The Role of Religion in al-Fārābī's Virtuous City

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"We have enough religion to make us hate,

but not enough to make us love one another"

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)

Abstract

This article aims to show the interaction between philosophy, religion and politics by revealing the role and rank of religion within the hierarchical system of al-Fārābī's political philosophy.

Religion is considered as the ideology that shapes the mentality of a nation. The life of persons in the community is based on the rules that their first ruler determines for them in order to seek the ultimate true happiness for all individuals in the community. This can be accomplished only if the first ruler and his rule are truly virtuous. Virtuous rulership and virtuous religion should be based on a "certain philosophy". Errant rulership leads to an ignorant city characterized by false opinions, i.e., false religion or false philosophy, and, therefore, cannot provide true happiness for the people.

The exact and accurate definition which al-Fārābī gives to *Milla* (religion) shows that he does not restrict this concept to Islam. He is not against a multiplicity of religions as long as they represent and contain an essential philosophical truth. Al-Fārābī's openness towards the validity of other religions may resolve the tensions between different sects or religions within the same community and makes his political thought of special importance and relevance to our times.

Al-Fārābī dreams about a utopian city but is aware of the fact that most regimes are deficient and ignorant. This is reflected by his criticism of errant rulers and authorities who frighten people by the use of religion for their own benefits.

There is a controversy among scholars about the kind and degree of al-Fārābī's commitment to Shīʿism. This study refers to a personal prayer by al-Fārābī known as "*Magnificent Invocation*" (*Duʿāʾ ʿazīm*) that was ignored by previous researchers, in order to suggest a resolution to this controversy. This *Duʿāʾ*

provides evidence for al-Fārābī's tendency to synthesize the Neo-Platonic emanation theory with some version of Sufism. Obviously such attitude differs from Sunnī Islam and cannot be accepted in traditional Islamic circles, yet it is compatible with the Shī'ite Ismā'īliyya.

Introduction

Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (257/870-339/950) is regarded as the founder of the tradition of political philosophy in Islam in which the main concern is political life and its relevance to human happiness and perfection.[1] His important works on politics are: *Al-Siyāsah al-madaniyyah*, *Mabādi' ārā' āhl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, *Fuṣūl al-madanī*, *Taḥṣīl al-sa'āda*. Yet other books by him also have political relevance, even when their titles seem to be far from political concerns as *Kitābu al-milla* and *Kitābu al-ḥūrūf*. The first two books mentioned above are the basic ones in al-Fārābī's political philosophy, containing the fullest expression of his metaphysical views and presenting the main features of the ideal city/state and its ruler. They also reflect his attempt to reconcile "religion" with socio-political philosophy. All these books may indicate that he was anxious about the socio-political situation of his time, and thought that his philosophical writings could show the leader the right path towards establishing a virtuous city. It is important to note that al-Fārābī stressed the Aristotelian notion of man as *zōon politikon*, who wants to be part of an association, of the community, of the city, and his fellow-citizens.[2]

Al-Farabi's understanding of religion as the ideology that shapes the mentality of a nation makes his political thought very important and relevant to our times. His triadic amalgamation of religion, philosophy and politics gives

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[1] See Fauzi M. Najjar, "Fārābī's Political Philosophy and Shī'sm", *Studio Islamica*, 14 (1961), p. 57.

[2] See Hans Daiber, "Political Philosophy", *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr & Oliver Leaman (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 849.

us a deeper insight into the quest for democracy in the contemporary Arab-world (Arab spring).[3] It seems that the socio-political situation of al-Fārābī's time is comparable to the instability and restlessness in many Arab countries today, thus allowing a fruitful approach towards his philosophy within our current horizon of expectations.

Different topics, in al-Fārābī's works still concern us such as the tension between religion and philosophy, how to attain happiness in our country and in this world, and what are the qualities of a good and virtuous leader? In addition to these questions, reading al-Fārābī's works within a modern horizon of expectations can raise such questions as: Can the revolutions in the Arab world produce democratic states? Is political stability possible in countries with different types of citizens, sects and religions as can be found in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria?

If every religion is a reflection of its underlying philosophy and both constitute the socio-political milieu of a nation, then it is more probable to expect, in the near future, the establishment of purely Islamic states rather than western-type democracies, thus reversing the usual course of revolutions. It is difficult to imagine a multi-religious state with different political parties in the Arab countries, not least for the reason that most of the people are Muslims committed to the support of the predominant Islamic parties in their different

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[3] Al-Fārābī has an interesting attitude concerning the democratic city (*al-madīnah al-jamaʿīyyah*). See Al-Fārābī, *Al-Siyāsah al-madaniyyah*, ed. Fauzi M. Najjar (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1964), pp. 99-102. See also Muhammad Ali Khalidi, "Al-Fārābī On The Democratic City", *British journal for the History of Philosophy* 11(3) 2003, pp. 379-394.

versions for which the separation of state and religion is alien to their underlying philosophy.[4]

Political philosophy can be defined as the philosophical view of the best way to conduct our collective life consisting of our political institutions, our social organization, our economic system, and our pattern of family life.[5] It is an investigation into the nature, causes, and effects of good and bad government.[6] Hence, we may expect the upcoming regimes in the Arab countries to rearrange the whole system of socio-political life in the light of a purely Islamic outlook.

The importance of political philosophy is evident today as it has always been ever since it came to light in Athens. It can be said that the practice of political philosophy emerges when human beings begin to regard their collective arrangement as potentially open to change, and therefore in need of philosophical justification. All political actions aim at either preservation or

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[4] Bassam Tibi distincts between Islamism and Islam in their relation to democracy and claims that Islam and Islamism are not just different words but different things. Islamism is not compatible with democracy because of its belief in the organic unity of state and religion (*dīn wa-dawlah*). Difference for the religionized ideology of Islamism appears as heresy. According to Tibi both violent and institutional Islamists aim to establish the "Islamic order" based on *sharī'ah* (Islamic law). But he thinks that Islam and democracy are indeed compatible, provided that certain necessary religious reforms are made. In order for democracy to function in the Islamic world, there is a need to establish a civil state and a civil society with autonomous institutions to match. See Bassam Tibi, "Why They Can't Be Democratic", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 19, no. 3 (July 2008), pp. 43-48. See also his book on the same topic *Islamism and Islam* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press), 2012 .

[5] See David Miller, "Political Philosophy", *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 500.

[6] See David Miller, *Political Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 2.

change. To preserve means to prevent a change for the worse, while desiring change means a wish to bring about something better. Hence, all political action contains within itself directedness towards knowledge of the good: of the good life, or the good society.[7]

Political philosophy, compared to political theology, is limited to what is accessible to the human mind unassisted by divine revelation.[8] Al-Fārābī's philosophy is theocentric in the sense that it holds God as the center of the universe. Robert Hammond ascribes to al-Fārābī the mystic tendency of a Neo-Platonist who believes in the emanation theory. The goal of man is to return to God which is to be accomplished by virtue and philosophical thought.[9]

Al-Fārābī's comprehensive philosophy should be interpreted as a network, every strand of which leads down different paths, and cannot be adequately understood if it is separated from the other strands in the network or from its historical context.

Historical Background and Some Modern Attitudes to al-Fārābī

The political writings of al-Fārābī are the product of a virtuous thinker who cannot accept the evils of his city and the disasters brought upon it by misrule. Therefore, as he writes in *Fuṣūl al-madanī*:

> "It is wrong for the virtuous man to remain in the corrupt polities (*as-siyāsāt al-fāsidah*), and he must emigrate (*wajabat 'alaīhi al-hijrah*) to the ideal cities, if such exist in fact in his time. If they do not exist, then the virtuous man is a stranger in

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[7] See Miller, "Political Philosophy", p. 500. See also Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1959), p. 10.

[8] See Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?,* p. 13.

[9] See Robert Hammond, *The Philosophy of Alfarabi and its Influence on Medieval Thought* (New York: The Hobson Book Press, 1947), intoduction.

the present world and wretched in life, and to die is preferable
for him than to live".[10]

In our times, this passage is applicable to the situation of many poets and
writers in the Arab countries who were obliged to leave their homeland because
they could not express their thoughts freely, and some were jailed because of
their writings. Indeed, they were alienated in their own native lands. To
mention only few of them: the Syrian writer Zakariyyā Tāmir (1931-), the
Syrian poet Muḥammad al-Māghūṭ (1934-2006), the Egyptian poet Amal
Dunqul (1983-1940), the Iraqi-Kurdi poet Buland al-Ḥaidari, and the Iraqi poet
Badr Shakir al-Sayyāb (1926-1964).

Al-Fārābī left Baghdad and went to Syria in 330/942 because there was
great confusion in the Muslim empire at this time, and the threat to the safety of
the city's inhabitants became extremely grave.[11] Fauzi Najjar thinks that al-

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[10] Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl al-madanī*, ed. & trans. D. M. Dunlop (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1961), p. 72. The above quoted passage may have marked some crisis in
al-Fārābī's life. See Ibid., p. 92. According to Dunlop, *Fuṣūl al-madanī* is late, written after
Taḥṣīl and probably also after the *Madīnah fāḍilah.* See Ibid., p. 14.

[11] The Caliph al-Muttaqī, his viziers, and his bodyguards were threatened by the rebellion of
a former tax collector from the south. The Caliph took refuge with the Ḥamdānid prince of
Mosul, Nāṣir al-Daulah, and he and his brother Saif al-Daulah escorted the Caliph back
from Mosul to Baghdad and received their honorific titles for so doing. Saif al-Daulah, who
was for a time the governor of Wāsiṭ, controlled Aleppo and also Homs in 332/944-333/945
and Damascus the following year, and by doing so became the leading political figure in
northern Syria. After staying in Damascus for about two years al-Fārābī was forced to leave
for Egypt because of the conflict in Syria between the Ikhshīdids and the Ḥamdānids. We
do not know for certain when al-Fārābī made his first acquaintance with Saif al-Daulah,
perhaps after the entry of the Ḥamdānids into Baghdad. About a year before his death, al-
Fārābī left Egypt to join Saif al-Daulah's circle and enjoyed the high esteem of this ruler
until his death in 339/950. See Ibid., pp. 14-16. See also Muhsin Mahdi, "Al-Fārābī, Abū

Fārābī had to flee Baghdad and seek refuge at the court of Saif al-Dawlah, a Shī'te prince, in fear of the 'Abbasid Caliphs of that period who were scions of orthodoxy. Therefore, intellectuals who showed any deviation from Muslim orthodoxy had no place in Baghdad. Because al-Fārābī was Turkish and not Arab in origin, his sympathies may have been with the anti-Arab, anti-Islamic subversion of that turbulent age. Najjar emphasizes this idea by referring to Bernard Lewis' book *The Origins of Ismā'īlism* (Cambridge, 1940) which discusses the social factors underlying the Isma'īlī movement, and by stressing the fact that al-Fārābī began his study of logic with the Syriac-speaking Nestorian Christian Yūḥannā ibn Ḥaylān, first in Baghdad and then in Ḥarrān. Najjar quotes Lewis that:

> "There is strong evidence that behind the schismatic movements of the 10th century lay a Persian nationalist resentment and a Judeo-Christian conspiracy to undermine the regime of the Sunnī and haughty Arab".[12]

Naṣr Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Ṭarkhān Ibn Awzalagh", *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (2008) http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-2830901380.html. Walzer writes that "for reasons unknown he accepted in 330/942 an invitation of the Shī'ī Ḥamdānid ruler Sayf al-Daulah and lived in his entourage, mainly in Aleppo, together with other men of letters, until his death". But, as shown above, this is not uncontroversial. R. Walzer, "al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ṭarkhān b. Awzalagh (uzlugh?)", *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd edition, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. Brill Online. UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA. 07 September 2011 http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-0212.

[12] Najjar, "Fārābī's Political Philosophy and Shī'sm", p. 62.

Yet, according to Najjar, although al-Fārābī lived in the midst of religious controversies, he tried to avoid being involved in them or to associate himself with any movement.[13]

While I do not concur with ascribing an "anti-Arab or anti-Islamic" attitude to al-Fārābī, I consider the fact that he had been taught Greek philosophy by Christian clerics as a significant contribution to the development of his openness and acceptance of other religions as virtuous, rather than restricting this virtue to Islam. These teachers were Nestorian Christians who had inherited the Christian Neoplatonic tradition handed down by the last representatives of the Alexandrian school. Influenced by his Nestorian Christian teachers and his reading of the works of the great Neoplatonic teachers and commentators of the Athenian and Alexandrian schools, al-Fārābī developed a Neoplatonic Islamic theology.[14] It should be mentioned that al-Fārābī's successors from all three revealed-religion communities confirmed his high position as the greatest philosophical authority since Aristotle, calling him the "second teacher" after Aristotle.[15]

Furthermore, we cannot deny the role, probably unconscious, of his non-Arab origin in his attempt to reconcile different attitudes such as those between Plato and Aristotle in his book *Kitābu al-jamʿ baina raʾyayyi al-ḥakīmayn*. His natural tendency to harmonize different views because of his belief in an underlying shared truth, may also explain his acceptance of multiple religions in the same nation. He was a Shiʿite who lived under a Sunnī regime (in Baghdad) and thus susceptible to feelings similar to those of minorities in general. Minorities by their very nature try to find some kind of adaptation and

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[13] See Ibid., pp. 68-69.

[14] See Muhsin S. Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 1-2.

[15] See Ibid., p. 3.

reconciliation between their culture and the culture of the majority in order not to feel as outsiders. But when the political circumstances worsened in Baghdad, as mentioned above, al-Fārābī left for Damascus to live under a Shī'ite regime. Perhaps the virtuous ruler he had in mind was Saif al-Daulah.

What we are sure about is that al-Fārābī was a Shī'īte, and, hence, it is not surprising to find that his philosophy shares and justifies the Shī'īte doctrine to some extent. Yet not all scholars agree about the kind and degree of his commitment to Shī'ism. According to Richard Walzer, al-Fārābī was a partisan of the Shī'ite Imāmiyya. Al-Fārābī's *Imām* was neither a descendant of 'Alī as the Shī'ites taught, nor necessarily from Muḥammad's tribe, Quraysh. He does not place the *Imām* within the religious sphere, because the Shī'ite Imāms of the Imāmiyya are philosophers. Obviously, al-Fārābī's view cannot be acceptable to Sunnī Muslims, and it is remote from the claims of the Shī'ite Ismā'īliyya.[16]

Henri Laoust connects al-Fārābī with the Shī'ite Isma'īlīyya, since the attributes that al-Fārābī ascribes for the first ruler of the virtuous city are those that should be ascribed to the *Imām*, especially the *Imām* 'Alī, who is one of the Prophet's companions and his legitimate successor. Also, the first ruler, the *Imām* and the Prophet acquired their knowledge from the same source i.e., the Active Intellect. Hence there is no essential difference between them, because they are both providentially assisted as defined in Shī'ism.[17]

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[16] See Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Mabādi' ārā' āhl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, trans. Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 5, pp. 441-442. For further study about Ismā'īlīyya see Farhad Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998). See also Aziz Esmail and Azim Nanji, "The Ismā'īlīs in History", *Ismā'īlī Contributions to Islamic Culture*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), pp. 227-258.

[17] See Henri Laoust, *Les Schismes Dans L'Islam* (Paris: Payot, 1965), p. 420.

Hans Daiber holds a similar opinion when he strengthens the connection of al-Fārābī with the Ismāʿīlī doctrines about the Imāmate. He notes that al-Fārābī speaks only in general terms of the "Prophet" or the "*Imām*" or the "first ruler". This may be explained as al-Fārābī's hanging on to the Ismāʿīlī notion of the universality of true religion, of the belief in one single God, and in the justness of His laws, common to all nations.[18]

For Sara Ahbel-Rappe, al-Fārābī presents a purely secular argument for the *Imām*, the leader of the community of the just, and sees religion as subordinate to philosophy. This view suggests that he advanced the cause of reason above the claims of revelation and subordinated the state-sanctioned religion to the rational conclusions of the philosopher. Moreover, it reflects al-Fārābī's doctrinal disagreement with the *Mutakallimūn*, and interprets the historical reverberations throughout the Islamic world as the struggle between philosophy and faith played out in a series of attacks and counterattacks.[19]

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[18] See Daiber, "Political Philosophy", pp. 848-849.

[19] See Sara Ahbel-Rappe, "Plato's Influence on Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Philosophy", *A Companion to Plato*, ed. Hugh H. Benson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 447-448.

As an example for the struggle between philosophy and religion see Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Aʿlām al-nubuwwah* (Beiruth: Dār al-Sāqi, 2003). See also Clara Srouji-Shajrawi, **"**Convergence and Divergence between Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and Secular Humanism" (al-ʾItilāf wal-ʾikhtilāf bayna al-Rāzī wal-ʾinsāniyya al-ʿalmaniyya), *Al-Karmil: Studies in Arabic Language and Literature*, vol. 32 (2012) (forthcoming). One of the aims of this article is to clarify the rationalistic basis of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's rejection of religion and prophecy. Because of his attitude towards religion and prophecy he was accused of heresy and most of his philosophical writings were destroyed. The book *Aʿlām al-nubuwwah* mirrors the debate that took place in Rayy around 318-320/930-932 between two opponents: the Ismāʿīlī Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and the well-known physician and philosopher Abū Bakr al-Rāzī. The debate between the two Rāzīs can be understood from the perspective of our

Fauzi Najjar believes that al-Fārābī was a Shī'ite only in a superficial sense. He says that although first impressions lead to the conclusion that al-Fārābī's political doctrine is eminently a theoretical justification of political Shī'ism,[20] an analysis of al-Fārābī's writings reveals that he refers to the *Imām* solely as the first chief. The discussion of the regime and powers of the first chief could have been used by Shī'ite partisans to justify the regime of the divine *Imām*. He also adds the fact that al-Fārābī was completely silent about the Caliph, the head of the Sunnī polity, and *ijmā'*, the method of his election or selection. Methodologically, the principle of *ta'wīl* (allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures) occupies a prominent place both in Shī'ism and in the philosophical systems of the Muslim philosophers, especially al-Fārābī's. Furthermore, it is known that the Shī'ites found powerful "rational" support in the Neo-Platonic theory of emanation.[21] Najjar concludes, convincingly, that al-Fārābī is no apologist for a given or emerging political order, for he sees in philosophy alone the guarantee of man's ultimate happiness and theoretical perfection.[22]

According to Muhsin Mahdi, al-Fārābī was the first philosopher who sought, as far as possible, to harmonize classical political philosophy with Islam. Since this classical political philosophy was radically different from the cultural atmosphere of Islam, al-Fārābī tried to harmonize two different cultures, though he did not have a relatively free sphere of activity. His importance in the history of political philosophy consists in his recovery of the

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millennium, as reflecting a conflict between an enlightened minority striving towards a secular state, and a majority ensnared by the dream of a purely religious state.

[20] See Najjar, "Fārābī's Political Philosophy and Shī'sm", p. 62.

[21] See Ibid., pp. 62-64.

[22] See Ibid., p. 72.

classical tradition and in making it intelligible within the new context provided by the revealed religions.[23]

How Religion Relates to Political Life?

From the opening sentence in *Book of Religion* (*Kitābu al-milla*) the reader notices that al-Fārābī is concerned with politics. This book begins with the definition of religion (*Milla*) as follows:

> "Religion is opinions and actions, determined and restricted with stipulations and prescribed for a community by their first ruler, who seeks to obtain through their practicing it a specific purpose with respect to them or by means of them".[24]

Religion is described as related to the socio-political life of a community, whether this community is a tribe, a city, a great nation or many nations. The life of persons in the community is based on the rules that their first ruler (*Ra'īsuhum el-awwal*) determines for them in order to seek the ultimate true happiness for all individuals in the community. This can be accomplished only if the first ruler (who is first in rank) is virtuous and his rulership truly virtuous. Virtuous rulership means virtuous religion which is based on a "certain philosophy",[25] while ignorant rulership leads to an ignorant city based on false

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[23] See Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, p. 125.

[24] Al-Fārābī, "Book of Religion", *Alfarabi: The Political Writings*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 93; Al-Fārābī, *Kitābu al-Milla Wanuṣūṣ 'Ukhra*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq Publishers, 1968), p. 43. From now on I shall refer to the English translation as *Book of Religion* and to the original Arabic as *Kitābu al-Milla*.

[25] The capacity for a "certain philosophy" (*falsafah yaqīniyyah*) which is a demonstrative philosophy (*falsafah burhaniyyah*) comes after (*muta'khirah bil-zamān*) the capacities for dialectic, sophistry, and for the uncertain or dubious philosophy (*falsafah maẓnūnah* or *falsafah mumawwahah*), since one becomes aware of demonstrations by surpassing these

opinions i.e., false religion or false philosophy, and, therefore, cannot provide true happiness for the people.

There are different types of ignorant rulers:[26]

1) The first one represents the egoist type whose prescriptions for his people are all dictated by his own "ignorant goods" (*al-khairāt al-jāhiliyyah*) such as wealth, pleasure, honor, glory and conquest. He uses those who are under his rulership as tools to achieve his purpose.

2) The second type is the good or kind and generous one who prefers to obtain the "ignorant goods" for his people but excludes himself from enjoying these goods.

3) The third type is also a kind and generous one, but he does not exclude himself from getting at least part of the "ignorant goods". Al-Fārābī considers type 2 and 3 as the relatively most virtuous of the ignorant rulers.

Al-Fārābī relates the ruler's view of himself with his type of rulership, and hence with the kind of information and happiness he offers his people to make them believe that his teaching is true. This idea can be compared with the apparently elegant and persuasive way of talking to the citizens by some leaders in our days.

The different types of rulership are:[27]

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other techniques. See al-Fārābī, "The Book of Letters", *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Muhammad Ali Khalidi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 1; Al-Fārābī, *Kitābu al-Ḥūrūf,* ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirūt: Dar El-Mashreq Publishers, 1969), p. 131. In what follows I shall refer to the English translation as *The Book of Letters* and to the Arabic origin as *Kitābu al-Ḥūrūf.*

[26] See Al-Fārābī, *Book of Religion*, p. 93; *Kitābu al-milla*, p. 43. Al-Fārābī does not give special names for every type of ruler, but to clarify the differences between them I prefer to give them names.

[27] See Ibid., pp. 93-94; pp. 43- 44.

1) The errant rulership (*ri'āsatu ḍalalatin*): The ruler presumes he has virtue and wisdom without actually having it. Thus he misleads his people by making them believe in his wisdom and virtue. Here the ruler and those under his rulership obtain only false happiness with the illusion that it is the ultimate true one.

2) The deceptive rulership (*ri'āsatu tamwihin*): The ruler strives to obtain one of the ignorant (false) goods for himself, but he deceives his people by persuading them that his decrees are directed towards achieving their ultimate happiness. The hidden truth is that those under his rulership are only tools for his own benefit.

3) The kingly craft (*al-mihnah al-malakiyya*) of the first virtuous ruler is combined with divine revelation. Hence, the opinions and actions that he prescribes for his people are definitely virtuous and lead to the realization of human excellence.

The type of political regime determines the kind of education and knowledge the people will receive. This shows the crucial importance of the type of the supreme leader:

> "For the prince forms the character of nations and instructs them, just as the head of a household forms the character of its members and instructs them".[28]

The realization of human perfection and virtue presupposes a certain ideological background or philosophy of the community. Politics is concerned with the realization of happiness for man through the agency of political association. In the virtuous regime human beings cooperate together to achieve

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[28] Ibid., pp. 36-37; p. 80. The first part of the sentence in Arabic: "*Al-malik huwa mū'addibu el-'umam wamu'allimuha*".

perfection in labor, and to perform noble activities in order to "attain earthly happiness in this life and supreme happiness in the life beyond".[29]

> "This is political science. It consists of knowing the things by which the citizens of cities attain happiness through political association in the measure that innate disposition (*bil-fiṭrah*) equips each of them for it".[30]

We may conclude from the above passage that man can achieve harmony with society and defeat "alienation" in the realm of work if he knows his natural abilities and position in the hierarchical community, and, hence, finds the work that suits him *bil-fiṭrah.* Happiness, in this sense, is a relative notion for it depends on the innate capabilities of the individual. Yet when every individual in a society works according to the principle of innate disposition, the whole sum of individuals are working together, even without declaring this explicitly, towards the perfection of their society. We may be disturbed by this

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[29] Al-Fārābī, "The Attainment of Happiness", *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press: 1962), p. 13; Al-Fārābī, *Kitābu Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, ed. Jaʿfar Āl Yāsīn (Beyrouth: Dār el-Andalus, 1981), p. 49. Later I shall refer to the English translation as *The Attainment of Happiness* and to the Arabic origin as *Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*.

As an aside, it may be mentioned that Ibn Bājja wrote a treatise in the defense of al-Fārābī because some thinkers, as Ibn Tufayl, ascribed to al-Fārābī the idea that there is no human happiness except in the civic sphere and this worldly life of the state (*al-saʿadatu el-madīniyyah*); everything else is mere delusion.

See Ibn Bajja, *Rasāʾel falsafiyyah li-Abī Bakr bni Bajja*, ed. Jamal al-Dīn al-ʿalawī (Beirūt: Dar al-Thaqāfah, 1983), pp. 197-202. See also Ibn Tufayl, *Ḥayy Bnu Yaqẓān*, ed. Fārūq Saʿd (Beirūt: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1992), pp. 112-113.

[30] Al-Fārābī, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 24; *Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, p. 63.

idea for it implies the inequality of persons, but, at the same time, we cannot unconditionally deny its plausibility.[31]

Though there are different nations and religions, they share a common universal truth that may be presented in different manifestations and "language games" according to the specificity of each nation and the *milla*.[32] This idea is

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[31] This is reminiscent of the hierarchical ranking in Plato's Republic especially when he talks about the reason that motivates people to settle down in a single place as the city. The reason for living together is that none of them is self-sufficient, but each one needs many things. Therefore, each citizen must contribute the work that he is talented at for the common benefit of all. See Plato, "Republic", *Plato Complete Works,* ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), book II, 369B-371E, pp. 1008-1011; Book IV, 433A, p. 1064. See also Al-Fārābī, *Mabādi' ārā' āhl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, pp. 228-229. Al-Fārābī likens the excellent city to the perfect and healthy body, all of whose limbs cooperate to make the life of the animal perfect and to preserve it in this state. See Ibid., pp. 230-231. His emphasis on cooperation and division of labor in the city, as in the body of man, is shown also in *Fuṣūl al-madanī*, ed. & trans. D. M. Dunlop (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 37; (Ibid., in Arabic, pp. 117-118). In Plato's "new city" the better rules the worse and "the inferior many are controlled by the wisdom and desires of the superior few". Plato, "*Republic"*, book IV, 431D, p. 1063. This view corresponds to al-Fārābī's when he speaks about the ruling organ in the body (the heart) that is by nature the most perfect and most complete of the organs in itself and in its specific qualifications. Beneath it are other organs which rule over organs inferior to them. The same is found in the city: "the ruler of the city is the most perfect part of the city, […] beneath him are people who are ruled by him and rule others". Al-Fārābī, *Mabādi' ārā' āhl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, p. 235.

[32] See Al-Fārābī, "The Political Regime", *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (Toronto, Ontario: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), p. 41; Al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsah al-madaniyyah*, pp. 85-86. Later I shall refer to these two books as *The Political Regime* and *al-Siyāsah al-madaniyyah*. We should note here that Ibn Rushd considers the religion of Islam as the only Divine *sharī'ah* and all must accept it for it is the road towards happiness. Yet because people differ in their intellectual nature and in their

in conformity with the Qurʿān, as in the verse, not mentioned by al- Fārābī: "We have never sent a messenger who did not use his own people's language to make things clear for them" (14: 4).

Each one of the citizens of the virtuous city is required to know the highest principles of the various beings and their ranks of order, the true meaning of happiness, the supreme rulership and the ruling ranks of order in the virtuous city. However, knowledge must be accompanied with deeds for there are specified actions that, when performed, lead to the attainment of happiness. The citizens should be directed to perform these actions.[33]

The multiplicity of nations and virtuous religions (*milal*) does not mean different underlying philosophical truths. They all pursue the very same kind of happiness. *Milla* or religion is only the impression or image, imprinted in the souls of people, of the principles of existence and its hierarchy, of the active intellect and the first leadership. When people fail to directly understand the first principles of beings and their nature, the need to teach them these principles or natures is fulfilled in other ways – the ways of imitation:

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way of belief (*taṣdīq*) there is a need to present the religious knowledge in different ways of discourse: the dialectic, the demonstrative, and the rhetoric. See Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-maqal fima bayna al-ḥikmati wal-sharīʿati mina al-ʾitiṣāl*, ed. Muhammad ʿAmārah (Al-Qahirat: Dar al-Maʿārif, 1972), pp. 30-31.

[33] See Al-Fārābī, *The Political Regime*, p. 40; *al-Siyāsah al-madaniyyah*, pp. 84-85. By the highest principles of beings and their ranks of order (*mabādiʾ al-mawjūdāt alquṣwā wa-marātibuhā*) al-Fārābī means the Divine, the celestial bodies, the transcendental intellects, and all the existents in the realm of nature. Every citizen should acquire the knowledge of the hierarchical system of the city/state with the supreme ruler at its head. But not all citizens have the capacity to understand the principles governing the realm above earth, including the capacity to recognize, and be united with, the Active Intellect by reason or imagination. In short, al-Fārābī bases his political regime on his metaphysics which echoes the emanation theory of Neo-Platonism.

"Hence these things are imitated for each group or nation through the matters that are best known to them; and it may very well be that what is best known to the one may not be the best known to the other".[34]

This view about religion may offer a plausible answer to the question that Seyyed Hossein Nasr asked when he discussed the fact of a multi-religious world:

"How is it possible to have a multiplicity of religions, which seems to imply a multiplicity of absolutes? Does this not already relativize the Absolute?"[35]

Al-Fārābī's philosophy maintains the Absoluteness of the One which nevertheless permits the multiplicity-of-religions phenomenon as different "language games" or "images" of a shared true philosophy, i.e., certain and demonstrative philosophy, formed according to the nature of each nation and its mentality. Thus he enables an open-minded and sincere dialogue between different religions.

The words *Milla* and *dīn* are almost synonymous, as are s*harī'a* and *sunna* (law and tradition). Yet the virtuous *milla* is similar (*shabīha*) to philosophy.[36] Consequently, philosophy is the final, ultimate and supreme truth, and it is above religion in the hierarchical system, for religion is only an "image" or a copy of philosophy. Najjar says in his preface to a*l-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*:

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[34] Ibid., p. 41; pp. 85-86.

[35] William C. Chittick (ed.), *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2007), p. 8.

[36] See al-Fārābī, *Book of Religion*, pp. 96-97; *Kitābu al-milla*, p. 46

"The treatment of divine and theoretical sciences within the framework of political books, leads to the subordination of religion to political philosophy and to philosophy in general".[37]

Actually, religion is exposed in al-Fārābī's writings without any confinement to the specificities of Islam, and his analysis may apply to any religion so long as it is virtuous and imitates philosophical truth. Though we may find some words that have an Islamic connotation or association, yet they are used as the "language" that the receptive readers, in his period, are ready to accept and able to understand. Al-Fārābī was cautious when he used words like *jihād*, *hijrah*, *sharī'a, fiqh, 'Imām* as a means of self-protection from those who do not have the ability to understand the higher cosmic truth in a purely philosophical language, which is foreign to Islamic religion. Since not everyone has the ability to understand the language of philosophy, it is recommended to use another language that is understood by the masses. Here the language of religion seems appropriate, and for this same reason, religion is subordinated to philosophy:

"Religion, if rendered human, comes after philosophy, in general, since it aims simply to instruct the multitude in theoretical and practical matters that have been inferred in philosophy, in such a way as to enable the multitude to understand them by persuasion (*'iqnā'*) or imaginative representation (*takhyīl*), or both".[38]

The art of theology (*ṣinā'atu al-kalām*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) also "come after philosophy in time and are dependent upon it".[39] Thus, the word

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[37] Al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsah al-madaniyyah*, the preface, p. 13.

[38] Al-Fārābī, *The Book of Letters*, p. 1; *Kitābu al-ḥurūf,* p. 131.

[39] Ibid.

"religion" has a special meaning in al-Fārābī's thought. It means the "imitative" or the "metaphoric" language of the philosophical vision of the whole universe as hierarchical. Al-Fārābī's view presupposes the principle that different audiences are capable of different levels of insight. The popular mind finds it difficult to rise above corporeal imagery.[40] Joshua Parens regards al-Fārābī's claim about religion's imitative character as offending our modern sensibilities. Parens explains that our education in the egalitarian spirit of the Enlightenment makes al-Fārābī's claim about the inequality of people in perceiving and apprehending things appalling.[41] Yet "Differences of place and time, climate, national character, and language justify al-Fārābī's championing of religious multiplicity".[42]

A Magnificent Invocation (*Du'ā' 'azīm*)

The above presentation of al-Fārābī's view seems to support the supremacy of intellectual knowledge over revelation. Yet Rosenthal does not see that al-Fārābī gives "reason" supremacy over "revelation", and considers al-Fārābī as a Muslim first, and a disciple of Plato, Aristotle and their Hellenistic successors and commentators second. In his view, al-Fārābī's philosophy shows the metaphysician the way to faith.[43]

To my mind al-Fārābī does give supremacy to "reason" (philosophy) and differs in his way of prayer from that of traditional Sunnī Islam. His faith has a

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[40] See Joshua Parens, *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions: Introducing Alfarabi* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 97.

[41] See Ibid., pp. 97-98.

[42] Ibid., p. 101.

[43] See Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought In Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 123-124.

mystic or Sūfī color.[44] The *Du'ā' 'azīm* is very important for it helps us to uncover the hidden personality of al-Fārābī that seems so delicate, and pious. His use of words when he prays cannot be accepted by a traditionalist Muslim. This makes our philosopher appear as a free thinker for he has his own vision and attitude to religion and to prayers. Although ignored by previous researchers, this *Du'ā'* seems to me as an evidence for al-Fārābī's inclination to the Neo-Platonic emanation theory, and this inclination, for sure, differs from Sunnī Islam and cannot be accepted in the Islamist circles.

Al-Fārābī was attracted to the spiritual life from an early age and was a practicing Sūfī.[45] A tendency to what may be called "Intellectual Sūfism" may explain his acceptance of other religions as virtuous and his emphasis on the unified truth behind the dogmatic differences, thus bringing to an end the everlasting debate over reason and revelation. This also explains his tendency to harmonize and reconcile religion with the emanation theory.

One is most honest when he prays. In his *Du'ā' 'azīm* (*A Magnificent Invocation*), we find some expressions that hint at an emanationist view of God which is better suited to the language of philosophy than the language of

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[44] It is well known that Sūfism differs from Sunnī Islam and contains foreign elements from Neoplatonism, Christianity and others. See, for example: James S. Cutsinger (ed.), *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004).

[45] See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 138. When al-Fārābī accepted the invitation of Saif al-Daulah in 330/942 he did not live in luxury as one may imagine. On the contrary, he did not accept to take from the Prince of Aleppo more than four *dirhams* per day, spending most of his time studying and writing, and he wore the Sūfī clothes to purify his soul. See 'Abdu al-Shimālī, *Dirāsāt fī tārīkh al-falsafa al-'arabiyya al-'islāmīyya* (Beirūt: Dār Ṣādir, 1965), p. 227. See also al-Fārābī, *Mabādi' ārā' āhl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, introduction, p. 4.

traditional religion, and which seems as if he is addressing "the God of philosophers". For example, in the first *Du'ā'* al-Fārābī says:

> "O God! You are the necessary existence *(wajib al-wūjūd)*, the cause of causes *('illatu al-'ilal)*, the eternal *(al-qadīm)* who is alive for ever, I ask you to protect me from error, and make my goal to do what pleases you."[46]

In his fourth *Du'ā'* he asks God to grant him an abundance *(fayḍ)* from the Active Intellect *(al-'aql al-fa''āl)*, and to purify his soul from the clay of *huyūlī*, and to refine his element by an emanation from Him, the Lord of all.[47]

In his 8th, 9th and 10th *Du'ā'* we notice a clear tendency towards asceticism which, surely, is compatible with Sūfism, but can also accord with other religions such as Christianity. He asks God to cheer up his soul with the Holy Spirit, and to provide him with great wisdom, and make the angels his companions instead of the world of nature (*Du'ā'* 8).[48] Further, he asks God to show him the right path and to confirm his belief by piety, and to bring to his soul the hatred for this world (*Du'ā'* 8).[49] In the 10th *Du'ā'* he says:

> "O God strengthen my soul so I may overcome the evanescent desires, bring it to the ranks of enduring souls, and secure it among the noble and valued essences in Heavens".[50]

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[46] Al-Fārābī, *Kitābu al-milla wanuṣūṣ 'ukhra*, p. 89. (The translation of the quotations from the *Du'ā'* is my own).

[47] See Ibid., pp. 89-90.

[48] See Ibid., p. 90.

[49] See Ibid.

[50] Ibid., p. 91.

The view of the soul as a prisoner of the material body (or the four elements) who yearns for freedom in order to return to God, is evident in *Du'ā'* 13 and especially in *Du'ā'* 14:

> "[…] O God promptly let my soul return to her holy place, bring upon its darkness the sun of the Active Intellect, remove the darkness of ignorance and delusion from it, and make what exists in her potentially (*bil-quwwa*) to become in actuality (*bil-fi'l*) […]".[51]

By depending on the *Qur'ān* al-Fārābī stresses that everything in the world praises God though man does not understand their praise because it is foreign to his ordinary language:[52]

> "The seven heavens and the earth and everyone in them glorify Him. There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise, though you do not understand their praise".[53]

One can interpret al-Fārābī's choice of this Qur'ānic verse as a reflection of his emanationist vision about the unity of being as hierarchical and well-ordered. All beings and creatures, in their own way, praise God. This is not far from the pantheistic view of Being and may be understood as a justification for accepting the "languages" of other religions as different ways of praising God. Although this view seems initially foreign to us, it is a unique manifestation of the common underlying demonstrative philosophy that is depicted differently by all forms of worship.

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[51] Ibid.

[52] See Ibid.

[53] *The Qur'ān* (17:44).

To believe in God and to live virtuously and for the benefit of the community does not entail necessarily that one must participate in the religious ceremonies or pray according to the laws that the religious authorities order.[54] This attitude of al-Fārābī seems unconventional, rebellious and even in conflict with his theory about the necessity of religion in the community. He is also against the whole notion of being punished or rewarded in the afterlife, and against the rule of some "people" who use religion for their own benefit:

> "To believe that, when men […] give up many of the cherished goods of this world and behave in this way persistently, they will be rewarded and compensated with wonderful goods which they attain after death; and that, if they do not adhere to any of these things and prefer the goods of this life, they will be punished for it after their death and requited with terrible evils which will befall them in the world-to-come – all these attitudes are kinds of tricks and ruses used by people against people. […] (These) tricks are sufficient to frighten and subdue them so that they will give up all these goods or some of them in order that those others may enjoy them who are too weak to take them in open fight and by force".[55]

When a religious figure, or any authority, asks the simple people to give up many of the cherished goods of this world, and frightens them with horrible

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[54] Al-Fārābī does not mention the Islamic clerks or the religious authorities but only speaks about people who frighten other people and rule them through religious systems and orders. I think that he does this as a way to protect himself (*taqiyy*a) in order not to be accused of heresy (*harṭaqa*).

[55] Al-Fārābī, *Mabādi' ārā' āhl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, p. 305.

suffering in Hell,   he is a deceiver. He fools the people by his outward appearance and his way of life that is described as the divine way:

> "That mock appearance becomes a cause for being honored and respected […]. Everybody submits himself to him, he is loved, and the fact that he gives in to his passions in everything is not disproved, on the contrary, the evil he does is considered by everybody as good".[56]

Reading the above quotations out of their context may cause us to think that al-Fārābī contradicts his own definition of religion (as brought up in a previous section). However, in this section of *Mabādi' ārā' āhl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah* he is speaking about the views of the ignorant city and the errant rulership rather than his own.

The last passage in the *Book of Religion* may perplex the reader. What he calls "common religion" (*milla mushtarakah*) can be understood as "one religion" that is common to a specific community. We may say it is the systematic laws, opinions and practices of Islam that bring together all people in the virtuous city in order to reach "the purpose that is sought after, namely, ultimate happiness".[57] Nevertheless, as shown earlier, al-Fārābī does not exclude other religions from being virtuous, which means that there is a logical possibility of a multi-religious city. Can we see in this last passage of the *Book of Religion* a realistic attitude of al-Fārābī's political view for it means that happiness, in the actual life of the community, cannot be achieved unless there is a common religion? This goes well with the assumption of Islamic political parties of today. Or are we supposed to understand his expression, "ultimate happiness", as the happiness after this life? The latter interpretation may be

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[56] Ibid., p. 307.

[57] Al-Fārābī, *Book of Religion*, p.113; *Kitābu al-milla*, p. 66.

supported by his individualistic ascetic way of life but it distorts his overall view of the community for it denies the possibility of actualizing happiness in real life.

The Supremacy of Philosophy

Al-Fārābī gives logical reasons for the supremacy of philosophy over religion (including jurisprudence and political science):

1) The practical things in religion are those whose universals are encompassed by practical philosophy. The universal is what gives the reasons for the particulars subordinate to it. The practical part of philosophy gives the reasons for the stipulations by which actions are made determinate in the virtuous religion. Hence, All virtuous laws (*al-shra'i' al-fāḍilah*) are subordinate to the universals of practical philosophy.

2) The theoretical opinions that a virtuous religion includes have their demonstrative proofs in theoretical philosophy.

3) In religion the theoretical opinions are taken without demonstrative proofs, while in philosophy nothing is taken as certain without demonstrative proof.

4) The "kingly craft" (*al-mihnah al-malakiyyah*) is responsible for what the virtuous religion consists of. Therefore, the "kingly craft" is also subordinate to philosophy.[58]

By distinguishing between the different kinds of discourse, al-Fārābī justifies the supremacy of philosophy. These discourses are:[59]

1) The dialectic (*al-jadal*) that produces strong presumption (*al-ẓann al-qawiy*).

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[58] See Ibid., pp. 97-98; pp. 46-47.

[59] See Ibid., p. 98; p. 47.

2) The demonstrative (*al-burhān*) that provides proofs and yields certain knowledge (*yaqīn*).

3) The rhetoric (*al-khaṭābatu*) that aims to persuade about most of what cannot be proven by demonstration or looked into by dialectic.

Most people accept the persuasive things without troubling themselves, as true philosophers do, to demonstrate the opinions of religion. Hence, dialectic and rhetoric are of major value and greatly needed for different purposes:

1) To verify and correct the opinions of religion held by the citizens.

2) To defend, support and confirm (*tamkīn*) those opinions in the souls of citizens.

3) To defend the opinions of religion against those who desire to deceive its followers by means of argument.

The supremacy of philosophy over religion does not mean that philosophy is antagonistic to religion, but means that religion is a reflection of that demonstrative and well formulated knowledge which is philosophy. Philosophy and religion establish the same truth in different ways according to the abilities of their receptive audiences. The truth of religion is based on revelation whereas the truth of philosophy is based on demonstrative reasoning.[60]

The reader of al-Fārābī's writings may misinterpret the status of the ruler-prophet as identical with that of the ruler-philosopher. Both, by their definition as virtuous rulers, necessarily possess a special kind of knowledge of the divine and the human.

Al-Fārābī defines the supreme ruler as one who does not depend on the rule of any other in anything whatsoever. He has actually acquired the sciences and

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[60] See Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 215.

every other kind of knowledge. Therefore, he has no need of a man to guide him in anything:

> "This is found only in the one who possesses great and superior natural dispositions, when his soul is in union with the Active Intellect. […] This man is the true prince according to the ancients; he is the one of whom it might be said that he receives revelation (*yūḥā ilayhi*). For man receives revelation only when he attains this rank, that is, when there is no longer an intermediary between him and the Active Intellect".[61]

One may fallaciously conclude that the status of the ruler-prophet is identical to that of the ruler-philosopher for both receive revelation from God through the agency of the Active Intellect.[62]

> "But when it happens, at a given time, that philosophy (*al-ḥikmah*) has no share in the government, though every other condition may be present in it, the excellent city will remain without a king, the ruler actually in charge of this city will not be a king, and the city will be on the verge of destruction; and if it happens that no philosopher (*ḥakīm*) can be found who will be attached to the actual ruler of the city, then, after a certain interval, this city will undoubtedly perish".[63]

A thorough study of al-Fārābī's theory of knowledge (which needs another article) reveals the supremacy of the rational faculty over the faculty of

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[61] Al-Fārābī, *The Political Regime*, p. 36; *al-Siyāsah al-madaniyyah*, p. 79.

[62] See Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, p. 133.

[63] Al-Fārābī, *Mabādi' ārā' āhl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, p. 253.

imagination and, hence, leads to the supremacy of the ruler-philosopher over the ruler-prophet. As Mahdi concludes:

> "Wisdom, or philosophy, is an indispensable condition for the founding and survival of the virtuous city. Prophecy, on the other hand, is indispensable for founding a virtuous city but not for its survival".[64]

Mahdi explains al-Fārābī's notion of prophecy as the "perfection of the faculty of imagination".[65] This "imagination can almost dispense with the rational faculty and receive the images of divine beings directly and without the latter's mediation".[66] Yet it is wrong to conclude from this that prophecy is higher than philosophy, and that it is possible to have a virtuous regime headed by a prophet who does not possess a developed rational faculty.

Al-Fārābī says clearly that the *man who holds the most perfect rank of humanity* (my italics) has to combine both the rational faculty (*al-quwwah al-nāṭiqah*) (in its theoretical and practical parts) and the representative faculty (*al-quwwah al-mutakhayīlah*). This is the man who receives Divine Revelation through the mediation of the Active Intellect.[67] Hence, there is no possibility of a virtuous regime headed by a prophet who does not posses a developed rational faculty. Moreover, al-Fārābī does not call the supreme ruler a perfect prophet or a perfect philosopher but a perfect human being.[68]

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[64] Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, p. 136.

[65] Ibid., p. 135.

[66] Ibid.

[67] See al-Fārābī, *Mabādi' ārā' āhl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, pp. 244-245.

[68] See Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, p. 135. Al-Fārābī does not say whether Muhammad the prophet was also a philosopher. See Ibid., p. 136.

Summary and Conclusion

Reading al-Fārābī's writings carefully can disclose his type of personality and way of thinking. This information is especially helpful given the fact that otherwise little is known about his personal life "since he never talks about himself".[69] Although Barthes and Foucault have announced the "death of the author" I still think that the reader is usually inclined to shape an image about the author and view him as a person. This tendency is much stronger when we deal with philosophers who aim, consciously and purposefully, to make their ideas accessible and understood.

Al-Fārābī seems to be a humanist thinker who adores peace and justice, and eschews all the abhorrent forms (e.g. ethnic or religious) of discrimination. He wanted to create a perfect state that corresponds, in its hierarchical system, to the hierarchical system of the whole universe. This wish portrays his perfectionist tendencies. In this virtuous state, every group and each individual, according to their natural abilities, will strive to achieve peace, prosperity, justice and happiness for themselves and for the whole community. The difficulty of actualizing this utopian state may cause misery, especially to the intellectuals, to such an extent that they feel alienated and strangers in their community, as happened to al-Fārābī and as is happening to many Arab intellectuals and writers in our days.

Because the human being is, by nature, a *zōon politikon*, he cannot achieve his happiness and cannot actualize his faculties without the support of the

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The image of the perfect supreme ruler in whom twelve natural qualities are found together as stated by al-Fārābī, is reminiscent of Plato's philosopher-king in his Republic (Book VI). See Al-Fārābī, *Mabādi' ārā' āhl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, pp. 244-249. See also, Plato, "Republic", book VI, 484B-511E, pp. 1107-1132.

[69] Al-Fārābī, *Mabādi' ārā' āhl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, introduction, p. 2.

community or society.[70] Therefore it is essential for all citizens to live in a virtuous state and defeat "alienation" in the realm of work that suits them by natural disposition (*bil-fiṭrah*).[71]

A Good and virtuous leader can help in the development of good, successful and happy community. For his leadership is combined with divine revelation or related to the Active Intellect. Therefore, the opinions and actions that he prescribes for his people are definitely virtuous and lead to the realization of human excellence.

Virtuous leadership includes virtuous religion which is based on a "certain philosophy" while ignorant leadership leads to an ignorant city based on false opinions i.e., false religion or false philosophy, and, therefore, cannot provide true happiness for the people.

Al-Fārābī gave rational and logical reasons for the supremacy of philosophy over religion, theology, jurisprudence and political science. All the latter fields depend on the philosophy that they imitate or manifest in their orders and actions. Their validity depends on the certainty of the philosophy that they represent. However, it is difficult to imagine that this approach to religion is acceptable by the traditional religious figures/authorities. Hence, the everlasting tension between philosophy and religion seems practically irresolvable.

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[70] See al-Fārābī, "The Attainment of Happiness", p. 23.

[71] The questions that must be asked here are: Can this virtuous state be democratic? Are major changes in the laws possible? Can the people bring about these changes by a revolution? Or is change the province of the first ruler only? Is al-Fārābī with or against opposition from the public? All these questions are important and need further study. On those citizens whom al-Fārābī considered as the opponents of the principles of their community and were regarded by him as oppositional see Ilai Alon, "Fārābī's funny Flora Al-Nawābit as "Opposition"", *Arabica*, T. 37, Fasc. 1 (Mar., 1990), pp. 56-90.

On the other hand, religion in al-Fārābī's thought fulfills the needs of the simple or common people who cannot live virtuously without being guided by the orders that they receive from a higher authority/leadership. This implies that the philosopher is free not to follow the orders of religion or to submit to religious figures. The rebellious attitude is clear here.

Al-Fārābī's philosophy maintains the Absoluteness of the One which nevertheless permits the phenomenon of multiplicity-of-religions as different "images" of a shared true philosophy, i.e., certain and demonstrative philosophy, formed according to the nature of each nation and its mentality. Thus his philosophy enables an open-minded and sincere dialogue between different religions.

Though he was better known as a Shī'īte, yet not all scholars agree about the kind and degree of his commitment to Shī'ism. To my mind, al-Fārābī's personal prayer, known as "*Magnificent Invocation*" (*Du'ā' 'Azīm*), that was almost neglected by previous scholars, can give us an answer to this riddle. The *Du'ā'* unveils al-Fārābī's hidden personality and emphasizes the claim that one's philosophy is the product of his sociopolitical background, education and personal temperament. It portrays the unique experience of the relationship between man and God with subtle words that reveal the kindness, modesty and sensitive nature of al-Fārābī. But it also may shock the traditional Islamic person for its richness in expressions that manifest a clear Neo-Platonic emanationist view. This view does not contradict Ismā'īlīsm and to some extent "Sufism". No matter to which stream he really belonged, al-Fārābī lived as a man of principles who cared deeply for his nation and desired its good.

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دور الدّين في مدينة الفارابي الفاضلة

كلارا سروجي-شجراوي

تلخيص:

يهدف هذا المقال إلى توضيح العلاقة المتبادَلة ما بين الفلسفة، الدّين والسّياسة في كتابات الفارابي السّياسيّة. الدّين كنسق إيديولوجيّ يشكّل عقليّة الأُمّة، ويبيّن طبيعة العلاقات والسّلوكيّات بين أفراد المجتمع الواحد. ترتكز حياة الأفراد في أيّ مجتمع على القوانين التي يضعها لهم "رئيسُهم الأوّل"، كي يصلوا إلى "السّعادة القصوى". لا يتحقّق ذلك إلّا في حال كان الرّئيس فاضلا ورئاسته فاضلة، ممّا يتطلّب دينًا فاضلا يتأسّس على "الفلسفة اليقينيّة". أمّا في حال الرّئاسة الضّالّة فإنّ ذلك يؤدّي إلى "مدينة جاهليّة" ترتكز على آراء غير صحيحة، أي على "مِلّة" وفلسفة "مظنونة" أو "مُمَوَّهَة"، ممّا لا يتيح سعادةً حقيقيّةً للأفراد. ما يثير الدّهشة في كتابات الفارابي السّياسيّة أنّه لا يتكلّم عن الدّين الإسلاميّ على أساس أنّه الدّين الحقّ الوحيد، بل يبدو منفتحًا على الدّيانات الأخرى، بشرط أن تعكس في تعاليمها جوهرَ الحقيقة الواحدة كما هي مُبيَّنَة عنده فيما يدعوه بـ"الفلسفة اليقينيّة". إنّ تقبّلَ تعدّد الديانات يجعل فلسفة الفارابي السّياسيّة مناسبةً لعصرنا، وذلك لأنّها تقدّم حلّاً فكريًا قد يخفّف من شدّة التوتّر في العلاقات بين الأديان والطّوائف. من ناحية ثانية يبدو الفارابي إنسانا واقعيًا، فهو، وإن كان يحلم بمدينة فاضلة، يعي أنّ معظم الأنظمة السّياسيّة فاسدة. يتجلّى ذلك في نقده لأصحاب السّلطة الذين يستغلّون الدّين لمآربهم الشخصيّة.

بما أنّ الدّارسين للفارابي قد تباينت آراؤهم بالنّسبة لمدى التزامه بمذهب الشّيعة، فإنّ البحث الحالي يحاول حسم هذا الاختلاف بالرّجوع إلى نصّ للفارابي قد أهمله الدّارسون حتّى الآن وهو الموسوم بـ"الدّعاء العظيم". يقدِّم "الدّعاء" دليلا على ميل الفارابي إلى نظرية الفيض الإلهيّ المُشرَبَة بروح التصوّف. موقفه هذا، بطبيعة الحال، يختلف عن الإسلام السّنّي، كما لا يمكن قبوله في الأوساط الإسلاميّة المحافظة، إلّا أنّه لا يتضارب مع الشّيعة الإسماعيليّة.

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