

SHUKRI B. ABED, *Aristotelian Logic and Arabic Language in Alfārābī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991). Pp. 201.

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This book is a welcome contribution to the study of logic in the medieval Islamic period, especially in view of the paucity of analytical studies of depth on the subject. The author aims to describe "Alfārābī's logico-linguistic enterprise" (p. xx) in six chapters.

The author succeeds in achieving his goal of defining and describing Farabi's "linguistic philosophy," and in many ways has given us a book in which Farabi's main views concerning a selected number of logical problems are worked out in a clear manner. The language used reflects current approaches to the study of Aristotelian logic and is thus quite helpful for purposes of teaching Arabic logic at the university level, especially to students who, because of language limitations, might otherwise have little or no access to primary texts.

The first five chapters are essentially devoted to summarizing Farabi's treatment of a selected number of problems of logic—formal and semantic. References are drawn from his main treatises such as *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* (Book of Letters), *Kitāb al-Alfāz al-Musta'mala fi'l-Manṭiq* (Book of Utterances Employed in Logic), *Kitāb bārī arminiyyās ay al-'ibāra* (Short Treatise on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*), and *Kitāb Īsāghūjī ay al-Madkhal* (Farabi's *Isagoge*). The author refers to many other works by Farabi as well, pointing out salient segments with a bearing on his logico-linguistic analysis. Chapter 6, "Alfārābī's Linguistic Philosophy," discusses Farabi's views on the relation between logic and grammar and on the philosophy of language, and treats the question of a theory of the copula in detail. In this chapter the author examines Farabi's position concerning predication, his views on tense and meaning, and explains his rejection of the logician's position on language.

Farabi, who was viewed in medieval Islamic philosophical circles as the greatest philosopher after Aristotle, is the only Muslim philosopher who makes a serious attempt to analyze language from a logical perspective. In this regard his *Book of Letters* stands out for its depth of analysis and his *Utterances Employed in Logic* is of significance especially as a lexicon of the technical terminology of logic. Both works have been used by Abed to bear on the main theme of his book, namely the process by which Aristotelian logic as employed by Farabi transformed the view of language as domain specific held by the logicians to a view that attempts to demonstrate its universal logical structure. Though Farabi's position, as stated by Abed, that "natural language must be logical in the sense that their [sic] rules must conform to and agree with the logical structures, which exist in the domain of thought" (p. 169) did not resolve the debate with the grammarians, it did set the trend for future logicians in the Islamic world.

In chapter 1 the author discusses particulars and universals in order to provide "familiarity with the terminology used in Arabic logical texts" (p. 1). This is in agreement with his objective of representing, especially in the first five chapters of the book, a "summary of Fārābī's logical lexicon" (p. 2). However, familiarity with the technical terminology of logical texts in Arabic (or Persian) cannot be established by a discussion of a very limited number of terms. Topics dealt with in this chapter are taken from the traditional *Isagoge*—problems known as *kulliyāt khams* in Arabic and Persian textbooks on logic. Farabi's genius in dealing with the topic at hand is aptly demonstrated. Abed fails to indicate, however, that while the universals are introduced in the *Isagoge*, they are picked up again in metaphysics where they are discussed later in almost every philosophical text in Arabic and Persian under the general topic of *metaphysica generalis* (*al-umūr al-'amma*). It must be stated clearly (and Abed does not) that Farabi's primary philosophical intention in the *Book of Letters*, which Abed refers to as "Alfārābī's metalogical work par excellence" (p. 1), is, as many have indicated, an examination of the principle problems of metaphysics. Logic is "secondary" in this work and is employed only to lay the axiomatic foundations of metaphysics. Treatment of logic per se is characteristic only of works such as the *Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione* and *Farabi's Isagoge*. Abed's tendency to treat seemingly similar subjects taken from works whose philosophical intentions are different can be misleading, especially to readers unfamiliar with the texts themselves.

There are a few minor problems in this chapter relating to specific significations of logical terms. For example *kulliyāt* and *ma'ānī 'amma* are considered synonymous (p. 5,

affecting also the discussion of “class” and “membership,” pp. 14–15), but one is translated as “universals” and the other as “general terms.” The two are, however, used differently in logic, reflecting the distinction between the Aristotelian “universal” and the Stoic “class name,” and the distinction has an ontological significance crucial to our understanding of medieval Islamic philosophy.

In chapter 2, “Definition and Description in Alfarabi’s System,” Abed provides us with a succinct and well presented discussion of Farabi’s formal and semantic theories of definition. The essentialist definition (Abed’s “essential definition”), *horos* and *horismos* in Aristotle’s works, corresponding to the Arabic term *ḥadd* in Farabi, has major significance in philosophical construction. The problem is discussed by Aristotle in *Posterior Analytics* (1:1–3; 2.3, 7, 10) and *Topics* (vol. 8), and is elaborated by Avicenna in his *Isagoge* (1:2–4) and in *Posterior Analytics* (vol. 4). Avicenna elaborates on the previous theory and distinguishes four types of definitions: the complete and incomplete essentialist, and complete and incomplete description. Given the significance of Avicenna’s treatment of the subject, reference to Avicenna’s texts would have helped elucidate much of the discussion in this chapter. The epistemological place of definition, as a first step in science, and the philosopher’s position regarding its ontological value is of major significance in our understanding of medieval Islamic philosophy and logic. Does essentialist definition, for example, provide us with real knowledge of essence, and can it be used as the most prior epistemological first step? Can an essentialist definition actually be constructed? What if the sequence of *genera* and *differentia* include unknown, or unknowable elements? How, then, can a compound statement be constructed where the elements are required to be exhaustively brought together? Abed concludes chapter 2 with this problematic question where he writes, “And if no definition *per genus et differentiam* can be assigned to certain things, an obvious question arises: Does an essence of any thing exist where a definition *per genus et differentiam* cannot be formulated?” (p. 53). Much of post-Farabian philosophy in Islam has been taken up with the discussion of the ontological positions held when analyzing the question of essence and existence in probing this very question. Chapters 3–5 are devoted to a discussion of Farabi’s views in this regard. The question of priority/primacy of essence over existence (or vice-versa)—the problem of “*aṣālat al-māhiyya* vs. *aṣālat al-wujūd*” that permeates numerous Arabic and Persian philosophical and logical texts—should have been well defined before the investigation of Farabi’s works. An enumeration of “Arabic question particles as they relate to ‘essence’” (chap. 3); classification of “how” and “why” in relation to formal techniques of constructing syllogisms (chap. 4); and a discussion of the Arabic term *mawjūd* (“is” as well as “existent entity”) in relation to question particles *hal* and *alif* (chap. 5) are helpful, and Abed is effective in showing us the substance of Farabi’s arguments. But the nonspecialist reader is not given a clue as to their significance in elucidating the central ontological question of the essence–existence distinction.

In chapter 6 the author provides the nonspecialist with a lucid summary of such questions as the use of copula in grammar and logic, the present tense examined from the point of view of logic as well as grammar, and other related questions that were debated at the time. Farabi’s discussion in the *Book of Letters* of the Greek *estin* and *on* and of the Persian *hast* and the Sogdian use of *ast* are reproduced (pp. 120, 130–135). But the distinction between *hast* (present stem of the verb “to be”) and *ast* (the copula) has not been made clear.

On the whole the book is well written, well organized, and quite useful. Readers interested in the history of medieval logic but without knowledge of Arabic will now be able to ponder the intricate details of a selected number of logico-linguistic problems dealt with in Islamic philosophy. Specialists will benefit from the analytic quality of the book and will find it a welcome relief from the plethora of merely descriptive books on this subject.

Finally there is an unfortunate confusion in the use of such phrases as "Arab students of philosophy and logic" (e.g., p. xiii, etc.), "Arab logicians" (e.g., p. xiv, etc.), "Arab grammarians" (p. xv, etc.), "medieval Arab thinkers" (e.g., p. 168), "Arab translators of Greek texts" (p. 126), and "medieval Arab world" (p. 120). A serious scholarly work such as this should avoid such inaccuracies, which are at best misleading to nonspecialist readers. One can quite easily substitute phrases such as "students of Arabic philosophy," "grammarians of Arabic language," and the like. A more precise usage would be "Arabic and Persian philosophy and logic," a phrase that describes more accurately the development of philosophy in the Islamic world, at least in the thousand and few years from Farabi's time to the present, and would include all of the people who actually participated in this great enterprise from Andalusia to India.