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HOW FĀRĀBĪ READ PLATO'S *LAWS*

Fārābī's brief summary of Plato's *Laws* consists of a preface and 9 chapters (or "speeches").[1] Each chapter is devoted to a book of the *Laws*. Fārābī says that he has seen only the first nine books but not the subsequent ones. He asserts that according to some the *Laws* consist of 10 books, while according to others they consist of 14 books (43,5-13). The correct number which Fārābī does not mention is exactly in the middle between ten and fourteen. Regardless of how this accident may have to be understood, Fārābī certainly did not summarize the 10th book of the *Laws*, i.e. Plato's theological statement *par excellence*.

Fārābī's preface consists of 3 parts: a general statement, a story, and the application of the lesson conveyed through both the general statement and the story to the question of how to read Plato's *Laws*. We may summarize the general statement as

1. Figures in parentheses and notes indicate the pages and lines of Gabrieli's edition of Fārābī's *Compendium Legum Platonis* (Alfarabius, *Compendium Legum Platonis*, edidit et latine vertit Franciscus Gabrieli, London, 1952.). The Arabic text (including the app. crit.) consists of 41 pages. I am grateful to Dr. Muhsin Mahdi for kindly checking my translations from the Arabic.

follows. Let us call "men of judgment" such men as have acquired the habit of discerning and attaining what is useful. They acquired that habit through observation and the proper evaluation of their observations. The proper evaluation of observations consists in forming true universal judgments on the basis of a number of observations of particular cases. It is in the nature of all men to form universal judgments on the basis of a number of particular observations. For instance if a man says the truth once or twice or frequently he is naturally judged to be a truthful man and always to say the truth. But judgments of this kind, however natural, are not necessarily true. The men of judgment have observed men's natural inclination to make unwarranted generalizations and they, the men of judgment, evaluate this observation properly. On the basis of this evaluation they act with a view to what is useful: by acting sometimes in a given manner, they induce the public to judge falsely that they will always act in that manner, so much so that it will escape the public if they act differently on occasion; the deviation will be thought to be a repetition (3,1-17).

Fārābī illustrates this general remark by referring to a story. Once upon a time there was a pious ascetic—a man who withdraws and abstains for the sake of mortification and abasement, or who habitually and knowingly prefers the painful to the pleasant (cf. 27,9-10). He was known as a man of probity, propriety, abstinence, and devotion to divine worship. In spite of this, or because of this, he aroused the hostility of the oppressive ruler of his city. Seized with fear of the ruler, he desired to flee. The ruler ordered his arrest and, lest he escape, caused all the gates of the city to be carefully watched. The pious ascetic obtained clothes which would be suitable for his purpose and put them on; how he obtained them is not told in the story. Then taking a cymbal in his hand, pretending to be drunk, and singing to the tune of the cymbal, he approached one of the gates of the city at the beginning of the night. When the guard asked him "who are you?" he replied in a mocking vein, "I am that pious ascetic you are looking for." The guard thought that he was making fun of him and let him go. Thus the pious ascetic escaped safely without having lied in his speech (4,1-9).

Let us consider the story in the light of the general remark and the general remark in the light of the story. The hero of the story is a man of judgment, but a man of judgment of a particular kind:

a man of judgment who happens to be a pious ascetic. Accordingly he has established his character as a man of the strictest morality and religion. His action is prompted by the desire to save himself: he acts appropriately with a view to what is useful for himself. To save himself, to escape, he must be unrecognizable: he does not look and act like a pious ascetic; on this singular occasion he acts differently than he is known to act. And yet his deviation from his habitual behavior is thought to be in full accord with his habitual behavior: the public thinks that the man who acted in this manner could not possibly be the pious ascetic. And when the public, which has very severe notions of decency, will find out, sooner or later, that it was the pious ascetic who escaped by acting in a manner which is not appropriate to a pious ascetic, it will still say that he did not deviate from his habitual behavior in the decisive respect: he did not lie in his speech. It would appear then that unqualified veracity is essential to a pious ascetic. However this may be, the public is mistaken in the decisive respect: the pious ascetic lied in deed. His not lying in speech was part of his lying in deed. Only because he lied in deed could he afford not to lie in speech. The public is mistaken as regards the reason why the pious ascetic's seemingly indecent action is not indecent: that action is justified by compulsion or persecution (cf. 14,17-15,3). At any rate the story shows, among other things, that one can safely tell a very dangerous truth provided one tells it in the proper surroundings, for the public will interpret the absolutely unexpected speech in terms of the customary and expected meaning of the surroundings rather than it will interpret the surroundings in terms of the dangerous character of the speech.

The explicit purpose of both the general remark and the story is to make intelligible the behavior of one particular man of judgment, Plato. Plato acted rightly in not permitting himself the seeming generosity of revealing the sciences to all men but rather presenting the sciences by means of allusive, ambiguous, misleading and obscure speech lest they lose their character or be misused. It became a matter of very common, nay, universal knowledge that Plato was famous for speaking or writing in the manner indicated. Hence, when he expressed a thought without any concealment, as he sometimes did, his readers or hearers assumed that in these cases too his speech was allusive and expressed something different from,

or opposite to, what it explicitly and unambiguously said. "This is one of the secrets of his books" (4,10-16).

Plato, as a man of judgment, acted appropriately with a view to what is useful, although he thought less of what was useful for himself than what is useful for the sciences or their existence in the cities and nations. He established for himself the character of a man who never explicitly and unambiguously says what he thinks about the highest themes. He thus enabled himself sometimes to say explicitly and unambiguously what he thought about the highest themes: his explicit and unambiguous utterances are not taken seriously.

We must understand this in the light of the story of the pious ascetic. Plato was not a pious ascetic. Whereas the pious ascetic almost always says explicitly and unambiguously what he thinks, Plato almost never says explicitly and unambiguously what he thinks. But Plato has something in common with the pious ascetic. Both are sometimes compelled to state truths which are dangerous either to themselves or others. Since they are both men of judgment, they act in such cases in the same way; they state the dangerous truth by surrounding it properly, with the result that they are not believed in what they say. It is in this manner that Plato has written about laws (4,18-19).

Fārābī resolved to bring to light, or to extract, some of the thoughts to which Plato had alluded in his *Laws* or, as he also says, to bring to light, or to extract, some of the thoughts which Plato had intended to explain in his *Laws* (4,19-20; 43,6-9). For to allude to a thought means, not indeed to explain that thought, but to intend to explain it; whether or not the intention is consummated depends decisively, not on the author, but on the reader. Fārābī's resolution must be understood in the light of his unqualified agreement with Plato's principle of secretiveness. Just as Plato before him, Fārābī does not permit himself the seeming generosity of trying to help all men toward knowledge but employs a kind of secretiveness which is mitigated or enhanced by unexpected and unbelievable frankness. Accordingly his resolution is two-fold: his summary of the *Laws* is meant "to be a help to him who desires to know [the *Laws*] and to be sufficient to him who cannot bear the toil of study and of meditation" (4,20-21). Those who desire to know the *Laws* form a different class from those who cannot bear the

toil of study and of meditation; the desire of those who have the velleity to know the *Laws*, while they cannot bear the toil of study and meditation, turns necessarily into aversion, since knowledge of the *Laws* cannot be acquired without the toil of study and meditation. Accordingly, Fārābī's *Summary* is intended to have a two-fold meaning. One can articulate the two-foldness of works of this kind by comparing them to men on horseback: to seeming wholes which consist of a discerning and slow ruler and a fast and less discerning subject, and which are well fitted for unexpected attack as well as for flight.

Fārābī's *Summary* consists of allusions to those thoughts to which, as he thinks, Plato has alluded in the *Laws*. Fārābī's allusions are meant to be helpful for men for whom Plato's allusions are not equally helpful: allusions which were intelligible to some of Plato's contemporaries are not equally intelligible to men of the same type among Fārābī's contemporaries. One cannot grasp Fārābī's allusions unless one undergoes the toil of studying carefully what he explicitly says. But since he is secretive, the study of what he explicitly says must include consideration of what he leaves unsaid. One ought to begin the study of his *Summary* by wondering which is the most important subject that he fails to mention in that work. Fārābī enables us to answer that question in the proper manner since he has written a companion work to the *Summary*: the treatise which he entitled *The Philosophy of Plato, its parts and the ranks of its parts, from its beginning to its end.* According to the *Philosophy of Plato*, the necessary and sufficient condition of happiness, or man's ultimate perfection, is philosophy (§§1,16-18). The *Summary* is silent about philosophy; the terms "philosophy" and "philosopher," or derivations from them, do not occur in that work.[2] Since, according to the *Philosophy of Plato*, philosophy is the science of the substances of all beings (§2), the *Summary*, which is characterized by silence about philosophy, avoids the term "beings" altogether and employs the term "substance" only once (32,22).[3] Since "philosopher" is necessarily understood in contradistinction to *jamhūr* (the vulgar), the *Summary*, which is characterized by silence about philosophy, avoids the

2. Plato is referred to as *al-hakīm* (4,10; 29,7; 43,7). Cf. also 3,9 and 7,4.
3. Cf. 15, 11 ff.

word *jamhūr*.[4] To understand the silence of the *Summary* on philosophy, one has to consider the corresponding silence of the *Philosophy of Plato* on other subjects. The *Philosophy of Plato* teaches that philosophy is the necessary and sufficient condition of happiness. According to the *Summary* it would rather seem that happiness is brought about by obedience to the divine law or to the gods (cf. 12,17-18 and 16,14-15 with 6,17-19). At any rate the *Summary* speaks rather frequently of God, gods, the other life, the revealed law (*shari'a*) and divine laws, whereas the *Philosophy of Plato* is completely silent about those subjects. The relation between the *Philosophy of Plato* and the *Summary* reflects the relation between philosophy and the divine law as between two entirely different worlds.

At the beginning of the last chapter of the *Summary*, Fārābī says that up to that point, i.e., up to the end of the eighth book of the *Laws*, Plato has discussed "the roots" of the laws and those subjects with which the legislator has to be greatly concerned, namely, "the laws proper and the roots" (40,21-22). It would appear that the subject matter of Plato, as distinguished from the legislator, is "the roots" of the laws rather than the laws proper. In describing Plato's manner of dealing with the roots, Fārābī uses the expression *takallama*. On another occasion he explicitly contrasts the way of speaking employed by the legislator, which is unambiguous commanding, with that employed by the *mutakallim* among others, which is a kind of discussion that is not necessarily free from self-contradiction (24,3-7; cf. 34,22-35,3). Derivatives from the root *klm* occur quite frequently in the *Summary* (twenty-six times, I believe). On the other hand they are completely absent from the *Philosophy of Plato*. As Fārābī elsewhere explains, *kalām*, or discussion of the roots of the laws or religions, is the art of defending the laws or religions. We shall venture to describe the relation of the *Summary* and the *Philosophy of Plato* as follows: the *Philosophy of Plato* presents Plato's philosophy whereas the *Summary* presents his art of *kalām*. This conclusion is obviously not contradicted by the fact that, according to Fārābī, Plato begins in the ninth book of the *Laws* to explain things which are ancillary to the roots of the laws (40,22-41,2). Our conclusion is rather confirmed by the fact

4. Cf. 20,5.

that only in the ninth chapter of the *Summary* which is meant to reproduce the content of the ninth book of the *Laws* does Fārābī refer to punishment in the other life (42,20; 43,2). From here we see without great difficulty how Fārābī would have interpreted the tenth book of the *Laws* had he been in a position to do so.[5]

There is another subject which Fārābī fails to mention in the *Philosophy of Plato* although he mentions it quite frequently in the *Summary*. In the *Philosophy of Plato* he never mentions himself. He speaks in that work three times of "us," but he means there by that expression "us human beings" (§§8-9). In the *Summary* however he speaks of himself in the singular five times and in the plural twenty-one times, if I am not mistaken. It is primarily for this reason that the *Summary* may be said to be more "personal" than the *Philosophy of Plato*.

At a first reading, and at any superficial reading, the *Summary* presents itself as a pedantic, pedestrian and wooden writing which abounds in trivial or insipid remarks and which reveals an amazing lack of comprehension of Plato. To say nothing of many Platonic thoughts to which Fārābī hardly alludes, he ascribes to Plato many contentions for which one seeks in vain in the text of the *Laws*. At first glance one receives the impression that Fārābī is trying to the best of his powers to give a mere report of the content of the *Laws*, a simple enumeration of the subjects discussed in the *Laws*: "he explained a; then he explained b; then he explained c. . . ." This apparent character of the *Summary* is surprising since Fārābī assumes, as he gradually discloses, that the *Laws* are accessible to the reader of the *Summary*, not to say at his elbow. In one case he goes so far as to explain a Platonic expression which he had not used in summarizing the passage concerned (12,1-2). The opening of the *Summary* suggests accordingly that the work is meant to consist less of summaries than of explanations, of simple and straightforward explanations—e.g., of the meaning of "cause" in the first sentence of the *Laws* or of "Zeus" (5,2-4). Yet explanations of this kind occur very rarely. Fārābī's chief concern is rather to set forth those purposes of Plato which Plato himself had not set forth, e.g. his purpose in discussing a given subject.[6] In addition, a

5. Cf. *Laws* 887b5-c2, 890d4-6, e6-7, 891a5-7.

6. Cf. especially 40, 17-19 with the earlier parallels, viz. 12, 1-2; 17, 15-16 and 28, 10-11; cf. also 5, 4-5 with 5, 2-4.

second glance at the *Summary* reveals that the work is much less monotonous than it appears to be at first sight. In a considerable number of instances Fārābī voices his assent to Plato's contentions or his approval of other features of the *Laws*, and he does this in a great variety of ways. It is obviously not the same thing to say that Plato was right in holding or uttering a certain view (4,13; 7,20; 9,8; 16,7-9) and to say that Plato demonstrated a certain view (19,5); or to say that Plato mentioned a useful subject (11,5; 21,5; 27,18; 32,3,22) or even a subject of exceeding usefulness (42,20-21), and to say that he mentioned a subject knowledge of which is useful (42,10); or to say that he discussed a subject in a copious speech (26,7-8; 27,7-8; 31,2) and to say that he discussed a subject with impressive terseness (27,22-23; 35,6; 42,21-22). The reader who is able to bear the toil of study and meditation and therefore pays attention to these varieties of expression is compelled to raise questions like these: Did Fārābī agree with those Platonic assertions to which he does not explicitly assent? What did he think of those Platonic assertions of which he does not say that Plato demonstrated them? What are we to understand by subjects which are useful while knowledge of them is perhaps not useful? What did Fārābī think of those Platonic subjects of which he does not say that they are useful or fine (19,12) or subtle (31,23; 36,21) but which he does not describe at all or else qualifies merely as "other subjects" (16,22; 22,3,5)?

Fārābī suggests then by no means that Plato "explained" all subjects on which he touches in the *Laws*. In many cases Plato is merely said to have "said" something or to have "mentioned" a subject or to have "intimated" a thought or to have "alluded" to it or to have "undertaken to explain" it or to have "begun to explain" it or to have "desired to explain" it (cf., e.g., 29,19; 30,5; 31,11,22; cf. especially 26,2-3 with 25,20 and 26,7-8). Thus the chief function of the *Summary* may be said to be to bring to light the difference in character and weight of the various utterances of Plato—utterances which, in the eyes of the undiscerning reader, would seem to possess, all of them, the same character and weight. At the very outset, Fārābī says that Plato intimated that it is correct to examine the laws, that he explained that the laws are "superior to all wisdoms," and that he examined the particulars of that law which was famous in his time. In the fourth chapter he states what Plato

said when "he undertook to explain the subject of tyranny," while in the fifth chapter he states what Plato said when "he mentioned another useful subject" which he discussed with impressive terseness; in the first statement, tyranny is declared to be good if used for rule over slaves and wicked people, and to be bad if used for rule over free and virtuous men; in the second statement tyranny is said to be indispensable as a prelude to divine laws for two reasons, the first reason being the need for purging the city of wicked people of a certain kind, and the second reason being the expectation that these wicked people will be a lesson and a warning to the good so that they will accept easily and gladly the laws of those who assimilate themselves to God or gods (22,16-23,3; 27,18-23).[7] At the beginning of the eighth chapter, "mentioning" is referred to 5 times and is contrasted with Plato's "intimating" another aspect of the same subject in the beginning of the book.[8] Since Fārābī frequently claims that he is summarizing what Plato only alluded to or intimated or began to explain, it is unreasonable to expect that one has merely to look up the corresponding passages of the *Laws* in order to find there the thoughts which Fārābī extracted from them: there is bound to be a great divergence between what Plato explicitly says in the *Laws* and what Fārābī explicitly says in the *Summary*.

We note furthermore that "then" does not occur in the *Summary* with deadening regularity. The "then's" are unevenly distributed. There are sections in which every sentence begins with a "Then he . . . ," but there are also comparatively extensive sections in which that uninviting expression does not occur a single time.[9] This observation leads us easily to the more revealing observation that it is sometimes impossible to say where the alleged report of what Plato did ends and Fārābī's independent exposition, which

7. Cf. also 18, 3-5 with 12, 18-13, 1 and 18, 10-14; 20, 18-22; 21, 2-3; 21, 11-13.

8. 36, 20-37, 2; cf. 8, 7-10 and 12, 3-15. Cf. the use of "mentioning" in the seventh chapter.

9. See, e.g., 5-6; cf. e.g., 28, 11-15 with 28, 15-29, 17. On an average the expression "then he . . ." occurs once in every six lines; in the second chapter it occurs least frequently (once in every twelve lines), while in the seventh chapter it occurs most frequently (once in every four lines). The second and seventh chapters are the only ones in which expressions of the type "he mentioned a useful (or fine, or subtle) subject (or thought)" do not occur. This is not to deny that Fārābī says in the second chapter that the art of song is truly very useful.

no longer claims simply to reproduce Plato's thought, begins. At the end of the fourth chapter Fārābī reproduces Plato's thought that the laws are in need of preludes or *prooemia*. But when he adds the remark that there are three kinds of such *prooemia*, namely, accidental, imposed, and natural, and thus incidentally excludes rational *prooemia*, he does not suggest that this distinction is taken from Plato.[10] There occur a few examples in the body of the *Summary* where Fārābī speaks in the first person (plural) and thus draws our attention to the difference between his speech and Plato's speech. When Fārābī speaks of a suspicion "which we have described" (9,20), he draws our attention to the difference between his description of the suspicion in question and Plato's description. When speaking of "those whom we have enumerated," one of the enumerated types being the *mutakallim*, he indicates that Plato had not spoken of the *mutakallim*, in spite of the fact that Fārābī had said shortly before that Plato did speak of the *mutakallim* (24,3-7); he explains in that very passage that self-contradiction is not incompatible with the character of *kalām*. At the end of the eighth chapter Fārābī appears to contrast "all these things which he mentioned" with "his intention which we mentioned." (cf. also 30,19-20). If I am not mistaken, Fārābī's expression "he [Plato] said," which occurs rarely, refers only in one third of the cases to sayings which can be found in the Platonic text.

To summarize: There is a great divergence between what Fārābī explicitly says and what Plato explicitly says; it is frequently impossible to say where Fārābī's alleged report of Plato's views ends and his own exposition begins; and Fārābī does not often voice assent to Plato's views. We begin to understand these features of the *Summary* when we consider the most startling example of complete deviation of a statement of Fārābī's from its model. This example is the seventh chapter which is meant to reproduce the content of the seventh book of the *Laws* and of the content of which one barely finds a single trace in the alleged source. In regard to one section of the seventh chapter the editor says: "In hoc praecepto conscribendo, quod apud graecum Platonem omnino deest, videtur Alfarabius Mahometi ipsius rationem de priorum prophetarum legibus ante oculos habuisse." The editor also notes, although in a different context, that Fārābī had no delusions about the fundamental dif-

10. Cf. also e.g., 7, 4-7; 12, 16-13, 13; 16, 13-19; 37, 9-14.

ference between the Islamic laws and Plato's laws.[11] We begin to wonder whether the bewildering features of the *Summary* cannot be partly understood if one takes into consideration Fārābī's awareness of the fundamental difference between Islam and Plato's philosophic politics. Fārābī may have rewritten the *Laws*, as it were, with a view to the situation that was created by the rise of Islam or of revealed religion generally. He may have tried to preserve Plato's purpose by adapting the expression of that purpose to the new medium. Desiring to act appropriately with a view to what is useful, he may have desired to ascribe his revised version of Plato's teaching to the dead Plato in order to protect that version, or the sciences generally speaking, especially by leaving open the question as to whether he agreed with everything his Plato taught and by failing to draw a precise line between his mere report and his independent exposition.

The *Laws* is not a book of whose content one can merely take cognizance without undergoing a change, or which one can merely use for inspiring himself with noble feelings. The *Laws* contains a teaching which claims to be true, i.e. valid for all times. Every serious reader of the *Laws* has to face this claim. Every Muslim reader in the Middle Ages did face it. He could do this in at least three different ways. He could reject Plato's claim by contending that Plato lacked completely the guidance supplied by Revelation. He could use the Platonic standards for judging, or criticizing, specific Islamic institutions, if not for rejecting Islam altogether. He could contend that Islam, and Islam alone, lives up to the true standards set forth by Plato, and on this basis elaborate a purely rational justification of both the content and the origin of Islam.

Fārābī knew well that there were important differences between the Greek laws and the Islamic law. Toward the end of the second chapter he says: "The art of singing was of marvelous importance with the Greeks; the legislators bestowed on it consummate care; that art is truly very useful. . . ." In the section immediately following he mentions the fact that the same institution is employed by one code and rejected by another, and explains the conditions under which this variety is unobjectionable. At the end of the sixth chapter he says that taking care of the leaders of the musicians is necessary in every time, but that the care for this was greater "in

11. Latin translation p. 27 n.; Praefatio, pp. X-XI.

those times." But Fārābī knew equally well that in other respects which are no less important there was no difference between Greek laws and Islamic law. For instance, as he notes toward the end of the last chapter, Plato had discussed the question as to whether a man who knows nothing except the laws and does nothing except what the laws demand is virtuous or not, and as regards this question "there is still grave disagreement among men." At the beginning of the third chapter he says: "He began to explain that the establishment of laws, their destruction, and their restoration is not a novelty belonging to this time, but something that happened in the past and will happen in the future." It would seem that Fārābī means by "this time" his own time, although not merely his own lifetime. Immediately afterward he summarizes Plato's natural explanation of the coming into being as well as of the perishing of "the divine law" (cf. 18,14). The mere possibility that Fārābī applied to his own time a remark which Plato might be thought to have made about his time would force one to wonder whether he contemplated the application to Islam of what Plato had said about the natural beginning and the necessary perishing of every code. It is not a sufficient answer to say that Fārābī did not explicitly assent to Plato's thesis or that he did not describe it as useful or fine, nor to refer to Fārābī's independent discussion of the counsel or ruse to be employed in the establishment of laws in a new political society (30,5-20), nor to allude to the obvious connection between Plato's thesis and the issue "eternity or creation" (17,2 ff.).[12] Finally, we note that the expressions "that city," "those cities," and "their cities" which occur in the seventh chapter as frequently as the expression "the city," are ambiguous, as appears clearly from a passage of the sixth chapter (30,3).

Fārābī agreed with Plato certainly to the extent that he, too, presented what he regarded as the truth by means of ambiguous, allusive, misleading, and obscure speech. The *Summary* is rich in obscure passages. "It is incumbent on the legislator to teach the rulers and authorities how they should guide every individual among the human beings in order that they will walk in that way of his and that they will go in that right road, lest there arise aversion

12. The third chapter is the only part of the *Summary* in which the expression "in this chapter" or "in this section" does not occur. The expression "in this chapter" occurs in six chapters at the beginning of the chapter. For other peculiarities of the third chapter, see 17, 9 and 12 as well as 20, 5.

from their bad guidance. He mentioned this subject and illustrated it with examples from the free and the slaves, and from the bees in beehives and men's dealings with them; he meant by this the wicked and the lazy" (39,3-7). The editor is quite certain that "by this" means "by the bees." But we fail to see why he is so certain of this interpretation. We observe that Fārābī mentions three pairs, apart from the pair consisting of the wicked and the lazy: the bees and the beekeepers, the free and the slaves, the way of the legislator and the right road. On the basis of this observation we raise a few questions, starting from these: Do the beekeepers take care of every single bee? Do the beekeepers treat the bees in the way in which one ought to treat freemen or in the way in which one ought to treat slaves? What is the relation of the way of the beekeeper to the way of the legislator? Is there a point of view from which one could regard the free as wicked? No one would claim that mere study of the quoted passage could lead to answers to these questions, although it is not irrelevant to note that in the immediate sequel Fārābī adumbrates the problem inherent in any universal law or more particularly in any code meant to be valid everywhere on earth.[13] We prefer to turn to two other passages which we shall quote in the editor's translation while italicizing those words which do not occur in the text.

Impudens vero sibi ipsi tantum et suae felicitati consulit, ideoque dis invisus est, at *dis* invisus *deorum* non firmatur auxilio; et qui *eorum* auxilio non firmatur, nullum pulchrum et gratum vestigium relinquit. Coepit deinde eum describere (*scil. optimum principem vel legislatorem*) et ea memoravit quae illi curanda sunt; et dixit eum primo curam corporis deinde animi deinde externarum rerum gradatim adhibere; cuius rei exempla attulit et copiose disseruit, cum hoc perutile sit. (23, 16-21.)

We do not see that Fārābī's Plato describes here unambiguously a man who is concerned with things other than his own felicity.

Explicavit deinde alios homines ex aliis rebus voluptatem capere, prout condicione et indole et moribus differunt, et ad hoc explicandum fortium virorum et artificum exempla attulit; quod enim alii artifici gratum est alii ingratum est, et idem ad rectum et pulchrum et justum pertinet. Deinde diffuse disseruit in hoc capite ad explicandum omnia haec pulchra esse turpia, quod ad aliquid referenda sint, non quod ipsa per se pulchra

13. As regards the latter problem, cf. also 5, 4-5; 12, 17-13, 7 (cf. 21, 11-13); 13, 14-19; 14, 11-12; 16, 12-15; 18, 16-17.

aut turpia sint; et artifices cum de hoc rogentur procul dubio assensuros esse dixit. (15, 4-10.)

For the interpretation of this passage one would have to dwell on the fact that whereas, according to Fārābī, the relativity of the just and noble things will be granted by the artisans, it does not appear that it will be granted by the heroes. This is not the only place in the *Summary* where Fārābī alludes to the fact that the noble things belong to the realm of opinion, or in other words, where he alludes to the fundamental difference between courage, war, city and kindred things on the one hand, and the arts on the other.[14] He understood in a rare way what Plato thought about the problem inherent in any universal or absolutely valid rule of action, the connection between such rules and warlike heroism, and the light supplied by the contrast between men's agreement in the despised and lowly arts on the one hand and their fanatical disagreement regarding the high and holy on the other.

These examples show how easy it is to put too narrow a construction on Fārābī's secretiveness. He is secretive not only by being completely silent about some subjects but likewise by being silent about other subjects in certain places only. We have noted that he is completely silent about God and gods in his *Philosophy of Plato* whereas in his *Summary* he mentions God and gods frequently, or, to be precise, fourteen times. We must now consider the distribution of his mentions of God and gods in various parts of the *Summary*. In the preface and the first chapter taken together, or, to be somewhat more exact, in the first six pages, God is mentioned three times as often as are gods; God is mentioned three times, gods are mentioned once. Thereafter, there occurs only a single mention of God, and this mention occurs in a genuine quotation from Plato (19,8); Fārābī himself speaks exclusively of gods. I distinctly remember one case in which Fārābī, summarizing a passage in which Plato speaks of God, goes so far as to replace God by gods (cf. 27,3-7 with *Laws* 732c7). There are even some sections in which there is complete silence, not only about God, but about gods as well: chapters 6, 7 and 9. This silence is prepared by a number of steps of which we may note the following ones. We begin with the fourth chapter. Summarizing *Laws* 709b-c where

14. Cf. 11, 1-4 and 13-14; 17, 16-18, 4; 22, 3-10; 26, 7-13; 31, 9-10; 37, 5-21. Cf. *Philosophy of Plato* §§ 12 (10, 8-10) and 14 (13, 2).

Plato speaks of the rule of God and Chance over human affairs, Fārābī preserves only the mention of Chance.[15] Summarizing *Laws* 716a, he fails even to allude to Plato's opening remark according to which "God holds the beginning, the end, and the center of all beings" and to Plato's immediately following remark that "God is the measure of all things" (23,14-16). This is perhaps the most striking parallel, within the *Summary*, to his silence about the tenth book. In the immediate sequel, when he summarizes *Laws* 716d-717a, he does refer to the gods as Plato does, but Fārābī's reference is strangely elliptical as we noted when quoting the editor's translation of the passage in the preceding paragraph. Summarizing the end of the fourth book of the *Laws*, Fārābī drops Plato's repeated reference to the gods (723e-724a). We have now reached, in our rapid survey, the very center of the *Summary*. At the beginning of the fifth chapter, which is literally the central chapter, Fārābī does exactly the same thing that he did at the end of the fourth chapter: he drops Plato's repeated and unambiguous reference to the gods (726a1,3; 727a1). The beginning of the fifth chapter reads as follows: "He explained in this chapter that what has to be cared for in the first place is the soul, since the soul is the most noble of things and on the third rank from the rank of the divine; the most worthy thing regarding the soul among the kinds of care is honor, since contempt of the soul is base. He explained that honor is of the class of the divine things and in fact is the most noble of them, and the soul is noble; the soul ought therefore to be honored." Fārābī does not reproduce Plato's statement that one ought to honor one's soul "next after the gods" (726a6-727a2). He seems to say that the soul is inferior to the divine. But he certainly says that the soul is the most noble of things. Could he possibly mean that the soul is superior in nobility or dignity to the divine? He cannot mean that the divine is not noble, for he says that honor is the most noble of the divine things. Nor can he mean that the divine does not belong to the sphere of "things" (*ashyā* or *umūr*), for he speaks of divine "things" in both the *Philosophy of Plato* and the *Summary*. The following divine things are mentioned in the *Summary*: divine virtues, divine pleasures, divine music, divine law, divine government, divine rulers, human occupations of a

15. 22, 11-15. Cf. also 32, 5-6 with *Laws* 757e4.

certain kind.[16] In most of these cases "divine" obviously designates a certain quality of human beings or of human achievements or of human pursuits, namely, their excellence. If one considers the fact that the divine laws are the work of a human legislator (8,18-20; 22,19; 29,15-17), there hardly remains a single example in which "divine" has a meaning different from the one that we have indicated. And the soul is certainly not a quality but has a different dignity. We note in parenthesis that the usage followed in the *Summary* is not altogether at variance with that followed in the *Philosophy of Plato*. In the *Philosophy of Plato* "divine" occurs eight times. It is mentioned seven times in a single paragraph (§ 22) which consists partly of a report of the opinions of people other than Plato; when the use of the term is ascribed to Plato, it is employed in contradistinction to "human" or "bestial." In the repetition of that passage, Fārābī replaces the dichotomy "divine-human" by the dichotomy "human-bestial" (§ 24). The eighth mention of "divine" is in a class by itself: Fārābī mentions once in the *Philosophy of Plato* "divine beings." He does this in § 26. And he never mentions "divine beings" in the *Summary*. Later on in the fifth chapter of the *Summary* Fārābī mentions gods three times in a single section. The section concludes with the remark that man loves to put his hope in the gods with a view to greater happiness of his existence and greater nobility of his life; "and the noble life is sometimes noble in the eyes of a people and sometimes it is noble in the eyes of gods; one must consider this and meditate on it thoroughly." (27,3-7.) One sees that this section does not dispel the obscurities of the passage with which the fifth chapter opens. As for the sixth chapter, it is the only chapter of the *Summary* in which there does not occur a single mention of any of the following themes: God, gods, revealed law and the other life. The sixth chapter represents therefore the closest approximation, within the *Summary*, to the *Philosophy of Plato*. It is also the only chapter of the *Summary* in which the term "substance" occurs. The sixth chapter goes even beyond the *Philosophy of Plato* since it avoids the terms "divine" and "religion." While God, religion and divine

16. 7, 1, 2, 2, 3, 6, 7; 12, 8, 9, 15; 18, 14; 20, 11; 21, 21; 22, 19; 23, 5, 7; 25, 12, 16; 27, 5, 19, 22; 29, 15. Seven mentions of "divine" as a quality occur in the fifth chapter. The mention of "divine" in 25, 10 is in a class by itself.

are no longer mentioned in the rest of the *Summary*, the revealed law reappears in the seventh chapter, gods in the eighth chapter, and the other life in the ninth chapter. For regarding the other life, the *Summary* proceeds in fundamentally the same way in which it proceeds regarding the gods. The other life is mentioned in the first chapter and punishments in the other life are mentioned in the last chapter: there is silence in a central section.[17]

These remarks will suffice to give a notion of the kind of difficulties with which the student of the *Summary* has to contend. We would be foolish to claim that we are in a position to explain these difficulties. We imagine that one would have to know much more about the religious situation in Fārābī's age than we know at present, before one could expect a clarification of Fārābī's own position. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that in reflecting for some time on writings like the *Summary*, one acquires a certain understanding of the manner in which such writings need to be read. We believe we have succeeded in following one of the threads of the argument of the first chapter.

Whatever assumptions we may have made regarding the way towards the truth, man's bliss and the law, Plato confronts us abruptly with the question, raised by one of his characters, concerning the efficient cause of legislation, i.e. concerning the legislator, and with the answer, given by another Platonic character, that the legislator was Zeus, a god, as is vouched for by popular accounts. While, as Plato makes clear, the laws are superior to wisdom of every kind, it is right, as he intimates, to examine the laws, i.e., not indeed to examine their origin or efficient cause, but to discover in what way their particular stipulations are agreeable to right reason (5,7-16). Such examination presupposes clarity as to what constitutes the virtuous city. It leads to the result that "those people" to whom the laws of Zeus were given, did not form a virtuous city. It is for this reason that their laws are judged explicitly with reference to standards supplied, not by these laws, but by certain poems (5,16-6,16). These steps make us receptive to the distinction which is not immediately made with full explicitness, between the true legislator and impostors, a distinction which had been completely disregarded in the unqualified praise of laws

17. 6, 17-18 (cf. the parallel in 16, 14-15); 42, 20; 43, 2. Cf. also 14, 5-10; 23, 22-24, 1; 25, 18-20 (cf. *Laws* 727d1-5).

at the beginning. The intention of the legislator is that men should seek the countenance of God, desire reward in the other life, and acquire the highest virtue which is above the four moral virtues (6,16-18). Could Zeus have had the intention to make his subjects seek the countenance, not of Zeus, but of God? Fārābī merely notes here that Plato warned men against impostors (6,18-22). As for the true legislator, he is concerned with his subjects acquiring both the human virtues, which include science, and the divine virtues. The acquisition of the human virtues must precede that of the divine virtues. If a man who possesses human virtue uses it according to the prescription of the law, his human virtue becomes divine virtue (7,1-7). It would appear that one can acquire human virtue without obeying the law, that to be religious means to be virtuous according to the prescriptions of the law, i.e., to obey the gods (cf. 16,14-15), or that the specific objective of the law is the production of divine virtue. Does the divine virtue which one can only acquire by obeying the law lead one to seek the countenance of God and to desire the other life? Fārābī does not answer this question. Nor does he answer the question of how the law brings about the transformation of human virtue into divine virtue. He merely speaks about the causes through which the legislators produce the virtues, without distinguishing any further between human and divine virtues (7,7-12). Both Zeus and Apollo used in their codes or in the ordinances of their revealed laws all the causes through which virtue is produced (7,12-14). Only sometime thereafter does Plato begin to censure certain prescriptions of the laws of Zeus and Apollo explicitly and contrast those laws unfavorably with some older laws which were made by gods and which contained precepts of consummate soundness (8,2-10). This justifies the contention that the laws of the victors are not necessarily superior in goodness to the laws of the vanquished (8,13-17; cf.12,13-15 and 16,7-9). It certainly casts some doubt on the divinity of Zeus and Apollo. We learn now that every true legislator is created and formed by God for the purpose of legislation, just as every leader in any craft is created and formed by god for his craft (8,18-20) and that the legislator must obey his own law (9,1 ff.), which cannot be said without qualification of gods: gods do not pray. Yet in spite of those doubts of the laws which may have suggested themselves to us, or may still suggest themselves to us (9,13-20), the law in

itself is noble and virtuous, and superior to everything which is said for it or against it (9,21-22). Still, in order that we may have genuine knowledge of the goodness of the law and, as a matter of fact, genuine knowledge of the truth regarding anything, we need training in logic, just as the legislator needs training, from his early youth, in the handling of political affairs (9,23-10,9). If we think of the connection between human virtue in the comprehensive sense of the term and training in logic, we are not surprised by Plato's next step. Morality may be said to consist in the proper resolution of the conflicts which arise between the discerning power of the soul and the bestial power of the soul: "It is incumbent on the individual to meditate on the states of his soul in these conflicts and to follow the discerning power, and on the people of the city altogether, if they are unable to discern by themselves, to accept the truth from the legislators and from the followers of the legislators and those who state the truth about them and the good and virtuous" (10,10-17). It would seem that the reasonable individuals do not need guidance by the legislator (11,5-17). At the end of the first chapter we are thus already somewhat prepared for the following remark which occurs unexpectedly in the center of the last chapter and which still strikes us as unbelievable: "Then he explained that when men are good and most excellent they do not need the laws and the *nomoi* at all and they are altogether happy; but the *nomoi* and laws are needed by those whose characters are not proper or right." (41,21-23)[18] We are much less surprised to find that shortly afterward, when he mentions the question as to whether a man is virtuous and praiseworthy who knows nothing except the laws and does nothing except what the laws demand, he leaves the question unanswered (42,15-18).

Only by understanding Fārābī's thoughts about the problematic character of law can one hope to understand the succinct remark which the *Philosophy of Plato* devotes to Plato's *Laws*: "Then he presented in the *Laws* the virtuous ways of life which are followed by the people of this city." By "this city" he means in all probability the virtuous city described in the *Republic*, for the passage on the *Laws* (§27) follows immediately after the summaries of the *Repub-*

18. Cf. 25, 2-6 and 26, 24-27, 2. Cf. also the teaching of the *Summary* regarding punishment: punishment forms part of the training of the body as distinguished from the training of the soul; cf. 26, 7-13 with 31, 18-21; 33, 19-34, 2; 41, 7-14; 42, 14-43, 4.

lic (§25) and the *Timaeus* (§26). We are surprised by the extreme brevity of the passage devoted to the *Laws* as well as by the silence of that passage about the obvious and guiding theme of the *Laws*, namely, the laws. As a matter of fact, laws are mentioned in the *Philosophy of Plato* only in §§29, 30, 32. We find however one other reference to the *Laws* in the *Philosophy of Plato*. In §28, a distinction is made between the science and art embodied in the *Laws* and the science and art embodied in the *Timaeus;* whereas the latter science and art is ascribed to Timaeus, the science and art embodied in the only Platonic dialogue in which Socrates does not occur is ascribed to Socrates. If we combine the information supplied by §28 with that supplied by §27, we reach the conclusion that Socrates was silent about laws; this conclusion is, to say the least, not at variance with Fārābī's summary of the *Crito* (§23). Socrates' silence about laws, in its turn, must be understood in the light of the implicit distinction, made in §30, between the way of Socrates and the way of Plato. The way of Plato emerges through a correction of the way of Socrates. The way of Socrates is intransigent: it demands of the philosopher an open break with the accepted opinions. The way of Plato combines the way of Socrates, which is appropriate for the philosopher's relations to the elite, with the way of Thrasymachus, which is appropriate for the philosopher's relations to the vulgar. The way of Plato demands therefore judicious conformity with the accepted opinions. If we consider the connection, stated in the *Summary*, between the vulgar and laws, we arrive at the conclusion that the appreciation or legitimation of laws becomes possible by virtue of Plato's correction of the way of Socrates.[19] It is as if Fārābī had interpreted the absence of Socrates from the *Laws* to mean that Socrates has nothing to do with laws, and as if he had tried to express this interpretation by suggesting that if *per impossibile* the *Laws* were Socratic, they would not deal with laws.

The statement about the *Laws* in the *Philosophy of Plato* must then be understood as part of such a presentation of Plato's philosophy as is guided by a peculiar distinction between the way of Socrates and the way of Plato. The importance of this distinction for the *Philosophy of Plato* as a whole does not appear at first

19. The first half of the *Philosophy of Plato* ends with "Socrates"; the second half ends with "their laws," i.e., the laws of the Athenians.

sight. At first it seems as if Fārābī meant to say that all insights which he ascribed to Plato were peculiar to Plato. What he actually says however is that Plato did not find the science which he desired among the sciences and arts which are known to the vulgar (§§6,12, 16). Only at the beginning of the second half of the work, i.e., immediately after the first mention of Socrates, does Fārābī explicitly speak of what Plato in contradistinction to all other men did: Plato attempted to exhibit or present the desired science (§16). Only in the eighth and last section (§§30-32) does he explicitly speak of Plato's "repetitions" and thus bring out the difference between Plato and Socrates. And only in the central paragraph of the last section (§31) does he mention an alleged remark of Plato to the effect that his predecessors had neglected something. The only originality which Fārābī's Plato claims for himself concerns the investigation, allegedly made in the *Menexenus*, of the ways in which the citizens ought to honor the philosophers on the one hand, and the kings and most excellent men on the other. The investigation apparently led to the result that the philosophers, as distinguished from the legislators, cannot expect to be deified by the citizens. However this may be, Fārābī introduces Plato's correction of the Socratic teaching only toward the end of the *Philosophy of Plato;* those summaries of Platonic writings which constitute the first seven sections of the *Philosophy of Plato* describe therefore the Platonic teaching as it was prior to Plato's correction of the Socratic teaching.[20] Yet, as Fārābī indicates by his remark about the Platonic writings in his preface to the *Summary*, all Platonic writings presuppose already Plato's correction of the Socratic teaching. It follows therefore that not everything Fārābī says in characterizing the content of the Platonic dialogues is meant to be borne out by the text of the Platonic dialogues. This conclusion is confirmed by the comparison of the remark on the *Laws* in the *Philosophy of Plato* with the *Summary*, to say nothing further about the *Summary* taken by itself. We admire the ease with which Fārābī invented Platonic speeches.

20. Cf. § 30 (22, 4) and § 15.