

# Elements of the Authentic Self in Fārābī: Between Alexander and Proclus

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Conceptions of self in Classical Antiquity and in Early Arabic philosophy were markedly different from those which are, and have been, in vogue in modern Western philosophy. In fact, they are so different as to be counter-intuitive to notions of self which are familiar to most of us, whether specialists or non-specialists. Contemporary conceptions of self (when something like “self” is even admitted to be real) are often tied up with notions of the uniqueness of personal identity. Such a conception would take as its guiding question something like “What is it that makes me the person that I am right now, such that I am not any other person but only me, and such that no other person is me?” As we will see in what follows, the concern to explain and preserve uniqueness of personal identity for its own sake is no concern at all of Proclus, Alexander and Fārābī, although they are compelled by observable reality to address it, even if only by endorsing a notion of self which tends to exclude it as much as possible. The importance of self for these figures rather lies in the force of the concept’s ability to explain what holds individual human beings together with each other and with the rest of the world by explaining how they know each other and their world.

This study takes as its primary focus Fārābī’s notion of what may be called *authentic self* as he develops it in light of (or perhaps despite) both Neoplatonism and the Peripateticism of Alexander of Aphrodisias. Here, Proclus will stand in as a representative of the Neoplatonic tradition, although we ought to keep in mind that Neoplatonism reached Fārābī through a number of disparate avenues including Porphyry,<sup>1</sup> the Alexandrian commentaries on

1. Fārābī wrote both a commentary and a paraphrase of Porphyry’s *Isagoge* (an introduction to Aristotle’s logic). On the existence of the commentary, see Dunlop, “Existence and definition of philosophy”; for the Arabic text and an English translation of the paraphrase, see Dunlop, “Al-Fārābī’s *Eisagoge*.” Both of these articles have been collected in *Islamic Philosophy*, vol. 11, Abū Nasr Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Fārābī (d.339/950), Text and Studies V, Collected and Reprinted by Fuat Sezgin (Frankfurt am Main: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 1999). For the continuous use from the end of the Neoplatonic Schools until Fārābī’s own lifetime of Porphyry’s *Isagoge* as an introduction to the study of Aristotle’s logic, see Gutas, “Paul the Persian.”

Aristotle's *Organon*,<sup>2</sup> the *Arabic Plotinus*<sup>3</sup> and the *Arabic Proclus*.<sup>4</sup> It is entirely infeasible to try to untangle all of these threads connecting Fārābī to Neoplatonism within the scope of a single article and so I propose simply to make the comparison between Proclus' concept of self and Fārābī's in order to get a view of how far we can say that Fārābī's psychology is Neoplatonic and how far not. In addition to this, and in light of his obvious debt to Alexander, we will want to be clear as to how far we can say that Fārābī's psychology is Peripatetic and how far not.

The metaphysical framework within which Fārābī works most closely resembles that of the Neoplatonists rather than that of Alexander.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, Fārābī's metaphysical hierarchy is most often compared with that of Plotinus, and especially as it appears in the *Arabic Plotinus* (notably the *Theology of Aristotle*). This is somewhat arbitrary since the hierarchy as it is described in the *Arabic Proclus* is, for all intents and purposes, structured in the same way and, insofar as it deals directly with multiple intellects subordinate to the First Cause, it may even be said to be closer to Fārābī in spirit. In any case, both of these collections of Neoplatonic texts present a hierarchy which is identical neither to that of their originals nor to that of Fārābī, although they share certain features with both. With respect to their originals (Plotinus' *Enneads* IV–VI and Proclus' *Elements of Theology*), the *Arabic Plotinus* and *Arabic Proclus* both reduce the One to Being and the source of Being and, in

2. Vallat, *Farabi et l'École d'Alexandrie*.

3. Fārābī's relationship to this series of texts is not entirely clear. Still, many scholars recognize such a relationship: e.g., Vallat, *Farabi et l'École d'Alexandrie*; Davidson, *Alfarabi Avicenna & Averroes*; Fattal, *Plotin face à Platon*. On the *Arabic Plotinus* in general, see Zimmerman, "Origin"; Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus*. The Arabic text has been edited and printed in Badawi, *Uḥūlūḡiyā Aristātālīs*; English translation by G. Lewis in Henry & Schwyzer, *Plotini opera* II.

4. As with the *Arabic Plotinus*, Fārābī's relationship to this series of texts has not been worked out in detail, although an attempt at clarifying it has recently been made by Janos (2010). On the *Arabic Proclus* in general, see Endress, *Proclus Arabus* [a study of twenty propositions of Proclus' *Elements* translated into Arabic, accompanied by a German translation of the fragments as well as the edited Arabic text]; Endress, "New and Improved Platonic Theology"; Zimmerman, "Proclus Arabus Rides Again"; Taylor, *The Liber De Causis* [a study of the Arabic text along with an English translation]; and the studies contained in D'Ancona Costa, *Recherches*.

5. Although it has been argued that Fārābī's conception of Providence is closer, or even identical, to that of Alexander, as does, e.g., Janos, "The Greek and Arabic Proclus," this position is probably too simplistic. Although it is true that, for Fārābī, the First transcends any relationship with lower beings (hence with all things other than Itself), it does, however, emanate its own being into some of those lower beings. Thus, the First does not simply perpetuate the existence of things by driving the motion of the heavenly spheres as is the case for Alexander, it also directly in-forms the intellects which animate the heavenly spheres. All things sublunary receive their existence from the movement of the spheres, although human beings, insofar as they are able to actualize intellect within themselves must be said to be in-formed by the First through the Active Intellect. This difference with respect to Alexander's cosmology must have consequences for Fārābī's conception of Providence.

the case of Proclus, remove any reference to a plurality of Gods or henads. On the other hand, they maintain the ranks of Intellect and Soul largely as found, as well as the strong negative discourse which Plotinus and Proclus applied to the One. Fārābī, like the author of the Arabic Neoplatonic texts, reduces the One to Being (First Existent or *al-wujūd al-āwwal*), although, unlike those texts, he also calls it the first Intellect. This difference appears to be an accommodation of Aristotle's first unmoved mover in *Metaphysics* Λ within an emanative causal process which, despite its evident differences, has its root in a Neoplatonic theory of eternal intelligible causation; yet, even here there are important differences whose examination lies outside of the scope of the present study. Let it be said that Fārābī's conception of productive intellection, which properly begins with the First Existent, results in the simultaneous immanence and transcendence of the First in and above all of its consequents. In this way, Fārābī's understanding of the relationship between a creative God and its creation approximates much more closely to the Neoplatonic One of a Plotinus or Proclus than it does to the absolutely transcendent First Cause posited by Alexander.<sup>6</sup>

The question which interests me here—that of the status and structure of self as authentic self—demands an explanation of how the self fits into the ontological hierarchy which constitutes and maintains, for Fārābī, both intelligible and physical reality. In light of the Neoplatonic character of his metaphysics (however modified), one might expect that Fārābī's conception of self would also exhibit a Neoplatonic character. Although this is not an unreasonable expectation, we will soon see that whatever Neoplatonic character it might have is confounded with the seemingly incompatible psychology developed by Alexander. Let me first sketch Proclus' conception of self, which I will then compare with the corresponding conception to be found in Fārābī's works.

#### PROCLUS ON SOUL

For Proclus, the human being, like everything else, has its own form of self-identity insofar as it has its own defining character which sets it apart from other kinds of beings or non-beings (such as the Gods). Following Plato, he posits soul as the source of human self-identity as an interpretation of the Delphic command to *Know Thyself*.<sup>7</sup> The body is just what belongs to the

6. That Alexander's "God" transcends absolutely the world over which it presides is argued in his *De Providentia* (Alexandre d'Aphrodise, *Traité de la providence*, introduction, édition et traduction par Pierre Thillet [Verdier, 2003]).

7. Pr.*InAlc.*5.13–19. This is a unanimous interpretation among Neoplatonists. See, e.g., Plot.*Enn.*IV.3 [27]; Ol.*InAlc.*5.18–8.14; Simp.*InEnch.Prae.*82–87. This definition of self, of course, finds its origin in Socrates' interrogation of the young Alcibiades in Plato's *Alcibiades* I (130c–131a).

soul so that it in no way contributes to an individual human's self-identity.<sup>8</sup> Soul as the individual's self-identity plays the role of a mediator between intelligible and sense-perceptible realities. As a bridge between Intellect and Body, its existence is analogical to that of the Demiurge, the Creator God of Plato's *Timaeus* who, according to Proclus' interpretation, acts as a bridge between the One and the cosmos.

The soul<sup>9</sup> in question here is the *logikē psukhē*, the rational soul—excluding the lower irrational soul—and this rational soul corresponds for the most part to what Aristotle calls intellect in his analysis of human thought in *De Anima* 3.4–5. This soul is an eternal, incorporeal entity whose primary character is “life-giving” (as a *zoē*): as “life-giving,” soul informs a body which has the character of being animate insofar as it participates life by participating soul. The soul in question here also has a cognitive life which is made possible by the presence in it of a totality of *logoi*.<sup>10</sup> These *logoi* are the result of the rational soul's participation in Intellect, and are images<sup>11</sup> of the Forms or *eidē* which are found in and are identical to Intellect (*Nous*). The *logoi* include not only the universals of all things but also the common notions, *koinai ennoiai*, such as “the whole is greater than the part” or “all things seek their good.”<sup>12</sup> Through these *logoi*, “every soul is all things, sense-perceptibles paradigmatically, intelligibles iconically.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, prior to any engagement with physical objects the rational soul carries the complete, but derivative, content of Being within itself as there for its contemplation and use in its discursive activity.

Proclus' psychology appears to be derived from a number of key passages from the writings of both Plato and Aristotle. Among these are the description of the rational soul's generation in Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's description of intellection in *De Anima* 3.4–5, both of which are made to exhibit a certain doctrinal harmony. From the *Timaeus* he draws the tripartite structure of the soul as constituted of Being, Sameness and Difference.<sup>14</sup> To these three ele-

8. This need not be construed as blind hatred or distrust of the body. Proclus, for example, affirms the necessity of the human soul's perpetual attachment to body, even if only to an astral body following the death of a person (Pr.ET.170.18–30).

9. I am drawing upon Procl.*InTim.*I.245–255.26 for the following analysis, unless otherwise noted.

10. Cf. also Pr.ET.168.11–170.17.

11. Images in the sense of being ontologically derivative.

12. See, e.g., Syr.*InMet.*3.18, 9–37; See also Saffrey and Westerink's discussion in Pr.PT.159–161.

13. Pr.ET.170.4–5; cf. Porph.*Sent.*10.

14. Sameness and Difference are represented in the dialogue as two intersecting circles, as an analogy of the rational soul's characteristic movements or activities. (The cosmological role played by the circles does not interest us here.)

ments he attaches the names *logos*, *dianoia* and *doxa*, respectively, drawing the latter two from the analogy of the divided line in Plato's *Republic*. *Logos* here is the psychic power which proceeds primarily and directly from the rational soul's essence, and whose highest activity is pure intellectual contemplation of its *logoi* (to the extent that this is possible for the soul); *Dianoia* is the rational soul's capacity for discursive self-contemplation, a power which is already derivative in relation to the *logos* insofar as it unfolds in steps what the *logos* can contemplate as a unity; *doxa* is the rational soul's capacity to engage with the external world that is known first through sense-perception, and is dependent proximately upon the forms projected by *dianoia*, but ultimately upon projections from soul's essential *logoi*. This Platonic division of powers is made to correspond to elements found in Aristotle's analysis of intellect at *De Anima* 3.4–5 (430a10–25).<sup>15</sup> Proclus does not explicitly make this connection in the passage we are considering, but a parallel treatment of the *logikē psuchē* in the Ps.-Simplician commentary on *De Anima* suggests it.<sup>16</sup> Ps.-Simplicius describes the element of intellect in the soul which “which is cause and maker, by making all things” (τὸ αἴτιον καὶ ποιητικόν, τῶ ποιεῖν πάντα) in Aristotle's *De Anima* III.5 in a way which—despite the different terminology employed by this author—closely resembles Proclus' description of the rational soul's *logos*. Similarly, he describes the element which is the “matter” (ύλη) for things “by becoming all things” (τῶ πάντα γίνεσθαι) in a way that agrees with Proclus' descriptions of *dianoia* and *doxa*.<sup>17</sup>

The divisions made by Proclus are, in his view, necessitated by the different subjects of these powers' actions, and thus by their different activities,<sup>18</sup> and are expressive of the soul's inability to engage simultaneously with both its innate content and what is external to it.<sup>19</sup> Through the *logos* the soul presides over and directs its attention to the other cognitive powers—in-

15. These same divisions are associated with Aristotle's division of theoretical and practical intellect at *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.1.

16. Cf. Ps.-Simp.*InDeAn.*240.1–243.6.

17. Rather than use the names *dianoia* and *doxa*, Ps.-Simplicius refers to a single power divided into two (whether substantially or logically is not entirely clear). When it is imperfect in its relation to the projections of the soul's *logoi* it looks outward toward the body and external entities; when it is perfect in relation to the projections of the *logoi* it is turned wholly upon the *logoi* in its discursive activity, while at the same time projecting its apprehensions of the *logoi*. This is undoubtedly an interpretation of the cutting of the circles in Plato's *Timaeus*. The language of this commentary is often quite vague, but the bare parallels to Proclus' treatment of the rational soul, as well as Ps-Simplicius' declaration that he is following Iamblichus' writings on the soul, suggest that Proclus' treatment has its proximate source in Iamblichus. Whether this Iamblican treatment was mediated to Proclus through Plutarch of Athens, with whom he read the *De Anima*, or Syrianus is indeterminable, but possible.

18. Pr.*InRemp.*II.264.21–268.8.

19. Again, Pr.*InTim.*II.306.1–307.30 is an excellent summary of this construction of the soul.

cluding *dianoia*, *doxa*, *phantasia*, and *aisthēsis*<sup>20</sup>—and the objects of their activities. It is present in every one of the soul's activities and it is by means of this power that the soul is aware of itself as the agent of those activities; it is the power which, in each of its activities, says, for example, "I think" (*ego logizomai*) or "I desire" (*ego epithumō*).<sup>21</sup> Thus, in its pure bodiless existence, this soul, through the *logos*, is always exercising its powers upon itself, but turns its powers to things outside of itself when the purity of its existence is diminished by its association with body. Once embodied, the rational soul can only make its reversion upon itself by first engaging with sense-perceptible objects and using them to spark recollection of the soul's essential *logoi*. This is how Proclus preserves the common recognition that our learning begins through sense-perception, without upsetting the superiority of the soul's incorporeal substance over the inferior corporeal substance. Preservation of the soul's superiority to body dictates that there be no genuine acquisition of knowledge through the abstraction of forms from matter since the soul would then depend upon beings of an inferior ontological rank for its own essential content and activity.<sup>22</sup> Thus, abstraction becomes simply a means of sparking recollection of more complete, and so more real, knowledge of these forms which already exist within the soul.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the doctrine of recollection also serves to preserve the soul's ability to cognize incorporeal beings superior to itself since it has some sort of knowledge of them as well in its *logoi*, themselves images of the intellectual Forms.

Regardless of the nature of the objects of its attentions, whether itself or external things, the soul, strictly speaking, does not *suffer* anything from outside, such that the soul would be a *hupokeimenon* to successive accidents, whether sense-perceptions, thoughts, imaginations, emotions, and so on. With the exception of sensation, to which the sensory organs alone are subject, the contents of this list are all directed activities, guided by *logos*. The only

20. The latter two powers indicated here belong to the irrational soul, but come under the jurisdiction of the rational soul during their co-embodiment. The *logos* also "cooperates" with the soul's *nous* which, properly speaking, is just the soul's totality of *logoi* in their unceasing, active projection.

21. Pr. *In Tim.* I.254.29–255.26; *idem*, *IP*958.1–10. It is this power which judges the things thought, imagined and perceived, and must be the power responsible for the soul's *prohairesis*. This is as close as Proclus comes to speaking of self as the "I" (*to ego / ānā*) which Themistius posited (*In De An.* 100.18 [L 182.3]). It is this power by which soul knows itself as pure thinker when it has achieved full separation from matter and is perfectly turned toward itself, thinking itself and intellect (Pr. *In Tim.* II.296.14–18).

22. Pr. *IP*.892.30–895.1.

23. De Libera (1996) 105–09. Abstracted forms can also devolve into a means of generating concepts which point to things which exist in the variable, temporal world, but for which there are no Forms. Syrianus' commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* M & N is the *locus classicus* for this understanding of abstracted forms as 'later-born' (*busterogenē*) forms, devoid of reality.

sense in which the rational soul can be affected as a subject (*hupokeimenon*) of external action is in relation to possession by divine powers, a possession which in some sense always has hold of the individual, insofar as soul participates in the Good.<sup>24</sup> Yet this possession only serves to strengthen the individuality of the soul as a self-sufficient agent. Thus, the soul's relation to things like sense-impressions and emotional impulse is always somehow an active, rational response, more or less guided by divine presence, even when that response would seem otherwise; the degree of rationality displayed in these activities will vary according to the individual's spiritual progress. For Proclus, the return to this universal and yet individual self in its purely active, self-motivated existence is the ultimate goal. In the disembodied life, souls know each other incorporeally through impressions of the other in the *phantasia*, and these impressions communicate the soul's character ( $\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma$ ) and the kind of life which it has led, whether worse or better; in other words, they are known by their proximity or remoteness to attainment of the goal.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, we may consider that this *phantasia* is that which resides either in the soul's luminous or its pneumatic body, both of which can remain animated by the soul after death: at the highest stage of perfection the pneumatic body is shed as well, but the soul always animates the luminous body. Yet, Proclus rejects body in any form as a principle of individuation.<sup>26</sup> Only the pure substance of the rational soul constitutes individual self-identity. There can be little doubt that there is not much room here for anything like modern notions of uniqueness of personal identity.<sup>27</sup> Do we find something like this Proclean conception in Fārābī?

#### FĀRĀBĪ'S ALEXANDRIAN PSYCHOLOGY

It requires little effort to show that Fārābī holds a conception of authentic selfhood, an identity which the individual must realize in himself. In Fārābī's *Philosophy of Aristotle* he claims that theoretical intellect is the very substance of man (*jawhar al-insān*).<sup>28</sup> Fārābī distinguishes there between intellect (both theoretical and practical) and the soul as an animating principle which is

24. I was reminded by the discussion held amongst the participants of the Panels on the Self for which this paper was written of the importance of the self's foundation outside of itself, so to speak, in higher principles. This was reinforced in my mind again afterward in discussion with Crystal Addey and by a reading of her "Ecstasy Between Divine and Human." Although her paper deals with Iamblichus' thought, it is just as pertinent to understanding that of Proclus.

25. Pr. *In Rem.* II. 165.22–166.10.

26. Pr. *In Alc.* fr. 11 (= Ol. *In Alc.* 203.20–204.12).

27. There certainly are factors which differentiate one soul from another, such as the divine series to which each soul is attached, and the character which each soul has as a result of the quality of life ( $\chi\epsilon\iota\rho\omicron\nu\ \eta\ \beta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\tau\iota\omicron\nu$ ) which it has led. Rather than being affirmations of the individual's uniqueness, however, they are more adequately considered as expressions of the individual's finite possibilities in relation to higher beings.

28. Fār., *Philosophy of Aristotle*, §93, 125.20.

shared in varying degrees by animals and plants. Of course, it is intellect which separates “man” from these other beings. In *The Virtuous City* and *The Political Regime*, he describes it as the highest faculty of soul, although in these texts he represents it as the only part of the soul which can guarantee survival after death, by extricating itself from dependence on things in matter for its substantification, which is just its actually intellecting; in fact, “survival” after death is the result, in both treatises, of the virtuous ruler’s substantification (through acquisition of intelligibles) of his own theoretical intellect.<sup>29</sup> There is a strong analogy between the theoretical intellect, as embodied in the *Imām* or Ruler, and the First Cause. Just as the First is the supreme identity in the superlunary region, the *Imām* as perfected theoretical intellect is the supreme identity in the region of human affairs, and so human intellect acts as a bridge between the intelligible and sense-perceptible.<sup>30</sup> What, then, is this theoretical intellect?

Like Proclus and Ps.-Simplicius, Fārābī finds support for his notion of theoretical intellect in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and in Aristotle’s analysis of intellect in *De Anima*. However, Fārābī’s interpretation of the latter analysis is not that of Proclus and Ps.-Simplicius, but rather something much closer, and certainly much indebted to, that of Alexander of Aphrodisias, and this indebtedness is evident in every passage in which Fārābī discusses the operation of intellect. Fārābī’s proximity to Alexander on the subject of the soul extends beyond the conception of intellect and intellection and, indeed, ranges over the whole of his psychology. Accordingly, I will briefly examine the nature of Fārābī’s adaptation of Alexander’s psychology and interpretation of Aristotle’s *De Anima*.<sup>31</sup>

In the first place, it must be noted that Fārābī adopts for the most part Alexander’s genetic theory of psychic development. For Alexander, the soul is the form of the human body, a disposition and form in matter (*hexis tis kai eidos en hulēi*) which is the source of the powers characteristic of the kind of body which it informs.<sup>32</sup> Whatever the soul’s origin — and this is as

29. The immortality which results from this substantification is stated explicitly in Fār., *Letter on the Intellect*, 31.6–9.

30. Fār., *On the Perfect State*, Ch.15, §6.

31. It is well known that Alexander’s *De Anima* is an “original” work, and not a direct commentary on Aristotle’s *De Anima*, although its arguments are clearly structured with the latter in mind.

32. Alex.*DeAn.* 15.11–12. The soul’s powers develop, or come into being, as the organs upon which they depend for their functioning develop in the body. Yet, the soul is not generated by the body: following Aristotle, Alexander argues that soul, as form, is communicated to the body during the body’s formation in the womb and the psychic powers remain in potential until the proper materials are ready to be informed by them. M. Bergeron and R. Dufour have argued this position in their introduction to Alex.*DeAn.*, pp.26–34; See Alex.*DeAn.* 36.19–37.3; cf. Arist. *DeGenAn.* II.1. Although I accept their argument at this point, the issue remains a contested one.



unclear in Alexander as it is in Fārābī<sup>33</sup>—for Alexander it seems that there is no separate soul which is ever independent of the body of which it is the form; the intellect too depends upon an organ as substrate, although it may think forms without the need of an organ.<sup>34</sup> Fārābī appears to be in agreement with this to an extent; he leaves unsaid whether the intellect depends upon an organ for its activity,<sup>35</sup> although he does say that the “discursive reasoning of the rational power” (*fīkr al-quwwa al-nātiqa*), itself only a particular activity within the rational faculty,<sup>36</sup> does depend upon the regulation of the heart’s temperature.<sup>37</sup> For Fārābī, as for Alexander, souls remain potentialities (*quwan*) and configurations (*hay’āt*) so long as no avenue is provided for their operation.<sup>38</sup> This is likewise true of the intellect in its original stage as potential intellect, which Fārābī describes as a *hay’a fī mādda*, a “disposition in matter.”<sup>39</sup> Yet, Fārābī goes somewhat further than Alexander in *The Political Regime*, arguing that soul is called form only homonymously, so that the name “form” (*sūra*) only properly belongs to the forms found in inanimate objects.<sup>40</sup> As soon as the soul begins to receive sense-impressions and imaginations, it is already something more than form. Therefore, although he describes the soul similarly to Alexander, Fārābī wants to secure a greater claim for soul which Alexander might imply but never explicitly makes, namely that it is a higher principle, something closer in reality to the First. Furthermore, Fārābī makes clear another aspect of soul’s existence which Alexander does not, and that is that the soul’s intellect can separate itself from the body and survive the death of the latter.<sup>41</sup>

When it comes to an analysis of the separable part of the soul and its functions, Fārābī follows Alexander’s lead, but deviates from the latter’s analysis in important ways, whether he did this intentionally or unwittingly, perhaps as a result of following the translations which he was reading. As mentioned above, both develop their analyses out of an interpretation of their predecessor in Aristotle’s *De Anima*. They both read the element which acts as matter “by becoming all things” (τὸ πᾶντα γίνεσθαι) as referring to human intellect prior to the time that it has intellected an intelligible form; likewise, they both call it both potential intellect (*nous dunamis* / ‘*aql bi-l-quwwa*) and

33. See previous note.

34. Alex. *DeAn.*98.24–99.6; *ibid.*, 84.10–12.

35. Fār., *On the Perfect State*, Ch.10, §2.

36. *Ibid.*, Ch.10, §5.

37. *Ibid.*, Ch.11, §4.

38. Fār., *The Political Regime*, 37.4–5, following the translation of these terms by the treatises’ latest translators, in McGinnis & Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 85.

39. Fār., *On the Perfect State*, 198, 5. This is Walzer’s translation.

40. Fār., *The Political Regime*, 37.

41. Fār., *On the Perfect State*, Ch.16, §2; *idem*, *The Political Regime*, 81.5–13; *Letter on the Intellect*, 31.3–32.7.

material intellect (*hulikos nous* / ‘*al-aql al-hayūlānī*) insofar as it is receptive of intelligibles which it must acquire from outside of itself.<sup>42</sup> This intellect passes through a number of stages in its advancement from potentiality to actuality and it is in the enumeration and explanation of these stages that Fārābī seriously begins to deviate from Alexander. The latter posits only two stages: dispositional intellect (*nous kata hexin*) and intellect in act (*nous kat’ energeian*).<sup>43</sup> Dispositional intellect refers to the first perfection of the potential or material intellect and only belongs to those human beings who have received some education. When the dispositional intellect is, in fact, intellecting some form or intelligible it is called the intellect in act (*nous kat’ energeian*). Fārābī also posits two stages after the potential or material stage: actual intellect (‘*aql bi-l-f’il*) or intellect in act, and acquired intellect (‘*aql mustafād*).<sup>44</sup> In both schemata, the intellect, when it is intellecting, becomes identical to what it intellects. However, Fārābī either rejects or misinterprets Alexander’s account of dispositional intellect and thus either adds his own “acquired intellect” or misinterprets Alexander’s one-time use of the adjective *epiktētos* to describe the dispositional intellect.<sup>45</sup> Whereas Alexander

42. Alex. *DeAn.* 81.22–26; Fār., *On the Perfect State*, Ch.13, §2, 3. Again, both Alexander and Fārābī identify this intellect with Aristotle’s practical and theoretical intellect, although, strictly speaking, it is the theoretical intellect to which they are referring when they discuss the advance from potentiality to actuality with respect to intellect.

43. Alex. *DeAn.* 85.11–86.6 (dispositional intellect); *ibid.*, 86.14–88.17 (intellect in act).

44. Fār., *Letter on the Intellect*, 12.4–5.

45. At 82.1–3, Alexander refers to the theoretical intellect—the only instance of this that I am aware of—as *acquired* (*epiktētos*), meaning acquired through education and study. A recent study shows that translation choices may be the clue to the ultimate origin of Fārābī’s “acquired intellect,” his unique contribution to noetic theory. He seems to have derived it from Alexander’s *nous thurathen* (intellect “from outside” or “through the door”). M. Geoffroy has argued that in the short treatise *Peri Nou*, attributed to Alexander, the translator consistently rendered *thurathen* as *mustafād* and that it is likely that this translator also translated the Greek term *epiktētos*, meaning “acquired,” in the same way. See Geoffroy, “La tradition arabe du Περὶ νοῦ, 191–231, where he shows that Ishāq ibn Hunayn consistently translated *thurathen* by the Arabic *mustafād*. Alexander himself derives this *nous thurathen* from Aristotle’s *On the Generation of Animals*, 736b9–29. Although Geoffroy focuses on the translation of *epiktētos* in the *Peri Nou* and Fārābī’s probable reading of it there, it is also as likely that the same Arabic word was used to translate *epiktētos* in Alexander’s *De Anima*. It is clear that Fārābī was working with this latter text as well, not just because most of his psychology can be shown to have its source there rather than in the *Peri Nou*, but because Fārābī wrote a commentary on the *De Anima*, which is now lost (see Walzer’s references in his commentary at *On the Perfect State*, 383). I am not interested here in tracing the avenues which Fārābī took in his modifications of Alexander’s psychology: I am only interested at the moment in bringing these modifications to light so that their origins can be traced. An investigation of the reasons and means of Fārābī’s modifications requires a dedicated study of its own and must take into account, at the very least, the available Arabic translations of Alexander’s work as well as those Proclean fragments which were attributed to him. Only when this is done, I think, will it be possible to determine with some accuracy Fārābī’s relation to the *Arabic Plotinus* and the *Book of Pure Good* or *Liber de Causis* (both versions).

conceived of the dispositional intellect as a stage attainable by anyone who has received some education—in other words, someone who has learned some bit of knowledge which may then be held in reserve—Fārābī conceives of the acquired intellect as the knowledge attained after all or nearly all of the intelligibles (*maqūlāt*) have been intellected and it has intellected itself (*dhātibi* / *heauton*). By intellecting all of these forms, the intellect replicates the *content of the Active Intellect*.<sup>46</sup> This “acquired intellect” is then the total system of knowledge of the world which belongs to the Active Intellect, the attainment of which is constitutive of the ultimate happiness for human beings.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the intellection in question here is at once intellection of the world and intellection of self, although the self-intellection involved seems to be an accident of the intellection of intelligibles, as Alexander argues.<sup>48</sup>

Both philosophers read the element “which is cause and maker, by making all things” (τὸ αἴτιον καὶ ποιητικόν, τῷ ποιεῖν πάντα) as a productive intellect (*poiêtikos nous* / *aql fa ‘al*)—or Active Intellect as it is usually named and as I will continue to name it—which is independent of the material intellect and makes the latter become the things which it intellects; it is in actuality what the material intellect is only potentially, when in its original condition.<sup>49</sup> For Alexander, the Active Intellect is none other than Aristotle’s First Cause.<sup>50</sup> For Fārābī, however, the Active Intellect is only the last of ten intellects which the First Cause “emanates” (*yufīdu*) from Itself. It presides over the sublunary world and mediates between the First Cause and human intellect. It is this Active Intellect, whose content is essentially constitutive of the perfection of human intellect, which makes the forms in material things intelligible for the human potential intellect.

46. Fār., *Letter on the Intellect*, 20.4–22.2. No doubt this is why, at *Letter on the Intellect* 27.8, he can say that the Active Intellect is of the same species (*naw*) as the acquired intellect.

47. Fārābī makes this assertion frequently and it is of course the entire subject of his treatise, *The Attainment of Happiness*. See, e.g., *Letter on the Intellect*, 31.3–32.7; *The Political Regime*, 79.12–80.4; *On the Perfect State*, Ch.15, §§8–11. In the last two passages mentioned, Fārābī connects happiness, systematic knowledge (content of the Active Intellect) and revelation.

48. Alexander (*DeAn*.86.20–23) says that intellect intellects itself *kata sumbebêkos*, “accidentally.” Ps.-Simplicius (*InDeAn*.230.12–29) attacks this position, arguing that it is not enough to say that the intellect intellects accidentally, insofar as the intelligibles would be what are intellected primarily and not the intellect itself. For Ps.-Simplicius, as of course for Proclus, the intellect apprehends itself at the same time, and just as primally, as it apprehends whatever it is intellecting.

49. Alex.*DeAn*.88.23–90.11; Fār., *Letter on the Intellect*, 24.6–30.2; *idem*, *On the Perfect State*, Ch.13 §2; *idem*, *The Political Regime*, 34.11–36.5.

50. He also identifies it with the *nous thurathen*. The precise relationship between the Active Intellect as separate principle and as immanent within human intellect (as *nous thurathen*) with the human intellect is unclear and remains a subject of deep debate amongst modern commentators. For a brief summary of the major positions taken, see the introduction in Alex. *DeAn.*, 48–56. For Fārābī’s handling of the *nous thurathen* see note 41.

Fārābī attributes to the Active Intellect an operation that it performs upon human intellect<sup>51</sup> but which Alexander nowhere makes explicit and may only hint at in his *De Anima*. For Fārābī, the Active Intellect acts as a secure foundation for an intellection which results in the identity of intellect and the intelligible (*ma'qūl*) that it intellects. The forms of material things in the world are made intelligible by the potential or material intellect through a process of abstraction which, as it does for Alexander, operates by stripping accidents (the matter) away from the impressions of sense-perceptions stored in the representative faculty. However, for our Arabic philosopher—and this is what seems to be only and at the most implicit in Alexander's *De Anima*<sup>52</sup>—this process is made possible by the intellect's possession of primary intelligibles which are imprinted in the soul by the Active Intellect at some point in time.<sup>53</sup> These intelligibles include the same principles which Proclus and much of the earlier tradition grouped under the category *ennoiai koinai*, principles like “the whole is greater than its parts” and “man is not horse,” but also ethical or moral principles; they are indemonstrable and their truth undeniable.<sup>54</sup> In addition to not having these intelligibles from birth, not all human souls receive these intelligibles at all, and consequently never engage in intellection.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, of those who receive them, not all reach the

51. To complicate this picture somewhat, I point out that Fārābī makes apparently contradictory statements regarding the range of the Active Intellect's activities. At *The Political Regime*, 71.10–13, he states that the Active Intellect is responsible for giving perfections to “man” alone and no other species. Conversely, at *Letter on the Intellect*, 28.10–30.2, he clearly states that the forms in matter pre-exist in the Active Intellect and that the latter gives to matter the “likenesses of what is in its substance” (*asbāh ma fī jawharīhi*). Whether this indicates a change in position over time, or whether these two positions may somehow be held together by a missing piece of the picture, remains to be determined.

52. Alexander does not sufficiently explain how the productive intellect is the cause of all intellection just as it is the cause of the intelligibility of all things. However, Tuominen, “Receptive Reason,” points to the importance for Alexander of what he calls “common intellect” (*koinos nous*) as a natural process of concept formation belonging to every non-disabled human being and *prior* to actualization of the dispositional intellect, which is a supervenient perfection only attained by those who have received some education. Fārābī very well could have connected this *koinos nous* with the *koinai ennoiai*.

53. In at least one passage Fārābī (*The Political Regime*, 71.9–72.4) indicates that the implantation of these intelligibles, if it happens at all, happens after the development of the lower psychic faculties (nutrition, sense-perception, imagination, etc.). At least one scholar argues that Aristotle's ten categories are amongst these intelligibles (Vallat, *op.cit.*, 209–13).

54. Fār., *Way to Happiness*, 81.9–10. Cf. *idem*, *On the Perfect State*, Ch.13, §3. Rather than citing a Platonic source for these intelligibles, Fārābī claims to find them in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* II.19 (*Letter on the Intellect*, 8.5–9.3). Druart, “Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles,” 415–16 argues that Fārābī may have found examples of these *koinai ennoiai* in Alexander's commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics A*.

55. Fār., *The Political Regime*, 74.13–75.3. If the possession of the *koinai ennoiai* is indeed what Alexander has in mind in his concept of the *koinos nous*, then he appears to be much

stage of acquired intellect and so do not secure for themselves an afterlife.<sup>56</sup>

The intellection which proceeds from the primary intelligibles as indemonstrable principles is a process of assimilation of intelligibles to the intellect and of the intellect to its intelligibles. This assimilation substantifies intellect in such a way that action is no longer separate from substance, in imitation of the unity of the First Cause. Thus, abstraction is an active process which makes forms and so intellect does not simply acquire intelligibles through a passive reception despite the fact that it is called a material intellect.<sup>57</sup> The intelligibility that forms in matter acquire through abstraction is, according to Fārābī, a new and higher mode of existence for them which allows for their identity with the intellect. In addition to abstracted forms, the primary intelligibles make possible the intellection of incorporeal forms which are not abstracted and whose mode of existence is preserved even after they are intellected. The intellect and its objects of knowledge (those which were not already intelligible) are brought together into a region of eternal intelligibility.

Yet, the description of human intellect as material intellect seems to pose a problem for Fārābī, as it does for Alexander. By virtue of its original nature as a pure receptivity, a substrate (*mawduʿ / hupokeimenon*) empty of any content, it is difficult to conceive of how the intellect is ever able to actively make intelligibles from forms in matter. The doctrine of primary intelligibles seems to be intended to answer this objection. Fārābī explains how the primary intelligibles set the material intellect in motion through a modified version of Plato's analogy of the sun and its illumination of visible things.<sup>58</sup> He gives at least three renditions of this modified analogy, the precise details of which it is not necessary to consider here; importantly, what remains constant in all of these renditions of the analogy is the role which is played by light in

more optimistic about the nature of the majority of human beings. Whereas Alexander says that everyone who is not disabled in some way has a share of the *koinos nous*, Fārābī states unequivocally that not all people receive the primary intelligibles from the Active Intellect. He seems to have, at the very least, some "bestial" (*babīmīyyūn*) people in mind, those who live at remote extremes from civilization (*The Political Regime*, 87.7–12). These bestial people seem to be characterized by the lack of a significant language; in other words, people who communicate by gesture and non-verbal sounds.

56. One may well wonder why reception of the primary intelligibles, since they are eternal principles given by the Active Intellect, is not enough to substantify the intellect. I am in debt to my supervisor, Taneli Kukkonen, for pointing out this potential difficulty.

57. As Alexander says, even sense-perception is "not a suffering but a judging" (οὐ πάσχειν ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ κρίνειν). At *Philosophy of Aristotle*, §92, 125.11–12). Fārābī himself remarks that when intellect has acquired its highest perfection (acquired intellect) then "its substance is identical to its act, or close to being its act" (*jawbarīhi huwa biʿainihi faʿalīhi aw qarība min an yakūna faʿalīhi*).

58. Plato. *Rep.* 507a6–509c11.

activating vision.<sup>59</sup> The sun's light makes all potentially visible things actually visible and, in a similar way, the primary intelligibles proceeding from the Active Intellect like the light make intelligible all of the forms in matter which are originally only potentially intelligible. It is the very presence of the primary intelligibles which makes the human material and potential intellect an intellect in act; the generation of the rest of the intelligibles then proceeds by demonstration using the primary intelligibles as premises.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, intellection constitutes the highest activity of the rational faculty (*al-quwwa al-nāṭiqā*) of the soul. It is clear that intellect is responsible for the performance of this power's activities, although Fārābī does not explain how it does so or how the activities relate to each other. What he does explain is the rational faculty's relation to the other psychic faculties, the nutritive, sensitive, appetitive and representative powers. These are all ordered in a hierarchy of ruler to ruled in which the ruling faculty plays the role of form to the ruled faculty which plays the role of matter.<sup>61</sup> This hierarchical ordering obtains between the different faculties as well as between the different components within each particular faculty (where there are multiple components); for example, the ruling faculty of the senses is that which collects all of the data of the senses (and which probably equates to the much-debated *koīna aisthēsis* of philosophy post-Aristotle), and it is ruled over by the faculty of representation (which has no components). Therefore, just as the First Cause is ruler over all existing things, just as the Imām is ruler over the virtuous community, the rational faculty rules over and informs all of the subordinate psychic faculties. Thus does Fārābī elaborate upon Alexander's designation of the rational faculty as *hēgemonikon*.<sup>62</sup>

Everything in Fārābī's account pushes toward a conception of self and self-identity which is wholly determined by the perfection of the rational capacity of the soul. The individual only has identity and authentic self through the

59. The three renditions of the analogy are to be found at *The Virtuous City*, Ch.13, §2; *The Political Regime*, 35.12–36.5; and *Letter on the Intellect*, 25.4–27.7. The three principle differences which distinguish each of these renditions are as follows: in *The Virtuous City* the eye (intellect) is said to see the light itself (the primary intelligibles); in *The Political Regime* the eye (intellect) is said to the sun itself (Active Intellect), with no mention of seeing the light; in the *Letter on the Intellect*, neither of the previous statements are present, but the analogy there introduces the element of the “transparent,” which was lacking in the other renditions. Examination of these differences and what they might mean is well beyond the scope of the present paper.

60. This is corroborated by Fārābī in Fār., *Selected Aphorisms*, §34. There he states explicitly that it is the primary intelligibles which make the material intellect an intellect in act. The question still remains as to how the primary intelligibles are obtained from the Active Intellect; in other words, what are the conditions which permit the reception or acquisition of the primary intelligibles? There is an answer to this question, I think, but it cannot be addressed here.

61. Fār., *On the Perfect State*, Ch.10, *passim*.

62. E.g., Alex.*DeAn.*76.10–15.

substantification attained in the act of intellecting intelligibles; until that act is accomplished the individual remains substantially tied to the body and other than what he or she ought to be. Nevertheless, those souls which attain immortality through substantification do not resolve indistinguishably into a single unity in the afterlife; association with the body affects the soul's disposition even in the afterlife and so the soul is particularized by matter even in its disembodiment.<sup>63</sup> This is perhaps an awkward way of arguing that each soul remains individual and experiences the afterlife in its own way, but it expresses the point that Fārābī wants to make clearly enough.

### CONCLUSIONS

It is clear, I think, that Fārābī's reflections on soul must be considered to be fundamentally closer to Alexander's interpretation of Aristotle's psychology. At the same time, he goes beyond Alexander's interpretation in important ways. What conclusions may we draw, then, from a comparison with the Proclean position? First, we must affirm that despite his fondness for the curriculum of Aristotelian studies proposed (and put into operation) by the Alexandrian Neoplatonists, Fārābī did not hold to their Platonic interpretations of Aristotle's psychology. He gives no indication that he knew of these interpretations and rejected them; if he did not consciously reject them in favor of Alexander's, it could be that he just did not have access to the requisite commentaries on Aristotle's *De Anima* or those on the pertinent Platonic Dialogues (like *Phaedo* or *Republic*). On the other hand, and although he comes by it via an alternate route, his conception of the authentic self contains many of the marks of Proclus' conception of the same—self-sufficiency, self-knowledge which is simultaneously complete knowledge of the world, and self-constitution—which assure that the rational soul in its highest perfection is self-motivated and active. He even arrives at a weak form of recollection in which some bits of knowledge, the indemonstrable primary intelligibles, are possessed by the soul and ready to hand for its use from the beginning of its intellectual activity and even initiate it, at least for those which engage in some intellectual activity.<sup>64</sup> Fārābī wants to affirm that certain souls are able to attain to eternal existence but is unwilling to afford immortality both *a parte ante* and *a parte post* to all human souls as Proclus does. His philosophical motives for this are unclear to me, but, from the tenor of his reflections on the relationship between philosophy and religion, I take it that he does not

63. Fār., *On the Perfect State*, Ch.16, §3.

64. It is still disconcerting that the Active Intellect seems to play the role of a *deus ex machina* for certain souls which are fortunate enough to have the right natural disposition and come to exist in a civilized part of the world, but I suspect that there is more to his account than this. Likely avenues to explore in this regard are Fārābī's views on the genesis of language.

feel himself bound by any particular religious dogma which would dictate the total annihilation of the majority of human beings at death. It is well known that Fārābī unapologetically subordinates religion with its imagery and methodologies to philosophical investigation. In his view, religion, when used properly, is merely a vehicle by which to communicate difficult philosophical principles to those lacking the intellectual capacity and disposition for discovering and contemplating them. Since the philosopher is supposed to be the perfect ruler in a properly functioning and virtuous state, religion then becomes a tool used for governance.

With his conception of self, Proclus posits the individual human being who has perfected himself as an entity whose subjective stance toward the world is objective: the *logos* knows itself as this entity which thinks and looks outward to the world as it performs these activities, but also knows the world as it is in its reflection upon itself and its causes. Every perfected human self is precisely the same in this regard: there is no element of personal identity here since self assimilates to its intellectual principle.<sup>65</sup> In every incarnation, its relation to the world is one of action, whether actively thinking the world or discriminating or making judgments upon its appearances: the soul is never a subject of action from the material objects outside of it. At the same time, the soul is constituted in its possession by superior principles, most proximately Intellect. Fārābī, in one sense, comes to a similar conception of the self's "objective subjectivity." For Fārābī, the intellect, when it intellects the intelligibles, becomes those intelligibles and thus intellects both itself and the world whose universal forms are its content. However, this self-intellection seems only to be a by-product of the intellection of intelligibles which has the function of making the intellect fully substantial. Whether there is a similar awareness at the levels of perception and imagination Fārābī does not say, and so it is difficult to draw too close a parallel with Proclus' *logos*. Difficulty also arises from the fact that self-intellection for Fārābī has an accidental character so that there is no apprehension of self that is not apprehension of the content of intellect. Self and content merge into one another. For Proclus, on the contrary, there is a definite sense that the *logos* apprehends itself as separate from its activity, precisely as the "I" who is performing the activity. In being intelligible and actually intellected, the intellect according to Fārābī succeeds in joining its substance with its act (as is the case with the higher principles). In doing so, it is on its way toward perfection and

65. The notion of personal identity is further problematised by the fact that the self remains essentially unchanged throughout the lives of numerous persons in its various terrestrial incarnations.



near-identity<sup>66</sup> with the Active Intellect, and correspondingly away from any possible modern conception of personal identity.

To conclude, I want to suggest that the importance of Fārābī's conception of authentic self is best seen in his vision of the virtuous state. The virtuous state is a community of individuals whose souls are formed and guided by the same objective content and so the existence of different subjectivities at the level of human being serve as a means of distinguishing rulers from subjects within a community organized according to cognitive capacity. Here, "different subjectivities" would only refer to the varying degrees of participation of individuals in the objective stance embodied by the Ruler and Imām. The force of this position comes out well in his assertion that if there is more than one perfected Ruler in the same city or in different cities, then they are all *like one Ruler and one soul*.<sup>67</sup>

66. Another reason why this can only be a near-identity is that the Active Intellect's stance toward the world differs from human intellect's by way of its order of intellection of the world. Whereas we have to ascend in thought from sense-perceptible things to the First Cause, the Active Intellect begins its intellection with the First Cause and works its way down to the lower principles (*Letter on the Intellect*, 27.8–29.5).

67. Fār., *On the perfect State*, Ch.16, §1.

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