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Strauss's Farabi

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Abstract:
This article considers a difference between Farabi's political views and Strauss political view at one part and showing how Strauss has skillfully diverged from Farabi's path on the other part. For this purpose, and because of the wide range of works from both thinkers, I will consider one work from Farabi under the title of *The philosophy of Plato* and one work of Strauss under the title of *Farabi's Plato* which they have already bounded together in a view to the context. It must be discussed and analysis that how and why Strauss took such a view in aforementioned work about Farabi which is not easy to discover. To make the discussion more concrete, I will explain some esoteric notion of Farabi's political view.

As we go further, the fight against *Stultitia* and relativism gets harder,
If we would not prepared.

1. Introduction

It is very likely to speak about the "Modern Crisis" and the fundamental political aspect of it in these days. Also it has been common to consider these issues with respect to "the Ancient Greek Thoughts". It has been admitted, but not generally, that the same attitude was taken, proposed and cultivated by one of our contemporary thinkers: Leo Strauss. One cannot fully understand of "critique of modernity" before one has study some notable thinkers, among them is Leo Strauss who has presented himself as a interpreter of medieval philosophy and the revealer of esoteric writing of that period which come down to us.

Indeed, he spoke of modern crisis and for his intention, he resort on medieval thinkers and philosophers like Maimonides and Farabi. To begin with, one must be familiar with Farabi's works who was one of the greatest political thinkers of his time and who lived in Islamic society and was aware of penetrating the Idea of Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy. The combination of "ration" and "devotion" or the confliction of them.

Strauss, followed the path which had taken by Maimonides, reaches Farabi and believed he has lots in common with his doctrine. But Farabi was not enough legitimate for him for being accepted without Plato (not mentioning Aristotle here). One might believes that the aim of Strauss to address the modern crisis was to fully understand Maimonides, but he found out the possibility only comes with understanding the philosophical teaching of them. For this, he has started among Farabi's work which seems to him to serve his demands, for instance, *On Political Governments.*

It would be potty to accept the common always for the conclusion. Prior to that, it is our duty, if not very deep, to just sketch correctly the intention of Farabi as a philosopher. After that, we commit ourselves to study what was the cornerstone of Farabi's *On Political Government* and what was the Strauss focus on that.

2. Historical Approach

It is obvious that acculturating and also knowing the period of time which each thinker lives in, would be helpful to understand his or her thought and the way of thinking of him. It is crucial to say that no thinker, particularly no philosopher, can be reduce to his time and condition and be regard as mere figure of political, social, religion, cultural, economical situations, but denying these aspect of life as one of the effective element, even the weakness one, is sorely unfaithful to the history itself harming our judgment.

Farabi born and lived all his life in restricted Islamic world who was witness of the lack of intellectual aspect, or even believing in it, among the individuals and the whole society. Thinking, criticizing, analyzing was not a popular and favorable act because "all required principles were sent down to us", has been regarded as *Sharia'a.* Since, according to Islamic tradition i.e. *Snona'a* and jurisprudence principles: *Sharia'a,* the politics regarded as a branch of religion science, and the position of leadership was left to a religious man: *Faghih*. Hence, every attempt e.g. making critical question, emanation, abrogation of the decay [political] principles or even participation in political debate would be defined as interference or, more strictly speaking, invasion to God's principle which has pre-set for us. All Islamic societies' leaders had been *Imam* or *Faghih*, that is no one else are entitled to take their place. This way of ruling has been seen in similar religion principle like Judaism or even pre-Islamic religion such as Ancient Egypt religion and Persian religion known as Zoroastrianism.

Translation movement slightly has changed the way of thinking and caused different view toward humanity and human's place, right and dignity in the city.

Farabi was among those philosophers who looked for the truth in that period of time and for his wide influence, in philosophy in general, and his priceless political ideas, in politics in particular, has been praised by the title of "The Second Teacher" or "The second Master" after Aristotle.[1]

Most of his works, if say not all of them, concern with political Ideas. But how can he freely used his critical mind as philosopher and at the same time chose a method to not be harmed by those who would not tolerate his ideas e.g. those who were at the top of pyramid of political power. How he could be a believer and a philosopher at the same time? What did he do to address his political Ideas of his time?

3. Political-Philosophical Approach

Farabi was greatly influence by Greek philosophers, particularly by Plato and Aristotle, and preserved basis of their origin, format of thinking and ideas very well. His technique causes a turning point in his philosophical and ethical-political of his ages thoughts. All of his effort, as it is obvious enough, was not done for double-proving of thought, which was already strongly accepted in his time, but, unlike all of analysis of eastern commentators of his works, accordance to the incentive of changes toward sophisticated situation. Farabi was aware of possible conflict between philosophy and religion and he was the first philosopher who articulate a solution [4, p. 135] to the crisis of his time who found out the way to Eudaimonia's life through re-shaping a ethical-political through of his age. He, as a philosopher, was up to save the both world; the both way of living good and reach ultimate perfection in both world. He, as a philosopher, was a student of those philosophers who were pagans. And he, as a citizen, was a Muslim member of Islamic society.

He was, however, royal to the truth than to his emotion, hopes and beliefs and he found this way, as most other philosopher, even more abstemious than other ways.

The crisis of his time was not moral crisis, in some sense, or nihilism. The crisis of his time was the same of ours. The crisis of "rationality" i.e. feebleness of being wise and cowardice against non-rational desires. To address this crisis he tried to establish his school and was greatly concern

with that decay and was thinking, like any wise philosopher in anytime, of the restoration of political health. Even he was fortitude being forced to immigrate couple of time.

Borrowing the unity of metaphysic and psychology from his Greek predecessors, he has open his way toward political doctrine in his way. Like Plato and Aristotle, he designed his system according to cosmological shape. Noble being known as "unmoved mover", "first cause" or better say "the pure *de facto* Intellect" located in the most supreme stratum of universe. Human body as a system had draw as similar as universe with the view to the Greek cosmological idea. Whereas as both universe and man combined with "mind and body" or "intellect and form", the sublime and noble place is intellect in both.

Both (pure intellect[2] and human intellect) rule over universe and body respectively. With this view, intellect e.g. human's intellect and also rationality take its nobility and credit back. This way of thinking reveals the character of Farabi's political idea. Like Plato, and also Aristotle, his politics are strongly connected with cosmology, psychology and metaphysics [5, p.193-194]. For instance, *The Virtues City* or *On Political Governments.* This presuppose the mature study in philosophy and uniquely leads every readers to consider his political views with an eye on his metaphysic idea of his and its origin. We limit ourselves, however, to stress on the structure of *On Political Government.*

The similar way has being used in addressing the idea about the structure of the city as political community. I am trying to describe, is not, to repeat, its origin his love of wisdom. Similarity of his school with his predecessors is obvious in his approach to political community: *Polis*.

Individuals compare with their city are just a component part of it that all together construct cities and governments. Just like body and also the whole universe, human's society has its levels and grades in itself and in the whole universe. The leader of city, whether it was a prophet-ruler or a philosopher-king, placed in the highest stand. There is an open debate whether we must content in his exoteric context or esoteric teaching.

4. Strauss' Approach

Farabi was not a mere imitator of his predecessors. Although, Plato and Aristotle's works were the main source of Farabi's work. Thus, we must understand his school in two possible ways: First we shall understand his school through his interpretations and how he had connected to his Greek predecessors and then we shall understand his school by itself. He was not only a reader or interpreter but a philosopher who carefully established his school on the infrastructure of his so called pagan predecessors. To do so, he must be familiar with every one of the works which has come down to us as Platonic and Aristotelian works. Farabi, with such a sense of responsibility for nuance survey and investigation, did not write such a topic like "the philosophy of …" or "…its parts…" without being sure that he has already seen works of that philosopher. Our contemporary scholars would not do that. To be realistic, both *The philosophy of Plato* and *The philosophy of Aristotle* are proofs of our claims.[3] Just a quick look, nevertheless, at *The Philosophy of Plato* can reveal the familiarity of writer to almost every one of Plato's dialogs. Thus, one might ask: what was the intention of the first impression of Strauss toward Farabi? Our main interest is to know whether the impression has made by Strauss is fairly or on the contrary, his intention and desires toward addressing "modernity", known as "Modern Crisis", dominate his philosophical character.

According to Strauss, and he was right, that Farabi depicted the main goal of Plato's mature works i.e. reaching *Eudaimonia* which undoubtedly leads to the question of "How?". The insufficiency of accepted ways leaded Plato, as Farabi said, to investigate the "other way". This "other way" which substance of *Eudaimonia* is identical or certainly consist of a "certain knowledge (γνώση) or science (επιστήμη)" and a "certain way of life (βίος)". The finding of "philosophy" and the "politics" inseparable from the presents of "Philosopher" and "king" and makes first group related to "that science" and the second group to "that way of life". That is where

Strauss initially began to establish his idea which manifests itself right at the end of his *Farabi's Plato*: the impossibility of virtues city and its leads toward desire way of life.

According to Strauss, it is paradoxical when we consider Farabi's view toward Plato, essentially political, and also Farabi himself attributed to philosophy essentially the political meaning. The paradoxical meaning of Strauss manifests itself when we respect "philosophy" as a science or knowledge completely separated from "the way of life" as a "practical science or wisdom". Strauss believed, or he apparently pretended to, that where as we talk about *Eudaimonia,* we are talking about "desire way of life", then there is no meaning of "virtues way of life" in that. That is all about the "philosophy" and to be "*de facto* philosopher". He obviously, here, negating the meaning of "virtue" related to the "practice" of human beings as fundamentally related to the "wisdom" and "theoretical sophisticate faculty" of human beings in Ancient Greek philosophy e.g. in dialogs of Plato, for instance, *Apology, Crito, Law, Erastia and Menexenus.*

It can be seen that the nuance relation between philosophy, on one hand, and politics and ethics, on the other hand, has been established e.g. between the philosopher and the ruler, between virtues and knowledge. The very intention of Strauss in *Philosophy and* Politics [3, first chapter] is to deeply separate these inseparable way through the notion of *Eudaimonia.* Yet, it has been seen that philosophy on one hand and politics on the other hand do not belong to the same level but they belong to the same realm, take the same investigation, same method and lead to the very same End. End which is desirable for its own sake i.e. *Eudaimonia*. Strauss, on contrary, seems to believe that the cosmological way of concerning metaphysics as the way concerning political order by Farabi must be objected indirectly. Statesman, for instance, depicted the way that to rule *Polis* or have political power called for a special knowledge which has been mentioned as "that knowledge", which what politics relies on.[4] That view will lead us, unlike Strauss, firstly, of to say that "philosophy is not merely a good thing; no, it is that which is truly useful" [3, p. 60, 13-15, the abstraction of *Erastai*]. And secondly, that *homo philosophus* and *homo rex* are in the same position in the virtues city [3, no. 20-25, *On political government*, second part, chapter 8]. The question is why Strauss attempt to humiliate the equality of them by omitting "the same position" and "in the virtues city" and tried to glare the insufficiency of the both, by separating them for degradation view of philosophy as a leading way to desire way of life but "impossible one" and the virtues way of life which leads to *Eudaimonia* but not human's ultimate perfection?

Farabi, referring to Plato's *Protagoras*, found that "that knowledge" can be attained and does "exist" in the manner that still leads to human's perfection. From the words such as "attainment", "investigation", thinking etc. we can predict that the goal i.e. perfection, is not something fancy which, as Strauss said at the beginning of *Farabi's Plato,* depicted by Farabi as well as Plato. Philosophy as a knowledge, supplies and trains theoretical wisdom, causes flourishing of intellect which separated from body and bodily things; until one move from opinion and reach knowledge [3, *On political Government,* First part, Ch. 12] and royal art supplied by "that knowledge" to lead human beings e.g. individuals as well as the whole society toward *Eudaimonia*. Thus, philosophy proves to contain the royal art since it supplies the virtues way of life which is in need of royal art and the royal art proves to contain philosophy since it supplies "that knowledge" which is in need of philosophy. Both philosophy and royal art are required for reaching *Eudaimonia* while "virtues way of life" cannot be exercised in the lack of knowledge which supplies it i.e. philosophy. Philosophy, on the other hand, cannot be exercised fully without concerning *Eudaimonia* as his humans' perfection. After all has explained, we must not ask about why we need both practical and theoretical faculty in perfection in order to produce *Eudaimonia*. Just because changes happen in human's body and human's soul, it is not for men to move innately toward ultimate perfection and *Eudaimonia*. Thus, we need endowments in both realm and exercise with our both faculty to reach and produce Eudaimonia [3, part two, ch.4].

Another point, nevertheless, which has rapidly stressed in On Political Government is the roll of Active intellect[5], its rank and its relation to the second notion of Farabi's school of *Eudaimonia* i.e. the one that occur in hereafter life if man after his intellectual endeavors reach that

level of perfection that he entitled to being combined to and coalesced with active intellect and reaching the level of *intellectus adeptus.* This sort of perfection seems related to his esoteric teaching. Through that, he depicted the way for those who dedicate themselves to the philosophical way of life.[6]

One, can find contradiction in Farabi's doctrine of Happiness at all, as much as can be find in the whole *Ethics* compare with book 10 of the same book, when Aristotle starts to talk about the sufficiency of philosophy. On the other hand, the philosophy in this term concern a wide range of notions rather we use it on a mere contrary to its practical aspect. But we shall not , so far, survey on this aspect, that is take another effort in another time. Here we focus on our main topic and the contradiction between Strauss' Farabi and the real Farabi.

By separating, Strauss, practical philosophy from philosophy itself with a view to their end- as he believes they aim at different goal- and also their method, he tried to degrade philosophy by showing its insufficiency. "Happiness consists in *consideratione scientiarum speculativarum*" [3, p.15], placed right after he illustrated the second Farabi's idea, which is the same in Plato and Aristotle's schools, about the role of philosophy.

Whereas Farabi mentioned opinion about *Eudaimonia* such as reaching money, fame, glory, etc.[7] he does not disconnected the hereafter *Eudaimonia* from this world *Eudaimonia*. In *Ihsa-al-ulum*, when he talked, in chapter five, on behalf of someone else rather than expressing himself, civil science which divided, but not corollaries, to the jurisprudence (*figh*)[8] and language science (*al-Kalam*)[9] he depicted that even the one who offer this Happiness must utilizes "that way of life" and exercise virtue and respect that as one of the most element. Yet, it is clear, from the method he take in chapter five, that he is satisfying his *Caliph* of his time by adding the *figh* and *kalam* beside the civil science. On contrary, in his commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* has been seen that the only *Eudaimonia* known by him can be achieved in this world. [6, p. 14]

Now we can claim with more certainty that the esoteric teaching of Farabi is, and contrary to Strauss, we shall not interpret that to the "paradoxical way" of Farabi's teaching. The esoteric teaching inevitably forces writer to show some contradiction in his works; or at least the reader seems to feel in this way, but with a astute mind, one must find the right way through his ideas. Maybe Strauss was aware of this aspect when he used his third example of Farabi's view about political science and theoretical science. This is based on suspension of his judgment as to the truth of the super-rational teaching. Thus, one may believes that Farabi made efforts to introduce or better say make a room for revealed theology. But why he would do that when all were neglected, was "rational" aspect of life and manifest itself by the name of "crisis of humanity" in that period. He, as far as I concern, makes room for philosophy by emphasizing on it in different forms e.g. cosmologically, psychological and philosophically. Since his emphasizing on the rational aspect of life and illustrated *Eudaimonia* depends on exercising the theoretical faculty in order to continuously reaching sophisticated level (through philosophy) and exercising in the virtue manner (through ethics and politics concern royal art), his view of "the life after death" was far from accepted opinion which is a heritage from religions and had been chosen by Strauss. To begin with that in order to get hold of Farabi's view, one ought to get familiar with the "ultimate perfection" of men through *On Political Government*. It is in this work that Farabi speaks about immorality in different ways: (a) the idea of Active intellect [3, *On political Government*, first part Ch.5/ second part Ch.5], (2) the priority of Form from Matter, (3) using or describing "immorality" directly and eternal *Eudaimonia* indirectly which implicate immorality [3, *On political Government.* first part, Ch.5,6].

The idea of Active intellect in Islamic philosophy is similar to, or better say borrowed from, Greek philosophy. In Farabi's view, accepted and more logical theory about the immortality and human's soul is the theory which has been presented by Aristotle[10]. Where the Aristotle's discussions about this matter end in ambiguity, Farabi would not make any changes through it. Thus, if one has fully understood Farabi's thoughts and its transitions can understand his silence about addressing "immortality" directly. We can briefly offer two main reasons: (a) Farabi has the

same uncertainty as Aristotle had. (b) Farabi has the same idea about immortality as Aristotle had. That is an important reason to not talk about it under the Topic of *The Philosophy of Plato*.

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Notes

1. By solution I mean reconciliation in the favor of ration and awareness of political society. If we do not consider this element, then we can say that the first philosopher who found this conflict was Mohammad Ibn Zakariya Razi (865-925) known as Rhazes or Rasis
2. العقل المحض
3. The full articles are *The philosophy of Plato, its part, the rank of order of its part from the beginning to the end*" and "*The philosophy of Aristotle, the part of philosophy, the rank of order of its parts, the position from which he started and the one he reached*.
4. The knowledge (γνώση) has the same root with cognition (γνώσις) which depicted the structure of knowing something with the "attempt" of knowing that thing. That is deliverance of a man from perception to cognition which is related to a mere intellectual realm.
5. العقل الفعال
6. We have shown already that the philosophical way of life, in his broad means, does not only concern the theoretical notion but also the practical notion.
7. The Alert on the way of Happiness (Al Tanbih Ala Sabil Al-Sa'ada) I believe, this work still not familiar for English readers.C.f. Attainment of Happiness.
8. فقه
9. الكلام
10. C.F *Metaphysics - de Anima*