

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course

Date of Submission

### Al Farabi Political Philosophy

Al Farabi's full name was Abu Nasr ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Tarkhan ibn Uzlag Al-Farabi and this name is shortened to Alfarabi by majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers. Al Farabi was born somewhere between 257-339 C.E. in Farab and lived up to eighty years of age. Alfarabi is often regarded as the father of philosophy in the Muslim world and his views are therefore widely regarded in the Muslim world. Although his main area of focus was music, Alfarabi left his hometown to pursue philosophy in Baghdad which was the then hub of Greek philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Although Farabi is known for numerous things, his main area of focus was his views on politics and government.

Farabi's views on politics were that human beings are unable to get the excellence that they are supposed to get outside the structure of political association. The major reason according to Farabi is that human beings are unable to exist on their own but they require regular help from those around them in order to be able to attain their perfection. This political premise as envisioned by Farabi is geared towards acquiring true happiness or towards opposite ideals such as pleasure and the attainment of wealth. For this reason, Al Farabi comes up with his virtuous city against non-virtuous city.

---

<sup>1</sup> Majid Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002. 50-66.

Al Farabi compared a perfect city to a perfect body only differing in its natural duties. The heart according to Farabi is the first rank and the other organs in the body all work towards perfecting the first rank. This function of the body is similar to the city which is served by people in lower ranks while those in the lower ranks are served by others in lower ranks all of which is meant to perfect the entire government system. According to Farabi, this function is necessary in the course of establishing an ideal society<sup>2</sup>.

Of the many questions that Al Farabi tried to answer, one of the most important was what qualities the ruler should possess. According to Al Farabi, an ideal ruler should be full of rational by gaining all the knowledge that they can. According to Al Farabi, God is the ultimate leader and He is therefore capable of ruling the world. This proposition by Al Farabi means that God can rule the world and bring happiness to all flesh. God is all knowing and He is everything. If then the ruler can have the attributes of God, such a leader can make the people that he governs happy since he has a high intellect and he can understand the challenges of the people that he governs<sup>3</sup>.

According to Al-Farabi, a good leader should have been born a leader and he should also have the right attitude for a leader. Such a leader according to Al Farabi should be devoid of any kind of blemish and should be good and understanding. What this means is that the leader should have the same qualities in place that he wants to see among those he is leading as this is the only

---

<sup>2</sup> Al-Farabi, Abu Nas'r. *Directing Attention to the Way to happiness*. In Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources. (Jon McGinnis and David Reisman, Trans). USA: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

<sup>3</sup> Parens Joshua. *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions, Introducing Alfarabi*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2006. 103-112. Print.

way through which one can build an ideal society. Instead of being focused on wealth, such a leader should esteem justice and always endeavor to build an equitable society<sup>4</sup>.

Like Plato, Al Farabi believed that human beings are social creatures that have natural tendencies to establishing communities. The main objective for Al Farabi to form a community was just not in meeting the daily needs but also to offer man a total life with happiness both in this and in the next life. Al Farabi believed that any city whose people were only in pursuit of wealth or driven by necessity end up oppressing others in order to attain those things. In such a city, everyone seeks to live as an individual and such a city is characterized by cut throat competition with each person trying to get ahead of the other despite the consequences. Farabi believed that the character of the leader is mirrored in the lives of the people living in the city something which mean that a city that has a virtuous leader would end up producing virtuous citizens<sup>5</sup>.

Al Farabi's analogy of ideal and wicked cities is definitely a reflection of Plato's Republic that grows on account of a virtuous city and virtuous people and examines it in light of various malfunctioning constitutions. Farabi notes that the leader in the excellent city will guide the city into happiness since he himself is happy<sup>6</sup>. The contrast is the case in an ignorant and wicked city where the leader misleads the people into believing that pleasures are the real cause of happiness. All of Farabi's discussions are meant to answer the questions – what is it like living in any of these cities? Is the excellent city proposed by Farabi attainable in this world?

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 104

<sup>5</sup> Brown Erick. *Plato's Ethics and Politics in the Republic*. 2009. Web. February 6, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Clayton Edward. *Aristotle: Politics*, 2005. Web. February 4, 2016.

Al Farabi is among the pioneers of philosophy in the Muslim world. Al Farabi focuses his decision on trying to find an ideal city, one where the leader is virtuous and leads the people in to happiness by teaching them how to shun pleasure. However, there is a strong debate on whether such an ideal city is available in the world or whether it only refers to the kingdom of God since the nature of the world shows that it is an ignorant and wicked city.

Works Cited

- Al-Farabi, Abu Nas'r. *Directing Attention to the Way to happiness*. In Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources. (Jon McGinnis and David Reisman, Trans). USA: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Brown, Erick. *Plato's Ethics and Politics in the Republic*. 2009. Web. February 6, 2016.
- Clayton, Edward. *Aristotle: Politics*, 2005. Web. February 4, 2016.
- Fakhry, Majid. *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002. 50-66. Print.
- Parens, Joshua. *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions, Introducing Alfarabi*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2006. 103-112. Print.