

## Al-Fārābī and Maimonides on the Christian Philosophical Tradition: a Re-evaluation

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The crucial role played by Christians in the preservation of Greek philosophy and in its transmission to the Arabs is acknowledged in the opening chapters of many general works on Arabic philosophy. Yet their contribution to the development of philosophy in the Arab world is often rated as of secondary importance.<sup>1)</sup> The interest of historians of philosophy usually focuses on the passage of "Greek into Arabic."<sup>2)</sup> To the extent that the Eastern Christians did leave their mark on the study of philosophy, their activity is often viewed as detrimental: we are told that they were too theologically minded, and that they even censored the Aristotelian corpus.<sup>3)</sup>

The Muslim philosopher Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 942), who may well have been the first to propound this negative evaluation of his Christian predecessors, has often been cited to support this view. The respect commanded by al-Fārābī's philosophy also affects appreciation of al-Fārābī as a historian: because his insights are valued, his factual assertions are often too easily accepted as true. But given that al-Fārābī was himself involved in the philosophical tradition he describes, it seems reasonable not to accept his claims without some corroboration.

In the last few years more sceptical voices have been heard concerning al-Fārābī's account of the history of philosophy.<sup>4)</sup> The following pages will seek to strengthen this scepticism by offering an analysis of al-Fārābī's

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<sup>1)</sup> See for example Fakhry, p. xxii; J. T. de Boer, *Geschichte der Philosophie im Islam* (Stuttgart, 1901), pp. 17–33; O'Leary, pp. 9–34. The role of the Christians, as well as their conservative tendencies, are already noted in the *Muntakhab ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, p. 113.

<sup>2)</sup> Walzer, pp. 4–6 and p. 60.

<sup>3)</sup> See below.

<sup>4)</sup> See, for instance, Paul Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin; Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au x<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1971), p. 25; Zimmermann, p. CVII.

statements and a motive for his disparaging view of the Christian Aristotelian tradition. I shall examine some well-known texts of al-Fārābī's and of the Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides' (1135–1204) that deal with the Christian philosophical tradition. These texts are not usually read together, and I shall try to show that doing so sheds some light on the reasons for al-Fārābī's preoccupation with the Christian philosophers. I shall also argue that there are grounds for believing that al-Fārābī's own bias affected both the substance of his account and his interpretation of it, and that, consequently, some oft-repeated statements about the Christian Aristotelian tradition must be modified.

## I

In his *Classes of Physicians* Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a quotes some paragraphs in which al-Fārābī outlines his views "concerning the emergence of Philosophy" (*fī zuḥūr al-falsafa*).<sup>5</sup> This text is as intriguing as it is vague. To begin with, it remains unclear where and in what form al-Fārābī published this outline. Shortly after this text, in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's list of al-Fārābī's writings, we find cited: "A discourse concerning the word 'philosophy'; the reason for the emergence of philosophy; with a list of the names of distinguished philosophers, and of those among them with whom he had studied."<sup>6</sup>

Several scholars have assumed that al-Fārābī wrote a book "on the emergence of philosophy", and that the text quoted by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a is the only part of this work to survive.<sup>7</sup> But this assumption is unwarranted. A comparison of the text quoted by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a with the title of the "discourse" in his list reveals the lengthy title to be nothing but a summary of the text he quotes (which is itself only one page long).<sup>8</sup> This text is evi-

<sup>5</sup> 'Uyūn, p. 604. This text was first published in Steinschneider, pp. 211–213. An English translation and an analysis of this text are offered in Rescher, "Farabi", pp. 21–27. See also F. Rosenthal, *Das Fortleben der Antike im Islam* (Zurich and Stuttgart, 1965), pp. 74–76; Idem, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975), p. 50; Strohmaier, esp. p. 382; Mahdi, p. 233, n. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Kalām fī ism al-falsafa wa-sabab zuḥūriha wa-asmā' al-mubrizin fihā wa-'alā man qara'a minhum* ('Uyūn, p. 608).

<sup>7</sup> For example Steinschneider, p. 85; Fakhry, p. 108; Rescher, "Farabi", p. 22; Idem, *Al-Fārābī, An Annotated Bibliography* (Pittsburgh, 1962), p. 45; Gutas, p. 255, note 58.

<sup>8</sup> There also seems to be no reason for Rescher's hesitation ("Farabi", p. 22, n. 10) to identify the *fī zuḥūr al-falsafa* with the *kitāb fī ism al-falsafa wa-sabab zuḥūriha*.

dently the complete "discourse", and not the only surviving part of a larger work. This short text cannot have been an independent book, and indeed no such book is listed by Ibn al-Nadīm, who was al-Fārābī's contemporary.<sup>9</sup>

The character of the item listed by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a seems to find its explanation in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's use of the term "discourse". Some of the items in his list of al-Fārābī's writings are indeed formal compositions, referred to as "books" (sg. *kitāb*) or "epistles" (sg. *risāla*), but others are described as more casual pronouncements on certain problems, dictated in reply to questions put to al-Fārābī. These are sometimes called "discourses".<sup>10</sup>

Yet other items in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's list are clearly parts of books (or essays). These books are listed as such, but Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a also knew of parts of them that existed in a separate form, and these he lists accordingly.<sup>11</sup> There are several possible explanations for the existence of such items. It may be that in some manuscripts the division of a book into chapters was indicated more clearly than in others, thus permitting the separation of the book into independent units. Alternatively, some student or scribe may have considered certain parts of a book to be of particular interest, and copied them separately. Still another possibility is that Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a found these excerpts quoted in some other book. At any rate, such "floating" chapters of a book are also described as "discourses".<sup>12</sup> It is quite possible that the "discourse on the emergence of philosophy" was part of some book of al-Fārābī's. But we can be sure that al-Fārābī did not dedicate a whole book to this subject.

<sup>9</sup> See *The Fihrist*, ed. G. Flügel (repr. Beirut), p. 263.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., *kalām amla'ahu 'alā sā'il sa'alahu 'an ma'nā dhāt wa-ma'nā jawhar wa-ma'nā ṭabī'a* ('Uyūn, p. 609).

<sup>11</sup> That Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a listed al-Fārābī's books in their manuscript form is clear from other instances as well: *The book of the two philosophies, that of Plato and that of Aristotle*, is listed as *makhrūm al-ākhir* ("with a missing end"). Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a also notes the existence of an autograph of the short commentary on the *Analytica Priora* (*wa-wujida kitābuhu hādha mutarjaman bi-khaṭṭihi*), see 'Uyūn, p. 608.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., *kalām lahu fī ma'nā al-falsafa*, which is likely to have been identical with the first part of the "the discourse on the word philosophy and the reason for its emergence" (and not a separate book on the word 'philosophy'). The quotations given by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a from this "discourse on the word philosophy" occupy five lines, introduced with the words: "I have copied this from a discourse by al-Fārābī concerning (*fī*) the meaning of the word 'philosophy'" ('Uyūn, p. 604:9–13).

## II

The fact that this "discourse" is not a full-fledged book does not diminish its importance. The relevant passage in Ibn Abi Uṣaybi'a begins with a brief overview of pre-Christian philosophy.<sup>13)</sup>

Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī relates, concerning the emergence of philosophy, what reads as follows.<sup>14)</sup> He says: "*Philosophy*<sup>15)</sup> became widespread in the days of the Greek kings, and after the death of Aristotle [it was pursued] in Alexandria until the end of the days of the woman [Cleopatra]."

Although the opening sentence of the quotation from al-Fārābī speaks of philosophy in general, the text in fact deals only with Aristotelian philosophy.

Al-Fārābī then proceeds to describe the role supposedly played by Augustus and Andronicus in determining the Aristotelian corpus. He goes on to recount the founding of two academies, one in *Rūmiya*, the other in Alexandria, adding:

This (teaching) continued in this fashion *until the coming of Christianity*. Then instruction in *Rūmiya* was discontinued. It continued in Alexandria until the Christian king considered the matter. The bishops were then assembled to deliberate as to what should remain of this instruction and what should be abolished. They were of the opinion that there should be instruction in the books of logic, up to the assertoric figures, and that there should be no teaching of *what comes after that*. For they were of the opinion that *this* contained things harmful to Christianity, and that what they permitted for instruction contained things that contributed to the vindication (*nuṣra*)<sup>16)</sup> of their religion. Overt instruction therefore remained within this prescribed limit, whereas whatever was consulted *of the rest* was consulted covertly,<sup>17)</sup> until the advent of Islam, long afterwards.

<sup>13)</sup> My translation differs from the translations mentioned in note 5 above. I have set those words that call for special explanation in italics.

<sup>14)</sup> *Mā hādha naṣṣuhū*; these words suggest a verbal quotation from al-Fārābī rather than a summary of the substance of his words. (Compare Rescher, "Farabi", p. 22, who translates: "relates . . . that whose substance is this. He says that . . .").

<sup>15)</sup> *Amr al-falsafa*, a rather loose expression. Perhaps "the practice of philosophy." Rescher, *ibid.*, translates: "instruction of philosophy".

<sup>16)</sup> Rescher translates: "Victory". On *nuṣra*, see below, p. 276 and p. 279.

<sup>17)</sup> Rescher's translation here follows Meyerhof, p. 394. This translation, which distinguishes between a "(public) exoteric" part of the instruction and a part that "was studied privately," misses al-Fārābī's point. *Zāhir* here is not juxtaposed

The general picture drawn in this paragraph is clear enough. The period between the rise of Christianity and the rise of Islam is described by al-Fārābī as the dark age of Aristotelian teaching. It is marked by a collaboration of state and church in restricting philosophical instruction by closing of one of the schools in which it was carried out and by censoring the literature.

The details, however, are considerably less clear. When did this Christian dark age begin? When and how were the decisions taken? What school was closed, and what was the restricted material?

Al-Fārābī does not specify the dates of "the coming of Christianity", the closing of the school in *Rūmiya*, and the "looking into the matter" by the Christian king. Rescher apparently took "the coming of Christianity" to be the birth of Christianity as a religion. He suggested that the "Christian king" was Constantine, and he took the closing of the school to be the closing of the school at Rome, some time between the advent of Christianity and the conversion of Constantine.<sup>18)</sup>

This interpretation is difficult to accept. Al-Fārābī seems to suggest that the closing of the school was the result of the "coming of Christianity", that is to say, that it was the Christians who caused the closing. Such an intervention could not have taken place before Christianity became the official religion of the empire. We must therefore assume that when al-Fārābī speaks of the "coming of Christianity", he means its adoption as the official religion of the Roman Empire, after the conversion of Constantine.

Nor can the school that was closed be the one in Rome.<sup>19)</sup> The two leading institutions of Aristotelian instruction were always Alexandria and Athens. In the sixth century there was also a chair of Aristotelian instruction in Constantinople. Rome was not on a par with these centers, and no dramatic closing of its academy is recorded. We could, of course, say that al-Fārābī was simply mistaken. It is also possible that he is using the term *Rūmiya* here in the sense of "Greek" or "Byzantine", thus referring to Cons-

with *bāṭin* (esoteric) but with *mastūr* (covert). This last word, indicating something done in secret, underlines al-Fārābī's claim that part of the *corpus* was explicitly forbidden (rather than just studied in a different forum). Oddly enough, in his analysis of the text Rescher abandons his own translation: he adopts the (correct) interpretation of al-Fārābī's account as referring to prohibited texts, and even takes it (incorrectly) to be historically accurate.

<sup>18)</sup> Rescher, "Farabi", pp. 22-23.

<sup>19)</sup> As is assumed by most scholars who deal with this passage. See, for instance, Steinschneider, p. 86; Rescher, "Farabi", pp. 22-23; Strohmaier, p. 382; Pines, "A Parallel", p. 126.

tantinople. His account, however, reflects, in all likelihood, the famous closing of the Academy in Athens in 529 by Justinian.<sup>20)</sup>

In other words, when al-Fārābī speaks of Christianity interfering with the teaching of philosophy, he focuses on the period close to the rise of Islam, from the sixth century on.<sup>21)</sup>

### III

If we turn now to what al-Fārābī says about the suppression of certain works, we face two problems: we must first try to understand what exactly al-Fārābī is saying, and then discover to what extent his account corresponds to the historical events known to us from other sources.

Al-Fārābī states categorically that the decision on the philosophical curriculum was taken by an assembly of bishops. He is also clear that the only criterion the bishops used in making their decision was religious. They forbade the teaching of whatever might be harmful to Christianity, and commended the teaching only of that which was considered useful for the vindication of Christianity.

The first difficulty lies in the identification of the proscribed material. Al-Fārābī's words can be read in two ways:

- a) The bishops were of the opinion that instruction in the books of logic should only be up to the end of the assertoric figures.
- b) The bishops were of the opinion that instruction should be only in the books of logic, and only up to the end of the assertoric figures.

The two readings entail very different understandings of the text. According to the first reading, part of the Aristotelian logic was considered

<sup>20)</sup> Al-Mas'ūdī, in the parallel account, distinguishes between *Athina* and *Rūmiya*; see *Kitāb al-tanbih wa'l-ishrāf*, ed. M. Y. De Goeje (Leiden, 1984<sup>1</sup>), pp. 121–122; and see Stern, p. 30. On the closing of the Academy in Athens (which was, in fact, less dramatic and final than Malalas would have it) see Cameron, "The Last Days". On the various chairs of philosophy in this period see idem, "The End of the Ancient Universities", *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale* 10 (1967, pp. 653–673, esp. pp. 658–662. In the present context it is also important to note that Justinian's restrictions concerned the teachers rather than the Aristotelian content of their teaching. See also A. C. Lloyd, "The Later Neoplatonists", in A. M. Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 274–275, 314; *EI*, s.v. "Rūm".

<sup>21)</sup> This understanding precludes the possibility of interpreting what follows in al-Fārābī's historical account as referring to the Arian controversies. On the Aristotelian aspects of the Arian debates see O'Leary, pp. 27–28. On the "Christian Aristotelian reaction of the sixth century" see Booth, p. 56; Walzer, p. 4.

particularly harmful. This part of the logic, and this alone, was banished from the curriculum.<sup>22)</sup> The implication is that the rest of the Aristotelian corpus was retained. The second reading suggests that part of the Aristotelian corpus – the logical part up to the *Analytica Priora* I,7 – was considered particularly helpful, and was therefore approved for teaching. *All the rest* of the Aristotelian corpus (and not only the rest of the logical books) was deemed harmful and proscribed.

But whatever reading we adopt, al-Fārābī's words here *cannot* be taken to mean that the *Analytica Posteriora*, and it alone, was forbidden by the Christians.<sup>23)</sup>

Ibn Abi Uṣaybi'a continues his account, and the rest of his quotation from al-Fārābī has some bearing on the problem of the banned material. Al-Fārābī describes the transmission of Aristotelian teaching from Alexandria, via Antioch and Harran, to Baghdad. In naming the people who were the last links in this process he notes in passing a bifurcation of the Christian students of philosophy; those who were distracted by their preoccupation with religious matters (about whom he says: *tashāghala fī dīnihi*), and those who remained faithful to their philosophical calling. Ibn Abi Uṣaybi'a then says:

In those days (i.e., before the emergence of philosophy among Muslims), the material studied went as far as the assertoric figures. Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī says of himself that he studied with Yuhannā b. Ḥaylān up to the end of the *Analytica Posteriora*. That which comes after the assertoric figures used to be called "the part that is not read", until [the time came when] it was read. Afterwards, when the matter passed into [the hands of] Muslim instructors, it became standard practice to read from the assertoric figures on, as far as a person was capable of reading. Abū Naṣr said that he himself had read up to the end of the *Analytica Posteriora*.<sup>24)</sup>

This paragraph, again, can be read in two ways: it can be taken to mean that, according to al-Fārābī, the Christians forbade the teaching of logic from the *Analytica Priora* I,7 on; that the *Analytica Posteriora* and the later books of the *Organon* were known as "the unread part"; and that al-Fārābī was the first to legitimize the study of logic beyond this set point.

<sup>22)</sup> Rescher, "Farabi", who reads Ibn Abi Uṣaybi'a in this way, complements the text accordingly: "They were of the opinion that in this [latter part of logic] there was harm etc."

<sup>23)</sup> Compare below, notes 26 and 37 and the corresponding text.

<sup>24)</sup> 'Uyūn, p. 605.



On the other hand, al-Fārābī's words here fit just as well with the second reading suggested above. If we understand the quotation as saying that the Christians permitted only the teaching of logic up to the end of the assertoric figures, that is, up to the *Analytica Priora* I.7, then this last paragraph could mean that the whole of the rest of the Aristotelian corpus was known as "the unread part"; and that, in studying the *Analytica Posteriora*, al-Fārābī was the first to go beyond the set limit.

In both readings, al-Fārābī's representation of himself as something of a pioneer is apparent, as is also the special importance he attaches to the *Analytica Posteriora*. The study of this book is presented by al-Fārābī as the breaking through of an artificial barrier. We know that al-Fārābī indeed regarded the *Analytica Posteriora* as particularly important. In the account of the parts of logic in his *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm* he says:

The fourth part among all the parts of logic (i.e., the Apodictics, the *Analytica Posteriora*) is the most effective for the achievement of dignity and leadership.<sup>25</sup>)

He presents all the other parts of logic as either preparatory to or explanatory of it.

Al-Fārābī's high esteem for this book may explain why he stresses the fact that he himself continued his studies beyond the propaedeutics, to the core of logic, the *Analytica Posteriora*. But this, again, does not imply that the *Analytica Posteriora* is what he means when speaking of "the unread part";<sup>26</sup>) his words, as quoted by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, can more easily be

<sup>25</sup>) *Ashadduha taqadduman fī'l-sharaf wa'l-riyāsa*. See *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*, pp. 50–51; Steinschneider, p. 209. The prime importance of the *Analytica Posteriora* was already upheld by Aristotle's Alexandrian commentators (see Walzer, p. 133). A milder formulation of this view presents the *Analytica Posteriora* as "the noblest (*ashraf*) of these books", as in Miskawaih's *Tartīb al-sa'ādāt*; see Ibn Miskawaih, *al-Sa'āda fī falsafat al-akhlāq*, ed. S. 'A. al-Ṭubjī al-Suyūṭī (Cairo, 1928<sup>2</sup>), p. 57; Gutas, p. 256, note 61; and see below, note 61. Al-Fārābī's choice of words, however, suggests a more activist interpretation: the *tamyīz* allows him to introduce both *taqaddum* and *riyāsa*. By adding these two words, pregnant with political connotations, al-Fārābī loads the *Analytica Posteriora* with power, which can be either coveted or feared.

<sup>26</sup>) Rescher ("Farabi", p. 24) writes such an interpretation into his translation of the text: "That which was taught [in logic] at the time was up to the end of the assertoric figures. The part [of the two *Analytica*] which comes after the assertoric figures (of the syllogism [i.e., which comes after *An. Prior.* I.7]) was called 'the part which is not read' [i.e., in the lecture curriculum]." The assumption that the *Analytica Posteriora* was given a particular treatment is shared by many scholars, see note 37 below.

taken to mean that the Christians limited the instruction of philosophy to the propaedeutic books of the *Organon*, stopping short before the *Analytica Posteriora*.

#### IV

If al-Fārābī's wording can cause some confusion, it is even harder to prove — or disprove — the historicity of his claims, for the evidence is inconclusive. Let us quickly review the facts: All the later books of the *Organon*, including the *Analytica Posteriora*, were not popular in the Syriac schools. Commentators like John of Damascus and his disciple Theodore Abū Qurra (d. 830) failed to comment on the *Analytica Posteriora*, and most of the surviving philosophical material in Syriac concerns the early books of the *Organon*.<sup>27</sup>) This unpopularity was not peculiar to the later books of the *Organon*: Aristotle's works on physics, natural sciences and metaphysics were not formally taught. Selected parts of them were studied in various forms, but the books themselves were not part of the curriculum.<sup>28</sup>)

It should be emphasized that the unpopularity of these texts did not amount to their total disappearance from the philosophers' horizon. A commentary on the complete *Organon* was written by Abha Kaškar (d. 628);<sup>29</sup>) a Syriac commentary on the *Analytica Posteriora* was written by Jacob, Bishop of the Arabs (d. 724);<sup>30</sup>) and the translations of the *Analytica Posteriora* that are quoted by later sources (such as Bar Hebraeus), while they may be quite late, may equally well be early, having perhaps been made by Sergius of Resh'ayna (d. 536).<sup>31</sup>) Nevertheless, compared to the plethora of commentaries on the earlier books of the *Organon*, the evidence for interest in the later books is admittedly meager.

Al-Fārābī's statement concerning the limitations of the Christian curriculum is to this extent corroborated. What remains uncorroborated is al-Fārābī's statement about the circumstances in which this curriculum was set and the motives that dictated it. Al-Fārābī, we must remember, does not speak of mere lack of popularity of parts of the *Organon*, but of an edict, issued by Church and State, that set strict limits on the study of Aristotle.

<sup>27</sup>) Walzer, pp. 68, 98; Rescher, "Farabi", pp. 14, 26–27.

<sup>28</sup>) On a similar phenomenon in the Christian West see Ibrahim Madkur, *L'organon d'Aristote dans le monde arabe: ses traductions, son étude et ses applications* (Paris, 1969), pp. 2–3.

<sup>29</sup>) Baumstark, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup>) Baumstark, p. 257; Rescher, "Farabi", p. 27 and note 18; Sauter, p. 524.

<sup>31</sup>) For the clarification of this point I am indebted to Dr. Sebastian Brock; and see Brock, p. 26.

None of the above mentioned facts implies the existence of such an edict, and they certainly do not indicate the existence of a specific ban on the *Analytica Posteriora*. The attempts of various scholars to present these facts as evidence of such a ban are wholly misleading.<sup>32)</sup>

If conclusion can be drawn from these facts, it is precisely that there was no ban: that if any writer was inclined to study these books, and was willing to invest the necessary effort, he was free to do so. Thus the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (d. 823) launched a search for commentaries on the *Topics* and on the books that followed it in the Alexandrian arrangement of the *Organon*. The involvement of this patriarch in a religiously suspect project is highly unlikely, and when the Patriarch asked that the search be carried out with "the appropriate discretion" his reasons were no doubt to preserve the secrecy that befits the hunt for rare objects.<sup>33)</sup>

Al-Fārābī in the text quoted by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a clearly focuses on the Greek-speaking Christian school of Alexandria (rather than on the Syriac speaking Nestorians). But the evidence concerning Alexandria leads in the same direction as the evidence concerning the Syriac schools: the later books of the *Organon* were not nearly as commonly read as the first four books, but there is no evidence that they were actually forbidden. Especially noteworthy in this context is the fact that John Philoponus (d. 580) wrote a commentary (in Greek) on the *Analytica Posteriora*.<sup>34)</sup> The existence of this commentary led Pines to conjecture that the alleged interdict was issued only after the publication of John Philoponus' book.<sup>35)</sup> It is nevertheless remarkable that this Christian theologian, in whose person were embodied for al-Fārābī many of the ills of the Christian treatment of

philosophy,<sup>36)</sup> had no qualms about reading the *Analytica Posteriora* and commenting on it.

So far, then, we have found no independent support for al-Fārābī's claims concerning the ban. The occasional attempts of modern scholars to corroborate al-Fārābī's accounts by what is presented as outside evidence are misleading: for such supposedly outside evidence the reader is referred to previous scholarly studies, which, when checked, turn out to rely ultimately on al-Fārābī alone.<sup>37)</sup>

The only evidence that deserves serious consideration as possible corroboration of al-Fārābī's claim is a paragraph in Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's treatise "On the Fourth Figure of the Categorical Syllogism". At the end of this treatise Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 1153) says that he has limited his discussion to the absolute (assertoric) premisses, since the necessary and possible premisses belong to a different branch of science. He then remarks that "already the ancients separated this branch of the science from the first: this (branch) was known to the later Alexandrians as the part which is not read."<sup>38)</sup> Unlike al-Fārābī's words, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's seem to suggest that the "unread part" was specifically the *Analytica Posteriora*.

According to Pines "there is no reason to think that there exists a direct connection" between Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's statement and the passage from al-Fārābī. To my mind, however, although such a direct connection cannot be proved, we have every reason to allow for the possibility of its existence.

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ acknowledges his indebtedness in this treatise to a Syriac source (the priest Dinḥa, who may be identified with the Christian of this name who lived around 800 C.E.), and the terminology for the various

<sup>32)</sup> See Steinschneider, *Farabi*, p. 86 and note 5; Rescher, "Farabi", pp. 24-27; see also idem, *Studies in the History of Arabic Logic* (Pittsburgh, 1968), p. 65; Walzer, pp. 68, 98; F. E. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus; The Oriental Translations and Commentaries on the Aristotelian Corpus* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), pp. 17-18; Gutas, p. 249; Sauter, p. 525; Steinschneider, p. 86, note 5. Sauter and Steinschneider rely on E. Renan, p. 40 (who, as Sauter admits, "does not provide any proof" for the claim that the Syriac commentators did not go beyond *An. Prior. I. 7*) and on Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a.

<sup>33)</sup> See O. Braun, "Brief des Katholikos Timotheos I", *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902), pp. 6-7.

<sup>34)</sup> *Ioannis Philoponi in Aristotelis Analytica Posteriora Commentaria*, ed. M. Wallies (Berlin, 1909).

<sup>35)</sup> Pines, "A Parallel", p. 127.

<sup>36)</sup> Al-Fārābī reacted particularly against Philoponus' proofs for the creation of the world. See Mahdi, esp. pp. 233-236; Badawi, *Rasā'il*, p. 17; see also Pines, "Philosophical Sources", p. lxxxv. But beyond this particular point of disagreement, al-Fārābī saw Philoponus's very approach to philosophy as dangerous, see below, note 49 and corresponding text.

<sup>37)</sup> Thus Rescher argues that "the eastern Christians (especially the Nestorians) took a disapproving view of the epistemology of the *Posterior Analytics*." (Rescher, "Farabi", p. 26 and note 17.) He supports his claim with references to studies by Steinschneider (M. Steinschneider, *Die arabischen Übersetzungen aus dem Griechischen* (= *Beiheft XII zum Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, 1893) (Graz, 1960), p. 22) and Walzer. But Steinschneider quotes no other source than al-Fārābī; and as for Walzer, he refers to the classical study by Meyerhof, which in turn relies solely on al-Fārābī.

<sup>38)</sup> See Rescher, *Galen*, p. 87; Pines, "A Parallel", pp. 127-128. I am indebted to the late Professor Pines for drawing my attention to his study and for discussing its implication with me.

kinds of syllogism is not the one used by al-Fārābī. This proves that Ibn al-Šalāḥ had not read al-Fārābī's book on the fourth syllogism (a fact which we already know from an outright declaration at the beginning of Ibn al-Šalāḥ's treatise).<sup>39</sup>) But by the same token, the fact that Ibn al-Šalāḥ uses the expression "the unread part", which is exactly the one used by al-Fārābī, may have resulted from Ibn al-Šalāḥ's having read some other text of al-Fārābī's, perhaps the one quoted by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a. In Ibn al-Šalāḥ's lifetime al-Fārābī's authority in logic was already well established. Ibn al-Šalāḥ felt the need to admit, somewhat apologetically, that he had not read al-Fārābī's book on the fourth syllogism; this implies not only that he was familiar with al-Fārābī's name, but also that he considered al-Fārābī worth reading. He may have come to believe this from reading other books by al-Fārābī. It seems to me, therefore, that the possibility that Ibn al-Šalāḥ derived his information concerning the "unread part" directly from al-Fārābī cannot be ruled out. If so, he would be the first in a list of respectable scholars who misinterpreted al-Fārābī's statement concerning the scope of the "unread" material.

But even if we were to accept Pines' evaluation and regard Ibn al-Šalāḥ as an independent source, Ibn al-Šalāḥ's remark corroborates only al-Fārābī's statement that the school of philosophy in Alexandria treated the first four books of the *Organon* as a separate unit, and that the other books (or some of them) were known as "the unread part". But al-Fārābī's claim that the unread part was actually forbidden does not appear in Ibn al-Šalāḥ's treatise. Ibn al-Šalāḥ's phraseology seems rather to suggest a purely technical arrangement that separated the 'read' from the 'unread' part.

## V

A plausible explanation for such a technical arrangement of the *Organon* can be found in another major testimony.

Ḥunain ibn Ishāq (809–877), in his famous *risāla*, lists the writings of Galen and their various translations into Syriac and Arabic. He also records the Galenian works which were studied in Alexandria, saying:

These are the books to the study of which it was customary to confine oneself in the places of medical instruction in Alexandria. . . . But as regards the remaining books, it was customary to read them individually and in private, after one had studied thoroughly the books previously mentioned.<sup>40</sup>)

<sup>39</sup>) Rescher, *Galen*, p. 76:14–15.

<sup>40</sup>) Bergsträsser, pp. 18–19, and p. 15 in Bergsträsser's German translation. A slightly different English translation is given by Rescher, *Development*, pp. 21–22.

Ḥunain is here making a distinction between various levels of study. He says not only that different books were studied at the different levels, but also that the same book might be divided into a part that belonged to the elementary curriculum and a part that was studied by advanced students. Thus, of the sixteen chapters of Galen's book on the pulse, only four were formally studied.<sup>41</sup>) Ḥunain also notes that the Alexandrian curriculum had a direct bearing on the number of surviving manuscripts: he says that the reason why Greek manuscripts of Galen's book *On the means of healing* are scarce is that they were not included in the teaching material at Alexandria.<sup>42</sup>)

Like al-Fārābī, Ḥunain notices that instruction in Alexandria had precise, set limits. But whereas al-Fārābī blames the restrictions on Christian bigotry, Ḥunain offers a pedagogical explanation. Applied to the instruction of philosophy, Ḥunain's explanation would mean that while the first four books of logic were considered appropriate for elementary instruction, the other books of the Aristotelian corpus, including the remaining books of logic, were considered appropriate only for advanced students. They were not part of the structured teaching, but they were equally not banned: they were merely left for advanced study in private.

The fact that "the four books" were indeed considered to be propaedeutic, while the other books were perceived as belonging to higher level of education, is stated by many scholars.<sup>43</sup>) At the same time, some of these scholars also accept al-Fārābī's statement that "the other books" were forbidden.<sup>44</sup>) The two statements are, however, mutually exclusive.

An examination of the study of philosophy in the Latin West, which one might expect to be illuminating, in fact produces results as inconclusive as the analysis of our sources concerning the Syrian schools. Pines, in his aforementioned study, discusses the existence of the *logica vetus* in the West. This was "a sort of canon" which comprised Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, but, unlike the usual eastern curriculum, did not include the first chapters of the *Analytica Priora*. Pines points out the parallels between the *Logica vetus* and the teaching material in the east, and tries to account for the differences between them. He suggests that "the similar effects in the East and the West were occasioned by one and the same cause, i.e., the interdict . . . promulgated by ecclesiastical

<sup>41</sup>) Bergsträsser, p. 14.

<sup>42</sup>) Bergsträsser, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup>) For instance Brock, p. 26; Rescher, *Development*, pp. 21–22; Peters, p. 58.

<sup>44</sup>) This is particularly striking in Rescher's studies, see his *Development*, p. 14; *Studies in the History of Arabic Logic*, p. 65; and see note 17 above.



authorities at the behest of the emperor."<sup>45</sup>) But in the West, as in the East, the curriculum may perfectly well have been dictated by practical considerations (namely, the estimate that elementary logic as contained in the first four books of the *Organon* answered the needs of most students) rather than by politico-religious ones (namely, the supposed fear of teaching the *Analytica Posteriora*). Given the fact that Church councils are relatively well documented,<sup>46</sup> and that there is no trace of such an interdict, it is likely that the anti-Aristotelian "assembly of bishops" is al-Fārābī's own contribution to church history.

## VI

We need not see al-Fārābī's statement as an intentional distortion of the facts. It is much more likely that al-Fārābī's bias against the Christian philosophers caused him to misunderstand their history.<sup>47</sup> The existence of such a bias can already be guessed from the choice of words in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's quotation: expressions like "he became preoccupied with his religion" and "vindication of their religion" (*nuṣra*) reflect, in a small way, al-Fārābī's mistrust of the Christian philosophers.

This mistrust is a little more explicite in al-Fārābī's attitude to John Philoponus. Al-Fārābī ascribes to Philoponus apologetical, utilitarian motives in the development of his philosophical positions.

One may suspect that he [i.e., Philoponus] sought, by his refutation of Aristotle, to vindicate<sup>48</sup> (existing) compositions concerning the world which were written in his religious community, or else that he tried to avoid contradicting the beliefs held by the people of his religious community and tolerated by their leaders, so as not to meet the same fate as Socrates.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup>) Pines, "A Parallel", p. 129.

<sup>46</sup>) See Charles Joseph Hefele, *Histoire des Conciles d'après les documents originaux* (10 vols.) (Paris, 1907 on). See also Arthur Vööbus, ed and transl., *The Statutes of the School of Nisibis* (Stockholm, 1961); *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, I(2): "Aristotélisme de la Scolastique", p. 1869 ff.; Renan, p. 3; Dörrie, *Theologische Real Enzyklopädie*, 3, svv. "Aristoteles / Aristotelismus / Antiker Aristotelismus", pp. 768-776, esp. 775-776.

<sup>47</sup>) As noted by Zimmermann, pp. xcix, cviii.

<sup>48</sup>) Al-Fārābī uses the word *nuṣra*.

<sup>49</sup>) See Muhsin Mahdi, "The Arabic Text of alfarabi's Against John the Grammarian" in S. A. Hanna, ed., *Medieval and Middle Eastern Studies in Honor of Aziz Suryal Atiya* (Leiden, 1972) p. 277, and the translation given in Mahdi, p. 257; also Badawi, *Rasā'il*, p. 111. Philoponus' difficulties with the Christian authorities of his times are recorded also in the *Muntakhab ṣiḥān al-ḥikma*, p. 113. See further al-Bay-

The political and polemical motives ascribed here to Philoponus are encapsulated in the word *nuṣra*. And like in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's quotation, this word betrays al-Fārābī's conviction that the Christians' concern in philosophy was apologetic.

But the precise nature of al-Fārābī's bias becomes evident only from a text by Maimonides, which is probably also dependent on al-Fārābī.

In chapter 71 of the first part of his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides attempts to trace the origins of *kalām* (and, in particular, of Jewish *kalām*). According to him, the encounter of Christianity with Greek philosophy during the first Christian centuries forced the Christians to formulate an apologetical theology, and in order to do so they had first to acquire philosophical tools. When Christianity became the religion of the empire, this apologetical philosophy was reinforced by the power of the state:

Inasmuch as the Christian community came to include those communities [i.e. the Greeks and the Syrians]. . . and inasmuch as the opinions of the philosophers were widely accepted in those communities in which philosophy had first arisen, and inasmuch as kings arose who protected religion, the learned of those periods from among the Greeks and Syrians saw that those preachings were greatly and clearly opposed to the philosophic opinions. Thus there arose among them the science of the *kalām*. They started to establish premises that would be useful to them with regard to their belief and to refute those opinions that ruined the foundations of their law.<sup>50</sup>

For Maimonides, then, the Christian philosophical tradition was nothing more than *kalām*, that is to say: theology. For him, this meant that

[the Christians] did not conform in their premises to the appearance of that which exists, but considered how being ought to be in order that it should furnish a proof for the correctness of a particular opinion, or at least should not refute it.<sup>51</sup>

In other words, instead of directing their thoughts towards the quest for truth, these early Christian *mutakallimūn* harnessed the truth to their theology, and still worse, to their polity.

ḥaḳī, *Tatimmat ṣiḥān al-ḥikma*, ed. M. Shafī' (Lahore, 1935), p. 23:6. For the actual role that Philoponus may have played in reconciling the Christian authorities to the teaching of philosophy by pagans see H.-D. Saffrey, "Le Chrétien Jean Philopon et la survivance de l'école d'Alexandrie au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Revue des Etudes Grecques* 67 (1954), pp. 407-408; Mahdi, pp. 234-235; and L. G. Westernick, *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (Amsterdam, 1962), p. XII.

<sup>50</sup>) *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*, p. 122 (= *Guide*, p. 177).

<sup>51</sup>) *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*, p. 122 (= *Guide*, p. 178).



Maimonides' criticism of the use made of Greek philosophy by the Christians applies not only to what is admittedly and openly Christian theology, but also to what we generally designate as "Christian Philosophy". He specifically mentions John Philoponus, who had come to personify the Christianization of the Alexandrian school.<sup>52</sup>) A sharp critique of Philoponus was part of al-Fārābī's lost book *On the Changing Beings*, a work with which Maimonides was familiar.<sup>53</sup>) Hence the possibility, suggested by Pines, that in this historical sketch Maimonides was dependent on al-Fārābī.<sup>54</sup>)

Maimonides' main interest was not the Christians, but his own Jewish opponents, theologians whose opinions he tried to discredit. He therefore does not end his historical sketch with the Christians, but goes on to discuss Muslim *kalām*:

When thereupon the community of Islam arrived and the books of philosophers were transmitted to it, then were transmitted to it those refutations composed against the philosophers. Thus they found the *kalām* of John Philoponus, of Ibn 'Adī<sup>55</sup>) and of others with regard to these notions, held on to it, and were victorious in their own opinion in a great task they sought to accomplish.<sup>56</sup>) To this Christian *kalām* the Moslems then added their own touch, and then passed it on to the Jewish Geonim and to the Karaites. Maimonides' view that the first Jewish theologians followed in everything their Mu'tazilite predecessors does not concern us here. But we should note his conviction that

all the statements that the men of Islam — both the Mu'tazila and the Ash'ariyya — have made concerning these notions are all of them opinions founded upon premises that are taken over from the books of the Greeks and the Syrians who wished to disagree with the opinions of the philosophers.<sup>57</sup>)

<sup>52</sup>) This despite the fact that Philoponus "the Grammarian" "never held a chair of philosophy in Alexandria", and that "at the time there was no synthesis of Aristotelianism and Christianity within the school" (Cameron, "The Last Days", p. 36; and see Mahdi, 235). On Philoponus's combination of philosophy and theology see, for instance, Walzer, *Greek into Arabic*, p. 4; and see note 49 above.

<sup>53</sup>) See *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*, p. 156 (= *Guide*, p. 222).

<sup>54</sup>) Pines, "Philosophical Sources", p. lxxvii.

<sup>55</sup>) On him, see below, sections VII and VIII.

<sup>56</sup>) *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*, p. 122 (= *Guide*, pp. 177–178).

<sup>57</sup>) *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*, p. 122 (= *Guide*, p. 177).

According to Maimonides, then, it was the Christian *kalām* which fathered Muslim *kalām*. It is precisely this connection that causes Maimonides to be interested in the history of Christian thought.

If we now compare Ibn Abi Uṣaybi'a's text with the passage from Maimonides' *Guide* we find that the two are strikingly similar. Ibn Abi Uṣaybi'a concentrates on the content of the curriculum, whereas Maimonides' text is more phenomenological and more outspokenly judgmental. But both advance the view that, in shaping the Christian approach to philosophy, religious considerations were dominant. They also both suggest that these Christian religious considerations were closely related to political ones, and that such scholarly-religious decisions were manipulated by "Christian kings," i.e., the state. And although Maimonides speaks of both Syriac and Greek Christianity, the special place he grants John Philoponus is in line with al-Fārābī's concentration on the Alexandrian Academy.<sup>58</sup>)

Such an analysis of the history of philosophy is rather unusual; And in view of the profound influence that al-Fārābī had on Maimonides,<sup>59</sup>) the similarity of approach makes it almost certain that Maimonides' analysis does indeed derive from al-Fārābī, as suggested by Pines. In the present state of our knowledge it is impossible to determine whether the two historical accounts, that of Maimonides and that of Ibn Abi Uṣaybi'a, are both drawn from the same book, be it the *On the Changing Beings* or some other work of al-Fārābī's.

Granted now that Maimonides' account is indeed derived from al-Fārābī, this account casts new light on al-Fārābī's interest in the Christian Aristotelian tradition. For it now becomes clear that al-Fārābī's bias against the Christians had more immediate reasons than the contempt for the limited horizons of people long dead, and that this bias should be seen in context with al-Fārābī's hostility to his contemporaries, the Muslim *mutakallimūn*.

That al-Fārābī was hostile to *kalām* we know from his own words. In his *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm* al-Fārābī describes *kalām* as a system contrived to harness truth (i.e., philosophy) to the political needs of a particular religion. According to him, the *mutakallimūn* do not shun the use of either demagogical means or physical coercion to achieve their aim, the vindication (*nuṣra*) and the spread of their religion.<sup>60</sup>)

<sup>58</sup>) See above, pp. 272–273 and note 36.

<sup>59</sup>) See Pines, "Philosophical Sources", pp. lxxviii–xcii; Lawrence V. Berman, "Maimonides, The Disciple of al-Fārābī", *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974), 154–171.

<sup>60</sup>) *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*, p. 100.

Like the passage in Maimonides' *Guide*, *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm* seethes with contempt for the *mutakallimūn*. Whereas Maimonides moves, more or less systematically, from Christian to Muslim and Jewish *mutakallimūn*, al-Fārābī does not specify the religious identity of his *mutakallimūn*. But we should not conclude that al-Fārābī reserves the term *mutakallimūn* to Muslims. In fact his '*ilm al-kalām* in the *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm* is a technique (*malaka*) that can be adapted to the needs of any religion. The use of the term *kalām* as a generic name for a phenomenon that can be found in various religions is rather unusual,<sup>61</sup>) and it is quite certain that Maimonides learnt this use from al-Fārābī.

From Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a we learn of al-Fārābī's view concerning the development of Christian philosophy, and from the *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* we know al-Fārābī's attitude to *kalām*; Maimonides' text allows us to reconstruct the missing link between these two parts of al-Fārābī's teaching. It tells us that for al-Fārābī the Christian philosophers who "became preoccupied with their religion" and who censored the *Organon* were really Christian *mutakallimūn*. And it also specifies that the faults of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* have their origin in the writings of their Christian predecessors.

Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's text claims to offer an unbiased historical survey. Only its last paragraph betrays some pride on al-Fārābī's part in the full, uncensored course of his studies. Al-Fārābī's pretence should not, however, mislead us: even this text is not intended primarily as a historical survey.<sup>62</sup>) It is only its first part, concerning the period before the sixth century,

ry, that can be taken as an attempt at a sweeping history of philosophy.<sup>63</sup>) The rest, to which the first part serves as an introduction, is mainly a critique of the Christian philosophical tradition.

Al-Fārābī's description of this tradition reflects his animosity to its offspring, *kalām*. And it is the anxiety to distance Muslim philosophy from Muslim *kalām* that drives al-Fārābī.<sup>64</sup>) Al-Fārābī believed that it was the apologetical needs (characteristic of *kalām*) that pushed the Christians to study elementary logic. In this he was probably right. But al-Fārābī's hostility to this approach led him to believe that this same need motivated the Christians actively to suppress other parts of philosophy. And his perception of the political side of *kalām* suggested to him that such a decision must have been taken at the instigation of a king, and by a formal assembly of bishops. This, as we have said above, is unlikely.

## VII

So far we have examined al-Fārābī's view of the Christian philosophical tradition before the rise of Islam. We have seen that for al-Fārābī the Christian philosophical tradition was contaminated by *kalām*. But even as he described their limitations, al-Fārābī had to admit the existence of real philosophical traditions in pre-Islamic Christianity. And he could not deny his debt to those Christians who had transmitted to him the unabridged Aristotle, among whom was his own teacher, Yuḥanna b. Ḥaylān.

In Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's text al-Fārābī seems to acknowledge this debt most grudgingly. And he leaves no doubt that, as far as he is concerned, the role of the Christian philosophers ended with the appearance of "the Muslim instructors". This seems to imply that, according to al-Fārābī, Christians of his own generation were not involved in the honest study of philosophy.

This is a curious presentation. In the tenth century the involvement of Christians with philosophical studies was far from over. A case in point is that of al-Fārābī's own student, the Jacobite Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (893–974), who was the center of philosophical activity in Baghdad. His companions

<sup>61</sup>) Gutas has noted the peculiarity of *mutakallimūn al-Islām* in Miskawaih's *Tartīb al-Sa'ādāt* (where *mutakallimūn* would have sufficed). Indeed, such qualification is more readily understood with a background like Maimonides' sketch, where the discussion of Christian *Kalām* precedes that of its Islamic counterpart. This suggests that Miskawaih is dependent upon a source that contained such a sketch (and not necessarily a source translated by a non-Muslim, as suggested by Gutas, p. 251). If Maimonides did indeed borrow his sketch from al-Fārābī, then al-Fārābī may well also have been Miskawaih's source (and compare note 25 above). But in al-Fārābī's *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* the term *mutakallimūn al-Islām* does not appear in this particular context (the term *qawm* being used in its stead). Until further data are produced, it seems that the question of whether Miskawaih's text was influenced by al-Fārābī's or vice versa must be left open.

<sup>62</sup>) This non-historical intention explains al-Fārābī's "utter silence on the (in fact pre-eminent) role of Ḥunain ibn Ishāq and his associates in the processes of translation and transmission", a silence which Rescher ("Farabi", p. 25) regarded as "the most curious feature of al-Fārābī's account".

<sup>63</sup>) And, as many scholars have noted, this part too is "at times mythical in character" (Rescher, "Farabi", p. 24; Stern, p. 40, note 1). This judgment is applied to the whole of al-Fārābī's text by Strohmaier, pp. 388–389. Strohmaier suggests that al-Fārābī's mistaken sketch resulted from the fact that as a Muslim he was conditioned to look for unbroken *isnāds*.

<sup>64</sup>) Rather than the anxiety to rid philosophy of the stigma of its association with Christianity, and thus recommend philosophy to Muslims, as suggested by Zimmermann, p. xciv, note 3.

and students are sometimes described as "the school of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī,<sup>65</sup>) and the most famous among them were Christians like himself. They continued the Christian tradition of attempting to establish the correct text of philosophical works by the collation of manuscripts. They translated hitherto untranslated philosophical texts, improved existing translations, and wrote commentaries.

In the eyes of some of his contemporaries, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī was "profoundly learned".<sup>66</sup>) He was known as "the principal spokesman of the circle of philosophers"<sup>67</sup>) and as "the logician".<sup>68</sup>) Particularly revealing in this context is Yaḥyā's own view of *kalām*. The forty eighth discussion in al-Tawḥīdī's *Muqābasāt* is dedicated to the differences between *kalām* and philosophy. During this discussion Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī is reported to have poked fun at the *mutakallimūn* for their claiming to be the only "speakers". More seriously, he criticizes them by saying:

These people have invented their own premises (*uṣūl*), and they consider their claims as proved on the basis of the exposition of these (invented) premises. (This is so), even though they can be shown to be using sophistries, at times intentionally and at times unintentionally.<sup>69</sup>)

Ibn 'Adī speaks here as befits a student of al-Fārābī. He accuses the *mutakallimūn* of sophistry and of arbitrarily inventing their premises. In this his words resemble Maimonides' strictures concerning *kalām*,<sup>70</sup>) which, we have suggested, reflect those of al-Fārābī. Obviously, Ibn 'Adī would have rejected with indignation any attempt to see in him a follower of such a distorted discipline. He regarded himself as a student of philosophy, not of *kalām*.<sup>71</sup>)

The evidence provided by Ibn 'Adī's own work is mixed. On the one hand, it corroborates his claim to be a student of philosophy. On the other

<sup>65</sup>) See, for instance, S. M. Stern, "Ibn al-Samḥ", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1956, p. 31, quoted in Platti, p. 14, n. 61; Kramer, p. 311.

<sup>66</sup>) "*Min al-'ulamā' al-rāsikhīn fī l-'ilm*", see the *Muntakhab siwān al-ḥikma*, p. 140.

<sup>67</sup>) "*Ra'is mutakallimī l-firqa al-falsafiyya*", Ibn al-Qiftī, *Ta'rikh*, p. 40. Despite Ibn 'Adī's position between philosophy and theology, *mutakallim* here does not seem to mean "theologian" (as it is rendered by Platti, p. 6).

<sup>68</sup>) *Uyūn*, I, p. 215.

<sup>69</sup>) Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Muqābasāt*, ed. Ḥasan al-Sandūbi (Egypt, 1939), pp. 223-224.

<sup>70</sup>) See above, p. 277 and note 51.

<sup>71</sup>) A similar self-perception is implied in the short treatise of Ibn 'Adī's disciple Ibn al-Samḥ "On demonstrating that the philosopher's proof for the creation of the world is better than the proof of the *Mutakallimūn*". See Badawi, *Neoplatonici apud Arabes* (Cairo, 1955), pp. 243-247.

hand, it reveals some characteristics that may explain al-Fārābī's reluctance to accept him as such. The titles of Ibn 'Adī's books as well as the fragments of his discussions recorded by al-Tawḥīdī show a definite interest in the Aristotelian corpus.<sup>72</sup>) But one cannot ignore the fact that some of the philosophical discussion attributed to Ibn 'Adī could have had distinct Christian applications. His discussion of the ways in which the cause (*'illa*) can be said to precede its effect (*ma'lūl*), for example, is quoted as part of an abstract philosophical conversation. But the Christological context can be guessed at,<sup>73</sup>) and similar discussions of precisely this philosophical problem were part and parcel of the Christian vindication of Christology, a fact which could account for Yaḥyā's interest in the problem and for the position he took concerning it.<sup>74</sup>) Yaḥyā's impressive output of straightforward theological works leaves no doubt as to his theological involvement.<sup>75</sup>)

Relatively few of Ibn 'Adī's philosophical works have come to light. One such work, his commentary on book *alpha mikron* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, is a disinterested scholarly attempt to explain Aristotle's text.<sup>76</sup>) A comment at the end of the treatise, in which the author expresses his doubts concerning the authenticity of part of the text, demonstrates Ibn 'Adī's critical approach to the translated text that was at his disposal.<sup>77</sup>) Nothing in this commentary shows the marks of theological manipulation. It is particularly noteworthy that this commentary reflects no qualms on Ibn 'Adī's part about using the *Analytica Posteriora*.<sup>78</sup>)

On the other hand, it must also be admitted that the commentary shows no philosophical originality. Ḥunain b. Ishāq had applied his critical spirit solely to establishing the correct text through the collation of manu-

<sup>72</sup>) See G. Graf, *Die Philosophie und Gotteslehre des Jahja ibn 'Adi und späteren Autoren* (Münster, 1910), p. 8; Tawḥīdī, *Imtā'*, index, s.v. "Yaḥyā b. 'Adī".

<sup>73</sup>) See al-Badīhī's question: "So when we say that a father precedes the son (or, perhaps: The Father precedes the Son), what does it mean in terms of time?" *Muntakhab*, p. 140.

<sup>74</sup>) Compare, for example, S. Stroumsa, *Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ' 'Ish-rūn Maqāla* (Leiden, 1989), pp. 219, 227.

<sup>75</sup>) Platti, p. 1 ff.; See also G. Endress, *The Works of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, An Analytical Inventory* (Wiesbaden, 1977), esp. pp. 99-123. As far as Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī is concerned, Kramer's estimation (p. vii) that "the philosophers were a class of their own, above theological concerns" seems unwarranted.

<sup>76</sup>) Badawi, *Rasā'il*, pp. 168-202.

<sup>77</sup>) *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>78</sup>) *Ibid.*, p. 177.



scripts, and Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī in turn directed his critical urge solely to a philological examination of the text established by Ishāq ibn Ḥunain.<sup>79)</sup>

All in all, Ibn 'Adī's case indicates that al-Fārābī's silence concerning the philosophical activity of his Christian contemporaries does not reflect the reality of his times. There is, however, reason to believe that his silence does faithfully reflect the value that al-Fārābī attached to their philosophical activity.

### VIII

As far as I know, there is in al-Fārābī's own surviving writings no direct reference to, or evaluation of, his Christian contemporaries. But here again Maimonides may reflect al-Fārābī's view.

In the above mentioned chapter 71 of the *Guide* Maimonides mentions, besides Philoponus, also Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī as a Christian *mutakallim* who had an unhealthy influence on the emergence of Muslim *kalām*. Of course, the sentence as it is includes a flagrant anachronism. Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, who lived in the fourth Islamic century, could not have influenced the emergence of Muslim *kalām*. It seems that this error of Maimonides' resulted from the similarity between Ibn 'Adī's name and that of John Philoponus (in Arabic — Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī).<sup>80)</sup> But is it *only* an error?

Maimonides mentions Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī in the course of his correspondence with his Hebrew translator Samuel ibn Tibbon. Ibn Tibbon had asked Maimonides' opinion on several books and philosophers, and in his answer Maimonides dedicates a separate paragraph to three Christian philosophers: Ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1063), Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, and Yaḥyā al-Biṭriq.<sup>81)</sup>

<sup>79)</sup> See Platti, p. 19: "Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī n'était ni théologien ni philosophe, mais plutôt un commentateur et surtout un éditeur des Anciens". A similar evaluation is given by Walzer, pp. 66, 77.

<sup>80)</sup> As was first pointed out by Pines, see his translation to Maimonides's *Guide*, p. 178, n. 19; and, "Philosophical Sources", p. CXXVI and note 112.

<sup>81)</sup> This last author is mentioned again by Maimonides in the course of his correspondence with Ibn Tibbon. Maimonides recommends an idiomatic translation, one which captures sense rather than etymology. This, he says, was Ḥunain ibn Ishāq's way of translating philosophical texts, whereas al-Biṭriq strived for a literal translation, the result being incomprehensible and incorrect. (J. Sonne, "Maimonides's Epistle to Samuel ibn Tibbon", *Tarbiz* 10 (1939), pp. 135–154, in Hebrew.) It is interesting that opinions about the translations of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī varied: al-Tawḥīdī considered these translations inelegant (*Imtā'*, p. 37), whereas Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a thought highly of them. See also Bergsträsser, pp. 711–712; Booth, p. 89, n. 202. On the various methods of translation, see Sebastian Brock, "Aspects of Translation Technique in Antiquity", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26 (1979), pp. 69–89.

Their commentaries (on Aristotle), says Maimonides, are worthless, and to read them would be a sheer waste of time.<sup>82)</sup>

This passage indicates, first of all, that Maimonides was familiar with Ibn 'Adī's Arabic commentaries and had some idea of Ibn 'Adī's milieu. The fact that Maimonides refers to these three Arab Christians together suggests that Maimonides regarded the flaws in Ibn 'Adī's writings as typical of Christian works. And the fact that Maimonides mentions Ibn 'Adī with two near contemporaries also suggests that Maimonides knew the correct chronological setting of Ibn 'Adī. If so, his embarrassing mistake in the *Guide* cannot be said to "make evident a glaring lacuna in his knowledge of the history of philosophy",<sup>83)</sup> and we need to seek another explanation for it.

Maimonides' anachronism in the *Guide* appears to be more than a meaningless confusion of similar names. Maimonides mentions Ibn 'Adī and John Philoponus while discussing the historical background to Jewish *kalām*, but his chronological error betrays the fact that his association of these two Christian theologians with *kalām* was phenomenological rather than chronological. For Maimonides, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, like John Philoponus before him, was part of the tradition of Christian *kalām*, the tradition of harnessing philosophy to the needs of religion.

In other words, Maimonides was aware of a group of people like Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, that is, Arab Christians whose occupation was *falsafa*. But he thought they were worthless as a school of philosophy. For him, they were only a modern version of *mutakallimū al-Naṣārā*.

As we have seen above, Maimonides probably drew his view of pre-Islamic Christian philosophy and its influence on Muslim *kalām* from the writings of al-Fārābī. It is quite possible that in his attitude to contemporaneous Arab Christian philosophy Maimonides is also dependent on al-Fārābī, although, on this point, the scarcity of the evidence precludes any definite conclusion.

### IX

The results of the study offered here are, in many ways, negative. It appears that, contrary to the commonly held view, al-Fārābī did not write a book *On the appearance of philosophy*; that his short discussion of the subject does not refer to an academy in Rome, and that he does not single out

<sup>82)</sup> A. Marx, "Texts by and about Maimonides", *Jewish Quarterly Review* N.S. 25 (1934–1935), p. 380.

<sup>83)</sup> Pines, "Philosophical Sources", p. CXXVI, note 112.



the *Analytica Posteriora* alone as having fallen prey to Christian censorship. It also shows al-Fārābī to be less of the unbiased historian of religion than he purported to be. In fact, al-Fārābī's repugnance for *kalām* produced a bias that distorted his otherwise accurate observations.

Al-Fārābī's account "concerning the emergence of philosophy" must be seen in this perspective. It is not reliable, and hence cannot be said to add anything to our knowledge of Christian Aristotelian teaching. Its value is not as a historical report. But when read together with Maimonides' descriptions of the origins of *kalām*, it offers a concise, comprehensive presentation of al-Fārābī's opinion about the Christian philosophical tradition, both before and after the rise of Islam.<sup>84</sup>)

#### Abbreviations of Frequently Quoted Sources

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<sup>84</sup>) An earlier version of this paper was read by the late Shlomo Pines, for whose critical remarks I remain grateful. I would also like to express my gratitude to Guy Stroumsa, to Rémi Brague and to Frank Stewart who read – and much improved – drafts of this paper.

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