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Qahtan Aljazrawi says

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Aristotelian predecessors, muses about who his 'Greek predecessor' must have been: "One obviously wonders who the author of this unusual synthesis of Aristotle and Plato may have been or, if this question cannot be answered, whether at least his place in the history of later Greek philosophy can somehow be circumscribed." In other words, even if a putative predecessor is never found we must assume he did exist! I will, btw, concede that if there is a predecessor Walzer is surely correct to say that it would be among the Middle Platonists, and not the Neoplatonists, that we would find him.

But why are we even looking for him? Walzer says, "the best evidence of a continuous appreciation of Plato's political thought in later Antiquity is provided by its impact on Arabic philosophical literature." Isn't this a bit like arguing that the best proof early moderns had something like refrigeration is that late moderns have it? I think the reason that Islam (and also Judaism in the Medieval period) had philosophers that made a great deal of Plato's Political Philosophy is that the Prophet Mohammed was above all a bringer of Law (as was Moses) but Jesus in the Gospels brings no Law (except to love others as you love yourself) at all. The fact of the Prophet/Legislator in Islam and Judaism thus dovetails rather nicely with Plato's political discussions in his Republic and Laws. This provided the opportunity for Farabi to speak of the Prophet as if he were Plato's Philosopher-King. Thus we should find that the originality of Farabi's Platonic Politics is explained by the fact that he was immersed in a revealed Religion that also contained a detailed revealed Law. This 'political interpretation' of the Platonic texts first becomes possible in Islam.

In Walzer's defense I want to add that it was not very long ago that it was thought that Islamic philosophers (falasifa) weren't really philosophers but merely transmitters of original Greek thought and texts. Thus it was typical that whenever one of the falasifa said something that wasn't in precise agreement with some Greek predecessor it was assumed that the Islamic philosopher had made a mistake. In other words, according to the accepted scholarship, originality was always taken to be an error. Charitably one could say that perhaps Walzer bent over backwards to show that Farabi was a genuine philosopher by insisting he belongs in the line of Middle Platonism. And I do not doubt for a moment that this was indeed part of his motivation. After all, Walzer does say that, "none of the 'political' works of al-Farabi - such as the Ara - which were well known and popular all over the Muslim world, from Spain to India, was ever translated into medieval Latin, although this important section of the Greek legacy had been seen in a new and very original light by al-Farabi." So we see that Walzer is somewhat aware of Farabi's originality. Now, further down this page (32) Walzer remarks that the reason these texts weren't translated into Latin by the Christians was that "Platonic 'political' thought as applied to Islamic situations of the tenth century A.D. was useless for them, and thus they did not embark on latinizing any such texts." Well, all I would add (as stated earlier) is that if we can explain the absence of Farabi's political Platonism in the West by the situation of Christianity then why can't we go ahead and explain the appearance of an original political Platonism in Farabi by the situation of Islam?

So, why does Walzer insist upon looking for a supposed 'Greek predecessor'? The problem is that all scholars worry about, can worry about, is the source of a given philosophical position and the accuracy of its transmission; but all that genuine philosophers can worry about is the appropriateness of a philosophical position in given circumstances. If the works of Plato were only discovered yesterday a scholar would have no trouble 'showing' that all the elements (positions) in Plato had come from Pythagoras, Parmenides, Heraclitus and Socrates. This would be exactly how one would expect a scholar to 'reason'! But Plato, by putting each of these elements together in the proper measure, as the circumstances of Athens and Greece required, creates Western Philosophy. So too Farabi, by weaving together prior elements into a properly measured whole, virtually creates Islamic philosophy. The Falasifa that follow him continually refer back to Farabi (known as the 'Second Philosopher' or 'Second Master', i.e., second after Aristotle, throughout much of the medieval period) in their works. Indeed, one can say (through Farabi's distant heirs, the 'Latin Averroists') that Farabi's decisive turn to (and distinctive interpretation of) Platonic political philosophy has even influenced Western philosophy itself.

As far as the text goes I can say that of the translations of Farabi that I have seen the Ara goes further in what might be called a neo-Platonic direction than any of the others. In fact, if one wanted to keep Farabi in the

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