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Imagination: Farabi vis-à-vis Hegel's Vantage Point

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ABSTRACT

Theory of imagination shares common features in Farabi and Hegel. Imagination, Farabi believes, may well be defined by its three most notable activities of preserving the sensible forms, combining and separating the sensible forms to make new images, and representing sensible beings as well as the intelligible affairs and beings by sensible forms of two former kinds of images, that is, preserved forms in imagination and the forms created by imagination via combining and separating the sensible forms. Imagination keeps forms of a horse, a stone, a wing, a smell, etc. Imagination also makes a horse with two wings, or a stone that is crying, or a wall that is singing. Imagination gets the image of the horse from nature, and the image of the wings from nature too, then produces a new form by joining them. Imagination represents, for example, the vice of damaging environment by drawing a row of crying trees in a painting. Three stages of imagination according to Hegel include the first stage as reproductive imagination, the second stage as the productive and associative imagination, also called fantasy, and third stage as the sign-making fantasy. Mentioned features of imagination in Hegel's work has a high resemblance to three activities explored in Farabi's philosophy.

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Introduction

The concept of imagination should be found amongst the outlooks of philosophers. Because theories of imagination, as the most basic precept in aesthetics and philosophy of art, are discussed with different approaches amongst continental and analytical philosophers. To expatiate on the issue, it should be noticed that in the analytic philosophy, truth and meaning are thought to be represented by the formal structures of language, logic, and science. However, in continental tradition the role of representing meaning and truth is mostly on the shoulders of art. (Schacht, 1973, 297–313) So art in itself is deemed a philosophical activity. Then imagination plays, as one of the permanent elements of art, a basic role in continental philosophy and literature. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) as one of the most influential figures of continental tradition and a hero for many philosophers, developed a theory of imagination on which this research is focused. But then, Farabi's theory of imagination seems corresponding to the Hegel's. Or in reverse, Hegel's theory of imagination is compatible with Farabi's one.

On the method should I say that some believe that the notion of "imagination" in Hegel's work is much more complex than simply confronting it.

I believe also that Hegel's work is indeed complex. But perhaps critics of my method of simplification have overlooked the central idea that imagination is fundamentally intertwined with the awareness of our own perception. We cannot separate our sense of perception from imagination.

Some simply think that my interpretation might benefit from additional sources, perhaps. Not all of us are fortunate enough to read Hegel in the original German. However, Hegel's literature in English seems a field of research in itself.

Moreover I believe it's worth remembering that interpretation, in philosophy, is never about rigid answers. It's about asking the right questions. Developing Farabi's theory on imagination is precisely because of the Western tradition that I am questioning it and its roots.

Do I even understand the core of Hegel's philosophy, or am I merely echoing popular postmodern sentiments?

I don't take in completely Hegel's philosophy. But the point of my paper is not to repeat the Western tradition—it's to challenge it. We've accepted these ideas for so long that we've stopped questioning them. My paper offers a new way of thinking about imagination, one that includes voices often left out of the conversation. It's about expanding the dialogue. Not just reaffirming what we already know.

Philosophy, after all, isn't about preserving tradition for tradition's sake. It's about pushing boundaries, even if that means challenging the very foundations that others have taken for granted.

1. Imagination for Farabi

Farabi defines imagination by enumerating its properties and functions. He states three activities for imagination: Preserving the sensible forms, for instance, form of a flower, a smell, a music, a taste, ... Combining and separating the sensible forms and making new forms, for example, to make a horse with two wings, or a stone that is crying, or a wall that is singing. People take the image of the horse from nature, and image of the wings from nature too, then their imagination produces a new form by joining them. Representing sensible beings and the intelligible by sensible forms of two groups mentioned above: preserved forms in imagination and the forms created by imagination (Farabi 2000, 154, 177, 196, 197; see also Maftouni and Nuri 1403, 4). The third activity of imagination had not been emphasized before Farabi in Aristotle's (321-383BC) writings and even after Farabi in Avicenna's (980-1037) books. Farabi based on this activity, gives imagination the ability of comprehension of the intelligible. Imagination can create an image to represent an intelligible as it can represent the other sensible. For instance, the rational pleasure can be likened to a pleasant smell or sight, and the sensible pleasure resulting of smelling an apple can be described with another pleasant smell. So, imagination is a creative perception.

For Farabi, the theory of imagination is embedded in definition of art. Art is a kind of taste that operates based on imaginations are created in soul (Farabi 1996,13). This definition inserts two results into philosophy of Farabi: one is related to the connection between art and knowledge, and another is about art and ethics the first of which will be discussed here. The latter will remain beyond the scope of current research. For further research, Farabi's view about the ethics of art may well be compared and contrasted with Hegel's notion in the same field. As Bates put it, "since time is central to all the discussions of the imagination in the *Philosophy of Spirit* lectures, I conclude with a discussion of the time of the Concept. Since time, history, our intentions, and our actions are not separable, for Hegel comprehension of the Concept makes possible the highest form of ethical life." (Bates 2004, 14-xiii)

2. The Relation Between Imagination and Knowledge According to Farabi

First let us mention the relation between art and knowledge in Farabi's work after which we will continue with the connection between imagination and knowledge for Farabi. Farabi considers the arts as a source of knowledge. The arts have a great potential to learn. All things that might be subject of knowledge, might be the subject of poem and even music (Farabi 1996, 561).

Farabi says the subjects of the knowledge include voluntary affairs and involuntary things. In other words, these are the contents of practicable knowledge and theoretical knowledge. All of these contents can be represented by poem and music. Of course, poem and music can deal with the other subjects too (Farabi 1996, 561-562).

This capacity of art is because of the ability of imagination. Farabi defines art based on imagination: Art is a sort of taste and talent dependent on the imaginations created in soul (Farabi 1996,13) and imagination is able to represent sensible and intellectual affairs. It means that imagination can embody insensible concepts by creating images and

sensible forms. Thus, the faculty of imagination can image contents of knowledge, although they might be insensible and intellectual.

This way is the only practical and useful way for teaching public. Farabi states two ways for understanding affairs and things: one is understanding essence and nature of something and the other is imagining the illustrations and examples and images of something (Farabi 1997, 225; 2000, 254; 2005, 68; see also Maftouni 2025, 65). A lot of affairs can be learned only by imagining them because human has no way to intellect them (Farabi 2005, 55). Yet until the details of insensible knowledge such as soul, intellect, hyle and all intellectual beings somehow do not come into imagination, neither we can speak about them nor we can actualize them. But as it is not possible to imagine these affairs through feeling them, we must choose another way which brings us to imagining and this way is called comparison or resemblance (Farabi 1996, 43).

It should be additionally mentioned here that hyle is an Aristotelian concept might well be introduced as the principle that “correlates with shape and this can be demonstrated in the way the philosopher described hyle, saying it is that which receives form or definiteness, that which is formed.” (Smith 2017, 201; Leclerc 2018, 76)

Also about other affairs that it is not impossible to intellect them, majority of people do not have the ability of intellection because of their nature or habit (Farabi 1997, 225). Soul is attracted to imagination and imagination has domination on it. Soul has trust in the sensible inasmuch as it denies the existence of intellectuals and considers them as unfounded fanciful and imaginary. Thus the method of teaching these affairs to public is transmitting the images, examples and illustrations to their mind and imagination (Farabi 1997, 225).

Farabi elsewhere says about this issue: Although source and origin of knowledge is the knowledge which represents beings rationally and with positive demonstrations, for teaching people and nations and citizens some other knowledges are useable, knowledges that take the reasonable

information and convert them into corporeal information (Farabi 2005, 64).

In Farabi's view the exclusive way of getting happiness for people is embodying intellectual knowledge and rational happiness in their imaginations.

Understanding real happiness is hard for public. Therefore real happiness should be embodied with affairs that according to their belief is happiness. To imagine beings without time and place is hard or even impossible for people and therefore it should be embodied in their imagination with beings related to time and place, and hereby approximate them to truth (Farabi 2005, 70-71). Thereupon Farabi counts the creativity of imagination a means for embodying intellectual affairs and teaching them to public and he believes embodying them as the only way for attainment of people to happiness.

3. Imagination for Hegel

The nature and role of the imagination in Hegel's work, according to Vieweg is believed about that, "One can speak of a new founding of a modern theory of imagination, one that, of course, connects up with *individual* ideas presented by other modern philosophers, Hume, Kant, and Schelling, for example, but nevertheless outlines the fundamental positions of a wholly independent, original conception of the imagination that has not been superseded even today." (Vieweg 2011, 87-88) However, in spite of all innovations of modern philosophers, when scrutinizing Farabi's theory of imagination, you're entitled to doubt a wholly independent, original conception of the imagination in the whole of modern philosophy.

As we're supposed to, after analyzing Farabi's notions on imagination we'll continue with Hegel's sayings about imagination. Despite of all differences in interpretations of Hegel's work and his words, three stages of imagination could be seen in his writings.

The first stage of imagination is called the stage of representation.

Related to this first stage, the faculty of imagination is presented as an indispensable transition or middle ground in the self-constitution of finite subjectivity (Düsing 1991, 311–312; Vieweg 2011, 90). Two statements “My vision is blue” and “There is a blue object” seem to be the same. As Vieweg points it out, “in intuition the effect of both propositions is posited as one. The one that sees and the one seen, hearing and making sound, mind and world, are taken as identical.” (Vieweg 2011, 91) He continues, “Pure intuition as well as pure representation is mere appearance or semblance that proves itself to be such; intuition and the faculty of imagination are infected by thought from the very beginning. Intuition is sensual *and* intellectual, natural *and* rational at the same time,” and akin to Schelling’s view, “That which produces and the product join together in a unity” (Schelling 1985, 528).

The faculty of imagination, according to Vieweg’s reading of Hegel, could be reached from remembrance. That is the way of transition to the stage of representation, “to *inner presencing, inner representation, by positing the inner present of the image, the overcoming of the existent, the past.*” (Vieweg 2011, 94)

What Hegel posits about shapes without mass help us to initiate a comparison study with Suhrawardi’s fourth archangelic world, i.e. fourth ontological world of images, (Suhrawardi 2002, 232-234; Marcotte 2024) “The initial creations of the faculty of imagination also appear as a world of spatio-temporally unformed shapes, shapes without mass, positings by which the unconscious picture can be thoroughly displaced. In principle there follows a subsuming, for example, the sensation blue or sorrow under a universal form—blueness, sorrowfulness.” Although it goes beyond the reach of current research, it still could be mentioned here to help whom are interested in the issue. Kant as a source of Hegel to a certain extent, speaks of the active capacity of the synthesis of the manifold, “The imagination must bring the manifold of intuition into an *image*; it must therefore antecedently take up the impressions into its activity, so previously it must record the impressions in their activity, that

is, apprehend them” (Kant 1977a, 176; Vieweg 2011, 94)

Hegel posits that the pure faculty of imagination without thought is just a deception, however that is most often represented and hypostatized, principally by artists. The presentation, for him, is essentially infected and determined by thought. Imagination locates itself in the intermundane, that is, existing between worlds, “world of intuition and thinking as the hinge, as the universalization of the sensual, that is, the particular, and as the sensualization or particularization of the universal, the universality of intuition and the making-intuitive of the universal.” (Hegel 1827, 10: 266; Vieweg 2011, 95)

Following this analysis, which is required for the apprehension of what is coming, we now focus back again on the subject of the faculty of imagination in Hegel’s work. The faculty of imagination is one which determines *the* images and makes the genuine passage from finding to inventing, from the passive findings to the active findings. The part of active imagination is called fantasy for Hegel, on which we will focus on the second stage of imagination. As Vieweg asserts, “here lies the cornerstone of Hegel’s theory of symbolic forms, his logic of signs, which elevated him, according to Derrida, to the status of founder of modern semiology (semiotics).” (Vieweg 2011, 95)

We were saying that in Hegel’s theory of imagination we can grasp three stages of imagination the first of which is reproductive imagination. This is what Hegel himself stressed on, “Images are internally re-presented. Intellect places these before itself in a new space-time in which the original spatio-temporal concretion is dissolved. On the basis of this abstraction and the coming-to-be of universal representations, there occurs a contingent and arbitrary reproduction of the content. This supposed occurrence in succession, the coordination between similar images, remains an act accomplished by intellect itself, which subordinates singular intuitions under the internally constituted picture and thus gives itself universality, presenting the universal as something common, re-presenting it.” (Hegel 1827, 10: 266) However, intellect may

upraise a particular quality of a thing to the status of the universal, or it may lend fixed form to a concrete universal. (Vieweg 2011, 95)

After analyzing the first stage of imagination, it comes to the second stage, that is, the productive and associative imagination or fantasy.

The faculty of imagination in the second stage strikes as not controlled and unbridled picture-giving power, and “the untiring and active inner picture-maker, as free play with possibilities.” (Vieweg 2011, 96-97)

Hume believes that there is nothing more worthy of wonder than the readiness with which the imagination assembles its representations, “hurrying from one end of the universe to the other to assemble the representations that belong to the object” (Hume 1969, 38). These lines exactly appear in Suhrawardi's description on imagination. (Maftouni, 2018, 17-28)

And this ability of the faculty of imagination does not differ from what Kant regards as an “unpredictable field of related representations” in which the content, a determined concept, could “be aesthetically extended in an unlimited way” (Kant 1977b, 251; Vieweg 2011, 97).

So the faculty of imagination in the second stage, which might well be called the creative imagination, is capable of spreading and circulating itself in a never-ending manner in its own outcomes.

As Hegel contends, the universal foundation of art and formal side of art is actually this very play of fantasy, presenting the true universal in the form of the singular image (Hegel 1827, 10: 267). However, as Vieweg nicely explains,

The play of fantasy has a double aspect: being restless and without rules, the form of representation implies an indifferent external arrangement of the multiform images with their many meanings. Creativity, activity, and restlessness always remain ambivalent qualities; they do not in themselves guarantee a successful product. Non-creativity, tranquility, passivity, and simple letting-be are by no means to be devalued from the outset, for they are the very foundation of the faculty of imagination.

Fantasy is able to create the human and the inhuman, to build heaven and hell, and thus to demonstrate its power as well as its deficiency. (Vieweg 2011, 97)

After explaining the first and second stages of the faculty of imagination, according to Hegel's opinion, we will turn to its third stage. Hegel calls this third stage of the faculty of imagination sign-making fantasy.

The creations of fantasy which occurs in the second stage of imagination first appears just inward and subjective, that is, the images in the second stage remain merely particular and stay subjectively capable of intuition. But those images are not external or objectified, according to Vieweg's reading, "Still absent is the moment of being, the externalization, creating the present in the external, external neo-representation as a step toward objectification (Vieweg 2011, 98).

Mostly in artistic works, what is produced in inner intuition and the pure synthesis of concept and intuition, the entirely internal and subjective, would be established as an external object and an independent being.

When establishing this external object and independent being, intellect constructs new intuitions at the higher level and therefore, this would be the return to the point of departure of intuition. So while sign-making and setting sign-making fantasy off, "in the sign (*Zeichen*) actual vividness (*Anschaulichkeit*) is added to the self-constituted representation." (Vieweg 2011, 98) As Hegel posits, the intellect makes itself into an external object in which simply particular subjectivity is trespassed. The fundamental characteristics of Hegel's semiotics make themselves conspicuous in the former passage. Also here, Hegel's philosophical linguistic signs and the concept of language vividly appears. Upon this notion, Hegel could be deemed as one of the initiators of the modern philosophy of language.

4. Knowledge and Imagination for Hegel

The issue of the relation of Knowledge and Imagination for Hegel might well be analyzed considering the same writings of Hegel about imagination. Some researchers believe that since the imagination is located between intuition and thought, imagination cannot reach “the perfect identity of self-relation and self-determination in the form of thought thinking itself. The true iconoclasm of conceptual thought, as Hegel conceives it, remains beyond the reach of the imagination.” (Vieweg 2011, 99) However, for some researchers, imagination is the only way to grasp knowledge. As Bates interprets Hegel, “Cognition of the concept occurs only with the inception of imagination. ... Imagination is the *sine qua non* of our knowledge of the concept in nature and ourselves.” (Bates 2004, 14-xiii) It recalls Farabi's theory according to which also imagination is the only path to reach intellectual knowledge among public and normal people.

As Bates asserts, “The lower levels of conscious experience are largely unconscious dialectical reverberations. We, as speculative observers, can follow the logic of those reverberations, but the consciousness experiencing them cannot. But as consciousness develops up the levels of dialectical object-formation, from intuitions to recollections to reproductions in symbols and then signs, consciousness emerges from the night of the mind into the light of communication.” (Bates 2004, 15-xiv) Bates's phrase means, as I figure it out, that awareness goes to the stage of creating, in some way or another, manifestations of knowledge like art works to communicate you with your audience.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Farabi and Hegel, in spite of all distinctions and differences, may well be compared in the theory of imagination, concerning its nature as well as its role. According to both Farabi and Hegel, the faculty of imagination has three activities and works in three levels. These three, for Farabi, are preserving the sensory images, separating and combining the sensory

images to make new images, and representing the sensory beings as well as the intelligible beings by the sensory images of the former kinds of images related to the level one and the level two.

The first stage of imagination, as Hegel argued, is called the stage of representation which corresponds to the first activity of imagination in Farabi's theory. The second stage of Hegel's imagination is the productive and associative imagination, also called fantasy, which corresponds to the second activity of imagination in Farabi's writings. And the third stage of Hegel's imagination is the sign-making fantasy which corresponds with the third level of Farabi's imagination.

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