Aim and End of Society in Farabi’s Political Philosophy

Maryam Ghanbarinejad Jahromi

Islamic Philosophy and Theology Program, Payame Noor University, Tehran, IRAN.

Maryam117449_gh@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Being engaged in philosophy of politics, monarchy traditions and desirable search of community have been some of the intellectual concerns of Muslim philosophers. Important parts of the works produced by the Muslims are allocated to reflect the political and philosophical ideas about society. Farabi is the first philosopher who introduced independent and regular discussions on the desired political community and its foundations in the Muslim world; he also published various works about it. Farabi’s ideal society enjoys meaningful words about politics, society, and the 'virtuous city'. Throughout the history of philosophy in the Islamic world, perhaps no one has paid more attention as much as him to the thinking about politics. Generally, the central issue on his political philosophy seems to be this issue that what kind of society is defined as the ideal society, and which policies are applied in? Also, what is the desirable political goal of such a society? The purpose of this study is to examine the political structure of Farabi’s ideal society, also to study the purpose of his ideal society.

Keywords: Farabi, Desirable Society, Virtuous City, Happiness

INTRODUCTION

On the basis of the end and aim of political systems, Farabi divides political societies into two types: virtuous political systems and non-virtuous political systems. According to him, virtuous city is considered as a way with which individual people can achieve true happiness while the only possible way to achieve perfection and happiness seems to be just this.

Farabi knows happiness as the political ideal of virtuous city and a way to achieve political development. According to him, the virtuous government is a government that has the ability to facilitate, continue and internalize the acts, laws and voluntary deeds. So, that society and people can attain true prosperity both in worldly life and in the life hereafter.

In Farabi’s political system, the fate of the virtuous city inhabitants is linked together. Farabi’s ideal society is defined not in a way that one attains felicity and another suffers from wretchedness. In a virtuous city and in a prosperous civil society, it seems impossible that a group of people enjoys welfare and happiness while majority of people live a hard and miserable life. Thus, the prosperity of the whole society is considered as a unit where each civil component enjoys equal share in comparison to other components.

In the Farabi’s virtuous city, internal revolution is set instead of external reforms. Therefore, in order to accept the reality, human intellect demands argument and his heart requires advantage and persuasion. To attain welfare in the whole community, commitment to voluntary good and virtuous deeds and refraining from evil, vice and misery are quested. This paper focuses on the analysis of the political goal of utopian or virtuous society community, and how this goal is ultimately obtained. Since the ultimate goal is to clarify finalism in
Farabi’s ideal political society, therefore in this paper, ‘political virtuous community’ which is known as ‘virtuous city’ is brought into discussion.

Farabi’s View on the Origin of Social Life

Farabi believes that human beings allocate the best position to themselves, and should be able to achieve the best status of felicity and perfection. As human is a two-dimensional creature; consequently, he enjoys two types of lives; one live is continued by nutrition and human is dependent on them. The other life stands by itself, it doesn’t need any other objects (Farabi 1996). Farabi believes on the second dimension which is actually human need in constituting a community; he declares: human can’t achieve the top position unless the parties gather together (Farabi 1982). In other words, to achieve ‘desired happiness’ and ‘ultimate perfection’ that are considered as the ultimate human spiritual dimension, there is a need to apply natural channels including constituting the ‘community’. He states in his *Attainment of happiness* (A'Tahsil A' Sa'aada) that human requires the use of a natural phenomenon reach its final perfection which one of its examples seems to be ‘human society’ (Farabi 1982).

As he declares in his book, *The Political Regime*: “human is a kind of creature whose necessities of life and his existence affairs are never fully answered, and he is not able to reach perfection and the highest spiritual human status except by their gathering in a society, housing in a unified place, location or a city”(Farabi 1992).

Thus, in Farabi’s point of view, terminating corporeal needs seems to act as a natural and instinctive way which leads human to constitute a society. He believes that human efforts in achieving happiness and perfection origin in his nature, and they are based on rational choice. These efforts are useless in achieving the desired goals except by being applied in the Community.

Farabi’s Political Community Organism

In many of its political works, Farabi resembles community to the human body based on social duties and operations. He believes that civil society is similar to a physically fitted body and all its healthy parts which maintain the integrity of the system resembles the parts of the body; in this organism there are different parts. They enjoy different strength, while heart is decided as the main and the controller of other parts; this is exactly what is observed in a community; members enjoy different characteristics and positions. In this community, the chief is considered as a ruler while position and ranking of each component is determined by proximity to the chief (Farabi 1996).

Though in Farabi’s community, ‘non- virtuous’ and incompatible people may exist, but given the structure, its components, its function and its similarity to a living body, the internal cohesion and solidarity can be observed among all its components. Individuals in society are linked together while they have special role and determination; this is interpreted in *Opinions of the People of Virtuous City* as components of civil society (Farabi 1996) which are combined in a regular, unified and well-prepared way.

Value – Based Division of Societies

One of the main topics of Farabi’s political debates which is key to understanding lots of issues seems to be “virtue” and the virtue- based deeds. Farabi divides man and society to the virtuous and non-virtuous. He discusses these value preferences at different levels of his social and political order. At this point, he presents his criteria in division of desirable or undesirable political systems. First, Second Master divides ‘city’ into two subcategories: virtuous city and non-virtuous city, and defines virtuous city, “a city which gathers
individuals for the purpose of cooperation, and can achieve happiness and felicity” (Farabi 1996).

In Farabi’s value-based divisions, communities larger than virtuous cities also exist which include «virtuous nations» which are consisted of at least two cities. ‘Virtuous ruling system’ which is defined as the global constitution is consisted of at least three nations. Farabi speaks of virtuous ruling system: “virtuous ruling system is organized at a time that all nations living in it collaborate in attaining happiness.

Farabi believes that these societies are revealed according to a special order. In other words, the ranking starts from ‘city’, then nation and at the last step ‘global government’ is formed. That is why the Farabi’s political system is named after its first level, ‘virtuous city’.

In fact, in Farabi’s political system, the first level of that civil community which can be called a government or a political constitution starts from ‘city’. Thus, smaller communities include village, Neighborhood, district, home or tribal communities are not included in the scope of civilization and human society; they are in fact dissolved in a society” (Mohajernia, 2015).

The Government’s Origin Based on Authority and Legitimacy

The government origin is usually considered from two perspectives: the first one is a historical perspective that focuses on the creation of state and government, and the second one is based on its authority and legitimacy which shows that the government has sought its power from the source. On the historical origins, Farabi believes that governments’ origins seem to be analyzable along human social life. He believes human a naturally sociable creature whose excellence and perfection achievement is not possible except through a community (Farabi 1996).

On the base and legitimacy of the ruling system, it should be noted that Second Master distinguished between the first governor and at the sub-managers. First, he focuses on the legitimacy of rulers while considering the type of their constitutions. In the book Opinions of the People of Virtuous City, Farabi believes that the governor has theoretical and natural talent, also enjoys strong will; such a governor is likely to receive divine grace. In The Political Regime such an individual is called ‘divine man’ (Farabi 1992), because his intellect is linked with an active intellect and the intellect of angel of revelation.

Human receives divine grace through the strengthening speech and the imagination abilities. So, from this point of view human can be, the ‘wise’, the ‘prophet’, ‘Imam’ and ‘monarch’ also human can attain divine legitimacy (Farabi 1982). Although, human may not be equipped with ‘presidency’ and the official ruling system. Human loses its legitimacy just by disconnecting from inspiration source and by losing the wisdom.

Farabi concludes the legitimacy of ruling system from the legitimacy of the governor. He continues that “till the time that the virtuous city employs a wise ruler, it enjoys legitimacy and whenever the condition of his wisdom is threatened the fundamentals of his power will be disappeared so it is exposed to declining” (Farabi 1996).

However, this type of legitimacy mostly is involved with “the top leader” and ‘sub-mangers’ and their ruling method. Sub-managers who are different from former presidents are deprived of connection to active intellect; Farabi knows the source of their legitimacy as ‘law’ and ‘legitimacy’ of the top governor (Farabi 1997).
Various Forms of Virtuous Government

Discussion about various forms of government has long been the focus of political and social thinkers. Philosophers of classic era introduced its desired and undesired shapes. Plato in his *Republic* defined different types of governments while Aristotle describes three forms of desired and corrupt governments. He knows imperial government as the best form of government which its corrupted form is ‘tyranny’. The government which stands in the second position is Aristocracy which its corrupted form is ‘oligarchy’ and on the third stage democracy stands with its corrupted form is ‘Mobocracy’ (Shaykh al-eslami 2009).

Based on criterion of virtue, Farabi divides governments into two groups: ‘virtuous’ and ‘non-virtuous’ ones, while each is divided into three levels: national (city government), regional (nation government) and international (global government). He then divides virtuous government into two forms of the individual and the collective.

The Individual Government

Farabi prefers the individual government over the collective. He divided this form of government into three independent types, namely:

The Top Governor: This type of government is considered as the most desirable form of government. Since the leader is a person who achieved all the theoretical, intellectual, emotional and practical virtues; he is connected to the active intellect; he is also one of mediated innate talented and great men. The mercy is revealed to them by God. From this perspective, he is called ‘governor of Principles’ (Farabi 1982). His Ruling is ‘divine’ and obeying his orders is absolutely necessary.

Compatible Sub-governor: Based on his Shia thought Farabi assumes a ruling governor who shares the most similarity in features with the top governor. So as it is asserted by Farabi in Political Science Journal: “If the top governor dies, a person who is similar to him in all cases will be his successor, and will take all the responsibilities”(Mohajernia 2015).

Governor of Traditions: Second Master in *Almelah* says whenever the top governor and the sub-governor are not available, another manager will take the role of succession; a person who does not resemble them in their personal, leadership and revelation features. He is called that Governor of Traditions or non-compatible sub-manager (Mohajernia 2015). With a quite realistic viewpoint, Farabi asserts according to his Shia thought that at the time of absence of the "Shia Imams" the leader should be a jurisconsult.

The Collective Ruling System

Contrary to some scholars’ thought, Farabi’s social and the political system seem not to be ideal and non-achievable. Therefore, he identifies three governments in a longitudinal order in individual ruling system; in fact, the system degrades from ‘infallible ruling system’ to ‘fallible one’. Then, since the rule of non-innocent person (Governor of Traditions) may not even be met, while the ruling system requires a safe ideological and philosophical status, Farabi proposes collective ruling system in which two types of governments longitudinally are presented as follows:

Presidency of Governors of Tradition: At the time of lack of a jurisconsult president, a collective form of government is preferred, and in the first stage, government is based on a double- governor committee. Farabi in his book *Opinions of the people of the Virtuous City* prefers wisdom to be one of conditions over non-compatible sub-managers, and declares that if a person who enjoys the six-features of leadership is not available, the government would be constituted based on two-person ruling method, in the condition that one at least be
qualified according to wisdom criteria and the other head possess the other conditions. After the formation of the government, Farabi solves any probable incompatibility problem in leadership system, and says: "in a counseling government, leaders must act in a coordinated and aligned manner" (Farabi 1996).

Presidency of Virtuous Governors: This government is constituted as a Council composed of six experts in the absence of ‘jurisconsult governors’. Because this council plays a substitutional role for Governors of Traditions. Therefore, the council must enjoy all those conditions. Members of the Council should cooperate well in leadership and management of the society (Farabi 1996).

Finalism in Farabi’s Political and Social System

Farabi is considered as a finalist philosopher, and his thought’s orientation in all areas developed based on ends. In discussions about community, along the importance which he allocates to subject, the individual, as a fundamental element of society, he pays careful attention to materialistic and abstract causes, meanwhile the ultimate cause is brought in a special attention. Therefore, in all his definitions while the attention is being paid to materialistic goals, ultimate truths such as ‘perfection’, ‘supreme happiness’, ‘predominant goodness’ and ‘virtue’ are also included in definitions from society. He believes a ‘living’ ultimate and a ‘Hereafter’ end for the society (Davari 1977). The basics of Farabi’s notion of ideal society seem to be "cooperation" and collaboration of all community members to attain the desired end.

So, Farabi evaluates importance of ‘cooperation’ at the same level as the community significance. In Opinions of the people of the Virtuous City it is written that there is Consensus on the need of human to both society and cooperation. In the same chapter he states: A large number of people who are cooperative should get together (Naazerzade 1997); each individual meets others’ requirements. As a result of assistance and congregation, all of what people need for consistency and perfection are collected.

According to Verse 43 of Najm Surah of Quran, Second Master cites that the extreme and end of all things is God, and says that “Lord who is absolute by nature is considered as the end of everything, because everything is ended up to Him, and since every end is good, thus God is considered as the absolute goodness” (Mohajernia 1996). Accordingly, Farabi’s political society established its end based on the Creator’s wisdom and this end can be seen in all political, social dimensions. He declares about the political system, says: “The best thing may happen, but if any deficiency appears, all the people of city should tolerate it” (Farabi 1996). Therefore, before any reference to the political system of ‘nation’ and the global system, the best and ultimate perfection can be attained through management of the top governor.

In Farabi’s political sociology, perfection enjoys a special position. He described perfection and says: “Perfection is what is desirable in nature, it is not just a tool to get to other things” (Farabi 1917). In the Farabi’s intellectual system several mechanisms are suggested to achieve perfection, one of which is ‘civil society’. He argued that human cannot meet the primary and essential basic needs of life (living perfection), and cannot achieve high spiritual status except by living in groups and forming the society in different forms of virtuous community (Farabi 1917). Farabi knows recognition of happiness as the first task of “civil episteme”.

Farabi believes that all three levels of government and political system that are namely ‘virtuous city’, virtuous nation and virtuous ruling system have major roles in achieving
happiness. He continues: “A city which follows the true purpose of the community which is cooperation on the matters that will ensure the happiness to human is called virtuous city or Utopia, and global virtuous society is fulfilled at a time that all the nations which constitute it cooperate to achieve prosperity” (Farabi 1996)

Farabi in his book *Chapters on Civil Principles* declares: “leader is a person whose intention according to which policies of the city are made is to bring true happiness to the people of city while well-leadership is the end.” Therefore, it is essential that the leader of virtuous city stands at the highest level of spiritual status because he has the major role in people’s welfare.

Virtue is one of Farabi’s philosophy basic concepts which are defined as: “human’s normal features and talents which end in good traits”. At first, it seems that this definition just belongs to moral virtues no other virtues. But Farabi, in another definition declares: “Virtue enjoys innate goodness; it is not just a tool for achieving other things” (Mohajernia 1996). It seems that the comprehensive definition includes all sorts of virtues which also encompass civil and political virtue.

In his book *The Attainment of happiness*, he issued that virtues are of four genera: the theoretical virtues, intellectual virtues, mood virtues and practical plans. His intellectual virtues are divided into two parts; the first part of virtues that are long lasting and exclusively related to the political system of ‘virtuous city’, ‘virtuous nation’ and ‘virtuous ruling system’. In this regard, he said: “intellectual virtue proves to be useful and beautiful among nations or between nation and city; intellectual virtue can infer some issues; if these issues endure a long time or if they change in a short time then intellectual virtue is called intellectual civil virtue. In this way, powerful strategic thinking is created, so ruling on people is achieved” (Mohajernia 1996).

Also, as it is in Journal of Political Sciences, Farabi states that the practical virtues are in charge of creating and distributing all charities in the community and all of what are related to the political, economic, cultural, social and military fate, and play an important role in perfection and happiness; indeed it is considered as a part of practical virtues (Mohajernia, 54-6). Based on Farabi, the top governor is a person who has the power and ability to accomplish and implement all virtues in society. He can ‘think over’ the issues, and supply people with their needs immediately; therefore the greater his power and strength, the stronger is his political system.

Full governor is the one who has all the theoretical virtues, he surely has attained ‘practical virtues’ by awareness and certainty; on the next step, he has the ability to establish all of them among the nations and cities (Farabi 1982).

Farabi interprets God as an absolute goodness which is based on absolute perfection. Then, he expresses different types of goodness. Human’s unique type of goodness is done voluntarily because this type of goodness is neither innate nor natural. This special type of goodness is reviled through humans’ deeds which is created by connecting the rational human mind with active intellect, so particular voluntary goodness is appeared (Farabi 1996). Farabi knows civil science the origin of charity, and identifies some tasks for that. The first task is the ‘episteme of happiness’. Its second task is ‘finalism’ which expresses the nature of the welfare and charity. The third task is to explain the way of distributing “common charities” which are done by the governor of virtuous city. These common charities are: Wealth, pleasure, power, presidency, dignity and grandeur. As Farabi interprets these charities include whatever assists man on the way to true social and civil happiness (Mohajernia 1996).
CONCLUSION

With respect to the previous discussion, we conclude that Farabi leads toward politics by the means of morality and virtues. In fact, in Farabi’s socio-political system, there is a hermeneutic relationship between moral virtues and desirable political behavior. Farabi believes that only human can understand the importance of community and the city, and if human is not involved with the policy, he/she cannot be called human. In fact, in Farabi’s point of view, formation of society is considered as the first stage of human perfection. Farabi believes a relationship and correlation which exist among society members while this special type of relationship is similar to other creatures’, so it can claim that Farabi’s desired political system is in harmony with cosmic and existence system.

In existence system, there is one individual major governor and Necessary Existent ruling the system; in Farabi’s system such relationships also exist. However, coordination is established, the prosperity of the citizens isn’t in one size and quality for all residents. The quantity and quality of humans’ contribution to city policy is not the same, but it is clear that prosperity has a direct relationship with peoples’ involvement in the policy. In his view, the ideal society is just ‘virtuous city’. In his opinion, a social virtuous city is a city which its entire people know happiness well; these citizens are committed to what leads them to the end. Thus, virtuous city isn’t the ultimate goal in itself, but it is a tool for reaching the desired goal, prosperity; in Farabi’s point of view it is considered as a link to truth and reality. In the Farabi’s perspective, governor of the society is a person who can push the society toward prosperity; of course the governor should enjoy all the features that are required to get the aim. It is noteworthy that when basic ideas of virtuous city are distorted, and elements of city become skeptical, those societies change to non-virtuous societies. Of course this change does not take place abruptly, but it happens with the passage of time or when specific events, such as the death of city governor and his successor occur or one of the leading causes gets weak, then virtuous city transfers to non-virtuous one.
REFERENCES


