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Farabi vis-à-vis Sartre on Imagination

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Abstract

According to Farabi, imagination is able to embody intellectual affairs and beings. Inasmuch as imagination and imaginary art introduce the intellectual and embody them by the sensible, public can get knowledge and intellectual happiness through art. Happiness-oriented art includes sensible beauty and aesthetics evaluation and also might include enjoyment and pleasure. Sartre portrays imagination as the positing of an object as a nothingness and not being. While in memory and perception, we take our experience for real, in imagination we contribute a content that has no reality beyond our disposition to see it, and it is clear that this added content is time and again cited by art when we see a face in a picture or hear an emotion in a piece of music. For Sartre, imagination represents the power of human consciousness because it is a type of intentionality that posits in the same act both the existence of the object and its inexistence, since it intends it precisely as a virtual object. In imagination, the object is indeed intended by consciousness, but as absent, as containing a certain part of nothingness inasmuch as it is posited as not existing here and now. An artwork, according to Sartre, is an imaginary presentation of the world inasmuch as it requires human freedom. In other words, the artwork serves the purpose of making us feel

essential in connection with the world. While Farabi considers both real as well as unreal aspects of imagination Sartre sees just imagination's unreal side. Moreover, Farabi's focus is on the social function of imagination which Sartre lacks.

Keywords: Farabi, Sartre, imagination, art.

The Issues

Imagination is a basic component of several philosophical issues like aesthetics and philosophy of art interested in which many old and new philosophers. Abu Nasr Farabi (870-950) is a philosopher interested in aesthetics and philosophy of art perhaps because of being a musician. Sharing Farabi these favorites, Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre is a French philosopher and leading figure of 20th-century, also playwright, novelist, screenwriter, and literary critic.

History of aesthetics including the issues of imagination and art ordinarily does not deal with Farabi, while Farabi in many of his writings such as *Al-Musiqi al-Kabir*, *Al-Fosul al-Montaza'a*, *Ara-e Ahl-e al-Madina al-Fadhela*, *Al-Siasa al-Madania*, *Tahsil al-Sa'ada* in effect, emphasizes on imagination, philosophy of art, and aesthetics.

He discusses issues like definitions of art, imagination and beauty, relation of art to knowledge and ethics, political role and social position of the artist in Utopia. Definition of art, according to Farabi, is based on imagination, and its functions. In addition, the relationship between art and knowledge can be explained dependent on the theory of imagination. So it is necessary to clarify what imagination is and does. Comparing and contrasting Farabi with philosophers like Sartre may ensure a standing understanding of both sides.

Imagination's Functions 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). The third activity of imagination had not been emphasized before Farabi in Aristotle's (321-383BC) writings and even after Farabi in Avicenne'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.

Art and Knowledge according to 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 potential 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 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). 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). 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 addict (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.

Art and Ethics for Farabi

How is art related to ethics in Farabi's writings? He believes that breadth of effects of art is enormous. Contrary to Plato (427-347BC) whose attacks on art in *The Republic* is famous (605c), Farabi concerns himself with the positive effects of art and then points to its negative effects. Art can affect faculty of intellect, emotions and actions driven by intellect or emotions.

He classifies three admissible and positive effects of music, poems, songs, and tones and three inadmissible and negative effects. Positives effects follows: Correction and adjustment of reason, convictions and thoughts; changing extreme emotions and qualities

to moderate attributes; changing weak emotions and qualities to moderate qualities.

Farabi does not explain the three negative effects of arts. However, he briefly says those are opposite of three positives. According to him, the best art is the first one which adjusts human's mind and thoughts (Farabi 2003, 53-54). Farabi with this positive view to art, believes that art has a great capacity of reaching for happiness. It should be noticed that Farabi does not limit the happiness-oriented art and ethical art to serious art.

Clearly, ethical art has two properties: First, it does not lack aesthetics evaluation and corporeal beauty. In other words, Farabi distinct from ethical judgement believes in sensible beauty and aesthetic judgement. It can be explained by his theory of beauty. Farabi counts beauty the most perfect form of existence (Farabi 2000, 84, 1997, 70). He affirms definition of beauty based on the perfection in human and also in God with this difference: The beauty and perfection of human is out of his/her essence and because of the corporeal accidents but the beauty and perfection of God is very his essence (ibid). Farabi although defines beauty with perfection, he does not limit the beauty to insensible perfection. He believes that beauty includes corporeal beings and sensible forms too. His view about human's bodily beauty mentioned. In another place he says about sensible beauty: Beautiful in lots of beings means the perfection in color or shape or position (Farabi 1997, 72). Therefore the subject of beauty includes sensible and insensible affairs. Sensible beauty points to aesthetic evaluation and insensible beauty points to ethical judgement.

Second, happiness-oriented and ethical art is more extensive than the subjects of knowledge and serious affairs and it can produce enjoyment and pleasure. Contrary to Tolstoy who maintains that the value of art lies in its evocation of a feeling of only spiritual joy (Tolstoy 1930, 227).

How can art be counted ethical and include pleasure and entertainment and enjoyment too? Farabi believes that arts are two types: serious affairs and game types (Farabi 1996, 562). First genre includes all arts which is useful for attaining to the most perfect humanitarian aim namely happiness. Such an art is valuable in itself. But the art including game and entertainment can stay in the path of happiness too. Certainly, the final aim of human is not game. But the purposed mean of game is to rest and the purpose of resting is retrieving the thing that excites human to deal with serious affairs (Farabi 1996, 562). Thereupon the main purpose for sorts of games and entertainments is serious affairs and game is no value in itself but it is valuable for getting things which human need to achieve final happiness. Therefore, sorts of games can be counted affective in humanity (Farabi 1996, 562).

The Characteristic Features of Imagination for Sartre

Imagination was the topic of Sartre's dissertation in 1927 for the *diplôme d'études supérieures*, an old French diploma delivering a fifth year of higher education, oriented so as to approach professional practice. In effect, imagination seems central to Sartre's philosophical work all through his career. Published in 1936, Sartre's first book was a critical analysis of psychological and philosophical theories of imagination since Descartes. (Webber 2020) Sartre's theory of mental imagery is often criticized for giving in to the very "illusion of immanence" that he denounces in both *The Imagination* and *The Imaginary*. (Sauer 2016, 53) However, some of his commentators hold that Sartre takes the phenomenology of imagination a number of steps further, specially farther than what Husserl ventured to go. (Casey 1981, 164) *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (French: *L'Imaginaire: Psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination*), also published as *The Psychology of the Imagination*, is Jean-Paul Sartre's main book in which his concept of imagination is analyzed.

(Sartre 1940) Grasping the imagination is pivotal for Sartre to grasp what it is to be human. In *A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (1940) Sartre draws a sharp line between perception and imagination, claiming that consciousness could either perceive or imagine, while the two kinds of act would never be combined. (Perna 2001) In order to have a lucid picture of Sartre's thesis, we'll continue with characteristics he's described as to imagination. Some of these characteristics work to differentiate between imagination and perception while some are common to both.

Developing his theory of imagination, Sartre believes in four defining characteristics the first of which is that the image is not the object of consciousness, but actually a variation of consciousness itself (Sartre 2004, 5-7). When you are imagining the Eiffel Tower, for instance, you are taking part in a specific sort of mental action directed towards the Tower. "You are directing your attention imaginatively towards that huge structure in the center of Paris. You are not directing your attention to a mental picture of it." (Webber 2020, 3) For Sartre, this notion that imagining is to direct attention just to pictures in the mind is 'the illusion of immanence'. (Sartre 2012, 3-8; 2004, 5-6, 12).

The second feature of imagination, for Sartre, which is intended to distinguish imagination from perception, makes possible only quasi-observation (Sartre 2004, 8-11). When one imagines the Panthéon, their experience reproduces perception in introducing the Panthéon. However, as to perception, one may look into and learn about the object, while in imagination one may just change the presentation of the object in ways that reflect information already has. One cannot find how many columns support the Panthéon's pediment by creating a mental image: the mental image will either exemplify information one already has about the issue or not present a fixed number of columns (Sartre 2004, 38, 86-88, 128). Therefore for Sartre, imagination cannot be a source of new data.

The third feature of imagination, according to Sartre, is also meant to differentiate imagination and perception. Imagination posits its

object as a nothingness, either introducing it as nonexistent, absent, or existing elsewhere, or not introducing it as existent (Sartre 2004, 12, 183).

The fourth feature of imagination, in Sartre's view, is spontaneity (Sartre 2004, 14). Sartre regards *Nonthetic consciousness of itself* as a key item to both imagination and perception. (Sartre 2004, 11-12).

Sartre asserts that imagination has a distinctive structure from perception, saying that perception seems passive while an imagination seems active and gives itself to itself as a spontaneity that produces and conserves the object as imaged. Put another way, imaginative consciousness appears to itself as creative (Sartre 2004, 14).

Discussion and Conclusion

Two first characteristics of imagination in Sartre's writings are comparable with Farabi's theory of imagination. Comparing the first characteristic of imagination in Sartre's view with Farabi's theory of imagination, we will see that Farabi's imagination includes Sartre's. That is, for Sartre the image is not the object of consciousness, but actually a variation of consciousness itself (Sartre 2004, 5-7). However for Farabi, the image might be not only a form of consciousness itself, but also the object of consciousness. Yes; when you are imagining the Eiffel Tower, for instance, you are taking part in a specific sort of mental action directed towards the Tower. And yes; you are directing your attention imaginatively towards that huge structure in the center of Paris. You are not directing your attention to a mental picture of it." (Webber 2020, 3) But on top of that, your imagination according to Farabi, may work on the images present in it. It may combine the Eiffel with feathers and create a tower covered with feathers! We can call it a *secondary* image, calling Sartre's kind of image a *primary* image. In other words, Farabi portrays both real

as well as unreal sides of imagination. But Sartre considers only imagination's unreal aspect.

Sartre draws a sharp line between perception and imagination and claims that consciousness could either perceive or imagine, but the two kinds would never be combined. Notwithstanding, Farabi believes in imagination as a way of perception; not only sensory perception, but also intellectual perception.

As to the second feature of imagination in Sartre's opinion, imagination makes possible only quasi-observation (Sartre 2004, 8-11). That is, when one imagines the Panthéon, for example, their experience reproduces perception in introducing the Panthéon. However, as to perception, one may look into and learn about the object, while in imagination one may just change the presentation of the object in ways that reflect information already has. One cannot find the number of columns support the Panthéon's pediment by creating a mental image: the mental image will either exemplify information one already has about the issue or not present a fixed number of columns (Sartre 2004, 38, 86-88, 128). Therefore for Sartre, imagination cannot be a source of new data. Yes; for Farabi also, your image might be consistent with reality and could be inconsistent with. Images of your imagination could be real or unreal. This notion is consistent with the first feature in Farabi's theory.

Furthermore, Farabi focuses on the social functions of imagination which are neglected in Sartre's analyses.

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