

Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī
THE CONDITIONS OF CERTITUDE

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Absolute certitude is: (1) to believe of something that it is thus or not thus; and (2) to agree that it corresponds and is not opposed to the existence of the thing externally; and (3) to know that it corresponds to it and (4) that it is not possible that it not correspond to it or that it be opposed to it; and further (5) that there does not exist anything opposed to it at any time; and (6) and that all of this does not happen accidentally, but essentially.

1. Our saying “to believe of something that it is thus or not thus” is the genus of certitude. And there is no difference between calling this “belief” or calling it “consensus” (*al-ijmāʿ*) that the thing is thus or not thus. And this is opinion (*al-raʾy*). And what comes after this are the differentiae (*fuṣūl*) of certitude.

2. In our saying “to agree that it corresponds and is not opposed to what belongs to the existence of the thing externally,” the meaning of “corresponds and is not opposed” is that if the soul’s belief is affirmative, then this thing which is external (external to the belief, that is), is also affirmative, and if the belief is negative, then the thing which is external to the belief is negative. For this is the meaning of truth (*al-ṣidq*), namely, the relation (*idāfah*) of what belongs to the belief to the object of belief insofar as the latter is external to the soul, or insofar as it is external to the belief, or insofar as it is a subject (*mawḍūʿ*) of the belief. For the existents external to the beliefs are subjects of those beliefs, and the beliefs only become false or true through their relation to their subjects which are external to the soul, or insofar as they are external to the beliefs. For if their qualities with respect to affirmation and negation correspond and are not opposed to the qualities of the subjects which are external with respect to affirmation or negation, then they are true, whereas if the qualities of the subjects are opposed to the qualities of the beliefs, the beliefs are false.

3. And our saying, “and to know that it corresponds and is not opposed to it,” is only made a condition for [certitude] because it is conceivable that there should be agreement and that it correspond to the thing, but that believer is not aware that it corresponds, but rather, it is in his view possible that it may not correspond.

—And what is external are the existents of whom the impressions in the soul are likenesses, these being the meanings which Aristotle mentions in the introduction to his second book on logic [i.e., *On Interpretation*]. And they are included in the genera of categories which Aristotle enumerated in the *Categories*. For they are existent to the extent that something is believed about

them, and this includes both what is external to the soul, and what exists in the soul, such as most logical matters and what one studies concerning the nature of the intellect and the intelligibles, memory and forgetfulness, the emotions of the soul, and other things like this. For belief includes these things in the same way that it includes what is external to the soul, and it proceeds in the same fashion inasmuch as [both kinds of things] are made subjects in order to be known and believed, and are [to that extent] external to the beliefs that are held about them. So by “what is external” we mean “what is external to the belief.” For it may be believed that the belief itself is a certitude or an opinion (*ẓann*). Thus the belief which is believed to be true or false, or to be a certitude or an opinion, or to be one of the other things which it is possible to predicate of a belief, is also external, since that which is believed of the belief, for example, that it is an opinion or a certitude, is external to the belief. And this is the case with most logical matters and with the intelligibles which are called “secondary intelligibles.”—¹

And if it were corresponding and not opposed, this would be a true opinion of whose truth the believer is unaware, in which case this is true for him accidentally.² Likewise if it does not correspond, whereas it is in his view possible for it to correspond, then this is a false opinion of whose falsity the believer is not aware, in which case this is a false opinion for him accidentally. And in this way there may be both true opinions and false opinions. And the condition of truth in the case of certitude is that it not be accidental. And for this reason it is necessary that a human be aware of the correspondence of the belief to the existence or non-existence of the thing.

And the meaning of “knowledge of it” (*‘ilm-hu*) is that the state of the intellect with respect to the intelligible—that is, the existent which is external insofar as it is the subject of the belief—comes to be like the state of vision with respect to the visible at the time of perception. For this relation is knowledge. And it is sometimes potential, and sometimes actual. That which is potential is of two types: (1) either it is in proximate potency; (2) or it is in more remote potency. And remote potency is such that whenever the human being desires, what is in potency emerges into actuality. And the remote admits of degrees of remoteness. For example, the capacity of the person who is asleep to see; the

¹ Recognizing with Turker’s older edition (196.8–197.2) that this the offset paragraph is an interpolation into the main argument. Fakhry runs this passage in with the main argument (98.22–99.12).

² Reading with Tūrker *وإن يقون غير مطابقاً* (following BN ms.), rather than *أو أن يكون غير مطابق* with Fakhry.

capacity of the person who is unconscious to do so; the capacity of the hare when it is first born; and the capacity of the embryo.

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4. And our saying, “that it is not possible for it not to correspond or to be opposed,” is the assurance (*ta’kīd*)³ and strength (*wathāqah*) by which conviction and belief (*al-i’tiqād wa-al-ra’y*) enter into the definition of certitude. And it is necessarily required that it does conform to it (and that it was not possible for it not to have corresponded to it), and that be in some state that is not possible to be opposed to it, but rather, it is in a state in which it is necessarily required that it correspond to it, and that it not be opposed to nor contradict it. And this strength and assurance in the belief itself is an inference/acquisition (*istifādah*) from the thing which produces [the belief]. This thing is either by nature (*bi-ṭabī’ah*) or the syllogism.

5. And our saying, “And moreover that it is not possible for something opposed to it to exist at any time.” This too is another additional assurance of the acquisition/inference of the belief from the assurance of the thing which is its subject in its existence outside the belief and its strength. For the first condition may also occur in sensibles and in existential propositions, whereas this [condition] may occur in beliefs whose subjects are unqualifiedly necessary intelligibles. For sensibles may be true, and it may be impossible for them to be opposed to our beliefs that they are such and such; however, they may either be capable (*mumkinah*) of ceasing in an indeterminate time, such as Zayd’s being seated; or it may be inevitable for them to cease at some determinate time, such as the eclipse of the moon which one is now seeing. Likewise universal existential propositions, like your saying, “Every human being is white.” And as for what is not possible to be opposed, and not at any particular time, this is only in the case of the necessary intelligibles. For in this case the belief cannot become opposed to existence at any particular time, nor can existence opposed to the belief at any particular time.

6. And our saying, “that whatever of this occurs should occur essentially, not accidentally,” is that by which the definition of unqualified certitude is completed. And this is because it is not impossible that all these things might arise in a human being by chance, rather than from things whose natural function is to cause them to arise. And it may happen that this is the case in necessary

³ Cf. Avicenna’s use of the phrase *ta’akkud al-wujūd* (Latin *vehementia*) to describe the priority of necessity over the other modal notions.

propositions, for all of them are conformed with one another, either insofar as the human being is not aware of them, or through induction, or because of the renown and testimony of all people, or through the report of someone in whom the person has confidence. For it is not the case that these things which occur only occur for him from his own vision (*'an baṣīrati nafsi-hi*), and the state by which he understands this in their case is not like /101 the state of someone who considers (*man yanẓuru*) the thing at the time when he is considering it and is aware that he is considering it. Moreover, it is not impossible that many emotions might take the place of belief (*al-ra'y*) for this person, for example, his beloved or his friend, or his zeal and partisanship, or his longstanding anger and affection, or the importance of the matter for him or the repulsiveness of its opposite, or the importance of the belief for him and of the person who reports it to him. And its magnitude and the excess of his confidence in it and his favourable opinion replace this belief of his with respect to strength, so that he supposes he has proven the belief. So for this reason Aristotle stipulated these conditions of certitude.

But because many people too, when they are not aware of the locus of the corruption of some belief, which is hidden from them especially if they are striving to seek and investigate it, and they do not have any imaginings (*mutahammūn*) about the thing for themselves, they suppose or imagine concerning what appears (*fī al-zāhir*) that what occurs to them from it is certain. So they too may suppose that what is not certain is certain. And for this reason it is necessary to seek the thing from which and concerning which certitude arises essentially and not accidentally, because these conditions are not only conditions in the thing from which certitude arises, but also in the thing concerning which certitude arises.

7. And Aristotle made all of this clear in the *Posterior Analytics*. And this certitude is what is used and found in philosophy and in the speculative sciences generally. And this certitude may arise without any syllogism at all, this being certitude *per se* with no need of any other certitude. And this is the certitude which is prior by nature and in time, namely, the certitude of the premises which are the primary intelligibles and the principles of the speculative sciences. And it may also arise from a syllogism, this being a certitude which comes from a certitude prior it.

That which arises from a syllogism is of two types: [1] one type requires that all six of these conditions be satisfied (*an yashtarit*), along with the cause of its existence being known and stated; [2] a type which requires that there be satisfied in it the opposite of the preceding condition instead, and this is what is said to occur without the cause of its existence being known. And each one of these two is ranked between the fifth and the sixth conditions. Then, after this [Aristotle] sought whatever states, characteristics, and conditions are required for these things and the propositions which lead to them to be subjects for /102 each one of the three⁴ types [of certitude] so that this certitude about them would arise, from whatever modes and propositions (*jihāt wa-qaḍāyan*), and from whatever things whose nature is such as to cause each one [of these types of certitude] to arise. And Aristotle investigated these matters to the utmost extent in his *Posterior Analytics*, where he showed that whenever the description of absolute certitude is met with respect these conditions,⁵ then a belief (*ra'y*) about it arises for this person, which does not cease except through death or insanity and the like, or through oblivion. As for [whether it can cease] through opposition or the destruction of the thing, not at all, because the subjects of this certitude do not change at all, and it is not possible for those things that belong to them to be removed from them.⁶ So on this account they are not destroyed, since as we said they are universal, necessary propositions.

8. As for the its cessation through opposition, this too is not possible, because it is not at all possible for any true opposition to it to be found. As for the false opposition by which it is possible to be misled, this is sophistry, as is called in the *Posterior Analytics*—be it technical sophistry or sophistry through atechanical ends,⁷ by means of things which are accidental (*araḍīyah*) which are in the art. And the sophistical art which is accidental is concerned with the art, but it does not occur to the mind of the master of the art, and if it does occur to his mind or he is addressed with it, he knows the falsity of what is false in it through the speed of the change of what he possesses of the capacity for the things which are essential in the art. And what is not essential, its universality is false. As for that which is proper to the art, it makes use of the disposition of the practitioner of the art, for if he yields to it and it makes him doubt this concerning one of the things in the art, it will become the case for him and others that this thing does not have

⁴ Three types, i.e., pre-syllogistic certitude and the two types of syllogistic certitude.

⁵ Literally: “its description is the equality/sameness of these conditions.”

⁶ Literally, “to be replaced/substituted” from them.

⁷ Literally, “a sophistry which is proper to the art, or a sophistry by means of aims which are external to the art.”

certitude. And most of this, if it makes him doubt things which are accidental in the art, in each of the two things the human being is not certain about this thing despite this, even if he supposes that he is certain. And it is necessary that he was lacking in one of the conditions of certitude, or neglected it. And this is what was prove in the *Posterior Analytics*, that it is not possible for these conditions, which are the conditions of certitude, to cause the belief concerning its truth to arise without certitude arising for him through these conditions, and the falsity of its opposite in this belief, and the falsity of the opposites of the premises which conclude the opposite of this belief. And since this is the case, whatever thing remains among them causes error, for **/103** the fallacies which are proper to the art, their enumeration is possible, and they are produced in a human being by the arising of the certain art. And all of this Aristotle shows in the *Posterior Analytics*.

And opposition of certitude is not possible at all, because certitude in the truth of the proposition cannot arise without certitude in the falsity of its opposite. And from certitude in the truth of the proposition certitude in the falsity of its opposite follows necessarily, [for] if the truth of the opposite is possible in our eyes, then it is possible that the proposition be false. And the propositions concerning which certitude arises in us in the certain arts include [1] the primary propositions which are the principles of these arts; and [2] the conclusions arising (*kā'inah 'an*) on the basis of these principles. And those things which are principles in the certain arts are determinate and limited in number, and it is known how many (*kam*) they are. Thus it is only possible to oppose what follows upon them (*mā ba'da-hum*) in the way of conclusions arising from these principles, either by way of the opposites of these principles, or by way of the opposites of the conclusions arising from these principles. and certitude of the principles cannot arise without certitude in the falsity of their opposites arising.

9. Since the premises taken in opposition are the opposites of the principles, they can only occur to the human being if he is aware of their falsity at once; thus for this reason he will not yield to the opposition. In the same way, if the things which are taken in opposition are the opposites of the conclusions arising from the principles, and he indeed knows these conclusions and has come to know demonstrations of them, then he can only have become certain of them if he has also become certain of the falsity of their opposites. And in the same way, [when] they occur to him, he knows their falsehood immediately. And he learns of them through demonstrations which reach these conclusions, and he opposes them

through these [demonstrations], so that they are proven false.⁸ And if these things are the opposites of conclusions in this art of which he is not yet aware, then he will pause over their nature case until he is aware of them.

And in general, it is only possible to oppose propositions when they are concluded from premises for which it is possible to believe of their opposites what is believed of these premises. As for when they are concluded from premises for which it is not possible to believe of their opposites what is believed of them, it is not possible to oppose those conclusions at all. And the premises in which this is possible are the widely-accepted, in the respect in which they are widely-accepted, and of which it is not possible that they be certain.

As for sophistry, it is only possible for it to eliminate or make doubtful or cause to cease the belief of the person in the certain sciences, when it happens that the conditions of certitude are not entirely fulfilled in them, either in their conclusions, or in the demonstrations. /104 As for the primary premises, the certitude puts them outside the scope of being demonstrative—and if it is slight, they can be falsified and they will become dialectical or sophistical or rhetorical.

The same is the case with the defect of the conditions of demonstration. For this reason, whenever a person's belief (*ra'y*) in the speculative sciences ceases through opposition, if the opposition was sophistry and the person was not aware of this, then this belief of his was an opinion (*kāna ra'yu-hu dhalika ḡannan*). Whereas he posited it as certain to him at a time when there was in it, without a doubt, a defect in the conditions of demonstration.

10. Certitude which is not absolute is of two types: certitude at some time which then ceases, and certitude which is supposed (*maznūnah*) to be certitude. The certitude which exists at some time and then ceases requires that there be something stipulated/satisfied in it something in place of the fifth condition, and that the opposite of it exist at some time, and that the rest of the conditions remain in the same state. And this is of two types: [1] in one type something opposed to it necessarily exists at some time, for example, the partial eclipse; [2] in the other type, it is possible that there does not exist necessarily at some time something opposed to it, for example, our knowledge (*ilm-nā*) that Zayd is sitting, and in general existential propositions. And each one of these two types

⁸ Fakhry starts a new paragraph here, but this is clearly the continuation of the previous paragraph.

ceases through the cessation of the thing (*amr*) which is the subject of the belief, and not through opposition.

And supposed certitude (*al-yaqīn al-maẓnūn*) is that in which there arises, in place of the sixth condition, its opposite, in that what arises from this is said and arises accidentally, not essentially. And this is in fact an opinion (*ẓann*) and always ceases through opposition. And the certitude which is found at a particular time is used in the arts whose subjects exist as individuals, and in the arts which use universal existential propositions, such as rhetoric and many of the practical sciences. And the certitude which is supposed to be certain is only used, when it is used, by way of error and carelessness and by way of deception through them. And this is in the arts which reach their purpose by means of them, even if there is error in them or in some of them or in that which achieves its end through deception, such as rhetoric and poetics, and that whose end is deception, such as sophistry.