be a conflict between moral and poetic validity, for Ibn Sinā, because the basis of poetic logical validity in the subject's experience of pleasurable awe precludes us from entertaining immoralities in a poem. Moreover, this is a *formal* requirement, not a separate moral one. Further, by supporting this general claim, we also see how we might defend it in the particular cases of satire and meanness and of tragedy and nobility. Of course, we must explain these claims further.

Ibn Sinā's general claim turns on the nature of virtue. In *The Metaphysics*, Book X, among other places, he suggests first that individuals need partnership and that virtue is a matter of balance.²⁰ A morally good life needs balance and the exercise of judgement. The goodness of a man's actions will depend on his place in the world—on his defining characteristics, in which the capacity to act and to live well or badly are important factors.²¹ To live well, we must exercise reason and judgement not only in our understanding of the world, but also in our behaviour in it. We must be able to appreciate the nature and depth of the balances these activities require, which will include not only the ability to live harmoniously in a society with others, but also our responsibility for our actions. Here moral awareness essentially involves the concept of the mean,²² and virtue is in

²⁰ See the extract from Book X, *Metaphysics* in *Medieval Political Philosophy, A Sourcebook*, edited by M. Mahdi and R. Lerner (New York, 1963), 99–110.

²¹ Ibn Sinā's understanding of the relation between moral action and behaviour is complicated by a conception of agency that does not clearly free human behaviour from determinism by causal forces. The ability to choose and act must be qualified in various ways. See Gabriel Lahood, *A Comparative Analysis of the Concept of Agency in Aristotle and Avicenna*, SUNY, PhD dissertation, (unpublished).

²² See 'Avicenna: *Healing, Metaphysics, X*' in Mahdi and Lerner, 99–100, 104, 110.

important ways a form of balance. Thus, the most reliable moral agent is best able both to grasp the wholeness and balance of our characteristics and to live in harmony with others and their virtuous balance.

This talk of balances and harmony might suggest that because the most reliable moral agent is the one who is best able to grasp wholeness and balance, he or she is also best suited to grasping the wholeness and balance between terms in poetry. Conversely, the ability to appreciate harmony in poetry may indicate a potential for virtue. But Ibn Sinā's theory needs something more than this analogy before it can lead us to an essential relation between moral and poetic validity. For we will not adequately defend the claim that satire must be base and that tragedy must involve nobility merely by arguing that there are homologies of balance between poetry and morality and that the capacity for appreciating harmony in the one case *could* lead us to be sensitive to it in the other. This is because, first, the harmony and balance involved in each case may depend on very different factors, so that a sensitivity to harmony in the one case implies nothing about the other. Second, if the whole issue were merely that of 'sensitivity,' then the relation between moral and poetic validity would be one of psychology, with all the variability and contingency that implies, rather than anything formal. For Ibn Sinā, it seems, we must establish the general relation between moral and aesthetic validity in some stronger sense than a psychological sensitivity to homologies before we can explain, for example, the relation between satire and baseness or tragedy and nobility as particular instantiations of the general relation. That is, Ibn Sinā's theory seems to require, first, arguing for a necessary general relation between the two kinds of validity and then, second, determining an hierarchy of the arts that depends on the particular relation between moral and aesthetic validity that each allows. Accordingly, we may begin by arguing for the general relation and then, because the argument allows it, can introduce qualifications that justify a more complicated form of the relation between poetic and moral validity. The more developed form, with its qualifications, will allow us to argue that the considerations which distinguish art forms from each other also suggest how they constitute different relations between poetic and moral validity.

We can propose the general relation between moral and poetic validity in the form of a claim that evil or immorality may not be poetically beautiful because evil cannot garner that pleasurable awe which is part of the formal character of poems, and so would preclude poetic validity. To explain this, we must relate a number of factors. By this argument evil will be an imbalance; it will involve not only a rejection of the mean and balance which constitutes a moral life but also will result in a commensurate stress on some one aspect over others. As an imbalance, evil serves to exclude or mis-stress some feature of ourselves. Because it sustains an emphasis on only some aspects, it cannot account for all the qualities whose possession

makes us virtuous human beings. Further, we can construe the sense of moral balance, involving subjects in maintaining a mean in their moral personalities, as denoting a society or group of individuals—as a collection of personalities possessing appropriate moral balances, engaged in moral relations with each other, under the influence of a lawgiver,²³ to constitute a Virtuous City. Ibn Sinā speaks of this in terms of ‘partnership’ and says that the existence of a community is necessary for individual existence.²⁴ Here, the evil rejection of a mean is also the rejection of the Virtuous City or an exclusion from the moral society. Moreover, the persons who are citizens of the Virtuous City are also the subjects who give assent to the beauty of poems. Together, these factors make it impossible for an evil lack of balance to evoke pleasure in the way necessary to valid aesthetic pleasure. For an evil poem would be morally imbalanced yet have to procure an aesthetically pleasing balance or harmony between terms. But given Ibn Sinā’s theory, this could not obtain, for this pleasure—the aesthetic assent or conviction necessary for a valid poetic syllogism—has to be given by the subject; yet the partial stresses in an evil poem will connote a description of society which is divisive and which excludes people from the moral mean or is itself excluded from the moral mean; but those people who are excluded by the evil poem are also the ones who must appreciate it and constitute its poetic value by grasping its meaning and giving assent. That is, to find this kind of poem beautiful, they would have to thwart their own participation in the community *just when they give assent to the poem*. In other words, a beautiful but evil poem would be self-defeating; by this account, ‘beautiful evil,’ so to speak, is an oxymoron and implicates self-defeating or contradictory behaviour. These points can be set out somewhat more systematically as follows.

As we have asserted, Ibn Sinā explains virtue and good in terms of a mean or balance.

The mean in morals or customs is sought for two things. The one, involving the breaking of the dominance of the passions, is for the soul’s purification and for enabling it to acquire the power of self-mastery so that it can liberate itself from the body untarnished. The other, involving the use of these passions, is for worldly interests.²⁵

The mean involves both a balance between reason and the passions, where self-mastery depends on controlling the passions, and a hierarchy where passions serve the pursuit of virtue. This balance can be disrupted by an excess of passion or of an excessive pursuit of self-mastery. The latter

²³ *Metaphysics*, Mahdi and Lerner, 99.

²⁴ *ibid*: ‘Man’s existence and survival require partnership.’

²⁵ *Metaphysics*: X in Mahdi and Lerner, 110. It is of interest also that Ibn Sinā describes this process of gaining balance in terms of a purification, for the latter is the sense Aristotle gives to catharsis in the passage from *Politics* we have cited above.

occurs when we misconceive virtue (wisdom) as a matter of theoretical knowledge. Ibn Sīnā rejects such misidentification as 'it is deception to concentrate on the knowledge of this wisdom.' Theoretical wisdom does not involve any mean; it is only in practical wisdom, 'in worldly actions and behaviour,' that we need criteria for relating particular actions and their consequences to each other and to their source in reason and passion. To treat practical wisdom as if it were theoretical knowledge is to abjure all reliance on a mean and to concern ourselves only with gaining ends for ourselves. But this results in our 'carefully guarding the ingenuous ways whereby one can attain through it every benefit and avoid every harm, to the extent that this would result in bringing upon one's associate the opposite of what one seeks for oneself.'²⁶

Ibn Sīnā's claims here seem to depend on exploiting the relation between concepts of 'individual,' 'self,' and 'selfishness.' That is, given that virtue is a balance between reason and passion, if we treat self-mastery as a matter of theory, which involves no sense of a mean, we are also lead to look without qualification or constraint for ways to gain whatever is defined as the self. But this has an unfortunate consequence, for self-mastery in the sense of freeing the self from the control of the passions, where it seeks to promote this *self* over the passions, also becomes a matter of promoting *this self per se* as defined by reference to or against subjective, individual passions *and* against other selves. That is, this self is defined by being counterpoised to subjective passions, and so is still understood in terms of the subjective individual; but further, it is also distinguished from other selves and objects as the only self whose fulfillment it understands, desires, or pursues. In pursuing such self-mastery, we lose sight of the use of 'these passions ... for worldly interests,' and lose our commensurate pursuit of virtue as a balance within individuals or with other selves. Thus, a natural result of treating virtue as a part of theoretical knowledge is that of 'distracting oneself from the attainment of other virtues.' To so 'cause the hand ... to be fettered to the neck,' Ibn Sīnā writes, 'means the loss of a man's soul, his whole life, the instrument of his well being.'²⁷

Moreover, Ibn Sīnā makes clear what virtue consists of in the case of our motivating powers. These latter are the source of action and so part of the domain of practical reason. In the case of each power, moderation or balance in harmony with others is of paramount importance, and he writes that since

the motivating powers are three—the appetitive, the irascible, and the *practical*—the virtues consist of three things: (a) moderation in such appetites as the pleasures of sex, food, clothing, comfort, and other pleasures of the sense

²⁶ ibid.

²⁷ ibid.

and imagination; (b) moderation in all irascible passions such as fear, anger, pride, hate, jealousy, and the like; (c) *moderation in practical matters*.²⁸

And while the details of Ibn Sinā's position call for further analysis, for our purposes it is enough to note that individual virtue is seen as a matter of balance—that we seek a mean that will allow us to continue to seek other virtues.

This conception of virtue, as a mean or balance denoting the individual, relates to that of community. Ibn Sinā goes on to clarify how our individual concern with attaining virtues commits us also to seeking a proper balance between individuals. When we misunderstand virtue as theoretical wisdom, we are led to bring 'upon one's associates the *opposite* of what one seeks for oneself.'²⁹ The result of treating others in this way is that we are distracted from 'the attainment of other virtues.' By contrast, a correct understanding of practical wisdom as 'pertaining to actions and behaviour' leads us to understand the latter in their public character, but so far as they have consequences for the individual and so far as his actions and behaviour support or disrupt the individual's relation to the community. Indeed,

man cannot lead a proper life when isolated as a single individual... One man needs to be complemented by another of his species, the other, in turn, by him, and one like him... For this reason men have found it necessary to establish cities and form associations.³⁰

Humans need each other to confirm and promote their humanity, it seems, and Ibn Sinā goes on to identify such associations as 'partnerships' that are 'only achieved through reciprocal transactions' which demand 'justice;' and justice, we know, is the mean regulating transactions between individuals.³¹

These last few claims are vital to understanding Ibn Sinā's conception of the individual. The claim that 'partnerships' are '*only* achieved through *reciprocal* transactions'³² suggests that the relation to other individuals in a community is necessary to individual human development and fulfillment. We have found it necessary to form associations because in their absence, where we fail to be complemented by others like ourselves, we also fail to be our human selves. Without reducing the individual to the community or *vice-versa*, Ibn Sinā is proposing that a particular kind of relation between individuals is essential to our own humanity. The importance of these claims will become clearer later. In any case, the upshot of these claims,

²⁸ *ibid.*, italics added.

²⁹ *ibid.*, italics added.

³⁰ *Metaphysics*: X, 99.

³¹ *Metaphysics*: X, 110.

³² *Metaphysics*: X, 99, italics added.

when related to those made for self-mastery, is that virtue implicates two inter-related balances, one within the individual, by which he seeks self-mastery and frees himself to pursue virtues, and another, by which individuals relate to each other in just transactions and so maintain a balanced or virtuous city. For Ibn Sīnā, then, the good life is a balanced individual living well in a just society.

This outline makes clearer Ibn Sīnā's conception of the nature of virtue as a mean; it also shows that its balance involves diverse elements both within and among individuals. Therefore virtue includes a heterogeneity such that the balance between elements is best described as a harmony of all those elements. By contrast, then, vice is generally an imbalance or a disharmony in the individual or in his relation to others. Given that we are dealing with a public realm of action and behaviour, evil must involve either intentionally rejecting or ignorantly subverting that harmony. Whether through intentional action or ignorant behaviour, Ibn Sīnā proposes, the resulting evil is either an excess which disrupts the individual's balance or a deficiency that disrupts the just relation between individuals. That is, the 'vices of excess are to be avoided for the harm they inflict in human interests, while the vices of deficiency are to be avoided for the harm they cause the city.'³³ An excess of passion threatens self-mastery; while deficiencies of passion or reason, where practical reason is substituted by theoretical knowledge, disrupt the balance proper to a good life and so lead to evil.

In this context, to identify anything as evil is to denote the individual and social disharmony that it subtends. Accordingly, to describe a poem as evil or vicious is to claim that it causes or is suited to a social or individual disharmony. And given that a poem is structured by a logically valid relation between terms, in an evil poem the relation of its terms leads to or suits social and individual disharmony.³⁴ And the last claim serves as the first step of Ibn Sīnā's argument: that a poem is evil when it depends on or generates an individual or social imbalance.

As Ibn Sīnā's second premise, we may reiterate the conclusion arrived at in the last chapter: poetic syllogisms succeed where subjects *give* assent through an experience of pleasure in the balance and harmony of terms in the poem. This pleasure depends on the subject—or is subjective—yet it is not arbitrary. It is part of the formal structure of the poetic syllogism, where it plays the role equivalent to the one assigned to conviction in a demonstrative syllogism; consequently it has a validity that makes it more than an expression of personal preference. Nevertheless, because pleasure is an experience which only the subjects can have for themselves, it retains a sub-

³³ *Metaphysics*: X, 110.

³⁴ Of course, such disharmony as the evil poem possesses need not be identifiable with any aesthetic dissonance in the relation between terms in the poem. However, if the claims we will go on to present are plausible, then we will show that an aesthetic dissonance depends on or determines an individual or social disharmony.

jective character and, further, just because it is so closely tied to the individual, it cannot be substituted for by anything or anyone else. Only the subject can experience pleasure for himself or herself, and so far as the occurrence of pleasure signals the success of a poetic syllogism, this success is made possible only by the subject *assenting* to the syllogism by having that experience of pleasure.

This experience of pleasure also fails to be idiosyncratic or arbitrary for other reasons. As the third step of the argument, we may reaffirm that pleasure in poetic syllogisms has a rational component in depending on understanding the terms and their relation in the syllogism. Figurative or poetic language may be subjective because it depends on the subjects' experience of pleasure, but pleasure is far from being some automatic or blind reflex. It was seen to depend on the relation between terms when these were considered for the harmony between them rather than, for example, for their correspondence to reality. Thus, assent as pleasure involves a reasonable procedure in which terms and their balances are understood to be appreciated. And this third claim, together with the two earlier ones, should lead us to deny that a beautiful poem can also be evil. This conclusion depends on certain suppositions about the role of the subjects' activity, and may be explained as follows.

So far as the poem, first, is evil because the terms which it contains generate or depend on a social or individual disharmony and, second, where our aesthetic response is a matter of pleasure, in the balance of its terms, through which we give assent to the poetic syllogistic which the poem contains, and, third, where we must understand the terms in order to appreciate their balance and to assent to the poem, there, fourth, a poem containing individual or social disharmonies will be unable to generate pleasure in the balance of terms because the individuals who are excluded from the disharmonious social or individual order will be unable to give assent to the poem's relation of terms which, by hypothesis, denotes a disharmonious order that excludes those very subjects on whose assent it depends in order to be successful. In other words, an evil poem cannot expect to gain some balanced subjects' assent *without also* confirming their exclusion from its society just when they give that assent. Those individuals will render their own participation in the disharmonious social group vacuous by assenting to the disharmonious order denoted by that poem. Yet if these subject's assent is vacuous, then the poem cannot be beautiful, for its beauty is constituted by subjects assenting to its order and relation of terms. Thus, the poem is successful where it gains assent; but an evil poem can be assented to only by also making vacuous the balanced subjects' assent because the poem excludes, from the disharmonious relations subtended by the evil poem, those balanced subjects who would give assent in order to make it beautiful, and thereby it also excludes their assent. In other words, we must suppose that the balance of terms in a poem can generate a plea-

surable response if it is beautiful; yet, if the poem is evil, and it lacks balance because it is evil, then it cannot gain the assent of subjects so far as the latter are also excluded from the society implicated by the poem. If they are excluded, it becomes impossible to find the work beautiful by giving assent, for if they cannot give assent, the work cannot be said to be beautiful as its beauty is constituted by the subject's response. Conversely, where subjects assent to an evil poem, there they exclude themselves from the virtuous community, and so make their assent vacuous. Only a balance of terms that is compatible with a virtuous balance will be able to avoid divisiveness among subjects and so be able to seek and gain the pleasurable assent of every member of the community. And if it lacks a procedure for gaining assent from all, then it cannot clearly be said to be beautiful. Or so it may be argued.

The claims made above may be questioned as follows. The association between moral and political validity we have proposed here depends on the role of the subject, who both embodies a moral mean and gives assent to poetic syllogisms. Because the same subject is involved in both activities, it seems, and as both activities involve a balance, we argued that the balance procured in the case of virtue must determine that gained in the case of poetic validity. Consequently, the claim is, the subject will not assent to the balance of terms that constitutes aesthetic validity if it means thereby excluding himself from the balance of, or introducing an evil element into the virtuous community. But against this claim we may argue that it merely conflates the assent given to the poetic syllogism, by which a subject participates in an aesthetic community, and the balance within and between subjects that is procured in the moral community of a virtuous city. The considerations which underlie imaginative assent need not necessarily bear any relation to moral balances. A subject may assent to a poetic syllogism by grasping the harmony of terms in a poem without thereby adopting the virtuous mean and, so, without considering whether the poem is evil.

As the criteria for poetic and moral validity are distinct, a subject may or may not participate in both communities. Just because a set of subjects happens to form a moral community, it does not follow that any related aesthetic community *must* incorporate the same set of subjects. The extent and nature of either community will be determined by the kind of validity it depends on, which subjects accede to, and will not be decided by who happens to be involved. That is, an aesthetic community formed by subjects on the basis of assent to the harmony of terms in works need not coincide with the community of moral, balanced subjects in the virtuous city, even though some of the same subjects may be involved in both communities. Here, the fact that *subjects give* assent in the case of poetic validity is idle, for they give assent on the basis of poetic validity, which is when such assent can be asked of them, and do not give or withhold it on moral grounds. What is important is the validity claimed for the poem through

assent, it is not important who gives this assent. The fact that *subjects* give assent does not justify the validity that is claimed through giving assent, and so does not warrant any implication that if we value assent we should also value everything about the actual or potential assenters, including their moral character. In other words, the nature and scope of poetic validity determines the range and nature of membership in the poetic community that it subtends, it is not the case that the nature of the community determines the scope of poetic validity. Thus, considerations of morality or moral balance do not enter into imaginative assent to poetic syllogisms, and we may seek persons' imaginative assent in spite of such assent being incompatible with or possibly opposed to the virtuous mean. This may be explained further in the following way.

Aesthetic and Moral Communities

According to this account, aesthetic and moral communities are distinctive in validity and scope. Such a distinction allows us to talk of validity as requiring assent without concerning ourselves with the question of who is the source of assent, and so without concerning ourselves with the moral community. For example, this separation between morality and aesthetics could obtain in the use of metaphors in a poem. Faced with a metaphor like 'the evening of life,' an audience would be struck by its juxtaposition of the span of day and of life, and the metaphor might be used in a poem which presents a sense of calm and repose that informs old age. It could then be urged that to appreciate the poem we must first grasp its terms and their relation, and that this understanding is separate from the feeling of pleasure by which we assent to the poem. Moreover, we can appreciate the poem by assenting to it without concerning ourselves with the moral balance or imbalance that might be connoted by this treatment of old age. Thus, even if the poem intends to exclude the older members of its putative audience, relegating them to a political limbo by stressing their need for calm, inactivity, and rest, and regardless of whether we find this relegation immoral, we may still grasp and assent to the poem for its successful syllogistic. Further, an evil but beautiful poem works in much the same way: its poetic validity holds in spite of and separately from any moral condemnation we may level against it. Even if evil is a matter of excluding individuals from the moral community, that exclusion is separate from their participation in the poetic community subtended by the poem because of its beauty. Even if they are excluded from the moral community, they may still assent to the poetic validity involved. Thus, there can be beauty that is evil.

For Ibn Sinā we may argue against this objection that because it misunderstands the role of the subject and its assent in determining validity, it also fails to appreciate the relation between moral and poetic validity

that he wants to establish. The objection was that poetic and moral validity depended on distinctive criteria, and so each could occur independently of its counterpart. Moreover, the subject's involvement in poetic validity, it was argued, was idle in an important sense, for the subject became important only as a *source of assent* to given criteria while a poem was valid where it satisfied certain criteria, and its validity was independent of *who* gave assent to poetic syllogisms. Consequently, the scope of the aesthetic community, which is a claim about who are its members, was decided by the force and nature of poetic validity, rather than its validity being determined by considering whether all the members of a given community gave assent.

But this objection misunderstands the role of giving assent in constituting poetic validity. First, for Ibn Sinā we might argue that giving assent is not contingent or external to validity, as if we had a procedure by which we recognised a successful poetic syllogism claiming validity, and a separate procedure where a subject assented to the syllogism by feeling pleasure. Instead, for Ibn Sinā, this kind of separation cannot obtain: the meaning of the poem is constituted by its poetic syllogism which, in turn, is successful when it occasions pleasure and so leads us to give imaginative assent. There is no sense of 'understanding the meaning of a poem' that can be both separated from imaginative assent yet also given poetic validity, for by giving assent we constitute the poem with its terms, their inter-relation, and their meanings.

Second, to give imaginative assent is to feel pleasure in the order and relation of elements, and this pleasure is subjective in the sense that only the subject can feel this pleasure for himself or herself. The fact that others do or do not feel pleasure forms no ground for the subject's own response. Yet if this pleasure and assent are vital to the success of a syllogism, and that pleasure involves the subject necessarily, then consideration of the validity of any poem cannot exclude consideration of the subject who gives assent. In this sense, the poem subtends its own community. Given that the subject is necessary to assent and so to validity, only if reference to the subject is not vacuous or idle can we describe the poem as having validity. Consequently, the subject and his or her assent go to constitute the aesthetic community, and so must belong to it, if we are to have that poem at all. In other words, we do not first identify poetic validity by certain criteria and then find ourselves constrained to assent to it, so that those who do feel constrained in this way also participate in the aesthetic community. Rather, there is no poem or community except where subjects participate through pleasure and assent.

Third, in distinguishing Arabic from Greek poetry, Ibn Sinā also makes clear that he thinks the 'whole' person is involved in assenting to poetic syllogisms. Thus, the subject's participation in the aesthetic community brings in considerations of his moral and other qualities. Given that

we cannot simply emphasise some parts of the subject's faculties over others when we explain how the poetic syllogism is constituted, as we might have done in understanding Greek poetry, there is also no clear distinction to be made between, say, the aesthetic and moral communities on the basis of which faculties of the subject participate in each community. In both cases, the same subject is involved. This is not to say that no distinction can be made between moral and aesthetic validity, for the second depends on agreement gained on the basis of experiences of pleasure while the first depends on agreement over what should be, but it does say that for Ibn Sinā the distinction cannot be made by reference to the different faculties of the subject. Moreover, given that the subject who constitutes the valid poetic syllogism in turn is constrained by a moral and social balance, the latter will determine the parameters within which we constitute the former. And these parameters are those of a just society, for a 'man cannot lead a proper life when isolated as a single individual,' but 'needs to be complemented by others' in order to affirm and promote his own humanity.³⁵ Therefore he cannot consent to an evil poem for, by doing so, he will not only exclude himself from the community because he will thwart his participation in the moral balance, but he will also thereby make his assent or pleasure vacuous because he will fail to affirm or promote his own humanity. This needs further explanation.

To clarify this last claim further, we can develop some features of the concept of evil. We suppose that evil tends towards so complete an imbalance and disharmony within and between individuals as to destroy the possibility of affirming the humanity of subjects. Given, first, that good is opposed to evil and, second, that Ibn Sinā's account of a Virtuous City, based on reciprocal transactions between partners where the pursuit of virtues is made possible, embodies what is a good life, then there is reason for defining evil negatively as the most complete impossibility of good. And that negative definition can lead us to deny the presence of balance and to affirm the presence of such excesses in individual pursuits or deficiencies in communal order as to render impossible any likelihood of gaining any virtues. But where this disorder prevails, partnership and reciprocal transactions become impossible, and at best other individuals are only used for the subject's own purposes. Far from being partners, other individuals only serve as means to the subject's purposes.

If we consider individuals in this way we suppress their humanity, rendering their actions and reasons irrelevant in the sense that these are denied all independent legitimacy and are considered only in the context and terms of the evil subject's own purposes—other individuals are merely like any other objects. Consequently, any assent those individuals may wish to give to a poetic syllogistic is rendered vacuous because it has no weight or meaning in this scheme of things, for assent has none of the basis

³⁵ *Metaphysics*: X, 99.

in subjectivity and in the humanity of the other that gives legitimacy to assent as valid and meaningful behaviour. Or, conversely, by giving assent to such an evil imbalance, the individual also thwarts his very ability to give assent meaningfully because he has sought to enter a scheme of things where his humanity, his substance as a subject, the basis for validity in assent, are all void. In other words, an evil poem cannot gain assent from the subjects because it excludes them just when they give it assent; but if it excludes them, then their assent is of no consequence because it cannot constitute the poem and its community. On the other hand, if their assent is included in order to gain the poem as constituted by their assent, it is no longer an evil poem. Conversely, if the subject were given to the immoral balance denoted by the evil poem, then his assent would be excluded from the virtuous city and its mean. That is, an evil subject might be thought to find the poem beautiful by assenting to its disharmony. But, in this case, the evil person would have excluded himself from the virtuous community because of the imbalances in himself, and his assent cannot form part of the community. In either case, then, evil and beauty do not intermix.

Of course, the partiality of terms, stresses, and their harmony need not be obvious, and may have to be explained, even to the subjects themselves. Various psychological factors may prevent subjects from seeing that the poem serves to exclude them wholly, so that the assent they may be tempted to give thwarts their participation in the virtuous community. Ibn Sinā's argument suggests that we can make mistakes in these cases, and that error can be explained to a subject. But the refusal to reduce poetic validity to moral validity, in spite of the former depending on the latter, also implies that any such explanation of the evil of a putative poem must take a particular form: we cannot simply dismiss a poem for having some evil content; we must argue also that the immoral quality exhibits an inadequacy in the *poetic* structure and validity of the poem itself. Conversely the requirement of adequacy will exclude the kinds of poetic dissonance that are generated by immoral partial stresses.

However, if this provides a plausible account of the relation which Ibn Sinā proposes between moral and poetic validity, it is because it depends on assuming an extreme contrast between virtue and evil. The contrast is not mistaken in itself; but the suggestion made here is that the distinction is exclusive and exhaustive when applied to individuals. Yet surely Ibn Sinā does not see virtue as an absolutely pure state of being, and he recognizes the existence of such degrees of goodness as would prevent us from dismissing a subject as evil simply because he is not perfectly good. In this context, then, it is possible to consider the degree to which a work is good and, consequently, the degree to which it permits or thwarts assent to a poetic syllogism. Further, given that poems subtend their own community of individuals, we might expect that the order and relation present in the latter will determine the scope of any assent. Thus, a poem may implicate a bal-

ance most appropriate to assent from subjects of a particular character, where the latter may be identified morally, in terms of individuals given to actions and behaviour which are good, or noble, or naive, or vapid, or ignorant, or base, etc..³⁶ And by understanding these variations, we may expect, we can come closer to understanding Ibn Sinā's contention that baseness supports satire, that nobility is native to tragedy, and so on.

Poetry and Character

The above expectation, although warranted, is not easily satisfied. To begin with, the relations we have usually mentioned, of satire to baseness, tragedy to nobility, and comedy to superficiality and ignorance, are all drawn by Ibn Sinā from Aristotle's *Poetics* with the acknowledgement that they are Greek examples, which are appropriate to a commentary on the Greek text, but are not necessarily inherent in Arabic poetics. Further, Ibn Sinā has distinguished Arabic from Greek poetics in terms of the former's reference to a subject. Thus, an explanation of the Greek connection between poetry and morality, that would emphasise the moral quality of actions depicted or spoken of over any concern with character and subject,³⁷ will remain inadequate to an understanding of Arabic poetry and its poetic subject and moral community. Ibn Sinā seems to confirm this by writing that his commentary is addressed only to 'that part of the First Teaching [i.e., the *Poetics*] which we are able to understand, since it mostly includes discussion of poems and descriptions peculiar and known only to them [i.e. to the Greeks].'³⁸ Accordingly, it must seem that there is a limit to any use we can hope to make of Ibn Sinā's explication of Aristotle's theory because the latter is directed at understanding Greek poetry.

However, the passage also suggests we can extract some conclusions that, because they are universal, will also be applicable to Arabic poetry. Thus, just as Greek poetry has a 'fixed number of poetic kinds with definite themes' and for 'each kind, [the Greeks] had certain conventions peculiar to them,' similarly Arabic poetry uses 'conventions, e.g., the description of deserted habitation, the erotic motif, the depiction of landscape, and the like...'.³⁹ So, in spite of differences in particular themes and conventions, there are similarities in that both have themes and conventions.

³⁶ It is worth adding here that if they were evil, no assent would be valid, for the reasons we have given above. Thus, the presence of evil may provide a base limit for the meaningfulness of assent, while if they are good, then as the pursuit of virtue has no limit, assent too is unlimited in scope.

³⁷ See above for the distinction Ibn Sinā makes between Greek and Arabic poetry, Chapter 4. See also M. Nussbaum, *the Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, 1984) and Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London, 1985), both of whom agree with Ibn Sinā's reading of Greek poetry in important respects.

³⁸ 2, Introductory.I, 70.

³⁹ *ibid.*

Consequently, we may expect to speak more generally of 'poetry, its kinds and the characteristics of each kind; the principle of excellence in making likenesses and poetic fictions, i.e., imaginative utterances; and the exposition of the parts of each kind—qualitatively and quantitatively.'⁴⁰ What we say here will apply to both Greek and Arabic poetry. And we may expect to use Ibn Sinā's study of Greek themes and conventions to arrive at conclusions about Arabic poetry, but with the proviso that differences between the two kinds of poetry will mean that such comparisons cannot be unconstrained. For example, where conclusions about Greek poetry depend on assumptions about the priority of action over character and a distinction of 'character' from 'subject,' there we can apply those conclusions to Arabic poetry only by arguing for the role of the subject. Similarly, where Greek poetry yields conclusions which follow from the use of appropriate themes, there to apply those conclusions to Arabic poetry we will have to argue for the validity of those conclusions for Arabic themes.

Another restriction on any comparison is this: many of the claims that can be made about, say, the relation of baseness to satire, are the result of insight rather than theory. We may provide genre-related arguments for the appropriateness of baseness to satire, where both elements are defined at some level of generality, but claims about particular works and their subtended community will depend only on insight into the work and its workings. The general theory at best can only point to the elements involved in understanding and interpreting any work of a particular kind, but it will not say more than that. That is, there are limits to the general explanatory power of theory, be it applied to Arabic or Greek poetry, for beyond theory we need a sensitivity to works and insight into them. The latter depends on a theory to explain what we should look at and why, but the theory does not determine how poets exploit the categories it identifies. A theory such as Ibn Sinā ascribes to Aristotle will explain works by identifying genres, themes, and conventions, but this says little of what makes a particular tragedy powerful or leads us to distinguish al-Munabbā from Buḥturī or *Oedipus* from *Trojan Women*. Similarly, any insights we garner into the nature of tragedy may fail to apply to satire or to the erotic motif of a *nasīb*.

The last paragraphs imply serious constraints over what we can expect from Ibn Sinā's analysis of Aristotle's *Poetics* at least so far as our interest is in the relation of theme to moral quality. First, Ibn Sinā is undertaking an exercise in philosophy rather than art appreciation or literary theory, and so is not concerned simply with providing insights into particular poems. Second, in his analysis of Aristotle's claims for the relation of tragedy to nobility, satire to baseness, or comedy to superficial ignorance, Ibn Sinā will be concerned with Aristotle's argument at a general level, from which conclusions can also be applied to Arabic themes and genres, rather than

⁴⁰ 1, 12, 70.

with the issues specific to Greek drama and poetry. This implies that, third, Ibn Sinā is interested in the mechanisms by which we associate themes with moral qualities, and in the consequences this has for a subject's assent, rather than in the specific relation of tragedy to nobility in Greek drama, and so on. Of course, these claims do not deny that Ibn Sinā makes some insightful claims about Aristotle's conception of Greek tragedy—as evinced in his emphasis on action over character in explaining the 'Greek conception of poetry,' for example—but the main thrust of his analysis of the text must be seen to lie in explaining Arabic poetry with its concomitant subjectivity.

But such constraints also suggest that we have already done as much as we can to explain the relation of genre to moral quality, for we earlier provided an argument showing that the nature of poetic validity was such that poetry implicated a community of partners. We might fill this out by showing how a noble community differs from one which is base or how one work fits the first category better than another does, but these sorts of cases fail to go beyond the general argument. His general conclusion is all that Ibn Sinā can provide if he does not want to analyze particular works of Arabic or Greek poetry in order to show what their moral community consists in. That is, his general argument can only be filled in by analyzing particular works to show why, say, *Trojan Women* depends on a nobility of response and subject. But that is also a step he cannot take because his concern is with general arguments rather than with particular analyses. And instead of trying to produce more arguments at this specific level, it may be more sensible to understand how genre or theme are related to the manner, means, and aim of imitations, for the latter are what make up the poems whose nature we want to understand.

Further, Ibn Sinā's concern with the mechanisms for associating themes with moral qualities has implications that take us back to the issue which we left at the end of the last chapter. For if we can explain those mechanisms by clarifying the rules for constructing works with given themes, then we will have gone some way towards showing the rationality of themes and of their development out of poetic forms. And by explaining how we gain themes and forms, by setting out the rules by which we assess them, we show how we can complete the poetic syllogism. Indeed what we will find is that by explaining how theme relates to form, and how syllogisms become complete, we can begin to clarify the moral quality of different poetic forms. Naturally, all this needs further argument; and we can begin by seeing how poetic themes have moral qualities.

A MECHANISM FOR THE MORAL QUALITY OF THEMES

In addition to the examples given earlier, there are numerous other instances where, following Aristotle, Ibn Sinā points out the moral quality of works. At Chapter Six he identifies tragedy as a 'type of imitation which is proper and which makes the soul [of the audience] disposed for the acceptance of noble deeds.'⁴¹ Tragedy presents 'what is connected with error, straying from the path of duty, and losing sight of what is more noble.'⁴² But by multiplying these examples we show only that Ibn Sinā ascribes moral qualities to works;⁴³ what we need is to justify such ascriptions. In regard to this issue, Ibn Sinā's claim is that if works, poets, and the audience all have moral qualities, it is because all these are involved in the business of poetry, where the latter depends on imaginative imitations which, in turn, naturally militate towards moral qualities. To explain this fully, we shall have to consider the issue of the completeness of the poetic syllogistic, for only by resolving that issue can we explain the moral qualities ascribed to a poetry constituted of imaginative imitations in a designed order. We may begin by looking at the moral qualities of poets.

Ibn Sinā identifies moral qualities in poetry in a number of ways, sometimes complicated by differences between Arabic and Greek poetry. Generally, his claim about the moral qualities of imaginative imitations depends on the fact that imitation is not only distinct from reality and produced by subjects but also imitates certain objects. For example, Greek poetry imitates actions, and as 'every action is either base or noble,' imitation concerns itself with the proper means for portraying the moral qualities of these actions, and thereby introduces moral qualities into consideration. Here, as Arabic poetry concerns itself primarily with subjects rather than actions, we may argue that the moral connotations applied to actions in Greek poetry cannot apply in Arabic poetry. Yet this conclusion does not follow, for Arabic poetry has its own reference to morality. First, for Ibn Sinā, both Arabic and Greek poetry seek to 'move the soul in the direction of an action or emotion;' therefore they both concern actions and morality. Second, in addition, Ibn Sinā maintains that Arabic poetry depends on the subject. Certainly this association between actions, emotions, and the subject is one that that Greek poetry does not stress. Nevertheless, as we have seen, a reference to the subject itself invites a concern with moral qualities, and so Arabic poetry also, because it concerns subjects *and* actions, must satisfy the moral strictures which apply to Greek poetry so far as the latter has its object in noble or base actions. Thus, first, actions

⁴¹ 6, XIII.4, 106

⁴² 6, XIII.6, 106

⁴³ Other instances where the same connection is made include 2, I.9, 73; 2, II.13, 76; 3, IV.12, 82; 4, V.2, 87; 4, IV.14, 92; 6, XV.11, 108; 7, XXIV.12, 116; 8, XXV.2-7, 119-120.

reflect their subjects, who are base or noble and, second, Arabic poetry imitates the actions and emotions of subjects, and so involves moral qualities.

Ibn Sinā also suggests that, third, because subjects constitute poetry made up of imaginative imitations, their very construction of poetry raises moral issues. If every action is base or noble, then the action of constructing poetry from imaginative imitations will also be noble or base. And from this intentional activity of constructing poetry Ibn Sinā concludes that the 'aim of every imitation is either amelioration or deprecation, for a thing is imitated either to be made better or worse.'⁴⁴

Ibn Sinā immediately qualifies the last claim, adding that some people 'imitated [actions] for pure similitude, neither for amelioration nor deprecation,' perhaps suggesting that a mere similitude can be morally neutral in intention. But if this implies a qualification, it is minimal, for if every action is base or noble, then every imitation, even if it is formally a 'pure similitude,' must still consider an action for its baseness or nobility. For example, the baseness of an action may make it unnecessary to add some deprecatory element, so that the poet's intention to deprecate is satisfied best by an imitation that is 'pure similitude.' Accordingly, Ibn Sinā can claim that 'every imitation *and similitude* ... [is] implicitly prepared towards amelioration or deprecation, or, in general terms, towards encomium or invective.'⁴⁵ And he can then explain that

the categories of imitation are these three: deprecation, amelioration, and correspondence. The means [of imitation] are ... speech. Correspondence is a fixed category which may be deflected towards baseness or towards nobleness, and thus become an *intended* imitation... [It] may be transformed into either amelioration or deprecation by having something imparted to it.⁴⁶

Later Ibn Sinā clarifies that the 'manners of imitation are three: similitude, metaphor, and the combination of both; the ends are three: amelioration, deprecation, and correspondence.'⁴⁷ Thus, the suggestion is that we explain the moral quality of poetry by reference to the poet constructing imaginative imitations which, in turn, we explain in terms of their means, manner, and aim, all of which involve moral considerations. Now, as the means and manner of imitation make it possible to satisfy their purpose, they are more basic. The manners of imitation, in turn, depend on the validity of poetic language; and that we have already discussed.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ 2,II.10, 74.

⁴⁵ 2,II.12, 75; italics added.

⁴⁶ 2,II.13, 75–6.

⁴⁷ 2, III.15, 76

⁴⁸ Unfortunately, there is a problem with pursuing this aim: Ibn Sinā does not explain the notion of mimesis as imaginative imitation very systematically in Ibn Sinā's *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*. Even though it plays a central role in his theory, he nowhere presents a clear account of the notion itself. We may explain the paucity of Ibn Sinā's explicit discussion in part by pointing out, first, that his language oriented account of imitation, which he presents

A number of points result from these interconnections. To begin with, we should not be surprised that Ibn Sinā not only identifies the *means* of imitation as speech,⁴⁹ but also claims that the *manner* of imitation involves similitude and metaphor.⁵⁰ His own theory is language oriented, and spoken language or speech is central to the oral tradition of Arabic poetry: both theory and tradition come together nicely in this regard. Further, language has given uses, which Ibn Sinā identifies as 'manners,' and producing similitude and metaphor—this manner—is how poets use speech. Poetic imitation—similitude, metaphor—is speech used affectively, evoking feelings of wonder and pleasure. Other *manners* of using the same means—speech—include cognition and rhetoric, for example, where the reference to wonder and pleasure distinguishes '*imaginative imitations*' from the more prosaic use of imitations in cognitive claims or of rhetoric and persuasion.

Further, '*imaginative imitations*' bore an essential reference to the subject, who reconstructed representations out of past intuitions, and were more than mere imitations.⁵¹ Ibn Sinā stressed their nature as *phantasia* over their mimetic quality, allowing that images are *reproduced* as particulars.⁵² He writes that we use 'the precepts which have been stored in the

in the first chapter and which depends on conclusions drawn from his logical works, does not entirely coincide with Aristotle's, and, second, that the latter's use of the concept of mimesis develops throughout his own text. The account he gives at Chapter 3 of the *Poetics*, for example, develops at Chapter 4, and neither coheres fully with what Aristotle says at Chapter 24. Moreover, Aristotle's discussion addresses Greek works which Ibn Sinā would not have known. Thus, where Aristotle discusses imitation at Chapter 3 in terms of action and narration in particular works, given both Ibn Sinā's own language-oriented account of poetic speech and the unfinished nature of Aristotle's reflections at this juncture, his commentator is left unwilling to say very much about imitation at this point in those terms. But the third reason for this alleged paucity is that Ibn Sinā wants to clarify the basic principles at work in Aristotle's discussion in order to see how they enlighten us about poetry generally. Our commentator distinguishes the manner of Greek poets—they 'make mere likenesses' or they 'imitated noble deeds alone' or both 'noble and ignoble deeds'—from what he suggests are more general 'manners of imitation [such as]: similitude, metaphor, and the combination of both.' As general manners of imitation, these must underlie Homer's imitation of noble or ignoble deeds as much as they underpin Arabic poetic conventions. In this discussion, Ibn Sinā wants to develop certain claims about imaginative imitations generally by reference to these 'manners,' and his explanation will not gain from pursuing Aristotle's discussion of particular Greek examples or by reiterating what Ibn Sinā has already said earlier in his commentary and in other texts about the nature and logical validity of imaginative imitations. Hence, given his concern with the use of imaginative imitations, his explicit discussion of their nature may seem unsystematic and indirect; but that is because in fact in Ibn Sinā's work the discussion is couched in singular terms and serves a distinct purpose—of explaining the use of imaginative imitations. For this purpose Ibn Sinā does examine particular works, rather than explicitly or arbitrarily develop the concept of mimesis, but he is interested in them only because he wants to derive general rules from what Aristotle says about these Greek works. In these circumstances, a systematic discussion of the nature of imaginative imitations becomes untenable and seems poorly developed, but in fact Ibn Sinā has already proposed in other texts what the logical status of these imitations is and set out an outline of how they function generally.

⁴⁹ 2, II.13, 75–6.

⁵⁰ 2.III.15, 76.

⁵¹ Cf the last Chapter, 'Imagination in Poetry'

⁵² Cf last Chapter 'Ibn Sinā on the Imagination'

imagination and then proceed[] to combine and analyze them, constructing quite different images, for instance a flying man or an emerald mountain.⁵³ In other instances too, as we saw, Ibn Sinā opposed imitation to reality rather than think of mimesis in terms of precisely copying some part of reality.⁵⁴ That is, the poet develops and presents new images and imaginative imitations in poems, which are symptomatic of the subject.

This reference to the subject is perfectly congruent with the tradition of Arabic poetry that venerated the poet or spokesman for his ability to use language and imagery to express ideas and maintain the tribe's honour by relating its accomplishments and defending it in disputes.⁵⁵ Further, because he thinks poetry is central, Ibn Sinā differs from Aristotle, who sometimes writes as if the visual or dramatic arts were paradigmatic cases of mimesis. Ibn Sinā too has something to say of this kind of visual representation—as when he discusses imitation in masks—but even there he thinks these visual and visible features are symptomatic of temperament⁵⁶ or of 'moral character and thought which give rise to .. action.'⁵⁷ This not only frees imitation from a merely iconic role, where it might be restricted to 'looking like' its object, but also reminds us that in poetry a subject must understand and respond to mimetic material. That is, as we saw, poetry is mimetic in this sense because it refers to subjects, human speech, action, and character through literal devices such as metaphor and similitude.⁵⁸ The poem is mimetic in that it must accord with the nature of the subject.⁵⁹

⁵³ Avicenna, Canon, 1.176–182, quoted by Kemp, 'From "Phantasia" to "Imagination",' 362.

⁵⁴ For example, imitation gives 'the likeness of a thing, not the thing itself' (2, I.3, 71). Further, while the products of the imagination are mimetic, nevertheless, they are not understood simply in terms of reality but must also be seen as constructions by a subject. Elsewhere Ibn Sinā identifies imaginative imitations by reference to the subject's contribution in generating these imaginative imitations and images, which are 'neither limited nor fixed... What is proper to poetry is that which is invented or created' (1, Introductory.5, 63).

⁵⁵ Introduction, above. This veneration of the subject is not usual to Greek poetry, it seems, which stresses action over character and is concerned with the moral qualities exhibited through action rather than the character of the subject. Ibn Sinā amplifies this reference to the subject in imaginative imitations when he contends that the appropriate response to imaginative imitation is a feeling of wonder. This feeling distinguishes our interest in imaginative imitations from one in the veridical relation of image to reality, for the 'soul yields [to imaginative speech], accepting or rejecting matters without pondering, reason or choice' (1, Introductory.2, 61–2).

⁵⁶ 3, V.15, 83.

⁵⁷ 4, IV.9, 90.

⁵⁸ We considered this sense of mimesis above, saying that poetry imitates the subject because it elicits an intersubjectively valid response from subjects who must give assent to a poetic syllogism.

⁵⁹ Of course, a poem is also mimetic in that it must make sense and convey meaning about objects, events, emotions, and so on—it must refer to these items—and Ibn Sinā explains other aspects of mimesis by elucidating the distinction between a thing and its appearance and the connection between poetic and demonstrative syllogisms. Poetry uses language and imagery that, while it bears reference to experience and knowledge, is important for its affective qualities.

But we need something more than these explanations—of the logical status of poetic language, imagery, and imaginative imitations and of the way in which this language imitates the subject—to fathom the workings of poetic language. That is, we may know all about the logical status of poetic language yet still be ignorant of the great many devices and items involved in particular uses of that language. Metaphors, similes, synecdodes, personifications, odes, sonnets, *nasīb*, and other devices that produce poetic meaning all share the logical status of poetic language, yet clearly they differ in how they exemplify that status. In other words, by ascribing this logical status to poetic language we open out a whole field of items and devices which exhibit that status.

In explaining this field Ibn Sīnā distinguished Arabic from Greek poetry, saying that some devices and uses are possible in one language but not in the other: poetic devices exemplify the logical status of poetic language in different ways in Greek and Arabic.⁶⁰ His most extensive consideration of the nature and use of these poetic devices—the poetic forms—in Arabic occurs in the first chapter of the *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*, where his own theory and approach are most clearly at work.

The Poetic Forms

Ibn Sīnā holds that our construction and ordering of language and its imaginative imitations into poetic forms is an exercise of practical reason. That is, the rules governing the *use of phantasia or mimesis*—imaginative imitations—are a variety of practical reason. Ibn Sīnā explained the logical validity and status when, in considering poetic discourse as a part of theoretical reason, he clarified the nature of the poetic syllogistic. But we saw that poetic speech depended on pleasure for its formal validity, and that consequently the completeness of the poetic syllogistic depends on the rules for gaining themes and forms. The latter rules and form, we are now proposing, we must think of by reference to a concept which, for Ibn Sīnā, becomes central to the activity of constructing poems: imitation as a conscious and rational activity. His specific claims about poetic forms or devices are worth quoting at length.

The five poetic forms or devices of imaginative imitations are as follows:

Starting with the first type, we say that some of the forms of this type are like syllables at the beginning or end of clauses, [parallelism], and the interlocking of articles, their contrast (such as 'from' and 'out of').

⁶⁰ But he also suggests that the two languages may be similar in some of their mechanisms and devices for developing that common poetical logical status.

Forms of the second type are either according to complete proportion: when words (i) that agree in declension but differ in substance, or (ii) that agree in substance but differ in declension, recur in the same line; or those according to incomplete proportion: when the words are (iii) related in substance, or (iv) in substance and declension. Examples of the first are ^ʿ*ayn* and *ghayn* (the 18th and 19th letters of the Arabic alphabet); of the second, *shaml* and *shamāl* ('north wind'); of the third, *fāriḥ* and *hārif* ('swift' and 'rash'); or ^ʿ*aẓīm* and ^ʿ*alīm* ('great' and 'knowledgeable'); of the fourth, *ṣābiḥ* and *sābiḥ* ('early' and 'floating'), or *suhād* and *suhā* ('sleeplessness'). This is the proportion in wording as such; it may be in wording according to meaning such as when two words known as synonymous or correlated are used in a different way (i.e. figuratively), e.g., *kawkab* and *najm* ('star') used to mean *bayt* ('tent' or 'house'), or *sahm* and *qaws* ('arrow' and 'bow') used to mean *athar* ^ʿ*ulwī* ('heavenly trace').

As to artifice according to contrast, a word does not merely differ from another in terms of sound, but also in terms of meaning, i.e., the meaning it commonly has. The form of this type exists in two, or more, words of which one means something and the other means its opposite, what is supposed to be its opposite or contrary, or what is proportional to, related to and connected with its opposite, e.g., *sawād* ('blackness') which also means 'arable land,' *bayāḍ* ('whiteness' and 'wasteland') *raḥmah* ('mercy'), *jahannam* ('hell'), and all such [words].

Forms according to the third type are (i) those characterised by proportion: when the expression is compared to another which is made up of parts which are singly declinable and which form a sentence of an ordered composition, or the composition may be compared to another which is made up of words that are simple in form; and (ii) those according to contrast: when there is a contrast between the sentences of two composite utterances in the ordering of their parts, whether these parts are common to both or not.

Forms of the fourth type are (i) according to complete proportion: when one meaning recurs in the line in different uses; and (ii) according to incomplete proportion: when there are single meanings, opposite or related, such as the 'bow' and 'arrow' and the meaning of 'father' and 'son.' Proportion may be through a similarity in relation, common practice, sharing in predication, or sharing in name. An example of the first is 'king' and 'intelligence;' of the second 'bow' and 'arrow;' of the third, 'length' and 'width;' of the fourth, 'sun' and 'rain.' Proportion may be explicit or it may be implicit. If explicit, it may be either according to the [nature] of the thing itself or according to convention.

Contrast is either complete in opposites and their likes, or incomplete. It exists between a thing and that which is similar or analogous to its opposite, and between the similars or analogies of two opposites. Contrast may be [based on] a mentionable reason; it may inhere in the thing itself.

[Forms] according to the fifth type are (i) those characterised by proportion : when two composite meanings resemble one another in composition or have common parts; and (ii) those characterised by contrast: when they differ in composition or order, with or without having common parts. Examples of this type are : the saying, 'either so-and-so or so-and-so;' combination and differentiation, e.g., 'you and he make a sea—but you are for flooding, he for clamour;' and combining a statement in order to clarify it by minute exposition, e.g., 'he is to be both solicited and dreaded : solicited for his enlivening rain and dreaded for storms.' This has been a brief enumeration of poetic forms.⁶¹

Neither the status nor the nature of these poetic forms is immediately clear from this passage. Ibn Sīnā prefaces his list by arguing that 'the pleasurable in sound or sense is of two types.'⁶² Having already associated poetry with pleasure, Ibn Sīnā is now clarifying that such poetic pleasure is gained in part by actively manipulating speech. The use of sound to mark the measures of an utterance may be one device for identifying a speech as poetic and, so, as imaginative. But sound does not seem as basic as sense. This is because we must understand a poem before we can appreciate it. Thus, presumably where we might lose the sense or meaning of a poem if we pursue its sound pattern, we will likely either sacrifice a sound pattern to preserve the sense of the poem or seek another sense that fits the sound we want. Even if sound is essential in providing rhythm, measure, and so on, where sound and sense are crucial, the latter's rules will also apply to the former. And given our interest in grasping the nature of poetic devices and the poems they make possible, we consider sense principally. After all, this is the philosopher's concern.

Given that our principal interest is in what these devices contribute to poetic sense, we must explain Ibn Sīnā's claim that in poetry the pleasurable in

sense is of two types: (i) it may be without artifice, and in this case, the wording itself is eloquent and yet without "art", or the meaning itself is unusual not through art but due to the strangeness of its imitation and imaginative representation; or (ii) the pleasurable may originate in a simple or composite artifice in either wording or meaning. Examples of a composite artifice in wording are internal rhyme, material proportion, decoration, inversion, and other [devices] mentioned in the *Rhetoric*.⁶³

Further, immediately following this, Ibn Sīnā sets out the relations of parts that 'every artifice occurs in terms of,' and which yield the five poetic forms quoted above. This suggests that poetic forms are not exhaustive be-

⁶¹ 1, Introductory, 9–15, 64–66.

⁶² 1, Introductory, 7, 62.

⁶³ 1, Introductory, 7, 64.

cause they only govern devices of artifice. As they do not necessarily govern what is 'pleasurable without artifice,' they cannot claim any special status in exploring the general validity and sense we claim for poetry. For although they provide one mechanism for constructing the pleasurable in sense, we can also attain the latter in other ways.

But this conclusion raises other problems, for if there are alternative accounts of validity 'without artifice,' then the arguments given in the last chapter, which show that we can claim a syllogistic validity for poetry, must remain inadequate. Those arguments at best defended only the validity of the five poetic forms because the latter were exhaustive and we could show that they were structured by poetic syllogisms in the sense that our ability to gain poetic meaning by using those forms was justified by showing that and how the poetic syllogistic justified poetic forms. If we could create in abundance and could establish poetic meanings merely by the use of these poetic forms, that would surely increase the unlikelihood of ever bringing the poetic syllogistic to completeness, for the more clearly we are able to create poetic forms that give rise to poetic meanings, the more it must seem that the poetic syllogistic remains incomplete because there is no guarantee that justifies the new form; and the less complete the syllogistic remains, the less validity it can claim.

It seems that we can dismiss these fears, of leaving the syllogistic incomplete, for three reasons. We gave the first in the last chapter when discussing the relation of poetic forms to syllogisms. If poetic forms are merely literary devices, as opposed to logical structures, the devices will have an adequate logical structure because the latter provide the validity of any poetic language, including ones using new linguistic devices. Thus, there will not be an occasion when we have a poetic form that cannot be linked to and justified by the poetic syllogistic that is already available. However, this answer is useless just because it supposes that we already have a justification of poetic validity and of poetic syllogisms and that we can extend this justification to support the logical validity of any meaningful poetic phrase that uses a new or given linguistic device. It was not necessary to make this assumption for the purpose of the earlier argument, but in the present context we are questioning just that assumption, and so cannot simply assert it without argument to defend the position under attack.

The second kind of argument seeks to vitiate fears about the abundance of poetic forms by first distinguishing the process of producing a work from the work itself and then, second, arguing that we must understand all works as constructs and, so, must see them as artifices made up of poetic forms and devices. In other words, poetic devices are crucial to and paradigmatic of *all* poetic speech, regardless of whether that speech results from a process of trial and error in which a poet actually does the work of constructing a poem or whether the poet creates 'naively'—out of an inspiration in which the work somehow comes to mind without his or her pain—

stakingly and consciously putting it together. Ibn Sinā suggests this argument when he claims that in a poem 'without artifice,' the 'wording may be eloquent yet without "art";⁶⁴ or the meaning is unusual not through art..' . . For the poem to be without 'artifice' or 'art' is for the poet to produce his work without consciously using poetic devices. The meaning in a poem is somehow direct, and the wording is eloquent, even though the author does not use the usual forms of expression. Earlier we saw al-Fārābī stress that some people produce superior poems through a natural disposition, employing 'this gift without being acquainted with the art of poetry as it should be [because] they lack a perfect deliberation and careful consideration in the art.' For al-Fārābī 'whoever [of these natural poets] says he is "sylogizing poetically" does so only because of the artistry he displays as a poet,'⁶⁵ and Ibn Sinā seems to remind us of the same possibility: that poems may please as poems without being produced in accordance with given rules for constructing them.

This last claim implies that we may distinguish between the poem itself and the manner in which it is produced. The poems are pleasurable in sense. But this pleasure in sense, these poems, we can form either by some naive and unstudied constructions that follow no given rules or by following the given rules and devices for constructing poems. The first may be striking because its 'meaning itself is unusual ... due to the strangeness of its imitation and imaginative representation,' while the second may be striking because it employs poetic forms on new material and thereby produces new and valuable imaginative imitations. In either case, however, because we understand and appreciate these items as poems, regardless of how they are produced, we expect that, first, they will have a logical status and validity simply by virtue of being poems. Consequently we expect we can analyze them into poetic syllogisms and *therefore* show that they are pleasurable in sense. Secondly, we expect that the naively constructed poem has a structure or poetic device. An unusual meaning escapes banality because of the strangeness of its 'imitation and imaginative representation,' and not because it is incomprehensible or lacks order; and even a strange imaginative imitation is still an imaginative imitation, bearing both a relation of terms to each other *in* a poem and a relation of the terms to a structure that makes it meaningful. Consequently, even if it is *formed* 'without artifice,' nevertheless, because it must have structure in order to be meaningful, we can extend some rule from the instance and construe it as a poetic device. As the naively constructed poem too depends on poetic devices, although the two kinds of poems differ in the naive or artful manner of their production, still, in terms of their 'pleasure in sense' and their deployment of poetic structure and meaningfulness, they seem similar. Therefore, to grasp

⁶⁴ 1, Introductory, 7, 64

⁶⁵ Canons, 116.

the nature of all poetic language, regardless of whether poets produce it naively or by art, we must explain it by reference to poetic devices.

Unfortunately, this defence of the exhaustiveness of poetic devices fails for two reasons.⁶⁶ The first reason for failure is that this still does not show us that the five poetic forms identified by Ibn Sinā are exhaustive. A naively produced poem may yet have a structure because a poet who fails to find any given device satisfactory may still produce a *new* device in the poem. If so, then the five previous forms can not be exhaustive because poets can generate new devices. This conclusion leads to the second reason for failure. The argument assumes that all poems have a validity that we can justify by analyzing the poetic syllogisms they contain. Whether the poem is created by artifice or naively, it seems that we can appreciate the poem for its pleasure in sense and so can understand it as a poem possessing all the validity warranted by the successful poetic syllogistic at its base. The suggestion is, further, that once we are assured of its poetic nature, then we can turn to discover whether it was constructed artfully or naively. Yet by raising questions about the exhaustiveness of the five poetic devices we are also questioning just that claim to validity, for if the five forms are not exhaustive, it may be argued, then the poetic syllogistic cannot claim completeness and the pleasure in sense which we want to associate with a poem cannot claim any validity. If so, then we do not ever successfully appreciate any of the poems which we purport to examine for their naive or artful construction.

From Forms to Themes

If these two defences of the exhaustiveness of poetic devices are unsuccessful, it is possible to suggest an alternative strategy and defence. The strategy is to accept both that poetry is constructed, whether with or without art, and that a naive construction of poetry may yield new poetic forms, so that the five poetic forms which Ibn Sinā identifies are not exhaustive. But, by this strategy, we do not need to conclude that because poetic forms are not exhaustive, therefore poetic syllogisms remain incomplete, for we may point out that there are other ways of defining the completeness of poetic syllogisms.

One such defence is to argue that we can identify many more than those five poetic forms—Ibn Sinā describes his discussion as merely a 'brief enumeration of poetic forms'⁶⁷—but will base all the forms on a small set of principles. Ibn Sinā identifies this small set of principles by saying that

⁶⁶ To raise these objections we set aside another, that it is not clear just what is being claimed by saying that naively constructed poetry must have a structure and that it embodies a rule or device. For it seems that we can explain how this is the case.

⁶⁷ 1, Introductory.15, 66.

'every artifice occurs in terms of a certain relation among parts. This relation is either proportional or contrastive; and both proportion and contrast are either complete or incomplete. All this is either according to wording or according to meaning.'⁶⁸ And we identify the particular way in which poets deploy these principles by saying that the construction of poetry using imaginative imitations is a rational business best understood as *techne* and practical philosophy. These principles of artifice and the rule-governed nature of *techne* provide a rationale for the devices we use in constructing poetry such that the particular devices may be numerous, but their rules and basis will remain qualifiedly constant. And that constancy of rules for constructing devices goes to guarantee the completeness of the poetic syllogistic. We shall explain this further.

By arguing that 'every artifice occurs in terms of a certain relation of parts,' Ibn Sīnā specifies how we gain figurative language. His claim is that this relation 'is proportional or contrastive.' It would be too crude to identify these relations with particular logical relations, as if assent to premises leads to pleasure in the case of a proportion but leads to pain in the case of a contrast. This seems plausible at first because the Celarent mood, for example, permits us to assert that 'Youth is not a sheep' because 'Youth is brave' and 'No sheep are brave,' while we have seen the Barbara mood affirming that 'N.N. is a moon.' Further, poetic premises result in wonder or pleasure or distress, and it seems an easy next step, given Ibn Sīnā's Aristotelian psychology, to find that contrasts which deny an association or harmony lead to distress and are naturally expressed in the Celarent mood, while proportions, being harmonious, result in pleasure and are naturally expressed in the Barbara mood or in some variations of it.

But not only has Ibn Sīnā failed to make any claims about contrast being painful or proportions being pleasurable, but also any such association between poetic constructs, feelings, and logical relations depends on conclusions about the general relation of language to logic that is presently at issue. That is, talk of 'relations of parts in contrast or proportion' identifies the way poetic language operates; and we have claimed that poetic language bears a particular relation to logic—to the poetic syllogistic—in that poetic language follows rules that go to complete the poetic syllogistic and *thereby* justify poetic validity. But this shows that we *seek* to justify poetic validity; and so we cannot presuppose that validity. Yet we would have to presuppose that validity if we wanted to argue that say contrasts which deny associations lead to distress and are expressed naturally in a Celarent mood. However, if we can justify poetic validity by making clear how poetic or figurative language functions, then we will have succeeded in showing what is the relation of language to logic. So we cannot assume a relation of language to logic of the kind suggested above, which associates contrasts with the Celarent mood, but are required to argue for it.

⁶⁸ 1, Introductory.8, 64.

The problem with asserting that there is a direct relation between language and logic is that we need to provide a warrant for it. Ibn Sinā goes some way towards doing this when he sets out the elements involved in the poetic forms. Every artifice is a relation that is proportional or contrastive, but each of the latter is either complete or incomplete, and each of these is

either according to wording, or according to meaning; if according to wording it may involve words of incomplete or no significance ... or significant words, simple or composite; if according to meaning it may be with respect to either simple or composite meaning.⁶⁹

The five forms which Ibn Sinā abstracts from these possibilities are all based on contrastive and proportional combinations of syllables, phrases, words, and sense to yield meaningful imaginative imitations. So, for example, the fifth poetic form includes constructions such as 'combination and differentiation,' e.g., 'you and he make a sea—but you are for flooding, he for clamour.'⁷⁰ Although cognitively false, the phrase is not literally meaningless because the combination of terms suggests a confluence of personalities or souls that is constantly moving in accord with two impulses, one of which is embracing and accepting, the other of which seeks attention. The poetic meaning occurs by incorporating the contrasting phrases such as 'flooding' and 'clamour' within the sense of combination provided by 'the sea.' Further, as this combination and contrast goes with others to make up a poem, the suggestion is that these forms may, in turn, be combined with each other to develop meanings further. And in all these poems we may expect to generate as-yet-unconstructed poetic forms through naively constructing poems, rather than it being the case that poems are always constructed by using the five poetic devices. Further, even where poets produce such poetic forms naively, they will involve some kind of contrastive and proportional combination of linguistic parts, for it is only by such combinations that imaginative imitations are gained in any given language.

However, given that poems consist of such proportion and contrast, we cannot expect to discover what guides their combination of proportion and contrast merely by looking at the latter. That is, we construct poems out of proportion and contrast in some given poetic forms, but the poetic forms themselves alone do not determine how they are combined to form a poem. Whether a poet uses the fifth form to describe the relation between two people, and whether he goes on to combine the resulting phrase with another, thus developing that relation through a further poetic form, depends on the intention behind the poem. The poet may use the phrase that 'you and he make the sea—but you are for flooding, he for clamour,' to

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ 1, Introductory.15, 66.

suggest a tragic irresolution between the two personalities or a comic but bearable conflict, and the choice of additional poetic forms and their contribution to the construction of meaning will depend on which suggestion he wants to develop. And while this development will occur by combining words and phrases having given forms, the choice of forms will be appropriate to something beyond the poetic forms themselves. This 'something beyond' Ibn Sinā identifies as the theme in Greek poetry and as conventions in Arabic poetry such as 'the description of deserted habitation, the erotic motif, the depiction of landscape, and the like.'⁷¹

These themes or conventions govern the combination of poetic forms and so guide the deployment of proportions and contrasts. Ibn Sinā at first identifies 'measure' as the mechanism by which themes work. 'Every theme had its particular measure, and each measure was given a particular name.'⁷² Tragedy, for example, 'has an exquisite and pleasant measure.' However, he goes on to argue for themes by saying that tragedy 'contains the commemoration of goodness, the morally excellent and outstanding human traits.'⁷³ By this more developed account of tragedy, a theme may provide a guiding thread for poetic forms by using appropriate measures, but the more important contribution the theme makes is by ordering poetic forms and their proportions and contrasts to evoke some intended response in subjects. Tragedy, for example, leads us to celebrate or commemorate 'outstanding human traits.' Later Ibn Sinā clarifies that themes gain their appropriate tone—tragedy celebrates the outstanding human traits, comedy enriches our sense of the ridiculous—by the simple mechanism of bringing about in our souls the imitation of sorrow, anger, and the like.⁷⁴

This brief description of the relation between form and theme is sufficient to suggest that it is an essentially loose one. The need to develop a theme does not determine which particular poetic forms the poet will use, and the occurrence of a given poetic form is not sufficient by itself to determine which theme is being developed. The two do not bear a sufficient and necessary relation to each other, so that for example our use of the fifth poetic form of combination and differentiation to construct the phrase, 'you and he make a sea—but you are for flooding and he for clamour', does not by itself determine whether it fits into a tragic or comic theme. Instead, by using various poetic devices we build up an emotional resonance and tone, which we may classify as a tragedy or a comedy depending on its nature and measure. When the poet gains a tragic or comic theme, we can explain how its particular poetic forms work in combination to produce the given tone and theme. Further, in a given example, we may adumbrate

⁷¹ 2, 1, 70.

⁷² 1, Introductory.16, 66. Ibn Sinā's claim may have made much better sense if he used 'metre' instead of 'measure' in this instance—as was suggested to me by a publisher's reader.

⁷³ 1, Introductory.16, 67.

⁷⁴ 4, VI.6–10, 88–91.

poetic forms and their content in order to explain why, say, a satirical theme is not developed acutely because it fails to use antithesis satisfactorily in deploying contrasts and so fails to 'include noble and praiseworthy actions in order to make wickedness even baser by comparison.'⁷⁵ Thus, the relation of forms to themes allows the kind of claims we usually make in appreciating or criticising works, but, in all this, the forms work as parts of a whole that produces or follows a theme: the forms are not sufficient and necessary elements determining what theme is actualized.

Such a part-whole relation between form and theme—this absence of a necessary and sufficient relation—raises a problem for the claim that poetic syllogisms can have completeness. Although we have raised this issue a number of times above, it may be as well to be reminded of why completeness is necessary. In arguing for the validity of poetic language in the last chapter, we worked out a notion of a poetic syllogism that was comparable to other syllogistic forms such as demonstration. Cognitive claims were valid for the following reasons: first, they rested ultimately on premises which were true because they instantiated definitions and, second, observed the basic rules of logic and demonstration in extrapolating from known to unobserved cases. We show that cognitive language is valid by analyzing it into both a set of basic truths which are true by definition and valid arguments based on syllogisms; and similarly we proposed that to justify the validity of poetic language we analyze it into its basic emotional and syllogistic structure. But when we tried to identify that poetic syllogistic, we were faced with the problem that any syllogistic structure must have a proof procedure that can be complete. In the case of demonstrative arguments, we could show completeness by reducing problem cases to simpler ones. Thus, we can analyze any complex set of predicates by reducing it to an appropriately long series of two-step predicates and can complete proof procedures because they consist only of the simpler argument steps, even if the latter are large in number. One assumption we make here is that none of the sense, meaning, or truth of the complex will be lost by its translation into simpler steps. That assumption was warranted in the case of demonstration, but poetry presented a different problem. In the case of the poetic syllogism, combinations of terms cannot be reduced to simpler forms because combinations of terms generate meanings that we cannot preserve if the combination is reduced to its elements. If poetic meaning is irreducible, this raises again the issue of incompleteness, for the profusion of meaning and nuance surely makes it impossible to reduce the meaning to simple logical forms without loss, and consequently we have no guarantee that the syllogistic forms we use are complete in that they can account for all the possible combinations of terms in poems. These combinations result from the poets' intention; they break out of the bounds of standard meanings and create new senses that logic cannot grasp. The rules of the

⁷⁵ 3,IV.5,79.

sylogistic, then, are such that proof procedures remained open and the syllogistic is incomplete.

Against this threat of incompleteness, in the last chapter we proposed that theme and form, and the way the former delimits the latter, provides some account of limits to proof procedure. But considering what we have since learnt of theme and form, their relation does not appear as determinate as it would need to be to thwart incompleteness: there is no limit to the number of themes we can develop and none to the forms we may use. While all the forms must be constructs out of a relation between parts, the relation of parts to and in themes remains indeterminate. And if the latter is open, then again, there is no limit to the poetic syllogistic rules we might need to grasp these new senses, and consequently the proof procedure using those poetic rules will be capable of completion only at a price: the price is that the proof procedure would not be able to cope with newly produced themes and forms.

Forms, Themes, and the Completeness of the Syllogism

To answer such doubts we must stress that poetry is composed out of poetic forms and themes, which are open ended in the sense that we can develop new forms and new themes. But these innovated forms and themes are also constructed, for new themes and forms order and structure the linguistic parts brought into contrastive or proportional relation to yield new meanings. We can see this construction as a matter of solving practical problems of composition, perhaps of adjusting contrasts and proportions and their deployment to gain an intended tone, or producing a new poetic form because it best uses some novel and valuable elements we want to introduce to gain a theme. This kind of problem-solving is essential to producing poetry, and while some poets solve problems intuitively in the poems they produce, others need to consider and solve technical problems independently of the process of producing a poem. For example, the usual contrast between natural and artificial poetry presents such a contrast between producing spontaneously and working on the poem. Similarly, the usual account of Mozart's genius, according to which he produced his music whole, almost ready to be performed, and solved technical problems intuitively, represents a contrast with the work of Mahler, who pursued and resolved the technical issues of symphonic works in order to use his conclusions to produce music. But neither kind of production is any less a matter of constructing a work, and both must be structured by appropriate forms and themes. Moreover, we can abstract from these works the technical and practical mechanisms their authors used to solve problems and can use them as models for producing work in the future. Accordingly, although there is an open endedness in producing and deploying poetic

forms and themes, this construction must follow a pattern. There are rules present, which we can abstract and consider for themselves in terms of the reasoning, skill, and problem solving or general rational standards which the works embody.

This constructive aspect of poetry is not discussed explicitly by Ibn Sinā, yet it is clearly fundamental to his account of poetry. He thinks of poets as makers of poetry, poems are composed,⁷⁶ and the audience gives assent by grasping that composition. Where Ibn Sinā talks of the artifices, poetic forms, and themes which structure poems, he must see them as things made by their authors, which would not come to exist without such activity. In poems, poetic forms were used to construct 'metaphors or similitudes or both' out of 'imaginative imitations' which, by nature, are open to such construction. They differ from the reality which they represent because they are produced by the mind—the original sensory experience, we saw, was manipulated to conceive of a man who can fly or an emerald mountain.

We can explain some part of this constructive aspect by reference to poetic forms and themes. The latter embody the manner in which construction occurs, and by examining them we can adumbrate particular rules for making poetic language of a given kind. Arguably these rules have a curious status. In one sense, they may serve as instructions setting out how to compose a poem, for an author intending to produce a tragedy may use these devices to construct metaphors and imaginative representations having the tone, exquisiteness of measure, and effect upon the soul that commemorate goodness, moral excellence, and the outstanding human traits.⁷⁷

In another sense, though, they not instructions for producing tragedy, comedy, or other poetic language and form. This is because instructions must be expressed separately both from the activity which they guide and from the material they apply to and eventually come to form; but even if particular poetic forms and themes serve as rules, they are not separate from the tragedy they form, as the particular tragedy is the work it is because of the way its forms compose that theme. Consequently, they do not have that distinctness from a material which is necessary for rules to serve as instructions. Yet there is a sense in which we may consider these 'instructions' for themselves, and so gain a variety of knowledge as we gain expertise in grasping the nature and function of forms and in deploying them when constructing poetical works. In this sense, by understanding the nature and our deployment of poetic forms and themes, we articulate what it is to produce an object by pursuing rules. Such knowledge as we gain here covers our activity in generating objects which come into being because of our activity. The skill, reasoning, problem solving and ordering that yields any particular work will embody a rule and activity which

⁷⁶ I,Introductory.I,61

⁷⁷ I,Introductory.16,67

others can follow and pursue, and we can abstract that rule to provide a kind of knowledge of this activity.

Further, we can also assess the success of such a rule. The poet will order all the relevant elements of the work by using poetic forms to suit a theme. The success of this use of forms and theme depends on its ability to generate a response in the subject. Ibn Sīnā writes of themes that they have their 'proper tone in accordance with its eloquence or "softness"—and by means of that effect, *the soul itself becomes imitative of sorrow, anger, and the like*.⁷⁸ Thus, the theme, which governs the order and development of material in given poetic forms, has its end in allowing 'the soul itself' to have an appropriate feeling, and its success is determined by how well its forms and elements are ordered to bring about those feelings.

In his discussion of tragedy, Ibn Sīnā exhibits these rules which structure our production of works:

The most important part of tragedy is the design [or intention] of those meanings that are imaginative, remarkable, and splendid; then upon these, tone and speech are structured. Imitation is achieved by combining these. Speech means measured language; tone, the force which reveals how the poetry has its meaning as a whole. Such a force means that the melodious intonation and the singing proper to every theme are the basis of moving the soul towards the meaning—hence the understanding [of the theme] is enhanced and a form indicative of potency is given to it..⁷⁹

And so on. All the details displayed in the discussions which follow this quotation in the text can serve as rules for those who follow. Here, it may be that we can only discover the rules through works by producing new tragedies or comedies containing more combinations of proportion and contrast, and so on, but nevertheless, rules are still present. They show us what is being done, rationalizing the procedures, rules, and order constructed in a work. Thus Ibn Sīnā writes that the 'most important of all are the things which compose the structure of the tragedy',⁸⁰ and goes on to list fiction and four other 'parts' as 'the principle and cause' of tragedy.⁸¹ All these—fiction, portrayal of habit, poetic composition, and melodious intonation⁸²—are structural elements, and they are all directed towards gaining that imitation of 'sorrow, anger and the like' which the soul itself imitates.

We can cite numerous other such examples from the text. Their purpose is to grasp our construction of poetry, our development of poetic forms with an intended tone, according to a design, to suit a theme. Of course, there is no end to the ways in which we develop a theme out of

⁷⁸ 7,I.4,71, italics added

⁷⁹ 4,VI.8,90

⁸⁰ 4,VI.14,92

⁸¹ 4,VI.18,94

⁸² 4,VI.18,94–5

given materials. As we do not have sufficient and necessary conditions for relating a theme to a poetic form, their relation is open. But that lack of sufficient and necessary conditions does not make the enterprise any less rational. Further, the set of rules which Ibn Sinā extracts is defensible as a description of the procedures followed by the poets; but other readers may extract other rules, and we will consider one more right or wrong than the other by seeing how closely it tallies with the works themselves. But in all these cases we agree and disagree for good reasons rather than arbitrarily. And just these good reasons establish the completeness of the poetic syllogistic. We can explain this as follows.

What we have seen is that the relation of themes to form is rule governed. This implies that even if there may not be an end to the number of themes and forms that can be produced, there is a given and rational way in which such production and construction occurs. Further, there must be such rules for production, for the work serves a purpose, and its success, which we can measure by how well it generates appropriate feelings in a subject, depends on understanding the elements which make up the poem. Even the newest theme and form must satisfy standard of success, and once poets create these radically new and successful works, we may understand them and abstract their rules. These rules will then join the established canon, and so there will still be a determinate set of themes governing the deployment of all poetic forms. Any attempt to add to or lessen their status or number will have to be justified, for example by showing how a new instance fits the standard of success, or by showing why a purportedly new theme is only a misconstrual of an already established one, or by explaining how a previously accepted theme fails to tally in some way with a preferred set of themes, and so on. There is no way of predicting which issues about which themes will occur nor how they can be dealt with, but we may expect that in every case where items become issues, they do so for good reasons, which can be set out and explained, and are not arbitrary or mysterious.

Thus, we may say that themes and forms are open ended but also complete because we can allow for new themes and forms while also insisting that critics, poets, and the audience can defend them in reason and feeling—that they can be found completeness through their success in providing appropriate feelings. As the open-endedness of themes was the source of our doubt about the completeness of the poetic syllogistic, by arguing that a reasoned openness is compatible with completeness and by showing that for Ibn Sinā the successful imitation of a feeling is a standard of success for all themes, we preclude those doubts about the completeness of the syllogistic. Even though the themes are not open ended in going beyond appropriate feelings, we can still change the structures and rules which we deploy. But of course that does not raise again the problem of incompleteness because, where changes occur, they are defensible and occur for good

reasons. When changes occur, it means that still a given set of rules is operating, and its operation and validity leads us to exclude the possibility of sheer open-endedness. For these are rules: they may allow for development, but they are rules nonetheless.

The use of feeling to resolve this issue of completeness parallels our use of pleasure, in the last chapter, to resolve another issue about completeness; and it further serves to exhibit the affective nature of poetic validity. Ibn Sīnā had proposed that a construction of meanings involves a relation between terms and elements that, when it is harmonious, occasions pleasure when we grasp it. So, in spite of the absence of principles and axioms, in a poetic syllogism the pleasure occasioned by harmony guarded against incompleteness by showing that its forms and terms must be finite. Now, in response to the second threat of incompleteness, stemming from the fact that we cannot reduce complex and nuanced poetic meaning to a series of simpler meanings, and so have no guarantee that we can grasp the complex meaning by using the rules of the poetic syllogistic, Ibn Sīnā first proposes that themes organise the deployment of poetic forms and second maintains that themes succeed where they evoke an appropriate feeling in the subject. So, we know that the mix of elements must be finite because it can be ordered under themes and the latter have their end in generating the subject's response. This response of 'sorrow, anger, and the like' results from understanding the elements of the theme, and so is rational but yet is a matter of being affected. Thus, in this case too, given that we would not understand the whole theme if the forms and terms it organised were infinite, as in the earlier case we justify the validity of the poetic syllogistic by showing how its completeness is guaranteed, so to speak, by our affective response on understanding the terms, forms, and themes. Where pleasurable appreciation of a finite harmony defends the completeness of the poetic syllogistic in the first case, now in the second case our response of 'sorrow, anger, and the like,' which we feel when we understand the work, its terms, forms, and theme, defends the success of themes.

Completeness and Moral Validity

As a result of this detour through the issue of the completeness of the poetic syllogistic, we can return to consider the moral connotations of different works. We have seen that poetic works use poetic forms to order materials and, in turn, are ordered by themes. Works are completed and valid when they realise a theme, and they succeed in realising a theme when they evoke 'sorrow, anger, and the like' in the subject as an appropriate response to understanding the elements of the work. In other words, and put simply, themes are realised when subjects' souls imitate the feeling in question and thereby validate the poetic meaning of the work. To validate the

work, then, the subject has to be responsive to those feelings: he or she has to discover this response in himself or herself, and to give assent through it. We can expand this emphasis on the subject's response to make clear another factor—the nature of the subject. To evoke an appropriate response to the work, to validate its poetic meaning, the subject must be capable of having the appropriate feeling in question. For if he cannot feel sorrow at certain events, then he cannot validate the tragic poem by appreciating its theme. Similarly, if she cannot understand why anger is the appropriate response, then she will not have grasped the relevant theme.

This interaction between the work and the subject is necessary to validating the poetic meaning of a work, but it also shows that the subject, so to speak, has responsibility for responding in an appropriate way to relevant material. But having an appropriate response depends on the subject being sensitive to the issues in a work, and so on the subject having a character and capacity for moral discrimination which he or she can deploy in response to a work. For a subject will show that he has these qualities through giving an appropriate response. For example, we may expect that a base person will remain insensitive to tragedy because, as baseness involves possessing moral turpitude and leaves the individual in possession of a moral balance that renders him incapable of some sympathies with other subjects, he will not comprehend the full extent of another character's rise, *agrosis*, and *hubris*. In such cases, by describing a subject as base, we also *explain* why his reactions, say to a tragedy, are always inappropriate: he cannot attain that balance of moral factors which would allow him to understand the play of natural forces and moral needs constituting any tragedy. Because he cannot understand the forces operating in and structuring the work, he is unable to respond with appropriate feelings, and cannot validate the given tragic theme. Of course, faced with a play of forces and characters that is base, he can respond to the ridicule heaped on any comic character. And just because he shows himself amenable to one balance rather than another, again we are able to explain the fact of his response by describing it as base. Similarly, with other reactions, we may describe subjects as noble, and so on, depending on the appropriateness of their responses. Further we may expect that a sensitivity to tragedy requires a more complicated grasp of and response to a work, and that a subject capable of tragedy will also be able to respond at some level to comedy, but that the reverse need not hold.

By identifying and explaining responses by these moral categories, we not only avoid the objection that as responses are merely subjective and arbitrary poetic validity is weakly founded, but also we clarify how works subtend particular moral communities. It might be argued that Ibn Sinā's explanation of poetic validity is unsuccessful so far as it depends on subjective reactions which vary from subject to subject. Just because one person responds with anger to a theme does not show that or why others ought to

do so. In fact, variations in responses suggest that there is no principle uniting them.

But we can dismiss such an objection for being naive in the face of variations in our capacity for moral discrimination and response. Such differences as there are, we can suggest, depend on the moral character of subjects and the forces at play in a work. Without also arguing that a capacity for moral responses is congenitally determined, and so without implying that people are incapable of developing their moral character, we can use Ibn Sinā's 'physiognomic' understanding of the relation between a subject and his moral character to argue that the capacity for responding appropriately to works exhibits moral character; and we can analyze and group these variations in diverse ways, including 'nobility,' 'baseness,' and so on. Similarly, we can analyze and group the 'manners of imitation—similitude, metaphor, or the combination of both,' and the ends of 'amelioration, deprecation, and correspondence.'⁸³

As to why we should maintain that nobility is tragic or that ridicule and baseness are comic rather than any other way—that is a matter of Aristotle's insight and Ibn Sinā's development of that insight. Naturally, there may be other ways of explaining that moral quality and so there may be other ways of relating the quality to emotions. But those alternatives have to be argued for, and we would have to give good reasons for deploying some alternative insight that perhaps all tragedy has an element of ridicule, and so on. Whatever our arguments and conclusions are here, however, they do not effect the essential point that some moral quality of the subject is crucial to his or her response to a work. Moreover, just that moral quality and sensitivity to works goes to identify a community because it circumscribes all those subjects who share an ability to respond appropriately.

Another doubt we might raise here stems from another response that is appropriate to works. We said earlier that pleasure was the basis of assent to works and that its occurrence went to validate the poetic syllogism. This might suggest a contradiction or at least an issue we must address: what is the relation between 'a feeling which the soul imitates' in responding to a theme and the pleasure which is the basis for our assent to poetic syllogisms? Both are feelings necessary to poetic validity because their occurrence goes to warrant the completeness of the poetic syllogism. And the different quality of these feelings does not lead to conflict or confusion, for they are not opposed to each other. The pleasure we gain in recognising a harmony does not detract from the sorrow or anger evoked in us by tragedy or ridicule in a comedy. The feelings may occur together, but they are not identical, and there is no need to confuse them since each is the result of a distinctive rational process. Ibn Sinā suggests a positive result of the occurrence of feelings, for example, in that we can even tolerate in art the

⁸³ 2, III.15, 76.

presence of ugliness, depravity, or sorrow, which would completely repel us in real life, because the harmony constituted by these and other events in the works leads to pleasure. Pleasure is appropriate to the order in a work, sorrow to the events having a theme which are depicted in that order; and the occurrence of both signals poetic validity.

In any case, if in this section we have clarified the moral connotations of poetry, we have done so by using a notion of emotional responses to themes to justify poetic validity. The latter claim may be developed to raise an issue of the relation of logical validity to language.

LOGIC AND LANGUAGE IN POETICS

In the last chapter we raised the issue of the relation between logic and language in Ibn Sinā's poetics. It was first proposed that we give poetic devices a logical validity by showing how each was constructed out of particular logical form or forms, where the latter possessed validity. The difficulty with this proposal lies in its crudity: it is generally the case that poetic language, using poetic devices, is supposed capable of logical validity; but as the meanings constructed by using the device are going to differ, depending on the context of its use and the other devices also used, there is no guarantee that the logical form that served the poetic device in one use to generate one meaning will also serve in the same way in every other use and context. The meaning gained by using a poetic device changes with the different relations the device enters in any theme, and the different meanings each relation produces; so the logical relation implicated in each use of the device may differ correspondingly, and we should not expect to find a strict identity between particular devices and particular logical structures.

We can illustrate this claim in a general way by showing that a poet can use the same poetic device in a context which connotes tragedy or comedy, where the meanings it promotes will differ. Further, it is far from clear how we can identify devices with logic. All devices are constructions out of proportional and contrastive relations, which lead to pleasure or pain. It may seem clear enough that contrasts involve some kind of opposition or negation, but that is surely to assume a great deal. Ibn Sinā explains how we gain such contrasts, and explanations in terms of negation seem at best a very small part of the more subtle balances we procure by using opposing positive terms, oblique references, and so on. And any attempt to collate all those ways of constructing contrasts by including them under the rubric of negation seems implausible if we do not add any other explanations.

Moreover, as the success of poetic devices lies in generating pleasure and an appropriate response to their theme, they must seem closed to logic. If our concern is with feelings, which are notoriously inexact, then any use of logic, which involves some command of determinate relations, will be

less than precise because no determinate and precise logical relation can grasp the inexact play of feelings in poetry. However, in making this last claim, the position set out above seems to go too far. It takes inexactness in feeling to be an issue in this case, but it is not. Our concern in proving the validity of the poetic syllogistic is with a communality of feeling, which is all that a poetic work hopes for; and this community of feeling is not arbitrary or less rational just because it is 'inexact.' Indeed, it is not clear what exactness is, here, unless it is merely masquerading for the determinate force of logic as contrasted with the persuasive force of poetic language. A comparison between logic and poetic devices that talks of exactness seems otiose because it only succeeds in by-passing the real issue: of the manner in which poetic language using poetic devices can claim validity. The point is not to show where poetic device joins with demonstrative validity and exactness but to explain what gives poetic language validity—and that purpose is not served by reducing particular devices to particular logical relations.

A second model for understanding the relation of poetic language to logic proposes that the poetic syllogistic supports the use of poetic language to gain figurative meanings. This model, which seems the most plausible, is comparable to the relation of language and its grammatical rules to the rules of logic. Ordinary cognitive speech must follow the rules of grammar to be comprehensible, but that allows us to use it to convey meanings, which are grasped and clarified by logic. By this understanding, language conveys to its linguistic community the truths which gain exactness in meaning through logic. The rules of logic are universal in the sense that they hold true regardless of a particular language and because of the order and nature of objects and events. By contrast, their expression in a particular language is a translation from logic into the grammatical and other linguistic practices particular to that community. In this case, to grasp the truth about objects and events, we must translate from say Arabic, Armenian, or Latin into logic.

Only the possibility of so translating knowledge claims from their expression in a particular language into the terms and constants of logic can assure us of the truth and epistemological validity of those claims. Where we fail to translate our claims into their logical form, there is always the danger that our knowledge claim is nothing better than a simple accretion of linguistic rules rather than a successful grasp of reality. Of course, not every use of a particular language will be mistaken, but the expression of truth in that language will be available and meaningful only to the speakers of that language, and while the linguistic form of a truth will change in its expression in different languages, the logical expression of that same thought will be constant because it grasps the thought underlying the diverse linguistic expressions. By this conception, we can use language to deal with the rules of thought—logic—but without supposing that every rule of lan-

guage is vital to establishing the universal validity of logical expressions. Indeed, too great an interest in the linguistic rules particular to any single language is detrimental to grasping the trans-linguistic structure of thought and logic. Conversely, any linguistic expression must be capable of being expressed in ways that display its logical structure if it is to claim validity. Logic thereby underlies the use of language to express thoughts and in the study of logic, say in the form of demonstrative syllogistic, the use of language is in important ways contingent because other languages could have been used to serve the same purpose. However, the truths of logic which the language yields are valid for all languages because they are valid for thought.

If the relation of logic to language set out above is to serve as a model for poetic language, however, we might argue that it would prove that the poetic syllogistic is vacuous. Instead it is more plausible to see poetic validity as an instance of the inter-penetration of logic and language, for that coincides nicely with our own suppositions about the nature of poetry. To see these points, we can look at the differences between poetic syllogistic and demonstration. One point is that in the case of demonstrative arguments, the syllogistic *underlies* language in a way that is not possible in the case of figurative language and the poetic syllogistic. In the latter, language and the validity of the syllogistic are more closely inter-dependent. In the case of demonstration, we can handle the issue of logical or syllogistic validity entirely within the domain of thought and without making that validity depend on the particular language in which we consider any issue of logic. We may explain this claim by reference to issues of the completeness of the respective syllogistics.

We saw that we could prove the completeness of the demonstrative syllogism by showing that expressions formalized in logical claims which, in turn, are always reducible to the basic syllogistic. If they were not reducible in this way, we could never know that the basic syllogistic provided all the needed rules for thought. If it did not provide all the rules, if the basic syllogistic could not govern all the implications of *every* rational statement or set of statements, the syllogistic would be inadequate. In cases of failure we should have to show why the syllogistic failed and would need to explain what new rule could both prove adequate to the material and compatible with the given syllogistic. To answer doubts about inadequacy, it could be argued that there must only ever be a finite set of predicates involved in any statement or use of language and that even the most complex meaning must be reducible to a series of simple two-step arguments using the primitive and obvious forms of the syllogistic.

The important features of this reduction have to do with logic rather than language or grammar. A complex of arguments and predicates may be expressed in language, but the relations between elements of that complex, even if they can be entertained in language, are part of the thought, and so

those relations are governed by logic. We carry out such reduction as there is by using just those basic syllogistic forms and following the meanings expressed in any language. Thus any given meaning may be expressed in numerous languages by using the appropriate grammar, etc., but the logical status and nature of the meaning will remain the same, regardless of the diverse requirements of the many languages. And if language is used meaningfully, that is because the meanings it expresses can be grasped and validated by reducing them to the basic syllogistic forms.

A similar reduction is not available in poetic language, and so its validity cannot be justified by any simple reference to logic and a clearly non-linguistic syllogistic. The principal reason why poetic language lacks this foundation in logic has to do with the arguments we have given above for the completeness of the poetic syllogistic. For although in demonstrative claims it was plausible to propose that a complex meaning could be reduced to a series of primitive and obvious two-step arguments without any loss of meanings, such a step was not viable in poetic language. Because poetic meanings are synthetic and cumulative, where we add to a complex meaning there we also change that meaning in a radical way; similarly to subtract from that complex meaning is to disrupt its nuances. Further, poetic language invited a creativity that demonstrative language did not: we could generate new poetic devices to gain different meanings in figurative language but could not do so in demonstration, where we abjured all claims to creativity. One consequence of such creativity is that a syllogistic may become inadequate or, more precisely, we cannot know that it is adequate—because we cannot simply assume that the new forms we produce will always be reducible to the given syllogistic. To counter this threat of possible inadequacy, Ibn Sīnā proposed that as all poetic forms, new or old, were guided by themes, and the latter were established, to prove the adequacy of the syllogistic, all we have to do is to show that the themes are reducible in the required way and it would follow that because themes governed forms, the latter would be accommodated to the syllogistic if the former were. But the problem with this answer seemed to be that themes themselves were capable of change and development. However, as any changes in themes were made for good reason, and we had criteria for judging the success of any theme—the feelings they evoked—the fact that themes changed did not show that the syllogistic's proof procedure was infinite because by deploying feelings we were able to establish an end for the mix of terms and forms.

What this may seem to make clear is that the relation of logic to language, of syllogistic to poetry, is far from the reductive one useful to demonstration. For here, it seems that as the completeness of the syllogistic cannot be made clear simply in terms of logic, it cannot play the role of an independently founded procedure of reasoning that provides a basis for poetic validity. Instead, quite the reverse, it seems clear that the validity of

the poetic syllogistic would fall victim to incompleteness unless we could show how the use of language evokes certain responses—of pleasure in a harmony of words and their meanings and of emotions appropriate to tragedy and so on. Without these emotional responses, the poetic syllogism will remain incomplete; but, conversely, these responses can only occur to subjects when they understand the meanings put forward in poetic works, and so the poetic syllogistic depends for its justification on the affective power of figurative language and the poetic devices which constitute it. Further, we may expect, that poetic language is not easily, if at all, translated, for the nuances available in one language need not be possible in any other, so that the completeness of any syllogistic gives validity only to the use of figures in that particular language.

One problem with this emphasis on language and poetic devices is that it is not clear that they can play the role being assigned to them. This is because the mutual dependence between language and logic that is being proposed will ensure that neither logic nor language succeeds. Without logic, language cannot become meaningful; yet without language, logic remains incomplete. The force of this objection can be seen if we question the claim that we need to have emotional responses or feelings of pleasure, evoked by the use of words and linguistic devices, in order to warrant the completeness of the syllogism. While affective responses do play a part in showing that the syllogistic is complete, the role of feelings cannot be as this claim projects. For feelings to occur in subjects in response to a poem, they must first understand the meanings put forward; but subjects grasp these meanings, if at all, only because the validity of the poetic syllogistic justifies the relation of terms which constitutes this meaning. In the absence of such logical validity, poetic meanings would remain questionable, for the mix of terms and the affective responses this generates will remain arbitrary and subjective until we are sure that the mix is rational and rule-governed—and where feelings of pleasure, wonder, and those appropriate to themes serve to warrant the completeness of the poetic syllogistic. That is, logic must be prior to language.

LOGIC, MORALITY, AND POETRY

With Ibn Sinā's conception of the moral character of poetry we arrive at a full defence of the relation between aesthetics and morality. The elements of al-Fārābī's first mature steps into the field come to fruition in the details of his successor's theory. Both their theories share the Classical understanding of beauty. Even if they do not account for truth completely, they set out the relation between the other two members of the triad of Beauty, Goodness, and Truth.

In this Ibn Sinā steps more assuredly than al-Fārābī. The latter argued that poetic statements were false; and though he gave it a part in sustaining a community, poetic validity remained merely instrumental. It was useful to the extent that it sustained a community whose structure and constitution were determined by the forms of reasoning. Because he decided that poetry was false, he gave it only the validity of arguments by example and explained its force as a matter of mere psychology. Nevertheless, al-Fārābī worked within that Classical conception, for that determined the elements he sought to relate together into a coherent theory.

That Classical inter-relation of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty coincides with the conception of poetry resulting from Islam. As we noted earlier, Islam associated speech with truth and sincerity.⁸⁴ By comparison with the Quran's match of expression, subject matter, and truth, poetry became of doubtful value. But, still, some critics argued, if poetry sustains the truth and supports the community which such truth subtends, then it is valuable.⁸⁵ Now this resolution of the relation of poetry to truth may make the former merely instrumental. Its moral quality is accidental and does not constitute its poetic character as such. But the claim still operates within the paradigm that inter-relates Truth, Beauty, and Goodness; and critics could discover other, closer links between the three. To the latter project, we saw, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sinā contributed an account of reasoning that included poetry within the *organon* of consistent thought. Poetry was a part of the logic that validated all our reasoning, including thought about the truths revealed in the Quran.

As part of that Islamic and Classical paradigm, we suggested, Ibn Sinā argued for an ideal relation between Beauty and Goodness. An evil poem cannot garner the pleasure that justifies assumptions of beauty because it excludes or makes vacuous the very consent it relies on to make good its claims. By this argument, beauty depends essentially on the moral community; and having set out the ideal relation, we turned to the quotidian subjects who respond to that ideal, to show how they participated in the consensual community of morally balanced individuals whose understanding and pleasure determined the aesthetic value of works. First Ibn Sinā suggested that, depending on the kind of balances between individuals that they procure, poetic works are tragic, comic, or satiric; second he proposed that depending on the balances individuals gain in their moral lives, they pursue baseness, ridicule, or nobility, and so suit comedy, satire, or tragedy. That is, in turning attention from the work to its audience, Ibn Sinā proposes that the moral quality of an actor determines the life it leads, the relations to itself and others it enters, and the kind of poetic community it suits. We can explain this claim through an example.

⁸⁴ See Chapter 1, above, and Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, 26–53.

⁸⁵ I have in mind Ibn Rashīq. See Note 45, Chapter 1, above.

For instance, we may rely on noble characters or persons to act justly. They will voluntarily act well, with the right balance, because of their sense for what is good. Subjects in a society of noble people need not fear betrayal or perfidiousness, and the institutions of that society will reflect the expectations subjects have of each other. They will not need agencies that coerce them into the doing the right thing, we may expect, nor need their relations to each other be tempered by fears of being taken advantage of, robbed, slandered, or maltreated. Foolishness will not be absent from such a society, perhaps, but its appearance could generate sympathy and education directed at improvement rather than simply ridicule.

As its members are, so this society shall be. We can trust in others' probity and the dignity subjects gain from living a good life. Moreover, a poetry that addresses these subjects can make assumptions about the texture of their feelings and reason. And Ibn Sinā suggests that the issues which concern them, their manner of dealing with them, and the solutions they adopt, all suit the serious purpose of tragedy. Without ascribing them an undue pomposity, he suggests that they grasp the significance of such serious purpose without having to be seduced into the narrative by resort to such devices as the *nasīb*.

By contrast, a society of base persons seems to revel in the loss of dignity. Lacking the proper balance in themselves because they do not grasp the full meaning of such order, these subjects fail to appreciate its appearance in others. While ridicule pierces pomposity and a false dignity, it may sustain our moral well being and balance. But as a form of life baseness neither escapes the cycle of farce nor achieves the balances of dignity. It is forever unable to establish the order of a truly good life by itself. When led by their baseness alone, subjects behave arbitrarily. Their actions and purposes become incoherent, when considered from the viewpoint of a good life, and they lack the consistency which could lead us to trust them fully. The texture of their lives will reflect the behaviour they exhibit, which will not embody the good moral life. And the poetry they find suitable will be commensurate with that moral immaturity.

In this move from considering the ideal of Goodness and Beauty to indicating the patterns of our reception of works by a community of base characters, we may argue, Ibn Sinā can use an evil or lying group of subjects as a limiting condition. And by making this clearer, we can reclaim the third member of the triad which, at other times, Ibn Sinā seems to exclude by saying that poetry can be untruthful.⁸⁶ Given that he thinks beauty subtends a community, whose members constitute the poem and its meaning through their experiences of pleasure, we may suggest that evil or lying persons cannot form a community and so could not provide the mechanisms for constituting poetry. That is, for all the distinctiveness of a community of

⁸⁶ See for example the Introductory section of his *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*, where he contrasts poetry with cognition.

base persons, it still forms a community, whose character we explain by reference to the moral quality of its members. Despite their baseness, these persons form a community of *some* sort, even if it differs in kind from the noble one. By contrast, we may suggest, evil and lying subjects cannot form any community at all. Their mendacity makes impossible even the minimal condition, of common meanings and a shared sense of others as persons or subjects, that any notion of community involves. There seems to be no room for community among lying and evil individuals if this implies any more than the accidental concatenation of self-interested subjects. Their concern for others does not rest on any sense of the others' worth or balance. As we saw, the grouping they form lacks communality and acceptance of the others' worth, and denies any substance to the latter's agreement.⁸⁷ In other words, lying and evil subjects cannot support any useful sense of poetic validity because they cannot sustain the community necessary to beauty. Lying or untruth is a form of evil, and deserves the same disapprobation.

Accordingly, if Ibn Sīnā allows that poetry is untrue or can serve an evil purpose, he must be contradicting himself or his words must allow some less obvious interpretation. We may argue for the latter: when Ibn Sīnā says at the beginning of the *Commentary* that the same sentence can be true when uttered as a scientific proposition but not true when uttered as a poetic statement, we may take him to mean not that the poetic statement is false but that it is inappropriate to use truth or falsity to measure the validity of poetic statements. He makes this clear also when he rejects al-Fārābī's grouping of syllogisms.⁸⁸ Paraphrasing his predecessor, Ibn Sīnā says in *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic* that al-Fārābī's analysis is unacceptable where it suggests that poetic syllogisms are false and impossible.⁸⁹ Similarly, if Ibn Sīnā allows that poetry can serve evil purposes, he must mean that if a poem is evil, it is not so for its beauty but for some other attribute.

These claims affirm the completeness and consistency of Ibn Sīnā's theory of poetics. The arguments we have discussed provide a most fruitful way of relating the different elements he considers in his writings and in the *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle* itself. To support these fully, to show how they cohere internally and with his other claims about logic, psychology, mind, poetics, and ethics, we considered another feature of his theory. In talking of politics he makes clear what kind of community a law giver will provide, considering the balance and participation we must account for in a morally good life and polity; and that account of community showed how he could weld together apparently separate parts of his theory of poetics.

⁸⁷ See above, this Chapter, the Section on 'Aesthetic and Moral Communities.'

⁸⁸ *Canons*, 116.

⁸⁹ *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 149.

The account this makes possible is rich not only for its own time. After the recent vagaries of value-neutral thought, concerned only with some etiolated 'form' of writing and knowledge, Ibn Sīnā's moral commitment and ingenious arguments have a lot to teach us still.

EPILOGUE

We followed the development of a logical and syllogistic poetic validity from its contrast with a method of 'argument by exegesis,' through its first maturity with al-Fārābī, to its later flourishing with Ibn Sīnā. This book ends with Ibn Sīnā, but the theory of a logical poetic validity continues beyond this juncture. Its next most important development occurred with Ibn Rushd, whose commentary on the *Poetics* harks back over the intervening presence of al-Ghazālī to reappropriate the tradition begun by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.⁹⁰

Ibn Rushd shares the Islamic and Classical association of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. But since he refines his claims in part through argument against al-Ghazālī, some of his concerns differ in their emphases. Like the two philosophers we have considered, Ibn Rushd is fully committed to arguing for a logical poetic validity. He seems to favour al-Fārābī's understanding of poetic syllogisms over Ibn Sīnā's, and in his *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle* discusses the workings of metaphor more often than he considers poetic syllogisms. But because he has had to deal with al-Ghazālī's onslaught against philosophy, Ibn Rushd first considers metaphors in their scriptural use. In *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* and in *Kitāb al-kashf 'an manāhij al-adilla*⁹¹ he examines the conditions in which we take metaphorical or allegorical meanings seriously without reducing them to some true or false claims, then argues for the conditions for sound agreement over metaphorical meanings.

This second set of conditions, perhaps surprisingly, coincides with al-Ghazālī's account of interpretation. Ibn Rushd sets out a number of criteria

⁹⁰ Ibn Rushd, *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*, translated and edited by C. W. Butterworth (Princeton, 1988). This translation contains a useful introductory essay by the editor that, among other things, sets out the relation between the *Commentary* and the *Poetics*. The issue of Ibn Rushd's conception of the relation between truth and poetry is treated by Mansour Ajami, *The Alchemy of Glory, The Dialectic of Truthfulness and Untruthfulness in Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism* (Washington, 1988), 57ff. I think the latter does not give sufficient weight to the tendencies in Ibn Rushd's commentary that militate towards associating truth and poetry positively, and instead, too often, takes the Commentator at his apparent word and maintains that truth and poetry are incompatible.

⁹¹ *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy. A translation with introduction and notes, of Ibn Rushd's Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl, with its appendix (Damima) and an extract from Kitāb al-kashf 'an manāhij al-adilla*, by George F. Hourani, (London, 1976). A fuller translation of the *Kitāb al-kashf* is provided by Jamil Ur-Rehman, *Averroes' Philosophy and Theology*, Baroda, (1921).

that metaphorical meanings must satisfy by identifying the class of persons who are capable of carrying out interpretations:

the rule in this regard is that which was followed by Abu Hamid [Ghazālī] in *The Book of the Distinction*: that this class of persons should learn that one and the same thing has five [modes of] existence, which are called by Abu Hamid 'essential,' 'sensible' 'imaginary,' 'intellectual' and 'metaphorical.' Thus when the question arises one considers which of these four [last named modes of] existence is more persuasive to the class of persons who find it impossible [to believe] that what is meant by it is essential existence, i.e. that which is external; then he brings down this symbolization for them to [the level of] that [mode of] existence whose possibility is most acceptable to their mode of thinking. To this sort [of texts] belong the words of the Prophet, peace on him, 'There is nothing that I have not seen, but I have seen it already in this place of mine—even Paradise and the Fire;' and 'Between my basin and my pulpit there is one of the gardens of Paradise, and my pulpit is close by my basin;' and 'Dust consumes all of a son of Adam except his *os coccygis*.' It is easy to perceive that all these sayings are symbolic, but difficult to perceive what they symbolize. Thus to the class [of people] who notice this much, these sayings ought to be brought down to that one of those four modes of existence which more nearly resembles [the essential mode].⁹²

Most importantly, Ibn Rushd considers the meanings of metaphors in the context of a search for truth. Only when the standard ways of arriving at truth prove inadequate, and in order to grasp the meanings contained in metaphors and allegories, do we use those criteria for explaining metaphorical meanings. That is, in pursuing our desire for truth and knowledge, we use metaphorical meanings when, because the standard means of deciding on truth and falsity do not apply, we can deploy the interpretation appropriate to the mode of existence in question. Moreover, only philosophers can tell when we should begin to interpret utterances as metaphorical or allegorical because they alone have certainty about the rules of reasoning logically.⁹³ And they therefore determine that the allegorical interpretation occurs within the context of a search for truth and certainty.

These texts set out the conditions for metaphorical meaning but they do not examine the logic and nature of figurative language. For the force, scope, and validity of the latter, Ibn Rushd turns to the *Poetics*. However, because his concern with metaphors arises from the context of the thrust

⁹² *Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, 80; see also the editor's discussion, 22–40. Al-Ghazālī's rules of interpretation are included in 'Appendix I' to *Freedom and Fulfillment*, translated by R.J. McCarthy (Boston, 1980). See also I.A. Bello, *The Medieval Islamic Controversy Between Philosophy and Orthodoxy*, (Leiden, 1989), which contains a discussion of the differences between Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazālī.

⁹³ *ibid*, Chapter 2, *passim*.

for truth in religious knowledge that we saw above, his understanding of metaphors in poetry is also coloured by that interest. This is not always clear, for in many instances he says that a use of metaphor is appropriate to 'scriptural texts' but not to poetry, suggesting a distinction between them.⁹⁴ Yet the latter seems to turn on truth. For in many instances Ibn Rushd is clear that truth in its variations is vital to poetic validity. If poetic statements are implausible,⁹⁵ exaggerated,⁹⁶ incoherent,⁹⁷ loose,⁹⁸ etc., they will lack validity, he maintains, thus suggesting that truth is crucial to poetic validity.

This reference to truth reappropriates the third element of the triad. We saw less of truth in al-Fārābī and had to infer its presence with Beauty and Goodness for Ibn Sīnā. Ibn Rushd, it seems, regains that Islamic and Classical relation of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. We may construe his argument for this conclusion briefly as follows. We can argue that where a poem is less than truthful—where it is implausible, exaggerated, one-sided, incoherent, etc.—there it is shallow and lacks unity. Thus a poem which misrepresents love is shallow and unlikely to satisfy anyone possessing or wanting a deeper understanding and experience of the subject—whether this understanding is philosophical, dialectical, or native to the masses. The poem will not be generally admired and will fail to generate a common response because it does not get at the real matter of love. Further, by contrast with that better understanding, where a poem's structure depends on a superficial understanding of love, there we will find it incoherent, because it is implausible, and therefore lacking in unity and, so, ill-constructed. The untruthfulness of the poem, then, determines its lack of unity, and so renders it aesthetically inadequate.

Moreover, Ibn Rushd can hold that moral approbation depends on getting closer to the truth and will of God. Consequently, as philosophy, with poetry as a part of the logical organon of philosophy, is as capable of truth as religion is, poetry will bring us closer to God in its distinctive way and so will possess a commensurate value. Poetics tells us of the sorts of demands we may make of each other on the basis of the moral, truth-seeking, and affective validity of poetry. Now Ibn Rushd maintains that we must use our reason; and morality is open to a rational justification. As rational philosophical justification and religion are equally capable of truth, the rational, philosophical justification of morality and revealed imperatives also gives us insight into God's demands of subjects. Thus, the demands we make of each other on the basis of poetic validity tell us also of the relation between human beings and God which poetry sustains. That is, it tells us of

⁹⁴ Ibn Rushd, *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*, 77–8, 92–4, 135, et. al..

⁹⁵ *ibid*, for example at 83 Ibn Rushd suggests that 'false invention' is not part of the poet's activity.

⁹⁶ *ibid* 84–6: Ibn Rushd criticises those who in eulogy 'exaggerate in praising.'

⁹⁷ *ibid*, 82–3, where he argues for a single purpose for poems.

⁹⁸ *ibid*, 81–2, where Ibn Rushd suggests that explanations must be well organized and short.

the conception of human being which Ibn Rushd thinks is appropriate to Islam. In other words, if we accept Ibn Sīnā's argument for the relation of Goodness and Beauty then, when taken together with Ibn Rushd's argument for Truth in aesthetic value, the philosophical tradition of poetic syllogisms reaffirms and unites the Islamic and Classical triad.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Al-Sirāfi's vituperation does not hide his grasp and use of logic. Indeed a good rhetorician and follower of *kalām* would be perfectly able to appreciate it. *Kalām* or philosophical theology could not do without logic, and Islamic jurists and exegetes employed sophisticated hermeneutic and logical methods to justify their judgements that imperatives from the Quran applied to particular cases. From this perspective, which found success in the vast and complex workings and language of the Islamic community, Mattā's logic—*manṭiq*—must have seemed merely an abstraction from normal speech—*nuṭq*.

The real argument is not over the use of logic, I suggest, but over which logic to accept. Aristotelian logic challenged the centrality of the exegetical and rational methods to Islamic life. *Kalām* is 'speech' that enables us to discover truths through dialogue in the pattern of question and answer rather than through deductions from self-evident and rule-governed premises. Perhaps this method results from the development of Islamic theology out of an urgent need to defend Islam against Jewish, Christian, and Manichean claims: theologians de-emphasised producing a systematic account in order to reply to attacks. Even within Islam, the growth of rival schools sustained the need for this method of dialogue.

What distinguishes *kalām* from Aristotelian logic is not the absence of logic but the use made of it and its methods. A dialectical mode of thinking generally restricts argument to refutation, taking premises from the adversary, in order to show their inadequacy, while the defendant's own positive position is not brought to issue. As we saw, al-Sirāfi makes a number of strong claims, that are more polemical emphases than they are independently justified theses.

See Josef van Ess, 'The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology,' 21–50, in *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, edited by G.E. von Grunebaum, (1970), 23–30 for a fuller account of the influence of Stoic logic on *kalām*, and R.M. Franks, *Being and Its Attributes*, New York, 1979.

Appendix 2

(I am indebted to Muhsin Mahdi's paper on 'Science, Philosophy and Religion' for material in this Appendix.)

The divisions point to both distinctive interests of understanding and different depths of explanation, and they have some parallels with other patterns of

explanation. In the case of language, for example, a general sense given to the 'science' of language covers the ability to recite expressions from memory, while a more restricted use covers only knowledge of the meanings of expressions used (*Catalogue*, p45ff). Both these senses are also found in the tradition of knowledge ('ilm) which preceded Greek philosophy in Islam (Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*). However, a stricter sense of science used by al-Fārābī explains and legislates over the rules for the expression being used, suggesting that a deeper and perhaps more satisfactory level of knowledge results from going beyond both the possession of instruments of knowledge and familiarity with the known objects (such as linguistic meanings) to arrive at the general principles or rules which govern these expressions in language. By this account, by explaining the nature of the rules used, we can justify our assessing correct or incorrect usage, and so understand the object more fully. This conception of rules as 'universal, that is comprehensive statements,' provides general principles for the operation of particular rules over their objects. But it differs from the conception of rules usual to grammar and exegesis (Mahdi, 'Science, Philosophy and Religion'). Formerly, a rule was a practical instrument which protected us against error in practice: for example, a plumb line serves as a rule in building a wall or an arithmetical table protects its user from error in actual calculations, while the outline of a book protects the reader from getting so caught in the book's details that he or she misunderstands the whole. To this al-Fārābī has added a concern with general explanations. We are able to protect ourselves against error and can gain an overview of our subject because we understand the principles by which objects of that sort operate. Accordingly, we can understand a practice because by explaining the source and scope of its rules we can grasp its nature and gain a facility for dealing with future instances. Given this conception of rules, it may be best to avoid using 'science' in the restricted or less strict sense proposed above. For as we have seen, not only does that use raise issues of the basis for restrictions which are applied, but that basis is accounted for by reference to 'rules' and explanations. Further, al-Fārābī has another use of 'science' that governs 'rules.'

Al-Fārābī in fact works with a distinction between 'science' and 'art,' and here seems to be concerned with science (See M. Mahdi, 'Science, Philosophy and Religion in al-Fārābī's *Enumeration of the Sciences*'). Sets of rules, including those of language, can be organised to constitute an 'art.' An art shows how we order rules, assessing the most appropriate deployment and organisation of words and linguistic expressions. So, the rules of poetry govern individual expressions, while the art of poetry sets out the operation of rules in constructing poetry, for example proposing that the relation between certain words is unfortunate because it interferes with meter, or that an expression gives a poem a distinctive mood, or a word causes problems because, like 'orange,' it has no matching rhyme. The art considers priorities and balances among the diverse linguistic rules, guiding exercise in constructing a poem. In the absence of the art we would lack a mechanism for dealing systematically with the rules of language and would possess only an arbitrary collection of rules for expressions. That is, generally our ability to

deal with objects, be these poetic expressions or other materials, and to understand them, will become less than comprehensive, and, as our ability to correct rules will lack systematic inter-relations, we could not be assured of consistency between them.

Consonant with but not identical with art, we may also possess a science. To arrive at a fuller explanation of the rules ordered in art, we apply a science of those rules (It seems that there cannot be a 'science of an art.' A science would have to take the nature of the arts generally as its object, being concerned to show what characterises any art as an art. Its particular nature—that is the art of writing or of poetry—would be immaterial.) Where poetic art is a matter of deploying and ordering the rules governing words and expressions, by contrast a science explains the nature of the object—in this case, the rules of poetic language. It examines the standards by which poetic rules count as poetic rules, while the art governs the way the rules cohere. Where the art of poetry guides our construction and, in part, our understanding of poems, the science of the rules of poetic language concerns the nature of the rules of poetry, seeking to distinguish them from other uses. In making this distinction between the art and science of language, al-Fārābī is proposing different ways of dealing with the object. Initially there were the elements of a language—the sounds, expressions, and so on—which we knew in the sense that they were recited from memory and their meanings understood. A direct grasp of these elements was then supplemented by the rules governing them. In poetry, the rules concerned the actual and individual elements—such as expressions—at one remove because they governed the use of expressions generally. In turn, the order and inter-relation of rules is the object considered in art. Thus, given the different elements involved in language, we may expect for example that the arts of poetry, correct reading, and compound expressions are made up of the rules governing poems, reading, and syntax (*Catalogue*, 59).

However, it is also possible to take another step in this direction, for the rules incorporated into these arts can be examined through a science of rules. Al-Fārābī develops the relation between art and science by proposing that we may expect to understand rules, because we know their science, yet still be unable to practice the relevant art. He maintains that the science of rules is necessary for a correct practice of an art but is insufficient by itself for practicing the art. A science of the rules of poetic language will tell us of their nature and consequently of the relation they bear to other parts of language; by contrast, to practice the art of poetry we must appreciate how the rules cohere. Al-Fārābī's claim also suggests that the science of rules of poetic language is necessary for the practice of poetic art—that the scientific explanation of a rule can determine its role in the art of poetry—yet still does not encompass the use made of rules in the exercise of the art. Thus, for example in poetic language, a science determines the nature of its rules, though the particular role of language in bringing forth beauty is subject to other criteria. That is, the answer to what makes this poem elegant is separable from the issue of what sort of rules, possessing what sort of validity, are involved in this (elegant) poem. Consequently, a critic or poet might defend the elegance of a poem by citing the

balance and order between its phrases and expression because, first, this order exemplifies the art of poetry, and second, because the science of the rules of poetic language identifies these expressions as instances of the rules of poetic language. Given these connections, in a similar way al-Fārābī could maintain that the grammarian's art allows him to grasp a use of linguistic rules, but ultimately this grasp and use must be defensible because it is based on a scientific understanding of the nature of linguistic rules. The distinction between art and science, while it does not necessarily set up a hierarchy between them, does find for them a distinctive scope and validity. The rules of language, including the grammatical rules by which expressions are constructed and used, do not detail the nature of the rules of language use. The latter task falls to science and, for al-Fārābī, is exemplified in logic. This needs further explanation. For al-Fārābī, logic ultimately explains the rules of grammar and justifies their validity.

To explain this claim, we may return to al-Fārābī's divisions in the *Catalogue of the Sciences*. There the science of the rules of language is divided into seven parts, and the development from dealing with objects directly to ordering their rules into an art and understanding the science of these rules seemed to involve an increasing self-consciousness about our capacity for reason and understanding. One reason for this may be that understanding is gained by discovering the common significant factors in an object at the level of order in art and examining their nature at the level of science, so that the universality of scientific claims and their comprehensiveness over their objects constitutes their explanatory power, making them valuable also as an expression of our rational capacity. Further, there is a level of consciousness and universality which proceeds from those of art and science—this is the area of logic in which our concern with knowledge and methodology gains its validity. Although al-Fārābī talks of 'logic,' 'the science of logic,' the 'rules of logic,' 'the scientific rules of logic,' and the 'art of logic' almost as if these were interchangeable, it is possible to make a broad division to sharpen the sense of these terms. 'Logic,' 'the scientific rules of logic,' and 'the rules of logic' all arguably concern the basic elements while the 'art of logic' concerns the rules for applying those elements. Thus, the first covers not only the most basic parts of sense—simple intelligibles and the simple expressions that signify them, which are examined in *The Categories*—but also composite intelligibles and their expressions—which are analyzed in *The Commentary on De Interpretatione*—and the syllogism, which examines the structured use of these expressions and intelligibles—and is considered in the *Analytics*. These may be thought of as the science of logic or as the scientific rules of logic; and they exclude the most important factor of our applying these rules in understanding the world of our experience and thought. The art of logic is displayed in application to argument and knowledge in the 'syllogistic arts,' for the latter consist of rules by which we assess statements, proving their validity so far as they give rise to conclusions which are demonstratively true, dialectically satisfactory, sophistically or rhetorically successful, or poetically appropriate.

Appendix 3

Al-Fārābī develops this contrast further by explaining the difference between poetic discourse and sophistry, and as that will deepen his characterisation of the former, we may pursue the contrast further. To explain the representational nature of poetic discourse, al-Fārābī contrasts it with sophistry, arguing that the two differ in their object and purpose. A sophistic statement ‘deludes the listener into believing the opposite of what the object is. It lets him imagine that what exists does not, or that what does not exist exists in reality’ (*Risālah*). It serves to mislead and misinform the listener, for whatever purpose such delusion itself may serve. Thus, the sophistic statement either does not imitate reality, and leads us to believe that something does not exist, or imitates reality in order to misguide us about its nature. In both cases it seeks to generate conviction in the absence of any warrant in reality, and so serves an interest in the existence of an object even though it is not truthful to that existence. In other words, sophistry is governed by a concern with whether objects exist or not, and works to make us believe they do or do not exist. By contrast, al-Fārābī proposes, the representational or “imitative” statement about an object ... does not let one imagine the opposite, but what is similar. Something like this can be found in sense perception: for example, the situation in which somebody at rest imagines that he is moving as happens to a passenger aboard a ship when looking at the people on the shore, or to one on the ground in springtime when he looks at the moon and the stars behind fast moving clouds. Those are situations which deceive the senses. But the situation in which he is looking into a mirror or any polished object is one that makes him imagine that he is seeing a likeness of a thing’ (*Risālah*). Poetic imitation does not so much deceive the viewer or listener into thinking he is actually seeing or hearing a given object as it makes the viewer or listener ‘imagine that he is seeing the likeness of a thing.’ And in a similar vein al-Fārābī elsewhere contrasts conception, where the essence of intelligibles, as they really are, are imprinted in the soul, with imagining those intelligibles, where their ‘images, representations, or imitations of them’ occur to us. In imagining things we have a grasp of matters that are imitations rather than a grasp of the things themselves’ (Cf *Kitāb al-Alfāz al-musta‘mala fī al-Manṭiq*, edited by Muhsin Mahdi, (Beirut, 1968), 87 and 96).

At first this way of distinguishing poetic from sophistic statements seems merely artificial and unsuccessful, for both cases depend on representation, even if we put it to different uses in the case of poetry and sophistry. Because both proffer imitations, making us imagine that we are presented with the likeness of objects, whether these exist or not, both of them must depend on a similar epistemology. But there are differences. Certainly their dissimilarity is not a phenomenal property of an utterance or statement. If there were some such mark we used to identify statements, then delusions would never work, for the phenomenal properties of a statement would give it away as a delusion when the very idea of a delusion is that it can be mistaken for reality. Thus their difference must lie elsewhere, perhaps in an account of ‘imitation’ which shows how a representation functions as a poetic

statement or as a sophistic delusion. Al-Fārābī holds that poetic discourses bring to mind 'the imitation of the object,' suggesting that the representation is known as an imitation. By contrast, delusion, so to speak, makes a claim to reality, 'bringing to the mind of the listeners the object referred to as a direct statement' rather than 'the imitation of the object.' In the one case we are deluded into thinking it is the object itself while in the other we understand somehow that the representation is only the *likeness* of a thing, and act accordingly. Here, by pointing to these differences in our responses, it seems, al-Fārābī is proposing that we must look at how these discourses are used in order to identify their different natures. And he points to this contrast in usage because other ways of distinguishing the two are not sufficiently sharp. For example, he could distinguish between different kinds of syllogism by reference to their ability to yield true or false statements. By this standard, one difference may be that as sophistry draws the 'hearer into error,' leading him to accept what the speaker affirms, we may try to distinguish it from poetry by pointing to the noetic status each has, arguing that sophistry is governed by an interest in truth whereas poetic discourse is not. But the two are not always distinguishable on noetic grounds, for sophistry and poetic discourse are both capable of being false. Of course sophistry is sometimes true and at others deludes the listener into believing the opposite of what the object is, but the truth of sophistic statements is incidental to the conviction it generates in 'overcoming the interlocutor by a supposed victory in the things which are thought ostensibly to be known.' Consequently, a reference to truth content does not serve to show that all sophistic statements are distinct from poetic discourse for both may be true or false.

Moreover, both poetry and sophistry serve to bring about a state of mind in the subject. Thus, in *Canons*, for all the differences between poetic and other discourses, al-Fārābī is still sure that 'yet [poetic discourse] belongs to a certain kind of syllogism of what follows the syllogism. By "follows" I mean deduction, image, intuition, or something similar which has the same force as analogy' (*Canons*, 111). And this force is a state of acquiescence to some discourse by which we associate objects or kinds with other objects or kinds in imagination (See *Canons*, 115 and for example, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, edited by Muhsin Mahdi, (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1969), 70f, and *Fuṣūl al-Madanī*, Section 51). Thus, in spite of its alleged falsity, poetry is meaningful and has its effect on the subject—just as sophistry does. Naturally, the effect each has will differ, and al-Fārābī compares sophistry with being deluded into thinking that the moon is moving fast behind clouds while he thinks of poetic representation as more like looking into a mirror and seeing the image of an object. In the first case we make a mistaken truth claim; in the second, the suggestion is, we would fail to see a representation as poetic if we sought to make any truth claim at all, even though we could find many ways of linking the image with the object of which it is an image. The difference between the two kinds of claim thus turn on our expectations of them rather than simply on their truth or falsity. And our expectations of the two kinds of statement show themselves in what use we make of them: that shows their difference, for we use sophistic

statements commensurately with an interest in truth while the uses of poetic statements do not concern themselves with the truth.

Al-Fārābī puts forward other related distinctions in *Fuṣūl al-Madanī*, arguing first that ‘excellence in producing an imaginative impression is not excellence in persuasion.’ (Section 51, 48). One reason for this difference is that excellence of imaginative impressions lies in the perfection with which they fit the responders’ mode of apprehension. Al-Fārābī also presents other distinctions between sophistry and poetry, all of which again turn on the differences in use we can make of these statements. The difference between sophistry and poetry ‘is that excellence of persuasion aims at the hearer doing the thing, after a conviction of truth, while excellence in producing an impression of this kind aims at the soul of the hearer rising up to seek the thing imagined or to flee from it, and be drawn to it or dislike it, even without a conviction of truth, just as a man is disgusted with something which, when he sees it, resembles what really calls forth disgust, though he is certain that what he sees is not what calls forth disgust. Excellence in producing an imaginative impression is employed in what causes anger and pleasure, fear and trust, in what softens the soul and what hardens it, and in all the passions of the soul. With excellence in producing an imaginative impression the aim is that the man should be moved to do the thing and rise up towards it, even though his knowledge of the thing necessitates the opposite of what is represented to his imagination. Many people, when they love and hate, and choose and avoid, do so by the imagination not deliberation, either because they have not deliberation naturally or have rejected it in their affairs’ (*Fuṣūl al-Madanī*, Section 51 and *Canons*, 112).

To mark this distinction between poetry and sophistry, whereby the first is interested in representations for themselves while the second has an interest in truth, where the first is self-reflective of mental activity in representation while the second uses representations to delude its hearers into believing that a state of affairs exists, where the first leads the hearer to rise up ‘to seek the thing imagined or to flee from it,’ while the second makes the hearer believe that the thing is such and so, we may denote the content of poetry and sophistry as representation and imitation respectively. ‘Imitation’ carries connotations of illusions that can be mistaken for reality, and seems appropriate to sophistry while representation seems an appropriately distinct mechanism so far as it has no interest in the truth. Of course this is not how al-Fārābī uses this distinction, but it will serve our present concern with poetry without being false to what the Commentator meant by representation in poetry.

In any case, if poetry is distinguished from sophistry by the factors set out above, the nature of poetry depends on the nature of representations. As we said earlier, poetry is representational, presumably in some way in which other syllogistic arts are not, and also totally and absolutely false; and to explain further the nature of poetry, that allows us to consider its object for itself rather than for its truth, while still remaining theoretical, we may consider what it is for poetry to be representational. Once this is clearer we may be in a better position to understand why poetry is still ‘syllogistic’ in spite of lacking almost every necessary feature of

that art. In summary, then, sophistry serves an interest in the existence of events and objects, working to generate beliefs about them, and so has a modicum of interest in truth. Its discourses 'are mostly false,' because they belong to the class of truth seeking and logically valid claims about objects and their existence, even though, within that class, they are deemed 'mostly false.' By contrast, we may suggest, poetry is not a member of that class of truth seeking and logically valid claims about objects and their existence, and is totally and absolutely false. And this is because it is not clearly concerned with existence and truth in the standard sense. At best it only 'imitates' or 'represents' objects rather than 'bringing to the mind of the listeners the object referred to as a direct statement.

In this discussion I have relied on the following texts, culling from them the quotations given above: *Canons*, *Fuṣūl al-Madani*, especially Sections 51–2, and 'The Political Regime.'

Appendix 4

There are some issues which arise in any exegesis of Ibn Sīnā's work that may be considered in an Appendix, although they affect the reading to be given. Ibn Sīnā's conception of the poetic syllogism develops Aristotelian ideas beyond their original scope by introducing elements from his own theory of poetics or from al-Fārābī's *Canons of Poetry*. Since the latter lacks a clearly recognizable Aristotelian source, while the former has features which are distinctive to Ibn Sīnā, the reader can only understand the *Commentary* by carefully disentangling its heterogeneous elements. This problem is compounded by the fact that Ibn Sīnā presents parts of his theory in different texts (See *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, 904–906, quoted in the Introduction to *Ibn Sīnā, Remarks and Admonitions, Part One: Logic*, Translated from the Original Arabic with an Introduction and Notes by Shams Constantine Inati, (Toronto, 1984), 3. This text is usually referred to as *Remarks and Admonitions: Logic*, and page references are usually to this translation. The text is sometimes translated as *Points and Reminders* (See Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 140)). As a result, the reader must be sensitive to nuances and ready to recognise how diverse concepts from different texts determine issues from their particular text. Moreover, as they must defend claims made for their texts by assessing and clarifying the part played by these concepts in Ibn Sīnā's theory, readers are forced to engage with the text by both exegesis and argument with it.

Another problem is that Ibn Sīnā uses concepts of 'imagination', 'wonder', 'imitation,' etc., which borrow meanings from Arabic culture as well as from Aristotelian psychology. That is, although philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā introduced a number of Greek terms into Arabic usage, nevertheless a number of other terms already had a history in Arabic; and to grasp Ibn Sīnā's usage, the reader must attend to all these senses. In addition, in relation to this *Commentary*, Ibn Sīnā explains the logic and ratiocinative force of the poetic

syllogism not in this work on poetics but in his texts on logic. Therefore, to understand the logical validity of poetry we must relate texts which are not explicitly related by Ibn Sīnā. Here we can neither introduce premises alien to Ibn Sīnā nor contradict his explicit claims, but we must explain his ideas to make his theory whole, even though Ibn Sīnā does not do so.

We can clarify these claims by considering an example. Ibn Sīnā claims that poetry is imaginative and figurative, where figurative speech involves a meaningful composition of images. This composition will be merely subjective unless it is governed by rules. Ibn Sīnā proposes that we see whether the imagination is successfully following rules in composing images by seeing whether its use in a poem evokes a feeling of pleasure. Yet pleasure seems entirely subjective, and so ill suited as a standard for assessing the rules of imagination. In other words, pleasure varies from subject to subject, and some use of imagination may generate pleasure in one person, perhaps because of associations she has with whatever is imagined, while another person may feel no such pleasure. Conversely, different images may be evoked in diverse subjects by the same poem, and so cause pleasure in each case, yet without any guarantee that the same rules of imagination are present or being observed. Where such arbitrariness obtains, each 'successful' use of imagination is only coincidentally related to pleasure, and the occurrence of pleasure fails to provide a ground for saying that the imagination is rule-governed. Thus, the occurrence of pleasure seems an unsatisfactory criterion by which to judge the operation of imagination in poetry.

At this point we might expect Ibn Sīnā to defend his claim by showing how pleasure and imagination are rule governed, but he does not do so. Now, once we see pleasure as part of the formal character of the poetic syllogistic, Ibn Sīnā's justification for his claims becomes clearer; yet we have to make this insight explicit by comparing different texts and extrapolating issues. Taking premises implicit in Ibn Sīnā's *Commentary on De Anima* and in the logical works, which are also advanced in his *Remarks and Admonitions : Logic*, we have to produce arguments to secure the conclusions which Ibn Sīnā espouses, seemingly without defence, in the *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*. It requires us to explain how the account of poetic syllogisms that Ibn Sīnā suggests in the writings on logic supports his contention in the *Commentary on Poetics of Aristotle* that 'Poetry is imaginative speech.' (1, Introductory, I,61). It is not obvious that the latter must be explained by the former, but we shall see that as Ibn Sīnā sets out his conception of imaginative speech, their relation becomes more plausible.

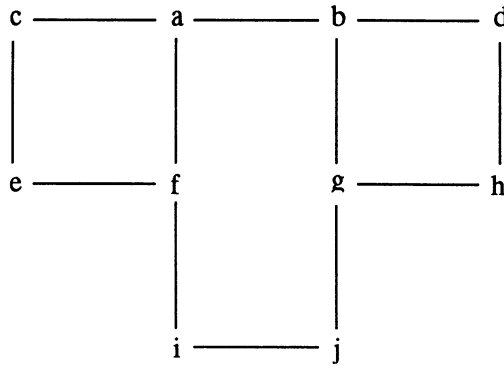
Appendix 5

To explain this quality of imagination, Ibn Sīnā provides an elaborate argument, that turns on imagination's dependence on the body. And to explain the interdependence between imagination and representation, he describes an hierarchy of faculties. The first tells us more about the nature of the imagination and

the second clarifies further how imagination is passive to sense experience. The second—the interdependence between imagination and representation—is straightforward and it does yield some further information about the imagination. Ibn Sīnā sets out the power of different faculties by ordering them into a hierarchy. He writes that ‘the faculty of representation is served by two faculties of different origins : the appetitive faculty serves it by obeying it, for the representative faculty impels the appetitive to movement, and the faculty of imagination serves it by accepting the combination and separation of its images. In their turn these two are governors of two groups. The faculty of imagination is served by *fantasia* or *sensus communis*, which is served by the five senses....’(ibid, 37). (We shall leave aside consideration of the second set because it does not enter into the argument for representation and imagination. This relation of imagination to representation, then, is the one we have already proposed. Imagination ‘serves’ representation in the sense of using its objects, and is governed by it to the extent that both are restricted by what is experienced. At the same time, imagination is more free in what it makes of these representations.

However, the suggestion is also made that the relation of imagination to intellect—here linked through estimation—must occur through representation (ibid). For Ibn Sīnā goes on to argue that estimation abstracts from and acts on representations (ibid). In this argument imagination is not mentioned as a separate faculty, except in the title of this chapter, and the suggestion is that if imagination serves estimation, it is only because it involves representations in whatever changed form they occur. Such a claim invites consideration of issues of the activity of imagination, of the way in which represented images can be manipulated to satisfy estimation in one way rather than another, and implies that the imagination can be subject to the will. However, as these issues are fairly wide, and involve concepts such as estimation and intellect which we have not as yet introduced, we shall set them aside to consider after we have examined Ibn Sīnā’s argument for the imagination’s need for the body and particulars.

That argument reveals something of the nature of the imagination. At first it seems Ibn Sīnā wants to argue that this faculty deals with particulars and so must depend on the body because all perception of the particular occurs through the body. But the argument he actually provides seems rather to assume this dependence on the body and, by showing that the image could not be a matter of form or accidents, concludes that it must be of a particular—which is owed ultimately to some bodily organ. To illustrate his claims, Ibn Sīnā presents a figure made up of a large square *abij* with two smaller equal squares—*acef* and *bdgh*—contiguous with its line *ab*. The figure looks like as follows, and although it is divisible into three contiguous squares, the figure is perceived as a whole.



Ibn Sīnā asks what about this image warrants us in ascribing the right hand square its distinctive location. That position is not determined by its form, for the concept applies also to the other squares and cannot be used to distinguish between them. It is true that the form of 'square' can be qualified by the concept of rightness, but this combination can only be obtained with universals, and not in the realm of particulars. Nor can the position be due to accident : an essential accident would belong to both squares, and so would not serve to account for the distinctive position of one of them, while if location were the result of a non-essential accident, then, 'when [the non-essential accident] is removed, the position of the square is changed' (Rahman, 98). Yet, obviously, we do not accept the latter either, and prefer to explain positional change in its own terms rather than by reference to some change in accidents. Finally, the location cannot result from the material characteristics of the object which is reproduced in the imagination. This is because the imagination is capable of producing images which have no corresponding object, in the sense that the imagination can put together an image of, say, a unicorn, even when it has never had sense experience of an object that corresponds to this image, and it is also able to provide that image with an imagined location. The location ascribed to the image in this instance could not have come from the object in sense experience corresponding to that image, for there was no such object, but if the image has location, then that location must be the result of something other than the initial sense experience. As the possibilities set out above seem to account for all the likely sources except the organ used by the representative faculty and so ultimately used by the imagination, Ibn Sīnā argues, it must be our possession of imagination that explains our ascribing a position to the figure.

Leaving aside the issue that Ibn Sīnā's argument fails to establish his conclusion—because the conclusion is presupposed by the argument—these passages do fill out the conception of the imagination. They do so by raising what seems to be a contradiction : on the one hand, imagination is active in manipulating images. It is capable of changing images by adding or subtracting parts, by relocating them, and

even by representing right as left. On the other hand, Ibn Sīnā's present argument seems to depend on making the imagination passive: 'imagination cannot change, or add anything to the images, but simply perceives them as they already exist. It cannot suppose them as right or left at its own will, but must accept the relative positions as they are, such supposition being only an intellectual operation' (*Kitāb al-Najāt*, 31ff and Rahman, 99). Unless the imagination were passive, it is claimed, Ibn Sīnā could not have eliminated it as one of the possible causes of location. However, arguably the opposition between active and passive which is being pointed to here does not so much amount to a contradiction in Ibn Sīnā's conception of the imagination as it adds layers to its meaning. This may be explained as follows.

We may argue that the imagination is shown to be passive in this context because it cannot determine location. If the right-handed square is reckoned to be on the right, which it clearly is, such a position does not result from any faculty but is owed to a bodily organ. But this cannot be acceptable. First, such passivity to location does not prevent the imagination from actively putting what it wants in that location. Second, it is something of a misnomer to say the imagination is passive because it does not determine what location is even though it may determine what is located, say, at the right. Rather, reference to location points to the structure of the imagination, suggesting that this faculty's activity occurs within the parameters of location. Accordingly, the imagination may change images, and even move their parts about, but such division into parts and their manipulation is possible only because the structure of the imagination permits it. If the structure were different, then the manner in which imagination divided or added or moved parts or wholes of images would become impossible. The structure of the conceptual realm, for example, differs from that of the imagination in that it is not constrained by the magnitudes of location. It is possible to consider the concept of square for itself or to qualify it by adding 'right' or 'left' or 'black' or 'white' but without involving location. Concepts, and the realm of concepts, do not have any spatial magnitude or colour; but it is impossible to imagine a square without either locating its parts at the right or left, or ascribing it colour, and so on. The imagination, the realm of images, is characterised by location, divisibility, colour, and so on. In effect, its structure constitutes the nature of the imagination, and it is a mistake to interpret this account of its nature as indicating that it is passive. It would be like saying that reason is passive because it operates by the rules of logic. The operation of reason is characterised by logic just as the operation of imagination is determined by its structure. Neither is passive in the relevant sense, though both are rule-governed, and it is because there are rules which each follows in its activity that we can even describe their operations as activity rather than merely random and irrational movement. Instead of being a symptom of their passivity, their structures give them an order which makes them what they are, and clarifies the nature of their activity (This structure of reason and imagination is clarified also in Ibn Sīnā's *Commentary on De Anima*. For example, imagination, (as *khayāl*) is distinguished from the

sensus communis by virtue of its form (p165), and from reason by its dependence on sensory experience (190 ff).

As it happens, Ibn Sīnā seeks to clarify the structure of the imagination by explaining that its source lies in the five senses. That is, he provides a genetic account of structure by saying that imagination owes its structure to the bodily organ. This account of its genesis may be questionable, but any inadequacy in this genetic explanation need not imply that he has failed to identify the structure correctly. And if we want to show that his understanding of the structure of imagination is mistaken, we would have to consider the elements and details of that structural account rather than merely take issue with the genetic explanation that it is caused by bodily senses. Those elements and details are examined by Ibn Sīnā in the passages we have just been considering, it may be suggested, and in arguing that the structure of the imagination cannot be owed to form or accident, Ibn Sīnā is proposing that the way in which this faculty behaves differs from the structure of the conceptual realm and of material accidents. As he says : the imagination deals actively with representations, which are of particulars and are abstracted from matter but not from the accidents of matter.

Appendix 6

Initially the imagination seems to be completely free. It is the ability to manipulate representations, adding or subtracting parts or qualities, in large or small measure. Yet such constructions do not occur arbitrarily, and we need to become clearer about their mechanisms. It has been argued that in such construction the imagination is passive. For example, the more we know about these mechanisms, the clearer it becomes that imagination is determined by sense. Whatever occurs in the imagination must have been presented previously in some experience. The latter may be deprived of its original associations and given new ones, yet even so the imagination will be bound to experience. But the material or content and form of experience are not identical— we can experience the form of ‘man’ in numerous guises determined by as many material causes as there are people. This distinction enables Ibn Sīnā to grant the imagination some independence from experience. He allows it to deal with a content in which ‘the faculty of representation purifies the abstracted form to a higher degree, since it takes it from matter in such a way that it does not need the presence of matter for the presence of form’ (39, *Avicenna’s Psychology*). Sense experience is tied to the form and matter of its objects because it is a response to a particular object with all its quiddity and accidents. We do not just see ‘any man;’ rather our experience is caused by this man, possessed of the form of man together with those accidental properties of location, size, shape, colouring, and so on, which make him the particular man that we see before us. So, although sense does not reproduce the matter ‘in us,’ so to speak, but rather ‘abstracts the form from the matter along with [its] accidents and its relation with matter,’

nevertheless, 'if this [latter] relationship is removed, then the process of abstraction will be nullified' (ibid).

From the above, it seems that the accidents involved in our present experience of this man have their material cause in this particular, and sense experience never loses that relation to matter. 'Sense neither abstracts [the form] completely from matter, nor from the accidents of matter.' This is because the particular sensory experience must be explained by the nature and accidents of its matter, and so is still tied to the latter. By contrast, in preserving the 'imprint' of sense experience, representation abstracts 'completely from matter,' though not from 'the accidents of matter,' 'since the forms in representation are, in this respect, the same as the sensed forms and they possess a certain quantity and position'(p39). By this account, sense experiences and representations differ in that the former result from the external senses responding to a present object while the latter, although they may have their ultimate basis in those present experiences, are a result of preserving those experiences and evoking them later. Accordingly, as each representation is not the effect of a particular present object which is causing its every occurrence, it is free of the object as material cause. (But nor does this freedom from its matter transform the representation into a universal : 'it is impossible for a form in representation to be such as to admit all the individuals of the species to share in it, for a man in representation resembles always a particular man among men' (ibid, 41)).

Yet the latter does seem to indicate that representation is passive: we can only imagine a particular individual, which cannot be so replete with qualities that it is not only black and white, tall and short, fat and thin, but also resembles all the other particulars which share its form. Further, if representations must always be of a particular, then so far as imagination differs from representations only in being able to manipulate representations, it too is tied to the particular. And, like the representations it manipulates, imagination may differ from sense in abstracting from matter but it remains tied to the senses for its material. Moreover, just as 'the faculty of representations cannot perceive without the represented forms being imprinted on the body in such a way that both it and the body share the same imprint'(ibid), so too the imagination, so far as it depends on representation, must also depend on the body. Accordingly, it is passive to sense experience.

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