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Three Different Readings of al-Farabi's Political Philosophy

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Abstract

Addition to historical analyses, three different types of reading of the ideas of al-Farabi have been offered: First, the connection between his ideas and the Greek thought; second, the connection between his ideas and theology, and the relationship that can be established between philosophy and religiousness; and third, the explication of al-Farabi's ideas on the basis of the crisis (-es) he faced. In the present article the relationship between al-Farabi's philosophy and Greece, Islam and the social crisis of the time are elaborated on.

Keywords: Al-Farabi; Philosophy; Greek Philosophy: Political Philosophy; Religion; Crisis.

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Introduction

Less than two hundred years after the Iranians' break with the tradition of Iranian action and thought, *Iranshahri*, and their encounter with the Islamic tradition and Muslims' conduct, which is less than one hundred years after their acquaintance with Greek thought, al-Farabi was born. He was born in 870 in Transoxiana (Wasij in Farab), was educated in Iraq (at Nizamiya) and died in Syria in 950. He resided in Transoxiana for a short time and went to Baghdad to continue his studies, and after a short while he immigrated to Syria (Damascus and Halab) for reasons such as the outbreak of cholera, residence in the imperfect city and the necessity of leaving this city, and Caliph al-Mutawakkil's disregard for philosophy. Al-Farabi's relationship with statesmen and government is ambiguous. It is not clear whether al-Farabi received stipends from the government or not[1]. Neither is it, psychologically and sociologically, clear to us what concerns al-Farabi had, and what changes occurred in his public and private life.

Adam Metz's study on Islamic civilization in the 4th century shows that that century was the time of the disintegration of Abbasid Caliphate, the appearance and evolution of powerful local governments in Islamic countries, the change of government administration to its previous form before the Arab Conquest, the amalgamation of the old civilizations and the emergence of practical and theoretical capacities of the Islamic civilization; this is what Metz calls the Islamic Renaissance.[2]

Perhaps what was discussed above suffices to show that a man of

1 Metz, Adam, Islamic Civilization in Fourth Century, Alireza Zakavati Qaragoozloo, Tehran: Amir Kabir publications, 1362, vol.1, p. 216
2. Ibid., vol.1, p.14.

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great interest in philosophy and thinking had a lot of enthusiasm for political thinking, and this makes the analysis of his ideas, as a political thinker, justifiable for us. These analyses and readings grow in importance especially because of our awareness of the issues in the colonial era and the post-colonial motivations. The concepts of "self" and "the other", the emphasis on the universality of "self" and the negation of "other", on the one hand, and attempt to find originality in the local/ethnic thought against universal thought, on the other hand, play an important part in this respect.

Another point that makes offering readings of al-Farabi independently justifiable is the necessity of paying close attention to political philosophy in order to shape a decent and happy society. This has made al-Farabi's political philosophy grow in importance and has resulted in numerous readings of his political philosophy. Because of the distinction between al-Farabi's (theoretical) philosophy and political (practical) philosophy, different answers have been given as reasons for his philosophizing. Two questions have been addressed so far: why did al-Farabi turn to philosophy? And why did he turn to political philosophy? This distinction is of little importance in the present study. However, it can pave the way for a new reading of al-Farabi's philosophy which can be discussed elsewhere.

Readings of al-Farabi's Political Philosophy

Various and somehow different readings of al-Farabi have been offered so far. This difference is due in part to the idea that philosophy, and knowledge in general, is a reflection of our language, not

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(merely) of our world and time. We can distinguish between four kinds of scholarly reading of al-Farabi; one of them is provided independently and its instant objective is to shed light on al-Farabi and his philosophy, which was neglected for some time. The sources for this kind of reading have generally been historical sources and the works of al-Farabi; attempts have been made, in this kind of reading, to provide a historical and intellectual introduction to al-Farabi and his works. This kind of analysis is not an object of interest to us; however, it can function as a source of study and an introduction to different kinds of research on al-Farabi. Among the important examples of this kind are the amended and critical editions of al-Farabi's works. Although a lot of effort has been made in this regard, no comprehensive study of al-Farabi and his work has been carried out and no revised edition of his works is available.

The other three kinds of readings which are of importance to us revolve around al-Farabi's thought to a "relationship": the relationship between his thought and Greek thought, the relationship between the philosophical and the theological nature of his thought, and the relationship between his thought and his time, as a strategy for resolving crisis. Some researchers have tried to examine al-Farabi's ideas in terms of being dependent on or independence from Greek teachings. Another group, relative to its religious concerns, has tried to explain the relationship between his philosophy and religion, especially *Nobuwwat*; this group views his philosophy as either religious or non-religious. And the third group has sought to explain al-Farabi's philosophy on the basis of the theory of crisis. Nevertheless,

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it might be impossible to distinguish between these three kinds of readings, and as a result some researchers have offered a combination of the first and second, or even all three readings; nevertheless, the emphasis and concentration of each reading on one of the aforesaid aspects can be noticed. This division deals more with the results of the researchers' studies than with the researchers who have carried out these studies.

A. The Relationship between Farabi Thought and the Greek Thought

As already discussed, in some readings of al-Farabi's thought effort is made to study his ideas in the light of the influence of Greek thought, and his interaction with Greek philosophy. This kind of reading is mainly concerned with the components of "identity", and the opposite ends of the spectrum can be distinguished: some scholars consider his philosophy to be an imitation of the Greek philosophy, and some others regard his philosophy as independent and innovative. For the first group, which is mainly influenced by the Orientalist notion of the superiority of the self over the other, the Greek philosophy has played a great role in the explaining the nature and the end of the Islamic philosophy. Oliver Leaman views logic, ethics, politics and metaphysics as the major areas where Muslims were influenced by the Greek thought.

According to him, what Muslims learned from the Greeks was the new ways of thinking. In this regard the consequences of research and thinking could not be of much importance to Muslims;[1] some of them depict no area where Islamic

1. Oliver Leaman, "Does The Interpretation of Islamic Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?", International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol.12, No.4, (1980), pp 525-538.

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philosophy is independent from Greek philosophy. For them it is important to demonstrate that al-Farabi borrowed his ideas from Plato, Aristotle and the Neo-Platonists; indeed, some scholars are definite about two points that concerns him: "first, his complete trust, based on his knowledge, on Aristotle and the concept of demonstrative science, which he regarded as philosophy, and second, responsibility for recovering and reviving a kind of politics or political philosophy from Plato's legacy"[1].

According to Walzer some researchers believe that this knowledge is the achievement of the Arabs, and some others consider it to be a (deviated, ambiguous and insufficient) continuation of the Greek tradition of philosophy. He supports the second viewpoint and maintains that etymologically all philosophical concepts and ideas in Islam, both those which are known to us, and those for which there is no supporting evidence; derive from Greek philosophy (Aristotelian and Neo-Platonist). He applies the same approach in his book on *The Ideas of the Perfect City Dwellers*. Being influenced by Orientalism, Walzer analyzes both the effect of Greek thought and Christian thought on al-Farabi.[2] According to Rosenthal, since Muslim philosophers are greatly influenced by Greek philosophers, they cannot be called "philosopher". He maintains that Muslim thinkers are influenced by Plato in practical philosophy and by Aristotle in theoretical philosophy. He believes this influence is so strong that without Greek

1. Walker, Paul, "The Philosophy of al-Farabi, Avicenna …" in The Lawson, Reason and Revelation in Islam, Tehran: Hikmat Publications, 1378, p. 62.

2. Ricahrd Walzer, "Islamic Philosophy" in: Islamic Philosophy and Theology, Edited by Ian Netton, Routledge, 2007, Vol. 1, 00108-133.

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philosophy they would have been unable to understand *sharia* and its relationship with politics.[1]

An important point highlighted by some researchers is that Muslim philosophers, such as al-Farabi paid more attention to Plato, because his philosophy was more compatible with their religious and political situation. In other words, the whole philosophy of al-Farabi is nothing more than the similarities between Islamic teachings and Platonic teachings.[2] However, in some cases al-Farabi challenged the Greek law by establishing religious political order on the basis of revelation.[3] Here the problem was not that Muslims did not have access to Aristotle's *Politics*, in fact, they ignored this book.[4] Corbin stresses that al-Farabi is more influenced by Plato than Aristotle, and his theory of philosophical *Nobuwwat* is the most important concept in his works and is Platonic in origin.[5] In his *Metaphysics as Rhetoric*, Joshua Parens discusses the influence of Plato on al-Farabi and argues that neither of them has provided metaphysics with originality. He maintains that Plato and al-Farabi have focused their attention on politics, and metaphysics, the theory of ideas and the theory of Ideas served as tools for expressing their political ideas.[6] He believes that without Greek philosophy no understanding of al-Farabi's ideas is

1. Erwin Rosenthal, Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline, Cambridge University Press, 1968, p.78
2. Muhsin Mahdi, "al-Farabi", History of Political Philosophy, Edited by Leo Strauss and Joseph Crapsey, The University of Chicago Press, 1987, p206.
3. Muhsin Mahdi, al-Farabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy, University of Chicago Press, 2001, p.1
4. Leo Strauss, "How to Begin to Study Medieval Philosophy", The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism; An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p.223
5.C.orbin, Henri, The History of Islamic philosophy, Seyyed Jvad Tabatabaee, Tehran: Kavir, 1373. P.231.
6. Joshua Parens, Metaphysics as Rhetoric, al-Farabi's Summary of Plato's Laws, State University of New York Press, 1995.

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possible. Miriam Galston considers such a distinction to be wrong and tries to reveal the influence of Aristotle on al-Farabi. According to her, concepts such as the dominating excellence, perfect city and happiness in al-Farabi are influenced by Aristotle.[1] In his studies, De Boer holds that Islamic philosophy is influenced by Aristotelian and Neo-Platonist philosophy. He believes that Muslims (unlike Christians) failed in understanding the philosophy of Aristotle and for this reason and also as result of the uncertainty in the Aristotelian and Neo-Platonist thought, al-Farabi's political thought is ambiguous and incompatible with the real situation of life.[2]

Batterworth analyzes al-Farabi's "Aphorisms of statesman" and maintains that it begins with "human soul" and ends with "human excellence": two concepts which reveal the influence of Plato and Aristotle on al-Farabi. According to him, both in ethics and politics, al-Farabi owes much to Plato and Aristotle.[3] For Walker this influence is so serious that the borrowing of Greek religion by Muslim philosophers, though impractical, does not seem unimaginable:

"None of these encounters has been more influential on Islamic thought than the encounter with the knowledge and philosophy of ancient Greece; the religion of the Greeks could not have been as influential because Muslims, quite surprisingly, paid no attention to the Greek religion … but the influence of different forms of Greek thought

1. Galston, Miriam, (1990), Politics and Excellence: The Political Philosophy of al-Farabi, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press

2. T. De Boer, The History of Philosophy in Islam, Trans. By E. Jones, London: Luzac & Co., 1903, p27 , p126.

3. Charles Batterworth, "Ethical and Political Philosophy", in: The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy, Edited by Peter Adamson and Richard Taylor, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 266-286.

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on Islamic thinking, especially in the field of philosophy, was profound and powerful".[1]

According to Walker, "al-Farabi, being influenced by Aristotle, tried to establish demonstrative knowledge as central point of his philosophical thought".[2]

However, some researchers have tried to show that al-Farabi's thought is independent from the philosophy originated in Greece. In general, "historical and scientific studies show that philosophy is not an imported souvenir and a foreign product for Iran and the East. However, it was formed through a circular process and a civilization transference in the East (Transoxiana, Egypt, Iran, India, …) and was transferred to Greece and ancient Rome, was changed into an rational legacy by authorities on wisdom and knowledge, and was taken back to its birthplace in the East, i.e. Iran and Islamic world, by Alexandrian and Syriac translators. At the time Islamic civilization was flourishing, philosophy was crystallized, by scholars such as al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ikhwan al-Safa, the Ismailis, Ameri, Ibn Moskwayh, Avicenna and many others, into various intellectual and philosophical schools with a completely new identity which was completely different from its Greek form".[3] Mohammad Iqbal Lahoori maintains that for different reasons, such as not knowing the Greek, "Muslims could not have understood Aristotle and Plato's philosophy. Avicenna was more knowledgeable and more innovative than al-Farabi and Ibn Moskweyh … Muslim

1. Walker, Paul, "The Philosophy of al-Farabi, Avicenna …" in The Lawson, Reason and Revelation in Islam, Tehran: Hikmat Publications, 1378, p. 63.
2. Ibid., p. 64.

3 .Shakoori, Abolfazal, The Political Philosophy of Avicenna, Qom: Aqle Sorkh Publications, 1384, p. 137

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philosophers cannot be considered to be mere imitators of Greek philosophers. The history of Islamic thought reveals that Muslim thinkers tried hard to broaden their horizons in philosophy. The translators of Greek philosophy had collected a great deal of fallacies which had made understanding Greek philosophy impossible for Muslim thinkers. As a result, these thinkers had to revise and reconstruct Aristotle and Plato's philosophy; that is why their commentaries are innovative and critical rather than explanatory. Needless to say, this prevented Iranian philosophers from constructing independent intellectual systems and made them engaged in futile endeavor, and as a result falsity and truth were intermingled."[1]

Most Muslim scholars insist that there are innovations in Islamic philosophy, and they do not regard al-Farabi as a commentator on Greek philosophy. According to them, "al-Farabi's works are different from Greek philosophy in general philosophy, political philosophy and classification of sciences. For example, al-Farabi is probably the first to divide being into necessary and possible; also, instead of Aristotle's classification of science into ethics, economics and politics, he divides science into political science, *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and *kalam* (Islamic theology)"[2]; however, sometime this viewpoint seems too radical. Nasrollah Hekmat argues that, "considering the ideas of Muslim philosophers to be eclectic" is "a pure invention of Orientalists and a part of their paradigm in the study of Eastern religion"; they try to demonstrate that Muslim philosophers had no original idea of

1 .Lahoori, Mohammad Iqbal, The Course of Philosophy in Iran, A. H. Arianpoor, Tehran: Amir Kabir Publication, 13863. Pp.40-41.

2. Qaderi, Hatam, Political Ideas in Iran and Islam, Tehran: Samt Publications, 1378, p. 140.

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their own.[1]

Along with the studies which focus on the opposite extremes of originality and imitation in al-Farabi, there is a third kind of research which adopts a different approach in the study of al-Farabi. One example is, Dimitri Gutas' reading of al-Farabi; Gutas does not regard al-Farabi as a political philosopher (for him, Ibn Khaldun is the only political thinker), and believes that al-Farabi is influenced by foreign thinkers only in his theory of emanation and theory of reason.[2]According to him, we have no clear understanding of al-Farabi yet. In another reading of al-Farabi by Davari Ardakani (in his latest research), his philosophy is discussed in the framework of an exchange, especially a kind of cultural exchange. He calls al-Farabi the philosopher of culture who deals with "cultural exchange" and he finds it regrettable that "the possibility of transferring science and thought from one civilization and cultural domain to another domain, the possibility of translating philosophical and literary works, as discussed in al-Farabi's books, have been almost completely forgotten".[3]

B. The Relationship between the Philosophical and Theological Aspects of Farabi

In another kind of reading al-Farabi's philosophy is discussed in terms of its relationship with its theological (and metaphysical) aspect. Two questions are raised here: does al-Farabi deal with religion and religious issues in his philosophy? If yes, what relationship

1. Hekmat, Nasrollah, The Life and Ideas of al-Frabai, Elham Publications, 1386, p. 284.
2. Dimitri Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in Twentieth Century: An Essay on Historiography of Arabic Philosophy" British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, Vol.29, No.1 (2002), pp5-25.
3. Davari Ardakani, Reza, al-Farabi: The Philosopher of Culture, Tehran: Saqi Publications, 1382, p. 3.

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does he establish between religion and philosophy? Oliver Leaman believes that al-Farabi and other Muslim philosophers deal with philosophy as the cornerstone of their work, and the issues in philosophy are different from those in theology. They dealt with philosophy, not religion; this was not because they were afraid, nor was it because they lacked religious faith.[1] Erwin Rosenthal maintains that the Muslim philosophers deemed philosophy in contrast with *sharia*, one was based on revelation and the other on mythology, and because of the limitations imposed by *sharia* they were incapable of understanding philosophy correctly.[2] In other words, he believed that both religion and philosophy exerted influence on al-Farabi; in some works he owes much to the Greeks, and in some other works he is heavily influenced by Islam. Rosenthal considers *The Ideas of the Perfect City Dwellers* to be Platonic, *al-Jam' Beyn Ray' Hakimin* Neo-Platonist and *Civil Chapters* Islamic. According to Davari Ardakani there is an essential distinction between these two kinds of religious and philosophical thought.[3] Abed al-Jabbari considers these two not contradictory, because according to him for al-Farabi religion is an imitation of philosophy.[4]

There is also a spectrum of ideas. Those who maintain that al-Farabi's philosophy is an imitation of the Greek philosophy, consider the effect of Islamic teachings to be minimal. Walker states that, "although al-Farabi is held to be an

1. Oliver Leaman, "Does The Interpretation of Islamic Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?", International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol.12, No.4, (1980), pp 525-538
2. Erwin Rosenthal, Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline, Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp.1-3.
3. Davari Ardakani, Reza, al-Farabi: the Philosopher of Culture, p.10.
4. Jaberi, Mohammad Abed, Criticism of Arabic Reason, Dar al-Nashir al-Maghribia, 2000

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Islamic philosopher, Islam has had little influence or even no influence on him".[1] Nevertheless, al-Farabi's discussions on Prophet and Imam in his *The Ideas of the Perfect City Dwellers* have caused some researchers to establish a positive relationship between his thought and the concepts of theology, *Nobuwwat* and *Imamat*. The presumption in these kinds of research on al-Farabi is that he has combined philosophy with religion: "al-Farabi has combined theology and philosophy into a single system". His philosophy is "a combination of religion and philosophy". While he believed in the "concomitance of reason and *sharia*" and "the equality of the value of philosophy and tradition in Quran" and "the conformity of religion and philosophy" and "the uniformity of the truth of philosophy and religion", he regarded "reason and revelation, and philosophy and *Nobuwwat* as two reliable ways for attaining divine emanation".[2] From this point of view, al-Farabi as a "Muslim philosopher believed that reason and *sharia* have a single origin and destination, and thus he deemed philosophy and *Nobuwwat* concomitant".[3]

According to Tabatabaee, al-Farabi is the representative of "the philosophical perception of Shia theory of *Imamat*". From the viewpoint of Tabatabaee "*Imamat*, as perceived by the Shias, and its philosophical interpretation, as discussed in al-Farabi, could have served as a way for resolving the crisis".[4] Tabatabaee takes one step further and maintains that al-Farabi "believed in a philosophical

1. Walker, Paul, ibid., p.63.

2. Fairahi, Davood, Power, Knowledge and Legitimacy in Islam,Tehran: Nay Publications, 1382, pp.327, 331, 332, 338, 339, and 340.
3. Fairahi, ibid., p. 328.
4. Tabatabaee, Decline, Kavir Publication, 1383 pp. 118, 119, 120.

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Nobuwwat" and "deemed the continuation of a kind of philosophical *Nobuwwat* necessary for the establishment of the perfect city".[1] In this respect, al-Farabi's philosophy is considered to be influenced by the Shia school. Scholars such as Hans Daiber argue that in his political philosophy, al-Farabi is inspired by the Ismaili teachings.[2] He adds that the theological issues of the early Islamic era are the starting point of Islamic political philosophy.[3]In his *Farabi and Ibn Al-Ravandi*, Josef Von Ess argues that in *Ehya al-Oloom*, al-Farabi echoes the theological teachings of Ibn Ravandi.[4] Also in his "al-Farabi and Sajestani: Reason and Sharia from the Viewpoint of the Teacher and Philosopher", Karimi Zanjani Asl holds that the strongest influence of the Ismaili teachings on al-Farabi has been through Sajestani. Seyyed Hassan Nasr views "Quran and Hadith as the sources of inspiration for Islamic philosophy".[5]

According to Rosenthal, Islamic philosophy is concerned with a main problem and a final goal: "the problem is the contrast between the revelation law and the human law, and its final goal is the investigation of politics". He states that, "the study of *Republic*, Laws, and *Nicomachean Ethics* led Muslim philosophers to a better understanding of the political nature of Islamic *Sharia*… because here

1. Tabatabee, ibid., 118, 119.
2. Hans Daiber, The Ismaili Background of Farabi's Political Philosophy: Abuhatam Al-Razi as a Forerunner of Farabi (1992), in Karimi Zanjani Asl, Mohammad, Iranian political thought for Hallaj to Sajestani, Tehran: Kavir Publications, 1383, p. 262.
3. Daiber, Hans, "Political philosophy" tr. Ali Morshedzadeh, The History of Islamic Philosophy, under the supervision of Seyyed Hassan Nasr and Oliver Leaman, Hekmat Publications, 1388, Vol. 4. P. 102.
4. Ess, Josef Von, Farabi and Ibn Al-Ravandi, (1992).
5. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, The Quran and Hadith as Sourse and Inspiration of Islamic Philosophy. History of Islamic Philosophy, Edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, 2003, pp. 27-38

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they found a concept similar to the rule of law, as a guarantee for human well-being; although they are different in form, they both put emphasis on law (*sharia*)".[1] He argues that, "the political philosophy of Muslim thinkers highlighted the contrast between Aristotle and Plato's political philosophy and the theory of Caliphate. Although their political philosophy, like the Greek thought, comprises the constructive part of their general philosophy, it is thoroughly intermingled with the recognition of religious authority. Therefore he stresses that the conformity between philosophy and revelation is a prerequisite for the assimilation of philosophy in Islam:

"I have no doubt about the originality of the equilibrium al-Farabi established between philosophy and revelation, and I respect al-Farabi's tendency to demonstrate the truth of revelation through philosophy, therefore, I do not interpret his ideas as an endorsement of the superiority of reason over revelation…; in the first place he is a Muslim, and in the second he is a student of Plato and Aristotle, and their commentators and Hellenistic successors."[2]

However, Daiber regards the political philosophy of al-Farabi as an attempt to Islamicize the Greek political philosophy.[3] In another reading it is stated that, "al-Farabi continued the attempt to establish conformity between Greek philosophy with Islam, which al-Kindi had started".[4]

1. Rosenthal, Erwin, Political Thought in Medieval Islam, tr. Ali Ardestani, Tehran: Qoomes Publications, 1387, pp. 3 and 109.

2 .Ibid., pp. 115 and 116.
3. Daiber, Political Philosophy, ibid., 114.
4. Sheikh Saeed, Comparative Studies in Islamic Philosophy, tr. Mostafa Mogaqeq Damad, Kharazmi, 1369, p.115.

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C. Explicating Farabi's Philosophy on the Basis of Crisis

One way to understand a thinker's ideas is by looking it on the basis of the historical situation in which the thinker lives. What is of importance here is the presence of crisis or crises, the response to which coincides with the emergence of a thought.[1] There is a general viewpoint which explains both al-Farabi's political philosophy and the whole Islamic philosophy on the basis of the theory of crisis. Mohsen Mehdi brings up the issues of government and rule while dealing with "the emergence of rationalism in Islam" and its relationship with *Nobuwwat*. The questions "who is claiming rule over the religious society of Muslims after the death of Prophet Mohammad?" which is dealt with in theology (*Kalam*) as well, and "how is this person going to be elected?" caused "rationalism in Islam to emerge".[2] This is accompanied by some other important issues about divine justice, human duties in society and the like. Through these discussion and also different movements, such as translation movement, a one-thousand-year old theological, religious and rational tradition entered Islam; a tradition that formerly existed among the Greeks, Iranians, Indians, and Syriac speaking Christians. The problem with understanding this current is that this tradition was much more advanced than the native tradition when it arrived. The relationship was unequal in the beginning.[3]

Oliver Leaman also views Islamic philosophy on the basis of crisis. According to him, Muslims had two motivations for the study of science

1. To read more, see: Thomas Springs, Understanding Political Theories, Farhang Rajaee, Tehran: Agah Publications, 1378, pp. 18 and 32-46.

2. Daftari, Farhad, Rational Traditions, p. 55.
3. Ibid, 56-57.

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and philosophy. One was the need for discussion and debate with people of other religions and encouraging them to convert to Islam. It is most probable that not all the people could have been forced to convert to Islam, and yet it could have not been to the advantage of the new empire. The presence of different religions and cultures in the Islamic state caused no problem provided the role of the Islamic leadership was recognized. This necessitated adoption of the methodology of the previous religions, so that it could be demonstrated that Islam was an amendment to what existed before the last mission. The second motivation had a practical aspect: other people lived a better life, were healthy, educated and more civilized. They wanted to know how they managed to do that.[1] It is held that philosophy entered Islamic culture, not out of the necessity of the political life, but mainly through medicine. For rulers and the wealthy needed medicine, medicine was a branch of philosophy and physicians were philosophers who transferred the rest of philosophical knowledge and common order to the Islamic society.

If we take the occurrence of crises as the origin of al-Farabi's philosophy, we need to analyze these crises. Jaberi argues that al-Farabi, unlike al-Kindi, did not live at the time of a powerful government (such as that of Mamoon and Mutasam), so that he would write to support the government and weaken its enemies; he live at the time of intellectual and political disorder, "therefore, his main goal was to reunite thought

1. Leaman, Oliver, "Scientific and Philosophical Research: Achievements and Reactions in the History of Islam", in Farhad Daftari, Rational Traditions in Islam, pp. 35-36.

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with the society" and he sought to do this by going beyond the polemical and fallacious theological framework, by recourse to demonstrative reason, and by establishing social relations on the basis of a new system which was indicative of the system of creation, its components and orders.[1]

Tabatabaee also examines al-Farabi's political philosophy on the basis of crisis, and refers to some crises. He regards "the crisis in the human conscience in this era" as the main crisis of al-Farabi's era.[2] He highlights "the establishment of philosophical thought" by al-Farabi and explicates it "in terms of the philosophical understanding of Caliphate crisis which could have ended the Islamic era", and, in this regard, he compares the attempt of Plato with that of al-Farabi. It should be noted that, "al-Farabi's philosophical thought, like that of Plato, developed and evolved through the political crisis of his time; therefore, his thought is political, and these two philosophers realized that resolving the political crisis is only possible through philosophical understanding".[3] Al-Farabi sought to "find a solution for problems of the socio-political system of Islamic Caliphate, through delving into the crisis of the Caliphate system".[4] For him, al-Farabi's thought was a reaction to Caliphate crisis and "a way of participating in the debate".

Fairahi states that "al-Farabi's aim was to analyze, philosophically, the crisis which had enveloped the Caliphate system and impaired the political identity of Muslims", and

1. Jaberi, Mohammad Abed, Criticism of Arabic Reason, Dar al-Nashir al-Maghribia, 2000, p.236, in this book and The Foundation of Arabic Reason, there is an identity attitude toward philosophy in Islam.
2. Tabatabaee, Decline of the Political Thought in Iran, Tehran: Kavir Publications, 1383, p.153.
3. Ibid, p. 121.
4. Ibid, pp.127 and 133.

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concludes that "al-Farabi could not challenge and criticize the structure and authoritative logic of political power, instead, he kept and relied on the same structure, which was founded on monarchy, to develop a philosophical outline of the government of sages".[1] Most researchers, who have sought contextual reasons for the emergence of al-Farabi's thought, find the crisis of Caliphate one of the most important causes for it. Richard Walzer considers al-Farabi's interest in Plato to be a reaction to the crisis of Caliphate and a way for resolving it.[2]

Conclusion

Every reading of a thought paves the way for expressing facts that have practical solutions. Various readings of a political philosophy can have more serious consequences, because philosophy is assumed to be dealing with truth more than other fields of knowledge; and when philosophy takes on a political aspect, it can play a more crucial role in the social life.

In the history of Islam, philosophy has not played a clear role, and the increasing enthusiasm of commentators and interpreters is indicative of the possibility and necessity of the presence of political philosophy in social life. In this article some important readings of al-Farabi, from that domain of Islamic philosophy which al-Farabi represents, were discussed. The three major trends in reading al-Farabi were concerned with "religious propositions",."Greek teachings" and "local crises"; the first two factors are regarded as external, and the third one as domestic and local.

1. Fairahi, Power, Knowledge and Legitimacy,p. 326-328.
2. Ricahrd Walzer, "Aspects of Islamic Political Thoughts: Al-Farabi and Ibn Xaldun", Oriens, Vol. 16, (1963), p.40

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From another aspect the first two factors are epistemological, and the third one is sociological. Each epistemological and sociological reading attracts a particular criticism. Two criticisms are leveled at these readings: one characteristic of the sociological explications is that more evidence can be offered to support their claims, and they can explain the inner logic of the emergence of an idea better. However, the contextual and sociological readings of the political philosophy of al-Farabi lack this quality and are more of a claim or guesswork than a sociological reading. For instance, comparing "the crisis in the early centuries of Islam in understanding al-Farabi's thought" and "the crisis in Athenian democracy for determining the fate of Plato's thought" is fundamentally wrong. Because there is a Socrates who represents the crisis and falls victim to that; and also Plato's dialogues are indicative of this. In the case of al-Farabi's philosophy there are neither textual evidences, nor contextual reasons.

In the first and second readings, "identity" and the distinction between "self and the other" cast a shadow on their scientific aspect. The epistemological explications of the emergence of al-Farabi's thought are far from creating an inter-subjective condition that can pave the way for a kind of "reasonability". Can't we regard the Iranian-Islamic emphasis on "innovations of al-Farabi" and the assertion that he was engaged in "cultural transference", as the other side of the coin of Orientalism? Was al-Farabi aware of cultural transference so that he would have tried to do that? A researcher can realize that al-Farabi had some innovations in philosophy and he carried out the transferences knowingly, only when he has a

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conception of identity. Al-Farabi concentrated his full attention on the basic issues of philosophy, i.e., the equality of being and truth; culture could not have been discussed here and no exchange could have been done. For al-Farabi, philosophy is not dependent on space, and it cannot move from the West to the East. He considers himself to be the most brilliant student of Aristotle. We can see some conceptions of the West and the East on the basis of identity in the works of Muslims later. Therefore, whenever al-Farabi speaks about the philosophy prior to him, he refers to the antecede philosophers. For him, the main subject in philosophy, i.e., *being*, is matter related to *time*. Yesterday it was somewhere; today it is elsewhere else, and tomorrow it will be in another place. He regards time as relative in proportion to human beings and that is why he considers ethics to be relative in different circumstances.

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سه خواندنی‌ها مختلف فلسفه سیاسی فارابی

دکتر بحرانی[1]

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تاکنون، علاوه بر بررسی‌های تاریخی، سه نحوه خوانش از اندیشه سیاسی فارابی صورت پذیرفته است: یکی در ارتباط اندیشه این فیلسوف با تفکر یونانی، دوم در ارتباط با نسبتی که می‌توان میان فلسفه و دیانت برقرار کرد؛ و سوم، توضیح اندیشه فارابی بر اساس بحران(هایی) که فارابی با آن مواجه بوده است. در این مقاله، حسب نسبت فلسفه سیاسی فارابی با «یونان»، «اسلام»؛و «بحران اجتماعی زمانه» این خوانش‌ها تحلیل و نقد می‌شوند.

واژگان‌کلیدی: فارابی، فلسفه سیاسی، دین اسلام، فلسفه یونانی، بحران اجتماعی.

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