Al-Fārābī's Political Science and Its Contribution to Islamic Humanism as It is Expounded in His *Iḥṣā' al-ᶜUlūm* (Enumeration of the Sciences)

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KEYWORDS

ABSTRACT

Islam is the origin of humanism. God Almighty revealed it to guard and guarantee mankind's *saᶜādah* **(**happiness) in this world and hereafter. The true humanism is for mankind to feel a sincere and veracious comfort that emanates from within him. Muslims recognise the highest levels of humanism, before others, because it is of complete love for people, which is to love *khayr* (good) for them. Therefore, the role of Muslims is to hold on to Islam and to convey its massage to all mankind. This helps to achieve the happiness and tranquility the world and hereafter need. Among Muslim philosophers, Al-Fārābī has distinguished himself in conveying this message in his classification of sciences, particularly in political science. He asserts that when human actions are examined and their ends, the role of political science is to illustrate that some of these ends are true happiness, while others are presumed to be happiness but, they are not. Although wealth, honour and pleasure are presumed to be happiness in this life, he argues that it is impossible for true happiness to be of this life, it is in fact of another life which is the life of hereafter. Al-Fārābī provides a purely religious perspective of true happiness, which is of hereafter and paradise. This article examines the political science of Al-Fārābī as his contribution to Islamic humanism. It discusses his main ideas of political science, which he calls "virtuous leadership" or "virtuous monarchical profession", arguing that a leader enacts rules, preserves virtuous cities and nations, and whose end is true happiness, which is attained by good, noble, and virtuous deeds.

Introduction

Al-Fārābī (258-339H/870-950M) is Abu al-Nasr Mohammed bin Ozelg bin Tarkhan. He was born in the Turkish town of Fāryāb, in Khurasan District. His father, who was of Persian origin, married to a Turkish woman and became a commander in the Turkish army. He devoted to his studies in his small town and was fluent in Persian, Turkish and Kurdish languages. He travelled to Iraq and settled in

Baghdad, which was then the capital of knowledge and scholarship and where he mastered the Arabic language. He studied under his teacher Abu Bishr Matta bin Yunus (deceased 328H/939M) who taught him logic. He also studied legal science under Jhonna ibn Haylan, who passed away in Baghdad during the era of al-Muqtadir Billah who ascended the throne of the caliphate in 295 H/907 AD). Al-Fārābī may not have been fluent in Arabic when he arrived in Baghdad because he studied the Arabic grammar

under Abu Bakr bin Al-Sarrāj in exchange for the logic lessons.[1]

The scholarly works of Al-Fārābī became famous. His students increased significantly because of his profound knowledge, making him a unique scholar of his time in his domain of sciences. Among his students who came to the fore during that time was Yahya ibn Uday al-Nasrani. Al-Fārābī moved to Damascus in 330 h/941 AD and joined Sayf al-Daulah al-Hamdani, the ruler of Aleppo. He became part of al-Hamdani scholars who sought his company in his expedition to Damascus. Al-Fārābī died in 339 H/950 AD at 80 years old.[2]

Regarding al-Fārābī's position among the Muslim philosophers, Ibn Khalikan described him as the greatest Muslim philosopher. This is because, Al-Fārābī's created a complete philosophical school of thought and doctrine. He also played a role like that played by Plato in the Western world. Ibn Khalikan explains that Al-Fārābī was rightly nick-named "The Second Teacher" as Aristotle was "The First Teacher". [3]

Delimitation of the Term *Insāniyyah* (Humanism) and the Usage of the Terms *al-insān* (human being) and *al-nās* (people) in the Holy Qur'ān

Lisān al-'Arab posits that *al-insāniyyah* (humanism) is from the word *insu* whose synonym is *al-bashar* or *al-insān* (human being). The singular and plural forms of humanism are *insiyyun* and *unāsiyyun* or *al-unās,* respectively from which *al-nās* is derived.[4] It is formulated from rigid words with letters *ya* with a stress and *ta* added to it and became *insāniyyah* to indicate its characteristics and qualities. This addition transferred the word from descriptive to nominal, inducing the pronunciation of the source meaning. In *Al-Qāmūs al-Muhīt*, the term *insāniyyah* (humanism), is an abstract feminine noun of quality ascribed to *insān* (human being) and created verbal noun. It is a relative adjective of thing, as distinguished from the concrete thing itself and the sum of the characteristics of humanity that

distinguishes it from other types of close species; it is opposite of bestialism or animalism.[5]

The Holy Qur'an mentions *al-insān* (human being) about eighty times but is used in three main ways: speaking about the creation of human nature[6], describing human psyche[7] and addressing human being by reminding him about his lord.[8] Regarding *al-nās* (people), the Holy Qur'ān repeatedly uses it about a hundred and forty times to refer to humanity. Many of them are mentioned to address humans in general.[9] The Qur'an also uses a*l-bashar* (human beings) to refer to one human race. This term has been used in more than thirty-five verses.[10]

Islam came, as it is understood from the Qu'ānic texts, to establish among all human beings the humanism league. This was based on the relationship of human beings with God, the Creator and the Almighty. The elaboration of the meaning and usage of *al-insān, insāniyyah and al-nās* in the Holy Qur'ān depicts how Islam as a universal religion stresses the importance of human beings and the high position that humanism has occupied in Islam.

The Position of *Insāniyyah* (Humanism) in Islam

In Islam, humanism is viewed with respect and honor. As a result, it establishes the general rights for all human beings. Justice, mercy, and equality in rights and duties are matters that God requires for all people, if they are not transgressing and departing from His laws. The Holy Qur'an states:

> We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of our creation.[11]

This means that we grant human beings honour, dignity, noble-mindedness, and preference. The honour encompasses the creation of human beings in the best mould, which cannot be for animals. Human beings have the right mind that may lead them to God Almighty, understands His words, leads him to His blessing, and to the approval of His messengers. Therefore, all human beings regardless of race, colour, cultural and socio-economic background refer to one father and to one origin. God, may He be glorified and exalted, has often

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[1] Ibn Abī Uṣaybiᶜah, ᶜ*Uyūn Al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*, (Beirut: Dār Al-Fikr: 1957) 3, p. 223.

[2] Al-Qatfi, Jamaluddin Abi al-Hassan Aliu bin Yusuf, *Ikhbār al-'Ulamā bi Akhbār al-Hukamā* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah,2005), p. 211.

[3] Ibn Khalikān, Abu al-Abbas Shamsuddin Ahamad bin Muhammad, *Wafayāt al A'yān wa Anbā Abnā al-Zamān* Vol. 5, (Beirut: Dār Sadir, 1994), p. 153. For more detailed English information on al-Fārābī's life, works and philosophy, see: Osman Bakar, *Al- Fārābī, Life, Works, and Significance* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2018) 2nd ed. with new preface.

[4] Ibn Manẓūr, Abū al-Fadl Jamāluddīn Mohammed bin Mukrim, *Lisān al 'Arab,* (Beirut: Dār Sadir, 1992 5th ed., pp. 10,12,13,14).

[5] Al-Fayruz Abadi, Majduddin Muhammad bin Ya'qub, *Al-Qāmūs al-Muhīt* (Cairo: Dar Hadith, 2008) vol. 1, p. 77.

[6] Sūrah Al-Hijr: 26. See also, Sūrah al-Isrā: 11, Sūrah al-Sajdah: 7, and Sūrah al-Muaminūn: 12.

[7] Sūrah, Al-'Alaq: 6. See also Sūrah al-Kahf: 54, and Sūrah Ibrāhīm: 34.

[8] Sūrah Al-Infitār: 6, and Sūrah al-Inshiqāq: 6.

[9] Sūrah Al-Hujurāt: 13, Sūrah Al-Baqarah: 21 and 168. See also Sūrah Yūnus: 23.

[10] Sūrah Al-Hijr: :28, Sūrah Ibrahim: 11, Sūrah al-Rūm: 20, and Sūrah Al-Furqān: 54.

[11] Sūrah al-Isrā: 70.

stated this truth in verses of the Holy Qur'an in various ways. The fundamental question is why all this attention? There is no doubt that it is for people to take care of this consideration and live in fraternity, cooperation, acquaintance, and exchange. God the Exalted states:

> O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; reverence God, though Whom ye demand your mutual (right), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for God ever watches over you.[12]

God is the one who created humanism from one soul, and it is the first man, from whom all other people were chained by generation, and he is Adam, peace be upon him. And in the creation of all people from one soul, there are evidence of God's power, His knowledge, wisdom, and oneness. There is a need for cooperation and acquaintance between human beings. There should be no hostility, fighting, or spreading the spirit of enmity and hatred among people.

It is worth highlighting that the concerns of Islam with people is indeed the consolidation of the general meaning of humanism. As Muslims read, listen, and practice the holy words in the Holy Qur'an, it is expected that they acquire the understanding that contributes to the unity of humanity. This is regardless of any form of discrimination since the Holy Qur'an addresses human beings in general. God the Exalted states:

> O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well-acquainted with all things.[13]

The verse highlights three quintessential points about *al-nās* (human beings or people). First, *al-nās* encompasses males and females, for both are one race, and this has been emphasised in other verses of the Holy Qur'an.[14] Second, humankind is composed of tribal societies and folks, and it is *al-nās* that expresses the common race that engulfs all of them. Finally, it illustrates that human development is based on a mutual understanding and knowledge of all families, tribes, and nations. This is the fundamental condition for achieving the mutual help and cooperation that the Holy Qur'an admonishes.[15] Given that human beings are responsible *khalīfah* vicegerent among all that God created, the true Islam places humanism above everything for Muslims to be God's vicegerent. The following section focuses on the contributions of Al-Fārābī's political science to Islamic humanism.

Al-Fārābī's Political Science and Its Contribution to Islamic Humanism

Al-Fārābī's political science begins with human science. It examines the purpose of human creation, the nature and how they attain perfection. He stresses that perfection can be attained through good deeds, virtuous and benefactions. These are contrasted with evil deeds, shortcomings and vices that prevent human beings from attaining perfection. His conception of political science explains how the activities of humankind contribute to the happiness and perfection for all.

Al-Farabi's political science examines the types of voluntary actions, laws, knacks, moral behaviors, natural dispositions, and innate qualities that form or shape human life. It investigates the existence of human beings, how they function in the social system based on customary procedures[16], and how they attain true happiness (the one that is attained the hereafter). Al-Fārābī's outlines the characteristics of a happy person or nation, arguing that both are based on four ethical virtues. These are *al-faḍā'il al-naẓariyyah* (theoretical virtues), *al-faḍā'il al-fikriyyah* (thinking virtues), *al-faḍā'il al-khuluqiyyah* (ethical virtues), and *al-sinā'at al-'amaliyyah* (practical vocations or professions).[17] Unlike attaining wordily happiness through wealth, nobility, and pleasures[18], a happy person possesses virtues, while a happy nation is governed by a virtuous king or leader. This contributes to the true *khayr* (good) that leads to the perfection and happiness in the afterlife.[19] He sees happiness as:

> The soul of human being becoming perfect in existence to where it does not need in its livelihood any kind of material support. It is the totality of things that are free from bodies, and in the group of essences that are separated from material entities. It remains in that condition always and forever.[20]

Referring to Al-Farabi's conception of happiness, greater happiness is to liberate the soul from the chains of material entities. This can be achieved through certain actions: *af'āl irādiyyah* (voluntary actions), *af'āl fikriyyah* (thinking actions), and *af'āl badaniyyah* (bodily actions). Thus, political science should distinguish the actions and the laws of life and

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[12] Sūrah al-Nisā: 1.
[13] Sūrah al-Hujrāt: 13.
[14] See, Sūrah al Rūm: and Sūrah al-Aᶜrāf: 189.
[15] See Sūrah al-Māidah: 2.

[16] Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-ᶜUlūm*, 3rd ed. Edited by: Uthman Amin, (Cairo: Makatabat al-Anjilo al-Misriyyah, 1968), p. 124
[17] Al-Fārābī, *Tahsīl al-Sa'ādah,* 1st ed. By: Bu Mulhim, Ali. (Beirut:Dar wa Maktabat al-Hilal, 1995), p. 25.
[18] Ibid, p. 124.
[19] Al-Fārābī, *Al-Taᶜlīqāt,* (Haidarabad: Majlis da'irat al-Ma'arif al-Uthmaniyyah, 1346h), p. 11.
[20] Al-Fārābī, *Arā Ahl al-Madīnat al-Fāḍilah wa Muḍāddātihā,* 1st ed. By Ali Bu Mulhim. (Beirut: Dar wa Maktabat al Hilal, 1995), p. 101-102.

illustrate the ones through which true happiness can be attained. It should teach us good deeds, beautiful actions, and virtues compared to evil and imperfections. This virtuous way of life should be practiced by all human beings regardless of their differences. [21]

The nature of leadership is a conduit for virtues and happiness in political science. Al-Fārābī's explains that virtues cannot be attained without effective leadership. He calls leadership as a profession that can take the form of a monarch or kinship. It is the responsibility of the leader to develop, implement, and maintain the laws and values that guide the culture of the people.[22] He provides two main roles of leadership in political science. First, leaders consolidate the voluntary actions and the laws of life. They develop virtuous communities to achieve true happiness. Second, leaders understand their communities and ensure that good virtues are practiced, without which there will be an ignorant leadership. [23, 24]

Al-Fārābī's demonstration of his true humanism in his political science or what he calls political philosophy becomes evident when he addresses the role of love in uniting and bounding together the parts of the city and the classes of its parts. According to him, love is something natural and voluntary love comes in three ways: by sharing in virtue, on account of advantage, and on account of pleasure. However, to love one another mostly happens by sharing the virtues that is well-connected with thoughts and actions.[25] Al-Fārābī explains the nature of the thoughts human beings should share. He states:

> The thoughts which they must share in are threefold: 1- in respect to the beginning, 2- in respect to the end, and 3- in respect to what lies in between. The agreement of opinion in respect to the beginning is the agreement of their opinions about Allah and spiritual beings, about the good human beings who are the pattern, how the world and its parts began, and how the human being came into being, then about the classes of the parts of the world, their mutual relation, their station with regard to Allah and spiritual beings, and the position of beings, and human being with regard to Allah and spiritual beings. This is the beginning. The end is happiness.[26]

'What lies in between' as used by al-Fārābī is the actions by which happiness is attained. Happiness should be attained by mutual agreement and the actions that are favorable by all. This also applies to monarchial professions. The political science of Al-Fārābī stresses that monarchical professions should themselves be virtuous under an effective leadership, bringing together one another to achieve a common goal. On the other hand, all negative actions and natural dispositions that bring disunity among people are detrimental in developing virtuous cities.[27, 28] The key among them is corrupted leadership that can transform virtuous cities into non-virtuous ones. Therefore, Al-Fārābī suggests the ways that can be employed to restore non-virtuous or ignorant cities. He demonstrates what constitutes a virtuous monarchical profession in communities, including theoretical and practical sciences [29], which have been distinguished by Osman Bakar in his magnum opus *Classification of Knowledge in Islam*:

> Clearly, the first part of al-Fārābī's political science deals more with theoretical knowledge than with action, while the reverse is true in the second part. On this basis, the two parts may be called respectively the theoretical and the practical dimensions of political science.... The practical part of al-Fārābī's political science refers primarily to politics proper (*siyāsah*). It is concerned with the virtuous and non-virtuous kinds of rulership or government. It describes the factors which may transform virtuous governments and ways of life into corrupt governments and ignorant ways of life. It prescribes the practical measures of preventing this transformation from taking place.[30]

Al-Fārābī political science illustrates that the virtuous city continues to be virtuous, and it is not transformed except when its successive kings or leaders become non-virtuous. Not only does it enhance our understanding of true happiness, but it also shows how virtuous, and values contribute to true happiness and highlights the qualities of kings that are necessary for monarchies, including how the sons of kings should be brought up. The political science of Al-Fārābī also emphasises the nature of education and monarchial profession, arguing that ignorant leaders or persons with no virtuous and understanding of humanity should not be allowed into governance [31]

Concluding Remarks

Al-Fārābī in his political science explains his political views that represent part of his practical philosophy. He links political science to morality and sees it not only as a mere science (*al-Ilm al-Madanī)*, but also as a civil philosophy *(al-Falsafah al-Madaniyyah*). His political opinions, involving humanism appears clearer in his vision of virtuous cities (*al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah).*

The overarching conceptualisation of Al-Fārābī's political science is what he calls "virtuous

[21] Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-ᶜUlūm,* Page 125.
[22] Ibid, 125.
[23] Ibid, p. 126.
[24] Ibid, p. 126.
[25] Al-Fārābī, Abu Nasr, *Fusūl Muntaza'ah*, ed. by: M. Fawzi Najjar, 2ⁿᵈ ed. (Iran: Al-Maktabah al-Zahra, 1985), p. 70.
[26] Ibid, p. 71.

[27] Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-ᶜUlūm*, p. 128.
[28] Ibid, p. 128.
[29] Ibid, p. 129.
[30] Bakar Osman, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A study in Islamic Philosophies of sciences.* (Kual Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilazation, ISTAC, IIUM, 2006). p. 144-145.
[31] Ibid, p. 130.

leadership" or the "virtuous monarchical profession". He suggests that leaders should be able to make and preserve laws and rules in virtuous cities for humanity to achieve true happiness. He underscores that true happiness is manifested in *khayr* (good), *karāmah* (noble), and *afʿāl jamīlah* (virtuous deeds). He provides an opposite of virtuous leadership, which is "ignorant leadership", and indicates that ignorant cities and nations strive for *al-tharwah* (wealth), al-*karāmah* (honor) and *al-ladhdhāt* (pleasures), which are not true happiness.

To al-Fārābī, what he calls *al-mihnah al-malakiyyah al-fāḍilah* (virtuous monarchical profession) suggests that political science plays two functions. First, it investigates actions, laws, moral habits, and culture, which need effective leadership to make and implement these laws and moral habits. In essence, political science considers the necessity of leadership. It suggests that one becomes a leader by virtue of profession and good dispositions (i.e., monarchical profession and divisions of leadership). Therefore, political science should encourage "virtuous monarchical profession." It should consider the faculty for general rulers, and the expertise *(hunka)* they attain through experience, human interactions, observation, and practice in special conditions across communities.

The second function of political science is to explain what constitutes "virtuous monarchical profession." He argues that virtuous monarchical profession is still datable since its conceptualisation is still left opened, creating the possibility of adding theoretical and practical sciences. However, political since is not theoretical or practical science. It focuses on humanity and how human beings attain true happiness in virtuous cities. Therefore, the consolidation and preservation of the "virtuous city" depend on people with "virtuous monarchical professions" and uninterrupted succession of such monarchs. This calls for a genuine election, proper upbringing, and education of prospective leaders so that they may turn out to be effective monarchs or leaders when it is their turn to attain a "monarchical profession." Indeed, the political since of Al-Fārābī' teaches as the need to be human and attain true happiness in virtuous cities, expressing an original and independent philosophical innovation that indicates the Islamic spirit.

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