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RHETORIC AND POETICS IN ALFARABI**

1. INTRODUCTION

ALFARABI is the foremost important philosopher one must know in order to understand the Arabic reception of the Aristotelian *Organon*. The Arab philosopher thoroughly revised Aristotle's treatises, and thereafter he tried to elaborate a theory concerning communication. Aristotelian logic proved to be useful, allowing Alfarabi to comprehend a variety of epistemological levels capable of engendering different kinds of mental states. Alfarabi considered *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* to be two relevant and especially valuable works for analyzing human communication from a logical perspective.

In this paper, I intend to explain which might be the place for these two treatises – *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* – within the *Organon* and, mainly, within the order proposed by Alfarabi. This demands, in first place, an examination of some philosophical contributions due to the Alexandrians, as well as a review of the Farabian classification of the logical treatises in his *Enumeration of the Sciences* (*Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*). Afterwards, I will analyze the similarities that Alfarabi established between rhetoric and poetics, while explaining how they work in the *Fusul [al-'ilm] Al-Madani* or *Aphorisms of the Statesman*.¹

2. RHETORIC AND POETICS IN THE ORGANON

In 1934, Richard Walzer² wrote an article where he described the well-known debate about the insertion of *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* as part of the Aristotelian logical writings within the Hellenic and the Arabic traditions. According to Walzer, this inclusion was not exclusively attributable to the Arabs. Time before Alfarabi, the Alexandrians gave an account of this classification. For instance,

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1. I will be using the English translation due to CH. E. BUTTERWORTH, "*Selected Aphorisms and other texts*", Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2001.

2. See R. WALZER, "*Zur Traditionsgeschichte der Aristotelischen Poetik*", in *Greek into Arabic: essays in Islamic philosophy*, «Oriental Studies» 1, Cassirer, Oxford, 1962.

Ammonius, Philoponus and Elias already dealt with this matter. In Ammonius' *Commentary on Prior Analytics*, there is a relevant quotation on the issue:

«But since [Aristotle] says that there are three species of syllogism, the apodeictic, the dialectical, and the sophistical, and he teaches about the apodeictic in the *Posterior Analytics*, about the dialectical in the *Topics*, and about the sophistical in the *Sophistical Refutations*, where shall we classify the rank of the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*? For [Aristotle] intends them to be treatises of logic. Surely this must be said, for it is especially true, that the syllogistic treatises are one thing, and the logical another. If, then, we were to make a division of the syllogistic [treatises], we would divide them, as was said, according to the three species of syllogisms, for the tentative syllogisms are the same as the sophistical. (...) And we shall not undertake [to discuss] the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*, for they are asyllogistic. But, if we were to make a division of logic, we would divide it thus: of logic, there is the syllogistic and the asyllogistic, the metrical and the ametrical, the metrical being the *Poetics*, the ametrical, the *Rhetoric*».³

This passage is quite a novelty. In *Topics* VIII, 11, 162 a 15-18, we find the triple division mentioned above. As a first highlight, we should not be surprised by the fact that rhetoric appears as a non-syllogistic kind of discourse. Let us remember the enthymeme has been banned from *Topics*. When Ammonius talks about *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* as non-syllogistic, he is referring to them as argumentative forms, although they do not have a syllogistic structure. An enthymeme is an abbreviated syllogism, and therefore it is not what we may accurately call a syllogism.

In the fourth chapter of *On Interpretation*, Aristotle states that non-apophantic discourses cannot be classified according to their truth or falsehood. That is why they seem to be excluded from logic. Finally, the Philosopher says that, since they are neither true nor false, they shall be studied in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, not in *On Interpretation*.⁴

Ammonius thinks that both kinds of discourses – apophantic and non-apophantic – are related to language: the latter is associated with the speeches that take place before an audience, while the former is allied with what things are within themselves and with the meaning of words. The non-apophantic discourse is that of the rhetorician and the poet, for they are both related to an audience that must be persuaded and moved with words. The philosopher, on the other hand, owns an apophantic kind of speech, for he studies the relation that lies between words and things. It is possible to think that Ammonius' division was based on the different uses that language might have. We must remember that Alfarabi also appeared to be very interested in the sciences of language and, particularly, in grammar. It could be surprising to note that, in a first moment, he read the *Organon* as a series of treatises on linguistics.

3. AMMONIUS, *In Aristotelis Analyticorum priorum librum 1 commentarium*, 11, 22-38, ed. M. Wallies, CAG, vol. 4, pt. 6, Berlin, 1890.

4. See ARISTOTLE, *On Interpretation* 4, 17a 1-8.

Several and distinct opinions regarding this issue are revealed in the Alexandrians' commentaries. Whatever the differences might be, a tripartite division of the Aristotelian *Organon* is common for them all.⁵ Logic is a method conceived as a rule for demonstrative knowledge, and that is the chief issue for these schemes. Such a method has three parts. The first one studies the principles; a necessary requirement is, obviously, to examine the method itself. *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, and *Prior Analytics* deal with these matters. The second and most important part studies the syllogism or demonstrative knowledge, and this is to be found in *Posterior Analytics*. Finally, according to these commentators, the third part is more independent, and may be considered only as an accessory for demonstrative methods. Yet, it includes most of the logical treatises: *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*, as well as *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. The Arab translators and commentators studied these last *oeuvres* before going through *Posterior Analytics*, on which they didn't work until the tenth century.

Rhetoric and poetics are non-apodeictic forms of reasoning, non-demonstrative branches of logic. This does not mean that rhetoric and poetics are built upon fallacies and paralogisms, as is the case with sophistical arguments. Although apodeictic demonstration (*álta'ím álbr'jany*) is the most important part of logic, there are other forms of reasoning that also intend to demonstrate. This means we can find arguments that "demonstrate" in a different and less rigorous manner, and therefore we may have a non-apodeictic truth for informal knowledge.

Thereafter, it is necessary to examine whether it is possible to have any sort of syllogism within a non-apodeictic scope, especially in rhetoric and poetics. The possibility of including them as branches of dialectic should not be so rashly discarded. We could find similarities between rhetoric and dialectical syllogisms or between poetical and sophistical ones. Rhetoric could be considered to be an *antistrophé*, i.e. a subclass of dialectic.⁶ In both the Arabic and the Aristotelian tradition, enthymeme and paradigm were the proper kinds of rhetorical syllogisms. In the case of poetics, the syllogistic kind of structure is not that evident. However, Alfarabi seems to point out the possibility of a poetic syllogism. There is where his interpretative innovation is to be found:

«Statements are either absolutely true, or absolutely false, or mainly true but partly

5. This tripartite division is similar to that of THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Aristotelis libros De interpretatione et Posteriorum analyticorum expositio*, ed. R. M. Spiazzi, Marietti, Torino 1955. This division can also be found in several Alexandrians. For example, AMMONIUS, *In Categorias Commentarium*, ed. A. Busse, CAG, vol. 4, pt. 4, Berlin 1895, 5. 6-8; OLIMPYODORUS, *Prolegomena et In Categorias commentarium*, ed. A. Busse, CAG, vol. 12, pt. 1, Berlin: Reimer 1902, 8. 4-10; ELÍAS, *In Aristotelis Categorias commentarium*, ed. A. Busse, CAG, vol. 18, pt. 1, Berlin: Reimer 1900, 116. 29-35; PHILOPONUS, *In Aristotelis Categorias commentarium*, ed. A. Busse, CAG, vol. 13, pt. 1., Berlin 1888, 5. 8-14.

6. See ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric* 1, 1354 a 1.

false, or the reverse of this, or true and false in equal proportions. The absolutely true statement is called demonstrative; that which is mainly true, disputative; that which is equally true and false, rhetorical; that which is mainly false, sophistical; that which is wholly false, poetical. The analysis proves that poetical statement is one which is neither demonstrative, nor argumentative, nor rhetorical, nor sophistical: yet for all that it belongs to a kind of syllogism, or rather post-syllogism (by 'post-syllogism' I mean a deduction, image, intuition, or the like, something which has the same force as an analogy)». ⁷

In the poetic or imaginative syllogism, the premises (*muqad'mát*) are suggested to imagination (*tajáy yulun*). ⁸ As will be explained further on, the main characteristic of poetic discourse, besides of its rhythm and musicality, is that it evokes images (*m'tálát*). Alfarabi – and Avicenna after him – especially emphasized this aspect.

The Arabic interpretations brought back the interest in the study of argumentation characteristics – including, as we have seen, the rhetorical and poetical arguments. Since 450 AD, Syrians had translated some theology texts and the six Aristotelian treatises of logic. They had two main reasons for studying the latter: first, because they were useful for arguing in theological debates, and second, because of their interest in medicine. By that time, medicine had its best exponent in Galen, who directly linked this science with logic.

After a long history of Muslim conquests, Syrian translations to Porphyry's *Introduction to the Categories of Aristotle*, and also to *Categories*, *On Interpretation* and *Prior Analytics* were copied. Oriental Christians assumed a Neoplatonic point of view. They organised the study of logic into nine units: 1) *Introduction to the Categories*, 2) *Categories*, 3) *On Interpretation*, 4) *Prior Analytics*, 5) *Posterior Analytics*, 6) *Topics*, 7) *Sophistical Refutations*, 8) *Rhetoric*, and 9) *Poetics*.

From the Syrian and Christian traditions, the Arabs learned various issues through the Baghdad and Jundishapur schools:

- 1) The same division of logic into nine branches;
- 2) Alexandrians' Neoplatonism comments and method;
- 3) The effort to attune Platonism to Aristotelian theories;⁹
- 4) The teaching of the first four treatises of the *Organon* to philosophy students, avoiding *Posterior Analytics* for religious reasons, and
- 5) The promotion of the study of logic as the basis for advanced knowledge, such as natural sciences, medicine and theology.

7. ALFARABI, "Canons of Poetry", bilingual text translated by A. J. Arberry, «Rivista degli Studi Orientali», xvii (1938), Università di Roma, Roma, p. 274.

8. See L. X. LÓPEZ-FARJEAT, *Teorías aristotélicas del discurso*, Eunsa, Pamplona 2002, pp. 237-289. Also see LÓPEZ-FARJEAT, "El silogismo poético y la imaginación en Alfarabi", «Tópicos» 18 (2000), Universidad Panamericana, México 2000, pp. 97-113. I have reviewed and modified this paper in the last months, since I have discovered some ambiguities in my exposition of Alfarabi's thought.

9. Alfarabi attempts it also in this way. See *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, Free Press of Glencoe (Macmillan Co.), New York 1962.

Some translators improved the editions of the *Organon* between the years 900 to 1000, finally recovering *Posterior Analytics*. Abu Bishr Matta (Baghdad, 870-940), who was conversant with the Arabic language, translated and commented most parts of the *Organon*, including *Poetics*. The first generation of Islamic logicians and philosophers studied with Bishr Matta's translations, and there are even some researchers that believe Alfarabi to be one of his pupils.

3. LOGIC TREATISES IN THE *ENUMERATION OF THE SCIENCES*

The *Enumeration of the Sciences* is one of Alfarabi's most important works.¹⁰ In this book we can read the following classification:

Article I

The Science of Language

Article II

On Logic

Article III

On the Science of Mathematics

Article IV

On Natural Science and Metaphysics

Article V

On Political Science, the Science of Jurisprudence and Theology

For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the second article. Alfarabi recognizes five logical arts which are reviewed in each of the following treatises: *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, *Sophistical Refutations*, *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*:

«Logic has eight parts. Indeed, the species of syllogism and the species of elocution that can be used to demonstrate any opinion or matter, and the species of the arts whose particular function (when they are perfect) consists on using the elocutionary syllogism, can be reduced, in short, to five: *apodeictic*, *dialectic*, *sophistic*, *rhetoric* and *poetic*».¹¹

Later on, he explains the contents of each of the eight books of logic and shows in which of them can each syllogism and species of elocution be found:

1st Book: which contains canons of the isolated ideas and of the words that express them. This book is the one called, in Arabic *al-maqūlāt* (*Predicaments*), and in Greek, Κατηγορίαι (*Categories*).

2nd Book: which contains the canons of simple elocutions, consisting of two isolated ideas or of the two words that express them. This book's title is, in Arabic, *al- 'ibāra* (*Interpretation*), and in Greek, Περί ἑρμηνείας (*On Interpretation*).

3rd Book: which contains the canons through which the value of the species of demonstration common to the five demonstrative arts, is appraised. This book is

10. See ALFARABI, *Catálogo de las Ciencias*, bilingual edition from Á. González Palencia, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid/Granada 1953.

11. ALFARABI, *Catálogo de las Ciencias*, cit., pp. 25-26.

called, in Arabic *al-qiyās* (*The Syllogism*) and in Greek, *Αναλυτικῶν προτέρων* (*Prior Analytics*).

4th Book: which contains the canons through which the value of apodeictic elocutions is appraised, as well as those canons that rule the systematization of the problems of Philosophy so that its investigations achieve the most perfect, excellent and complete success. In Arabic, this book is called *Kitāb al-burhān* (*Book of the Apodeictic Demonstration*), and in Greek, *Αναλυτικῶν ὑστέρων* (*Second Analytics*).

5th Book: which contains the canons to appraise the value of dialectical elocutions, the method of dialectic objection and response and, in short, the canons that rule the systematization of the art of controversy so that all its operations turn out to be as perfect, excellent and efficacious as possible. This book is called, in Arabic, *Kitāb al-mawādi' i al-yādabiyya* (*Book of the Dialectic Places*), and in Greek, *Τοπικῶν* (*Places or Topics*).

6th Book: which contains, firstly, the canons for the use of means, whose particular function is to mislead understanding from the path of truth, deceive it and leave it perplexed. In it are enumerated all the resources used by the one that intends to alter the truth and subtly falsify it both in knowledge and elocutions. Afterwards, he furthermore enumerates those necessary to find those sophistical elocutions used by the forger and the fake; explains what is and how to solve what must be rejected and how man should preserve himself from either falling in a sophism in his investigations or to lead others into error. This book is called, in Greek, *Περὶ τῶν σοφιστικῶν ἐλέγχων* (*Sophistry*), which means “the forged wisdom”.

7th Book, which contains the canons through which one can examine and appraise the value of rhetoric elocutions, of the various species of oratorical discourse, of the ways of speaking used by writers and orators, in order to find out if they are in line with the rhetoric's particular method. In the said canons, all the elements that contribute to integrate the organism of rhetoric art are enumerated, indicating the contrived way of composing, in each matter, the elocutions of this art, the resources through which they will come to be as excellent and perfect as possible, and its operations as efficacious and eloquent as can be. In Greek, this book is called *Ῥητορικὴ* which is, (in Arabic) *al-jitāba* (*Rhetoric*).

8th Book, which contains the canons through which one can examine poems and artificial poetic elocutions in general as well as those particularly composed for each poetic genre according to the matters. In these canons are enumerated all the elements that make up (integrate) the organism of the art of poetry, how many its parts are, how many kinds of poems and poetical elocutions there are, which the contrived way to compose each of them is, with which resources one can count for its composition, how to get the poem to be an organic whole, and that it turns out endowed with all the possible beauty, emphasis, brightness and taste, and, in short, which qualities must it bring together so that its eloquence produces the maximum effect. In Greek, this book is called *Περὶ ποιητικῆς* (*Poetics*), which is, (in Arabic) *Kitāb al-ši' ar* (*Book of poetry*)». ¹²

The first argumentative form is referred to conviction and certainty, and is called demonstration (*ṣarḥun*). The second form gains a conviction that is only an approach to certainty, and this is dialectic (*tahlīlun mantiqiy 'yun*). The third one is sophistical argumentation (*mantiqiy 'yatun*), the art of cheating by

12. ALFARABI, *Catálogo de las Ciencias*, cit., pp. 32-35.

making the interlocutor believe that the orator is sage and expert. The fourth is rhetoric (*'albalāgatu*) or art of persuading. The last art is poetry (*'aš'šī'ru*). Its purpose is to evoke images that are similar to real things, even when they are not real things within themselves. Alfarabi distinguishes – just as the Alexandrians – demonstration from dialectic and sophistical argumentation considering three criteria: 1) the composition of their premises; 2) their epistemological background, and 3) the object of their inquiry.

3. 1. *Demonstration*

Alfarabi considers demonstration to be the supreme and most noble of the five logical arts, because it leads to certainty. The main goal of demonstration is to communicate an unerring knowledge (*ḍarūriy 'yun*) about the existence and causes of what is real. The epistemological certainty of demonstration cannot be reduced to the act of understanding, but shall also be referred to the capacity of communicating evident premises. Demonstrative sciences, according to Alfarabi, include three basic aspects: subject, problems and principles. These three are explained in the *Kitāb al-Burhān*.¹³ For the purpose of this paper, a brief explanation will be enough. The *subject* is each science's object of inquiry; for example, the study of numbers belongs to mathematics, as just as the study of lines, surfaces and bodies belongs to geometry. Alfarabi understands *problem* as "that which is to be demonstrated". Finally, he takes *principles* as the axioms of each science or, in other words, the evident suppositions related to that which is to be demonstrated; for example, when studying motion, a physicist does not start by demonstrating the malleability of matter. Alfarabi writes:

«*Apodeictic* elocutions are those whose function consists in producing a true knowledge about the matter whose resolution is being searched for; whether a man uses them inside his own spirit to look into that matter himself or whether he uses them to demonstrate it to another, or whether another uses them to demonstrate them to him. In every case, the particular function of such elocutions is to give, as a result, a true knowledge. Knowledge is true when what is known cannot be in absolutely any other way; when the man who possesses it cannot recant it in any way or case, nor can conceive he himself conceives such recantation as possible; when there is no possibility that he thinks of any suspicion of error, nor that any kind of sophism that forces him to reject what he already knows crosses his mind, nor doubts nor conjectures».¹⁴

3. 2. *Dialectic*

This is the art that engenders a conviction closely related to certainty. Alfarabi calls this kind of conviction "a belief" (*ālẓn*). He assumes the Aristotelian point

13. See ALFARABI, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, included in *Al-mantiq 'ind Alfārābi*, edited by Mājid Fakhūrī, Beirut, Dār al-mashriq 1970, Fol. 73.

14. ALFARABI, *Catálogo de las Ciencias*, cit., p. 26.

of view of *Topics*, in which dialectic is an argumentative process that takes place between at least two rivals: one who poses the questions and another who answers them. The one who poses the questions tries to refute his opponent's position, while the latter responds trying to resist the objections. Dialectical premises are either generally accepted opinions or opinions accepted by authority. In the first case (generally accepted opinions), the strength of a conviction is based upon the testimony or the criteria of the majority: something is qualified as true because the majority accepts it to be so. However, Alfarabi affirms that this kind of "truth" is accidental,¹⁵ and that the opinions of the majority only lead us to a non-apodeictic kind of truth, not to a truth *strictu sensu*.

Those opinions accepted by authority are divided into three different kinds: those that are known by theoretical sciences, others known from practical sciences and a third kind that belong to logical arts. In a debate, arguers may use any of these. It is not necessary for these opinions to be either true nor false. In fact, it is possible to find two generally accepted opinions that are mutually contradictory. That is why the arguer must show positions that get as close as possible to certainty, knowing that their acceptance can vary. If an opinion is widely accepted, it will lead to a stronger argument, and *vice versa*. That is why a good dialectical arguer appeals to opinions that have great acceptance. Alfarabi says:

«Dialectical elocutions are used in two cases: First, when one argues with assertions of common feeling, the kind that every man admits, trying only to defeat his adversary on a thesis for whose truth the latter answers, or to defend against him another thesis with assertions of that same genre. If the one who argues tries to defeat the defender, but with assertions or means that do not belong to common feeling, and if the defender tries to sustain or defend his thesis, but with assertions or means that do not belong to the common feeling either, then the function of both does not belong to the dialectical method; second, when man uses common-feeling assertions as means to suggest vehement suspicions of error in his own spirits or in those of other person, concerning an opinion whose truth he tries to prove, even coming to the point of imagining that it is true without it really being so».¹⁶

3. 3. *Sophistical argumentation*

Sophistic is a logical art that makes general opinions appear like syllogisms. A sophist is skillful enough to state an opinion in such a way to make others consider him as a sage.¹⁷ According to Alfarabi, the scope of sophistic is similar

15. See ALFARABI, *Kitab al Burhān*, cit., Fol. 62.

16. ALFARABI, *Catálogo de las Ciencias*, cit., pp. 26-27.

17. See Fuad Said HADDAD, *Alfarabi's Theory of Communication*, American University of Beirut, Lebanon 1989, pp. 111-113.

to that of rhetoric, even when the real object of investigation of the former is not truth. Premises used in sophistical argumentation seem to be familiar for everyone, even when they are not. A sophist uses generalized opinions that resemble universal ones. There may be a considerable amount of falsehood within these opinions, but this falseness is hidden by their great acceptance. This art can easily engender false beliefs:

«Sophistical elocutions are those whose particular function consists on leading understanding into error, to lead it astray and confuse it, so that it comes to suspect as true what is actually not, and reciprocally; to regard as an eminent sage someone who is really not so; and to disregard a true philosopher and sage as if he were not».¹⁸

4. RHETORIC AND POETICS IN THE *FUSUL [AL- 'ILM] AL- MADANI*

There are two arts – rhetoric and poetics – which are yet to be described. We find a more detailed review of them in the *Fusul [al- 'ilm] Al- Madani*. In aphorism 54 it is read:

«Rhetoric is the ability to speak to others by means of statements that are excellent in persuading about each and every one of the possible matters that are such as to be preferred or avoided. However, the virtuous practitioners of this faculty use it with respect to good things, while those who are cunning use it with respect to evil ones».

Rhetoric does not have a defined object, but is rather useful for any topic. Therefore, its field of action is wide open. As in dialectic, rhetorical premises are “possible things (*mumkinun*) whose nature consists in being chosen or avoided”. In the *Kitab fī l-mantiq* Alfarabi adds to this *repertoire* of premises both generally accepted opinions and opinions accepted by authority.¹⁹ Whenever one of these opinions attains such a degree of verisimilitude that it can easily be mistaken for truth, then they are useful for the rhetorician. They are profitable not because of their close relation with truth, but because of their general acceptance. At this point, rhetoric clearly resembles dialectic. Occasionally, rhetoricians ought to discard true premises just because they lack general acceptance.

The main purpose of rhetoric is to persuade. Persuasion engenders a belief referred to something either necessary or plausible. In rhetoric, the latter term – plausible – does not submit to the nature of things, but to a specific standpoint. In other words, this kind of plausibility used by the rhetorician to engender a belief, does not refer to the essence of things, but to a state of mind in which we might end up believing something, even when we do not have any certainty about it.

18. ALFARABI, *Catálogo de las Ciencias*, cit., p. 27.

19. See ALFARABI, *Kitāb fī l-mantiq: al- Khitabah*, edited by M. S. Sālim, Cairo 1976, Fol. 112.

Rhetorical persuasion is based upon the use of enthymemes and paradigms. When a rhetorician uses enthymemes, he makes a premise evident, while leaving the other unsaid. Rhetoricians not only intend to argue: their syllogisms also appeal to their listeners' passions (anger, gratitude, sympathy, discourtesy). This is quite an effective resource. The other argumentative resource, which has already been mentioned, is paradigm. Such an argument consists on determining the similarities between two different objects.

In the *Fusul [al- 'ilm] al- Madani*, Alfarabi recognizes the double face of *Rhetoric*: if the rhetorician is virtuous, he will use the rhetoric for goodness; if he is evil, he will seduce and lead to vices. It is in this last sense that Alfarabi suggests – as Plato did – that rhetoric and sophistic are very alike. When a rhetorician uses false arguments, he is acting like a sophist. In the same context, an honest rhetorician would be that one who uses true arguments and presents them as believable and highly persuasive.

Some considerations concerning rhetoric and poetic discourse can be read in several of Alfarabi's texts. I will now compare those appearing in the *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm* with those I have reported from the *Fusul [al- 'ilm] Al- Madani*. This last text is decisive, because in it, a curious difference between these two discourses – rhetoric and poetic – enhanced: namely, the distinction between assent and simple disposition. It is relevant then, to first recall the explanation of the *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*:

«*Rhetoric* elocutions are those whose particular function consists in managing to persuade man of any opinion by inclining his spirit to the truth of what is said to him and to grant it his assent, with lesser or greater intensity; because adherences founded on mere persuasion, although inferior in intensity to very probable opinion, admit various degrees among themselves, some being firmer than others, depending on how firm the elocutions that produce them are, since certain persuasive elocutions are, undoubtedly, more efficacious, more eloquent, more trustworthy than others; the same thing happens with testimonies; the more they are in number, the more eloquent and efficacious they are to persuade and convince of the truth of a notice and to obtain a firmer assent with respect of the truth of what is said. However, in spite of this variety of degrees in the intensity of persuasion, none of the rhetoric elocutions can come to produce the particular rise of the very probable opinion, which is quite close to certainty. And that is how, in this respect, rhetoric and dialectic differ from each other».²⁰

Thus far the explanation on rhetoric. Rhetoric's premises can deal with any subject and, with them, it is intended to incline an individual towards a certain belief. According to Alfarabi, different degrees of persuasion are admitted because different elements must be taken into account: force of elocution, testimonies, etcetera. Though in this passage Alfarabi does not mention it, even the mood of the orator must be taken into account. A good rhetorician tries to obtain an assent as firm as can be. Further on, we will observe that

20. ALFARABI, *Catálogo de las Ciencias*, cit., p. 29.

this is an important aspect in the *Fusul*. Another matter worthy of comment is the difference between rhetoric and dialectic. According to Alfarabi, while dialectics could engender an opinion which is very close to certainty, that does not happen with rhetoric. In my opinion, this distinction is not clear, and to see it that way, instead of dealing with argumentative force or with syllogistic uses, is quite disputable. Although a dialectical argument can be firmer from the logical point of view, a rhetorical one can be more persuasive. The versatility of a rhetorician and his ability for taking emotional elements into account might allow him a greater capacity for someone to believe that an opinion is close to certainty, even though those versed in logic might realize it is not.

We shall now explain the role of poetics considered as a logical art:

«Poetic elocutions are those composed of elements whose particular function is to provoke, in the spirit, the imaginative representation of a way of being or property of the thing being dealt with, whether this trait is excellent or vile, as might be beauty, ugliness, nobility, abjectness, or other traits similar to these. When listening to poetic elocutions, it happens to us that, by effects of that imaginative suggestion, those elocutions provoke in our spirits something analogous to what happens to us when we look at an object similar to another one that disgusts us, because as soon as we look at it, imagination represents it as something that upsets us, and thus our spirit backs away and flees from it, even though we are quite certain that such object is not really as we imagine it to be. Thus, even if we know that what poetic elocutions suggest to us about an object is not as they tell, we act just as we would act if we were sure that it is so, because many times, man acts according to what he imagines more than to what he thinks or knows; and quite often, it happens that what he thinks or knows is against to what he imagines, and in such cases, he acts according to what he imagines and not to what he thinks or knows. The same thing happens when we look at the representative images of a thing or at objects that resemble another object. Poetic elocutions are only used when addressing a man whom one desires to provoke into doing a certain thing, provoking in his spirit an emotion or feeling and thus inclining him to fulfill it. Yet, this cannot be but in two hypotheses; either when the man who is being enticed is a man who has no reflection to lead him and thus, has to be enticed to act as proposed by means of the imaginative suggestion, which works in him just as reflection would do; or when one is dealing with a man endowed with a reflective spirit, but who would probably not act as one would like him to if he examines reflectively the act being asked of him; and in this case, one would tackle him suddenly with poetic phrases so that imaginative suggestion precedes his reflection and thus throws him, due to rashness, into the realization of that act, before his reflecting on its consequences makes him either recant from his purpose and abstain from fulfilling it at all, or decide not to hurry and to leave it for later, so as to study it carefully. For this reason poetic elocutions are the only ones to be presented embellished, adorned, filled with emphasis and redundancies, polished with the splendor and glow given by the resources with which the science of Logic deals with».²¹

21. ALFARABI, *Catálogo de las Ciencias*, cit., pp. 29-31.

The ability of poetic discourse to generate a sort of emotive affection in the soul by resorting to a representation, stands out in this passage. When this happens, we can act according to the dictates of imagination and not according to reality. Alfarabi points out that this discourse is useful when we want someone to act in a certain way. In other words, poetic discourses lead to action. This is the reason for which they are useful in educating people. At the same time, one must be careful with representations, because, as it has been explained, these possess an attracting ability that is determining when one is about to act.

Now, let me quote the aphorism 55 of the *Fusul [al- 'ilm] Al- Madani*:

«Excellence in imaginative evocations is other than excellence in persuasion. The difference between the two is that what is intended by excellence in persuasion is for the hearer to do something after assenting to it. What is intended by excellence in imaginative evocations is to inspire the soul of the hearer to seek or to flee the thing imaginatively evoked, or to have an inclination to or loathing for it, even if he has not assented to it. This is like a human being feeling disgust when he sees something that resembles what is such as to be truly disgusting, even if he is certain that what he sees is not the thing that is disgusting. Excellence in imaginative evocation is used with respect to what annoys and contents, with respect to what frightens and assures, with respect to what softens the soul, with respect to what hardens it, and with respect to the rest of the accidents of the soul. What is intended by excellence in imaginative evocation is that a human being be moved to accept something and be inspired toward it, even if what he knows about the thing requires the converse of what is imaginatively evoked. Many people love or detest something, or prefer or avoid it, only due to imaginative evocation, to the exclusion of deliberation, either because they naturally have no deliberation or because they have rejected it in their affairs».

In the first part of this aphorism, we find an important difference between rhetoric and poetics: the former persuades, and thus achieves the conviction or assent (*taṣḍīq*) of the listener, inciting him to act. That is why Alfarabi gives rhetoric an important place in his articles about political science. “*Tasḍīq*” is an innovative concept in Alfarabi’s interpretation, and it is possible that he may have adopted it from stoic logic.²²

As occurred in Platonism, Alfarabi assigns poetry a pedagogical function. The goal of this kind of discourse is to arouse passions in the soul, without needing the listener either to act or to assent. There is no need for the audience to suffer in flesh and blood, e.g., Oedipus’ tragedy, when the aim is for them to reject incest by means of its representation. That is why, in aphorism 56 of the *Fusul [al- 'ilm] Al- Madani*, Alfarabi explains how poetic images can improve and correct the passions of the soul.²³

22. See L. X. LÓPEZ-FARJEAT and M. T. SÁNCHEZ MIER, *Analogía poética en Alfarabi*, 2002 (this paper will be published in «Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval», Zaragoza 2004).

23. See ALFARABI, *Fusul [al- 'ilm] Al- Madani* 56. In this paragraph, Alfarabi affirms the

Assent is not necessarily implied when one rejects a vice or accepts a virtue through poetic images. The rhetorician obtains his audience's assent by using a series of arguments whose persuasive power leads to deliberation. The listener will ponder the reasons given by the rhetorical argument, and he will end up acting according to the most convincing option for him. On the contrary, poetry leaves out the deliberative process: it just prepares the listener by exciting his soul with desire or reluctance in an imaginative way, not in a deliberative one.

5. EPILOGUE

Demonstrations, dialectic and sophistic, have a specific argumentative and rational process. But these are not the only options that exist for persuading, nor for communicating. Some people are more strongly incited through good illocutions or by images. In the case of rhetoric, enthymemes and paradigms are frequently used. They lead to action. On the other hand, poetry evokes images that only prepare the soul, even though overwhelming convictions are not obtained. The premises are not evident. Alfarabi's interpretation was inspired by Aristotelian ideas, although he sometimes innovates and deviates from the original source.

It is true that many times it is more effective to persuade with illocutions or images, rather than with deductive reasoning. Regarding poetry, Alfarabi explains that some people have such an active imagination that it is difficult for them to control it.²⁴ Therefore, their soul easily reacts to attractive or disgusting images. The strength and, I dare to say, the central role that Alfarabi gives to the imagination is one of the features that grant his philosophy an unquestionable originality. Alfarabi's philosophy is not a simple paraphrase of Aristotelian thought.

Image is to poetry what certainty is to demonstration, opinion to dialectic and persuasion to rhetoric. We can be convinced by demonstrations or opinions, but also by images. In many cases, the contents of imagination may contend with our convictions and beliefs, and in fact it is easier to follow the dictates of imagination than to obey other cognitive faculties. Images, as much as knowledge, opinions and persuasions, can incite us to different mental states.²⁵ The fact that images incite us to such mental states is very significant: poetry provides us with mental images, which prepare us for acting. According to Alfarabi, poetry prepares; rhetoric, on the other hand, leads to action. That is why politicians must know these two disciplines, indispensable when dealing with human communication.

existence of six types of poetry. The first three are well seen, for they guide to virtue; the other three are censored because they promote vice.

24. See SALIM KEMAL, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna*, E. J. Brill: Leiden, Netherlands 1991, pp. 89-107.

25. See ALFARABI, *Fusul [al- 'ilm] Al- Madani*, 56.