



## **MORE MODOQUE**

Die Wurzeln der europäischen Kultur  
und deren Rezeption im Orient  
und Okzident

Festschrift für  
Miklós Maróth  
zum siebzigsten Geburtstag



Amos K. 13

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**MIKLÓS MARÓTH**  
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herausgegeben von  
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Kornél Szovák und László Takács

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*Nicolao Maróth septuagenario*

Εἴκοσι δις δέκα τρίς βιότοι' ἐπὶ τέρματ' ἰκόντος  
ἀγκείσθω σοφίης τοῦτο γενεθλιακὸν  
μνημεῖον φωτὸς φιλόμουσ' ἀπερείσια δρώντος  
ἔργματα νῶ τ' ἀγαθῶ οὐτ' ἀτέρ εὐφροσύνης,  
ὅστ' ἄλλων περίεστιν ἀληθέσιν ἐκπεπονηκῶς  
σπουδῆσ' ἔλλογίμους Καλλιόπης ἀνόδους.  
Σεμνὰ θέμεθλ' Ἀρετῆς πύργω καθαρῆς ὑποθέντα  
εἶθε πατήρ πάντων μὴ λίποι αὐτε Χρόνος.  
Ἐλπίδ' ἔχει Μοῦσαι γὰρ ὅσους ἴδον ὄθματι παῖδας  
μὴ λοξῶ, πολιοῦς οὐκ ἀπέθεντο φίλους.

*Zoltanus Hadrianus*

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## Zum Geleit

Die vorliegende Festschrift ist Herrn Professor Miklós Maróth anlässlich seines siebenzigsten Geburtstags gewidmet. Sieben Jahrzehnte sind aus menschlicher Perspektive gesehen eine recht lange Zeit, und es ist davon ein halbes Jahrhundert, das ein siebenzigjähriger Jubilar mit aktiver wissenschaftlicher Arbeit zubringt. Dieser Meilenstein gemahnt uns alle, innezuhalten und uns an unser Tun und Lassen zurückzubesinnen. Die Autoren dieses Bandes sind ausnahmslos Kollegen und Freunde, deren Laufbahn sich zu einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt mit der des Jubilars traf. Einigen war dies bereits am Anfang ihrer Karriere vergönnt, einigen erst in den späteren Jahren, einige haben sich niemals von ihm gelöst, einige sind nach Pausen verschiedener Länge immer wieder mit ihm in Berührung gekommen.

Sein Lebenswerk ist in vielerlei Hinsicht einzigartig. Denn er hat sich nicht nur in die beiden klassischen Kulturen des Altertums vertieft, sondern auch in die der Araber, die das Wissen der alten Griechen in das mittelalterliche Europa hinübergerettet hatten. Sein fachübergreifendes wissenschaftliches Interesse hat ihn aber nie in die geschlossene Welt der Bibliothek verbannt. Der Kenner der Vergangenheit hat nimmer die Gegenwart vergessen. Im Gegenteil war und ist für ihn die Erforschung des Vergangenen gleichbedeutend mit der Offenheit gegenüber den drängenden Fragen der Gegenwart. Und wenn es nicht gelingen sollte, diese Fragen zu beantworten, so versucht er doch die in tiefer Vergangenheit verwurzelten Vorgänge zu verstehen, die das Antlitz der Gegenwart zerfurcht haben.

Er will jedoch die Ganzheit der Zeit nicht nur verstehen, sondern auch – soweit es möglich ist – sie zu formen. Dies zeichnet seine Tätigkeit auf unverwechselbare Weise aus. Gedanke und Tat sind bei ihm aufs engste verwachsen. Dies hat ihn bewogen, als die politische Milderung Gelegenheit dazu bot, seinen großartigen Traum zu verwirklichen, eine christlich-katholisch gesinnte philosophische Fakultät, Rechtserbin der Königlichen Péter-Pázmány-Universität von ehemals, zu gründen. Von Skyllen und Charybden flankiert, begleitet von den ständigen Sirenenstimmen der Kleingläubigen schritt er vorwärts zur Verwirklichung seines Planes und baute das katholische Unterrichtssystem bis zum Dach, das die Universitätsstudien darstellen, aus. Die von ihm erträumte und gegründete philosophische Fakultät ist in den vergangenen mehr als zwanzig Jahren ihres Bestehens zur *alma mater* mehrerer Generationen von Wissenschaftlern und Lehrern geworden.

Sein tätiges Eingebundensein in die ungarische wissenschaftliche Gemeinschaft hat indessen seine Blickweite nicht beeinträchtigt: Er ist zu einem der international bekanntesten ungarischen Altertumswissenschaftler geworden, der unser Fach vor weiter Öffentlichkeit vertritt. Die sich an diesem Band als Mitwirkende oder Gratulanten beteiligt haben, drücken hierdurch ihre Hochachtung und Dankbarkeit aus für die hervorragende wissenschaftliche und organisatorische Arbeit, die Miklós Maróth seit Jahrzehnten zum Wohle unser aller leistet, treu der Bescheidenheit Horazens: *apis Matinae more modoque.*

*Pál Fodor*

*Gyula Mayer*

*Martina Monostori*

*Kornél Szovák*

*László Takács*

CHARLES E. BUTTERWORTH

## How to Read Alfarabi

### *Introduction*

It is fitting that this essay in honor of an ever so learned and gracious colleague such as Miklós Maróth celebrates the man responsible for our becoming acquainted, Muhsin Mahdi. Maróth is a rare academic, a man who stands by his convictions even as he seeks by his diligent studies to deepen and sometimes shake them. By his rare character, he teaches us the virtues of diligence, patience, and commitment to the search for truth. While this world of disappearing boundaries we inhabit allows individuals from lands separated by many miles to come to know one another and also to enjoy some real as well as virtual comradeship, it does not, alas, permit the constant interaction that marked older, more limited societies and the interactions of those whose writings and works we study. But thanks to the colleagues and students of Miklós Maróth, it is possible to tell him publicly how much he is appreciated and to offer a gift of thought and study.

Muhsin S. Mahdi (1926–2007) was a rare individual, one who succeeded in bringing solid and painstaking scholarship to bear on perennial questions in the history of philosophy while opening academic awareness to the rich, albeit somewhat inaccessible, field of medieval Arabic political philosophy. This esteemed scholar also won acclaim for alerting fellow specialists in the discipline of Arabic language and literature to the deeper understanding they might gain by looking again, more critically and more learnedly, at one of the old mainstays of the discipline – that work known so familiarly and yet so incorrectly as the *Thousand and One Nights* or *Alf Layla wa Layla*. Earlier, his novel and compelling presentation of Ibn Khaldūn as a philosopher of history seeking to bring the wisdom of ancient Greece to bear upon the analysis of Arab and Berber political and social development fired the imagination of many. Commendable and unusual as are such accomplishments, they pale in comparison with the revolution Muhsin Mahdi wrought in rekindling interest in **Alfarabi** and providing a clear, compelling portrait of the second teacher as *the* major thinker to be reckoned with in the history of Arabic philosophy and the founder of political philosophy within that tradition. It is not an exaggeration to say of him what Alfarabi said of Plato and Aristotle, namely, that he has “given us an account of philosophy” while also “giving

us an account of the way to it and of the way to re-establish it” now that it has “become confused or extinct”.<sup>1</sup>

Though Muhsin Mahdi learned to read more deeply and accurately than many of his contemporaries and predecessors, he never hesitated to acknowledge how much he benefitted from the guidance of others. As a youth, he caught a glimpse of the promise of philosophy while reading various essays of ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī during long hot Kerbala summers. During his undergraduate years at the American University of Beirut, the lectures of Charles Malik lured him so to philosophy that he tacked this pursuit onto the study of business administration, for which he had been given an Iraqi national scholarship, and ended up with a double-major long before such endeavors were popular. Sent to the University of Chicago to prepare a Ph. D. in economics, he soon turned to the Committee on Social Thought and the tutelage of Arnold Bergsträsser, Nabia Abbott, John Nef, Yves Simon, and Leo Strauss in order to focus more on recovering the tradition of medieval Arabic philosophy. That Muhsin Mahdi studied with or was influenced by some of the most remarkable teachers and scholars of recent memory is worth mentioning only because his own achievements entitle him to be counted among such luminaries. Chief among them, and this is the focus of the reflections that follow, is the way he single-handedly recovered first the writings and then the teaching of Alfarabi thereby providing insight into the wisdom that so many philosophers and scholars learned to appreciate and cherish, but that then fell into neglect and even into oblivion. He did this by rediscovering how to read Alfarabi – how to go beyond the repetitions, the apparent simple-minded presentation of older teachings, and the seeming unexceptional piety to ferret out Alfarabi’s novel and most unconventional teaching.

### *Getting back to Alfarabi*

Today, as we peruse the scholarly literature, we are faced with at least three portraits of Alfarabi. For some, despite Mahdi’s decisive presentation of the perspective’s shortcomings,<sup>2</sup> Alfarabi has nothing original whatsoever to say. Others, inattentive to the unusual structure of Alfarabi’s political or public works (that is, not the commentaries or other technical writings) and the consequent difficulty of attributing the views expressed in them to

<sup>1</sup> See ALFARABI: The Attainment of Happiness, sec. 63, in *Alfarabi: Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*. Ed. M. MAHDI. Ithaca, NY 2001.

<sup>2</sup> MAHDI, M.: Al-Fārābī’s Imperfect State. *JAOS* 110 (1990) 691–726.

Alfarabi himself, overlook Muhsin Mahdi's common sense rule that "one cannot quote any portion of these books [i. e. the *Virtuous City* and *Political Regime*] as representing Alfarabi's philosophic doctrines without first explaining why they are presented in this strange manner"<sup>3</sup> and insist upon Alfarabi's uncritical embrace of Neoplatonism. Finally, and most thankfully, a strong case can now be made for considering Alfarabi as the founder of political philosophy within the Arabic-Islamic cultural tradition. Still, the academy being ever contentious, it is only to be expected that a denial of this view should have been voiced in a plenary session lecture at the July 2000 BRISMES annual meetings.<sup>4</sup>

For those given to public opinion surveys, let it be noted that the learned community opts most readily for Alfarabi as pedestrian imitator of yet unidentified Greek sources, followed by Alfarabi as purveyor of a Platonic doctrine very reminiscent of revealed religion. As evidence of how unwilling most scholars are to acknowledge Alfarabi as a conscious, critical thinker, consider a recent book about him and his thought: it cites not a single article or book that suggests Alfarabi has deeper roots.<sup>5</sup> Equally dismissive of his acumen are the books by O'Meara and Vallat.<sup>6</sup> Alfarabi's near contemporaries and immediate successors did, however, hold him in the highest esteem. Indeed, a brief glance at the attention accorded him by Arab philosophers during a time span of about two and a half centuries and over an area reaching east from Baghdad to at least Isfahan and west to Andalusia and Morocco shows how respected he was as a guide to the ancient philosophical tradition.

In his autobiography, for example, Avicenna (980–1037) acknowledges that he was unable to understand anything about Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, not even its purpose, until he read Alfarabi's commentary on it.<sup>7</sup> Given Avicenna's unique style, it is not surprising that he pays little homage to Alfarabi in his other writings. From allusions scattered throughout his corpus, we

<sup>3</sup> MAHDI, M.: *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*. Chicago 2001, 60. See also 147–49.

<sup>4</sup> See GUTAS, D.: The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29/1 (2002) 5–25.

<sup>5</sup> See FAKHRY, M.: *Al-Fārābī, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism: His Life, Works and Influence*. Oxford 2002.

<sup>6</sup> O'MEARA, D. J.: *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*. Oxford 2003; and VALLAT, PH.: *Farabi et l'école d'Alexandrie. Des prémisses de la connaissance à la philosophie politique*. Paris 2005.

<sup>7</sup> See GOHLMAN, W. E.: *The Life of Ibn Sina: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*. Albany, NY 1974, 32 and 34 (Arabic), 33 and 35 (English).

nonetheless discern that he relied heavily upon “the second teacher” to find his way through the intricacies of Aristotle’s logical and physical writings. Moreover, Avicenna’s understanding of politics and especially of the link between kingly rule, prophecy, and divine law is much in keeping with Alfarabi’s teaching. Indeed, in the famous little *Epistle on the Divisions of the Intellectual Sciences* (*Risāla Fī Aqsām al-‘Ulūm al-‘Aqliyya*), he notes that the main subjects of political science are kingship, prophecy, and divine law, then urges that what the philosophers (namely, Plato and Aristotle) mean by *nomos* is properly termed “traditional law” (*al-sunna*) and “the coming down of revelation” (*nuzūl al-wahy*). They do so, says Avicenna, because they recognize “the need the human species has of the divine law for its existence, preservation, and life to come”.<sup>8</sup> Such speech echoes what Alfarabi explains at greater length in the *Enumeration of the Sciences*, Chapter Five, as well as in the *Book of Religion*. To note such commonality of approach and understanding is not to suggest influence, but to underscore how one so close to Alfarabi shared these political insights.

That Alghazali (1058–1111) looked not to what Alfarabi said concerning kingship, prophecy, and the divine law but to what he said – or might be accused of having implied – about God, His substance, and His creation is well-known and hardly surprising given his clearly stated intentions. For Ibn Bājja (died 1138), however, Alfarabi was the touchstone. In addition to writing several sets of notes on Alfarabi’s logical commentaries, Ibn Bājja refers to him time and again in his own commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics*.<sup>9</sup> Equally important, and more to the present purpose, is the deep familiarity he demonstrates of Alfarabi’s political writings. In his *Regime of the Solitary* (*Tadbīr al-Mutawahhid*) and *Farewell Epistle* (*Risālat al-Widā‘*), Ibn Bājja learnedly refers to arguments from the *Selected Aphorisms*, *Political Regime*, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, and perhaps *Commentary on Aristotle’s Rhetoric* (neither of the latter two being now extant).<sup>10</sup> Writing in

<sup>8</sup> Avicenna: *Risāla Fī Aqsām al-‘Ulūm al-‘Aqliyya in Tis‘ Rasā’il*. Cairo 1908, 107, 15 – 108, 10; esp. 108, 4–5 and 7–8.

<sup>9</sup> For the writings on logic, see the different treatises published by Majid Fakhry in *Al-Abhāth*, vols. 23 (1970), 24 (1971), 27 (1978–79), 34 (1986), and 35 (1987); Fakhry also edited Ibn Bājja’s *Sharḥ al-Samā‘ al-Ṭabī‘ī li-Aristūṭālīs*. Beirut 1973.

<sup>10</sup> For *Regime of the Solitary*, see *Tadbīr al-Mutawahhid*, in *Ibn Bājja (Avempace). La conduite de l’isolé et deux autres épîtres*. Ed. CH. GENEQUAND. Paris 2010, 126, 17–127, 13, esp. 127, 1–7 (secs. 32–35, esp. sec. 33); for *Farewell Epistle*, see *Risālat al-Widā‘* in *ibid.* 91, 10–18 (sec. 8) and 110, 1–111, 5, esp. 110, 8–18 (secs. 65–68, esp. secs. 66–67). In the latter passage, Ibn Bājja makes use of an aphorism from Alfarabi’s *Selected Aphorisms* – one found at the end of only one manuscript and whose authenticity has therefore been questioned; see Alfarabi: *The Political Writings. “Selected Aphorisms” and Other*



Andalusia about a century and a half after Alfarabi's death in Damascus, Ibn Bājjah acknowledges the soundness of Alfarabi's analyses and gratefully uses them to advance his own political teaching.

Shortly afterwards, Ibn Ṭufayl (1110–1185) and Ibn Rushd or Averroes (1126–1198) testify to the esteem philosophers continue to have for Alfarabi and his teaching. In the introduction to *Ḥayy ibn Yağzān*, Ibn Ṭufayl refers to Alfarabi's writings briefly and negatively. He dismisses the logical works and faults three political writings – the *Virtuous City*, *Political Regime*, and *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* – for their teaching as concerns the fate of the soul after death. That teaching, whatever its merit, is at odds with the superficial features of Ibn Ṭufayl's account of Ḥayy's discoveries. To prepare the reader for it, Ibn Ṭufayl must reject Alfarabi and his teaching. What remains to be answered, however, is what Ibn Ṭufayl wanted his interlocutor to learn from the life of Ḥayy – especially from Ḥayy's inability to pass on his understanding of religion and what buttresses religious belief to those who lacked his understanding. To date, no one has answered that question successfully. Indeed, no one has tried to do so, and few scholars have recognized it as a problem.

A more positive view, one in keeping with that of Ibn Bājjah, is put forth by Averroes. Not only does he defend Alfarabi against the charges of unbelief brought by Alghazali, he also praises him for his understanding of Plato and Aristotle. Thus Averroes cites Alfarabi approvingly in his various commentaries on Aristotle's logical and physical writings as well as in his own *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. He also turns to Alfarabi for direction in both his *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Rhetoric* and his *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, noting with approval – as did Ibn Bājjah – Alfarabi's remarks about an ancient Persian form of aristocracy.

Maimonides (1138–1204), almost as junior to Averroes as Averroes was to Ibn Ṭufayl, warmly recommends Alfarabi to Ibn Tibbon (who translated the *Guide of the Perplexed* into Hebrew). Emphasizing the complexity of Alfarabi's literary style and its elusiveness, Maimonides advises Ibn Tibbon to read his writings with care and attentiveness. Though Maimonides refers explicitly only to one of Alfarabi's political writings in the *Guide* – the *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* – he does cite the *Commentary on the Physics* and *Epistle on the Intellect* as well, it seems, as the *Commentary on the Dialectic*. It is clear, all the same, that Maimonides is conversant and in basic agreement with Alfarabi's general political philosophy. Parenthetically,

*Texts*. Ed. Ch. E. BUTTERWORTH. Ithaca, NY 2001, 65 (Aphorism 95). For the problems raised by Ibn Bājjah's use of the aphorism and how one might make sense of it, see *ibid.*

“Commentaire Épître de l'Adieu,” 238, sec. 66.

as it were, the common goal and background of Averroes and Maimonides – as distinct from Alfarabi’s – should be noted. Both Averroes and Maimonides are esteemed for their knowledge of their respective revealed law as well as for their contributions to a better understanding of it, and both strive to smooth over apparent conflicts between the teachings of the law and those of philosophy. Differently stated, both expend great effort in showing how the law can be interpreted or explained so that apparent inconsistencies between it and philosophy disappear.

Nor was awareness, even acceptance, of Alfarabi’s teaching restricted to the Middle East and Andalusia. Roger Bacon (1214/9–1292), who studied for a few years in Paris, but spent most of his life in Oxford, speaks approvingly of Alfarabi’s *Enumeration of the Sciences* as well as of his *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* and *Commentary on Aristotle’s Rhetoric*. Acquainted with these writings in their Arabic original, he mentions at one point that Latin readers could have access to this last one.<sup>11</sup> For all practical purposes, this marks the end, for several centuries, of Alfarabi’s appeal to those wishing to combine the wisdom of Plato and Aristotle with the demands of revealed law in order to arrive at a better understanding of political life and its limits.

References to Alfarabi are to be found in Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), to be sure, and even in Marsilius Ficino (1433–1499) as well as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494). But Ibn Khaldūn cites Alfarabi primarily to criticize his opinions, especially with respect to political rule and the prerequisites for a virtuous city.<sup>12</sup> Ficino and Pico, while laudatory, cite him with respect to questions about the soul and metaphysics. Again, although references to Alfarabi can be found in later Arabic philosophy, they focus solely on mystical and theosophic themes. In the West, Alfarabi faded into

<sup>11</sup> See Roger Bacon: *Opus Maius*. Trans. R. McKeon, D. McCarthy, E. L. Fortin in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*. Ed. R. LERNER–M. MAHDI. Glencoe, IL 1963, 373–74, 382–83 and 388; all but the last passage is reproduced in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of this work. Ed. J. PARENS–J. C. MACFARLAND. Ithaca, NY 2011, 260–61 and 265–66.

<sup>12</sup> See Ibn Khaldūn: *Muqaddima*. Ed. A. M. QUATREMERE. Paris 1858; reprint Beirut 1970, II, 127. This is in Chapter 3, the section entitled “That Human Civilization undoubtedly needs Politics for its Organization”. For an English version, see Ibn Khaldun: *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History*. Trans. F. ROSENTHAL. Bollingen Series XLIII. New York 1958, Chapter 3, section 50. A fuller examination of this question may be found in BUTTERWORTH, Ch. E.: Ibn Khaldun on The Essential Accidents of Human Social Organization. *MUSJ* 57 (2004) 443–67, issue dedicated to *The Greek Strand in Islamic Political Thought: Proceedings of the Conference held at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, 16–27 June 2003*. Ed. E. GANNAGÉ–P. CRONE–M. AOUAD–D. GUTAS–E. SCHÜTRUMPF.

oblivion, as did Arabic philosophy. The generalization is too sweeping, to be sure. For example, the Pococks, father and son, published an edition of Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* along with Latin and English translations in the late seventeenth century. And there are other faint glimmers of interest here and there, but very few all the same.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Recovery of Alfarabi*

Somewhere around the middle of the nineteenth century, interest in Arabic philosophy and in Alfarabi was rekindled. No less a personality than Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī urged Muslim Indian students to pay attention to Arabic philosophy and, above all, to Alfarabi. While Ernest Renan was alerting interested audiences to the wonders of Averroes and Latin Averroism, Salomon Munk and A. Franck were writing of Arabic and Jewish medieval philosophy more broadly. Eventually, Moritz Steinschneider, who had been toiling over Arabic, Hebrew, and Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts in the Munich Staatsbibliothek, published his comprehensive monograph *Al-Farabi des arabischen Philosophen Leben und Schriften mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Geschichte der griechischen Wissenschaft unter den Arabern*.<sup>14</sup> In it, he painstakingly elaborated all that could then be known about Alfarabi's writings. Others, taking their bearings from the work of Renan, Munk, Franck, and Steinschneider, edited particular treatises and sometimes even translated them into French and German. Soon, scholars in Lebanon and Egypt joined in.

Still, recovery of a tradition is one thing, understanding it accurately another. For some time, Renan's view of Arabic philosophy held sway. Alfarabi was seen as merely an interesting figure who attempted to reconcile

<sup>13</sup> For an account of the Pococks and the activity with respect to the study of Arabic philosophy at that period of time, see DAIBER, H.: The Reception of Islamic Philosophy at Oxford in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The Pococks' (Father and Son) Contribution to the Understanding of Islamic Philosophy in Europe. In *The Introduction of Arabic Philosophy into Europe*. Eds. Ch. E. BUTTERWORTH–B. A. KESSEL. Leiden 1994, 65–82. See also RUSSELL, G. A.: The Impact of the *Philosophus Autodidactus*: Pocockes, John Locke, and the Society of Friends. In *The "Arabick" Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth Century England*. Ed. G. A. RUSSELL. Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 47. Leiden 1991, 224–65.

<sup>14</sup> STEINSCHNEIDER, M.: *Al-Farabi des arabischen Philosophen Leben und Schriften mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Geschichte der griechischen Wissenschaft unter den Arabern*. Mémoire de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St. Petersburg, VIII<sup>e</sup> série, tome XIII, no. 4, 1869; reprint Amsterdam 1966.

religion and philosophy with a greater or lesser degree of success depending on the interpreter. The first to suggest that such a view might not be entirely accurate was Leo Strauss, who simply reported on what he had observed as he read different works by Alfarabi and reports by other philosophers (e. g., Ibn Tufayl) about those works, namely, that Alfarabi does not always say the same thing. As Strauss put it so plainly: "...he treats differently the two kinds of happiness in *On the Attainment of Happiness* and in the [*Philosophy of*] *Plato*; and he treats religious knowledge somewhat differently in the *Enumeration of the Sciences* and in the [*Philosophy of*] *Plato*. Proceeding in accordance with the same rule, he pronounces more or less orthodox views concerning the life after death in *The Virtuous Religious Community* and *The Political Governments*, i. e., in works in which he speaks in his own name. More precisely, in *The Virtuous Religious Community*, he pronounces simply orthodox views, and in *The Political Governments* he pronounces views which, if heretical, could nonetheless still be considered tolerable. But in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* he declares that there is only the happiness of this life, and that all divergent statements are based on 'ravings and old women's tales.'"<sup>15</sup>

But it was the conclusion Strauss drew from these observations that prepared the way for the new understanding of Alfarabi: "Fārābī avails himself then of the specific immunity of the commentator or of the historian in order to speak his mind concerning grave matters in his 'historical' works, rather than in the works in which he speaks in his own name."

As noted above, not all scholars have followed Strauss's lead and read Alfarabi as a political philosopher convinced of the need to write indirectly about questions important to the larger community. But a few have, Muhsin Mahdi chief among them, as the dedication to his book on Alfarabi so clearly indicates. He went further insofar as he discovered manuscripts of writings by Alfarabi that had been lost for centuries, generously made them available to others so that they might be edited and published, translated many into English, and presented far-reaching accounts of their individual teachings. Above all, he paid special attention to the question of how Alfarabi might have ordered his writings and came up with a persuasive explanation that any who would claim to interpret – rather than merely dismiss – Alfarabi must be prepared to combat.

His explanation begins with a careful reading of Alfarabi's admittedly popular *Enumeration of the Sciences*, a reading that leads him to conclude:

<sup>15</sup> STRAUSS, L.: *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. Glencoe, IL 1952, 14. The writings Strauss identifies here as *The Virtuous Religious Community* and *The Political Governments* are now known as *Book of Religion* and *Political Regime*.

“what the *Enumeration of the Sciences* has done is to show that the strict division of sciences into practical and theoretical is no longer *practically tenable*.” That is, given the claim by revealed religion to provide people with clear opinions about all aspects of human life as well as of the larger whole in which it unfolds, the political philosophy of the ancients, with its separation of the human or practical and the universal or theoretical, is no longer persuasive and must therefore be reconsidered and perhaps revised. And, on the premise that the *Book of Religion* stands “as the counterpart of Chapter 5 of the *Enumeration of the Sciences*”, Mahdi goes on to show that it provides “a programmatic indication as to how and why such books [as the *Virtuous City* and *Political Regime*] should be written and for what purpose”. With only the slightest hint of a smile, he adds: “Perhaps the best way to characterize these political works is to say that they are ‘letters’ addressed to the enlightened citizens in the Muslim community, to potential philosophers and potential rulers.”<sup>16</sup> The task now is to find qualified readers for these letters.

To return to the beginning of this essay: one such reader is the distinguished scholar for whom these thoughts are primarily intended, Miklós Maróth. May he thrive long enough to turn his attention to such an endeavor.

<sup>16</sup> MAHDI (n. 3) 96 and 60.