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**AL-FARABI ON THE INTERDEPENDENCE  
OF RELIGION AND POLITICS**

Abu Nasr Muhammad b. Muhammad, better known as al-Farabi (c.870 –c.950), was the most authentic of the Arabic philosophers. The principal sources of his philosophy are to be sought in the Greek tradition, in the original writings of Plato and Aristotle, in Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism of Alexandria. Most significant is his turn towards the much undervalued Middle Platonism. His main thesis consists in the preponderance of philosophy over theology. Religion is used as a substitute for philosophy, as the complex and abstract notions of the latter are difficult to grasp. Religion attempts to express philosophical truths with the aid of imagination. Along with the support of jurisprudence and politics, it has taken upon itself to guide the ignorant, that is, the largest part of the population, towards the attainment of happiness. Political and social problems become overwhelming when legislators are under the sway of religious beliefs and do not realize the need to base their legislation on philosophy, rather than religion. In this paper, we are attempting to present, analyze and evaluate the views of al-Farabi on the interaction between religion and politics.

**Key words:** philosophy, political philosophy, virtuous city, virtuous state, religion and politics.

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**Әл-Фараби: дін мен саясаттың өзара байланысы туралы**

Әл-Фараби (с.870-с.950) деген атпен танылған Әбу Насыр Мұхаммед ибн Мұхаммед Араб философтарының ішіндегі бірегейі болып саналады. Оның философиясының негізгі көздері Грек дәстүрінен, Платон мен Аристотельдің түпнұсқа жазбаларынан, неоплатонизмнен және Александрия Аристотелизмінен бастау алады. Ең маңыздысы, ол тиісті бағасын алмаған орташа платонизмге бет бұруы болды. Оның негізгі тезисі философияның теологиядан артықшылығы болып табылады. Философияның күрделі және абстрактілі ұғымдарын түсіну қиын болғандықтан, дін оның алмастырушысы ретінде пайдаланылды. Дін қиялдың көмегімен философиялық шындықтарды білдіруге тырысады. Құқықтану мен саясатты қолдай отырып, ол қайырымсыз, ізгіліксіз адамдарды, яғни халықтың басым бөлігін бақытқа қол жеткізуге арнады. Заң шығарушылар өз заңдарын дін емес, философияға негіздеу қажеттілігін түсінбей, діни нанымдарға бағынышты болған жағдайда саяси және әлеуметтік мәселелер басым болады. Осы мақалада біз дін мен саясаттың өзара әрекеттесуіндегі әл-Фарабидің пікірлерін ұсынуға, талдауға және бағалауға тырысамыз.

**Түйін сөздер:** философия, саяси философия, ізгілікті қала, ізгілікті мемлекет, дін және саясат.

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**Аль-Фараби о взаимозависимости религии и политики**

Абу Наср Мухаммед ибн Мухаммед, более известный как аль-Фараби (ок. 870-950 гг.), был самым подлинным из арабских философов. Основные источники его философии следует искать в греческой традиции, в оригинальных трудах Платона и Аристотеля, в неоплатонизме

и аристотелизме Александрии. Наиболее значительным является его поворот в сторону недооцененного среднего. Его главный тезис состоит в преобладании философии над теологией. Религия используется в качестве замены философии, поскольку сложные и абстрактные понятия последних трудно понять. Религия пытается выразить философские истины с помощью воображения. Наряду с поддержкой юриспруденции и политики она взяла на себя обязательство вести невежественную, то есть наибольшую часть населения, к достижению счастья. Политические и социальные проблемы становятся огромными, когда законодатели подчиняются религиозным убеждениям и не осознают необходимости основывать свое законодательство на философии, чем на религии. В этой статье мы пытаемся представить, проанализировать и оценить взгляды аль-Фараби на взаимодействие между религией и политикой.

**Ключевые слова:** философия, политическая философия, добродетельный город, добродетельное государство, религия и политика.

## INTRODUCTION

Abu Nasr Muhammad b. Muhammad, better known as al-Fārābī (c.870 -c.950), was the most authentic of the Arabic philosophers. The principal sources of his philosophy are to be sought in the Greek tradition, in the original writings of Plato and Aristotle, in Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism of Alexandria (Fakhry, 1965: 469-478; Gutas, 2009: 10; Reisman, 2005: 55; Vallat, 2004: 11-28). Most significant is his turn towards the much undervalued Middle Platonism (Mahdi, 1961: 3; Mahdi, 2001:2). His main thesis consists in the preponderance of philosophy over theology. Religion is used as a substitute for philosophy, as the complex and abstract notions of the latter are difficult to grasp. Religion attempts to express philosophical truths with the aid of imagination. Along with the support of jurisprudence and politics, it has taken upon itself to guide the ignorant, that is, the largest part of the population, towards the attainment of happiness. Political and social problems become overwhelming when legislators are under the sway of religious beliefs and do not realize the need to base their legislation on philosophy, rather than religion. In this paper, I attempt to present, analyze and evaluate the views of al-Fārābī on the interaction between religion and politics.

### Al-Fārābī on Politics

Al-Fārābī's political philosophy is directly related to his metaphysics, which bears strong Neoplatonic overtones, without, however, relying on the intricate philosophy of Proclus or Iamblichus (Butterworth, 2014-15: 91-102; Druart, 2008: 215-232; Walzer, 1967: 658). The hierarchical structure of the virtuous city corresponds to the hierarchical structure of the divine. All beings ought to imitate the First Cause, depending on their particular nature and their position within this hierarchy. The layout of the

virtuous state is in a similar vein: all its components have to imitate and follow the aims of the chief ruler (*ra'ī*), always in accordance with their position in the ontopolitical hierarchy (al-Fārābī, 1985: 237-239; al-Fārābī, 2004: 61-63). Besides, it is by no means a coincidence that al-Fārābī's metaphysics is articulated and presented exclusively in his political writings. However, al-Fārābī does not uncritically adopt Neoplatonic metaphysics, which is also proven by the fact that the First Cause is identified with the Mind (*νοῦς νοῶν νοούμενον*), whereas in Neoplatonism the One lies beyond the Mind. All the same, regardless of how far he accepts the metaphysically inspired, teleological and hierarchical structure of nature, this helps him support his argumentation regarding the order of the city (Parens 1995: 20-21). Al-Fārābī follows the basic line of the Arabic philosophy, to the effect that the city, which is constituted by philosophers and the city which is founded upon the divine law, demand a thorough understanding of the world, the metaphysical hierarchy and the precise position of humans within the latter (Janos, 2012: 92; Mahdi, 2001: 18; Umar, 1992: 209; Vallat, 2004: 85-129). Nevertheless, it needs to be stressed that al-Fārābī does not attempt to support this analogy between politics and metaphysics with a logical proof, which he emphatically puts forth in a number of his writings. Although a philosophical one, his undertaking is lacking in logical reasoning.

The administration of the city corresponds to al-Fārābī's metaphysical order. The relation between the First Cause and other beings is analogous to the relation between the leader of the virtuous city and the rest of its members. The chief ruler corresponds to the First Cause, which presides over all immaterial entities, heavenly bodies and material entities. It is worth taking into account that the First Cause, as a notion, is absent from the purely philosophical works of al-Fārābī, as from the ones in which he analyses the philosophy of Aristotle (Colmo, 2005: 32). The First Cause necessarily satisfies all

requirements for a perfect government of the world, whereas the same is to be hoped for the city. The chief ruler is the one who does not need any guidance, knows all sciences and is aware of the actions that have to be undertaken. On the contrary, he leads everyone else towards happiness. He possesses, to a significant degree, the most enviable capacities, both by nature and as developed through education. This person is the real ruler (Al-Fārābī, 1963: 36-37). He is characterized by a perfect intellect and a fully developed imagination, so as to perceive particular things, through the Active Intellect. When all the above have been satisfied, the ruler possesses the Acquired Intellect (*'aql mustafād*). This constitutes the highest intellectual level within human reach. As already mentioned, al-Fārābī refers to this level as an approach (*muqārabah*) towards the Active Intellect and elsewhere as a union (*ittisal*) with it. The person who combines intellectual perfection with the perfection of the imagination is thereby held capable of receiving the divine revelation. In fact, we are dealing here with the fusion of three basic qualities in one person: perfect philosopher, wise man (*hakīm*), prophet. Only the latter is able to define and trace happiness, so as to guide the city to it (Fakhry, 2002: 102-103). If there is no philosopher in the governing body, the virtuous state is left without a king. It is thereupon driven to destruction, which is bound to take place unless a philosopher is found to take on the role of the consultant of the city ruler (Al-Fārābī, 1985: 253).

The hierarchical structure of the city is laid out as a pyramid, from the top to its base, which constituted by people who only serve, without having the opportunity to exert any form of power. The intermediate groups of people are subject to the power of those who lay above them, while they dominate upon those below them. Those who belong to groups by the king, enjoy a higher level of perfection. Above the ruler, lays the Active Intellect, through which God reveals his will. Still higher lays God himself, whose revelation reaches the ruler of the city or the nation. God is the real ruler of the virtuous city, since he is the ruler of the world, although the mode of government is different in each case, yet analogous (Al-Fārābī, 2004: 63-64). In a way which runs parallel to the divinely determined harmony and order of the universe, the city ruler has to found and consolidate voluntary tendencies and predispositions in the people's souls, so as to live harmoniously, united and ready to help each other (Al-Fārābī, 2004: 65).

As al-Fārābī does not restrict politics to philosophy -as a quest of universals- it is rather the work

of political science to seek happiness, which is divided to real happiness, which is an end in itself, and apparent happiness (Rosenthal, 1958: 119-121; Strauss, 1952: 13). He holds that political science deals with the particulars, as it takes place in a determinate time and place (Al-Fārābī, 2004: 58-59). The supreme happiness is not brought about in this life, but in the next one, despite al-Fārābī's ambiguous views (Al-Fārābī, 2004: 52; Galston, 1992: 100; Mahdi, 1973: 1-25). Political science offers the presentation and the interpretation of the structure of the universe, of its parts and its hierarchical structure under the dominion of God, of the human soul and the human body. It is the proper work of the founder of the city to obtain knowledge of theoretical philosophy, so as to make sure that the chief ruler imitates the way God governs the universe. The principles of the practical rules and actions are to be found in the political science. The principles of the theoretical part, which concerns the universe, are to be sought in physics and metaphysics as political and religious images (Mahdi, 2001: 120-122). Political science forms part of political philosophy and is restricted to the study of universals and their ambit, as well as to the specification of the particulars. The particular and the actual do not belong to the scope of philosophy, but to that of political science. The latter has two branches: one of them aims at revealing what happiness is, in relation to all those things that are not happiness. The other branch deals with the ways in which virtuous predispositions and actions are established in cities. It is also a function of political science to take account of non-virtuous forms of government and political action, which constitute an illness for a virtuous city (Al-Fārābī, 2004: 59-60).

Political science shows that the virtuous governance is twofold: the first one and the one depending upon the first one. The first one is identified with the rule, which establishes virtuous forms of living and virtuous predispositions within a city or a nation, by relieving people from their ignorance. The person who undertakes this work is the chief ruler. The government, which depends upon the first type of government, is the one that follows in the latter's footsteps (Al-Fārābī, 2004: 56; Burns, 2016: 365-389).

### Religion as political institution

Religion is perceived by al-Fārābī as the totality of views and practices which have been determined for a society by its chief ruler, the king (*ra'īs awwal*), who has a particular prospect in mind: if

the king is virtuous and his rule is virtuous, the sole aim of his actions is and has to be the achievement of true happiness. The virtuous religion shares the same goal (Al-Fārābī, 2004: 43). Religion imitates the divine actions and the natural forces and principles, in accordance with their similarities to the activities and crafts that relate to volition, in the same way that Plato attempts to specify in *Timaeus* (21B-C). According to al-Fārābī, the religion that contributes to virtue and happiness runs parallel to philosophy. They are both put together practically and theoretically (Lahoud, 2004, 283-301). The universal principles of the practical aspect of a religion are found in practical philosophy (Al-Fārābī, 2004: 47). As soon as religion is seen as a human construction, it is revealed to be inferior to philosophy, since its goal is the guidance of people through theoretical and practical issues in a simple and clear way, which is not in the nature of philosophy to do. Religion succeeds in rendering the truths and the principles of philosophy understandable, by using persuasion and imagination (Al-Fārābī, 2005: 1; Arnaldez, 1977, 57-65). Al-Fārābī concludes that philosophy precedes religion in the historical sense as well, a conclusion that cannot be verified and this explains why Al-Fārābī does not bother to establish (Al-Fārābī, 1969: 44-45; Como, 2005: 7-16; Ivry, 1990: 378-388; Kemal, 1991: 79-85; Leaman, 2009: 184; Tanguay, 2007: 89.). His view to the effect that religion is a mere reflection of philosophy and, by consequence, inferior to the latter, is the most radical of all theories of double truth, which were usual in Medieval Europe, or of Latin Averroism of Siger of Brabant and his followers.

It needs to be noted that in the world of Islam, theology never had the position it did in Medieval Europe. The interpretation of divine law and the most prevalent thesis belonged to jurisprudence (Mahdi, 2001: 43). If religion depends upon an uncertain and ambiguous philosophy, theology and jurisprudence, which depend upon the latter, also suffer and are inadequate. From time to time, theology attempts to support arguments on representations and symbols, which makes matters even worse (Al-Fārābī, 2005: 1-2). Theology also serves philosophy and the theologian serves the philosopher, although the theologian thinks that he belongs to the chosen ones. He is a victim of his own fallacy, by thinking that he stands above members of the same religion, yet failing to see that the philosopher is superior to everyone, irrespectively of his nationality (Al-Fārābī, 2005: 2-3).

Al-Fārābī does not reject in advance all religion (Ramón Guerrero, 2005: 77-94). If religion depends

upon a philosophy, which has been set out in clear terms and has proceeded upon the principles of reflection, then it can be deemed both valid and valuable. If, however, it has rested upon some philosophy that has itself proceeded upon mere rhetoric, dialectic tricks and sophistries, then it can be largely false. A religion that rests upon such philosophies must contain false premises. If, again, this religion substitutes all false premises with their images, as it usually happens with religions, then it will find itself drifting even further away from philosophy. It will constitute a corrupt religion, which will not even be conscious of its ever increasing distancing from the truth. Al-Fārābī's conclusion from the above is that religion, whether true or not, is based upon philosophy (Al-Fārābī, 2005: 20-21).

But even this conclusion is not an inescapable one. A religion can be transferred from one nation to another, while undergoing possible improvements or additions, in the process. In this case, it is possible for this religion to crop up in a nation before philosophy, dialectic or sophistry have emerged. That is, it is possible that in this nation, philosophy springs and flourishes after religion (Al-Fārābī, 2005: 21). This religion, as a simplified version of philosophy may be transferred to a nation without it being known that it depends upon philosophy. Nevertheless, as mentioned, religion already contains images of the issues that have been proven by philosophy. This fact could be kept silent and then the nation might be misled to believe that this religious imagery stands for the real thing. Things could, however, take a different course if philosophy, upon which religion is dependent, is spread to a nation that has already espoused the religion in question. Then philosophy and religion might come into conflict. The followers of philosophy, if they are aware of the fact that religion contains images of philosophical truths, may not be so inimical. However, the followers of religion usually become very eristic because they think that they know the truth. The result of this battle is the marginalization of philosophy and its followers, which, in turn, leads the latter to withdraw their support to religion. Still, because the position of philosophers is a precarious one and they may be subject to prosecutions, it is more prudent for them to oppose to those religious dogmas which contradict philosophy and not to religion as a whole (Al-Fārābī, 2005: 21-22).

As proven by Mahdi, in *Kitab al-Huruf*, an abstract of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is being commented upon (1074a38-1074b14), in which Aristotle treats the ancient Greek belief to the effect that the heavenly bodies are gods and the totality

of the world is divine. However, his contemporaries showed preference to anthropocentrism, because the latter contributes to abiding by the law. Al-Fārābī's conclusion is that this proves the priority of philosophy over traditional religion and tradition in general (Mahdi, 1973: 1-25; Netton, 1989: 100; Parens, 1995: 11-13). He clarifies that personal happiness and an effective political structure are impossible, lest there be some common religion that unites people and helps in organizing things (Al-Fārābī, 2004: 66).

### **The political interpretation of prophecy and revelation**

The prophecies that refer to the transcendent stem from the mental appearances in the Active Intellect. Even though visions usually occur during sleep, al-Fārābī insists that, occasionally, they also come about in a conscious state. In this case, they concern a handful of people, who have accomplished the perfection of their imagination. Those people are able to receive the prophecy about present and future events by means of the particulars, whereas, by means of the intelligibles, they receive prophecies regarding the sphere of the transcendent (Al-Fārābī, 1985: 219-227; Butterworth, 2013-14: 103-118; Nacafov, 2016: 115-132; Rahman, 2013: 11-52).

In the course of the examination of this issue, divine revelation becomes involved which, according to al-Fārābī, is superior to practical knowledge. It is highly possible that one might be aware of the general principles of ethics and arts, and have extraordinary experience in the management of public affairs and still find it difficult to discover the appropriate means for the attainment of the supreme goal. Only revelation will present to humans the first principles of causes, as well as the capacity of choosing the right means. The nature of this revelation (*wahy*) is utterly political, as it concerns society as a whole, while the instigation itself (*ilhām*) only concerns the saint or the mystic (Mahdi, 2001: 150-153; Lobel, 2000: 124, 139-142). This is also proven by the fact that happiness, the *summum bonum*, is only obtained within the borders of a virtuous city, established according to the divine plan that permeates the universe. This work, however, cannot be accomplished by just anyone, as natural gifts, effort and proper education are required. The person who accepts to receive prophecy is the one in which the theoretical and practical powers of reason and imagination are instantiated. The perfection of the human being and the city does not come about through prophecy

itself, that is, through the emanation of the divine mind in imagination, but through the revelation of the divine mind in reason. The incorporation of the divine reason allows for human knowledge of both theoretical and practical issues. The person, who incarnates all the above attributes, as a gift from God, is thereby rendered an ideal for all other humans and pursues happiness for the entire inhabited world. In essence, al-Fārābī attempts to dislocate prophecy, which he ascribes to a pre-political stage and considers it inferior to the revelation. Al-Fārābī does not go as far as Ibn Tufayl, in rejecting prophecy altogether, yet he does not put faith in it without the control of reason. He does not reject imagination either because he is fully aware of its social benefits (Mahdi, 2001: 161-166).

A clarification is now due, regarding the way the ruler-prophet is discriminated from the ruler-philosopher. The criterion is purely epistemological: the human being acquires knowledge of the divine through the aid of intellect but, in rare cases, the perfection and the corroboration of the imagination may also lead to the perception of the divine. This is what prophecy is about. When the ruler exerts his imagination, he is a prophet and when he relies upon his intellect, he is a philosopher. Of these two qualities, philosophy is the superior one, since it is inextricably associated with the exertion of political power. Sound governance based exclusively upon prophecy is not possible. Al-Fārābī pursues this line of thought a bit further and maintains that philosophy is a prerequisite for the foundation and the survival of the virtuous state, whereas prophecy is only sufficient for the survival (Mahdi, 2001: 134-137).

Foreknowledge, as a notion, has its sources in ancient Greek and Hebrew tradition (Streetman, 2008: 211-246). Prophecy within the Arabic and, in general, the Muslim world, received a particular connotation. Al-Fārābī, by communicating with all these traditions, treats this matter in a special way. However, the attribution of prophecy, in its political dimension, to *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus* is rather far-fetched (Walzer, 1957: 142-148). In contrast to the most widespread theistic and Gnostic traditions of the later antiquity, al-Fārābī believes that prophecy has always been and will always be inferior to philosophy (Macy, 1986: 185-201; Walzer, 1985: 414-415). Strauss thought that al-Fārābī deals with prophecy in an ambivalent way: as a function of the soul, which may concern the mass of people and as a superior function, which is addressed to elite (Strauss, 1995: 124-126). In specific, during the emanation of the Passive Intellect from the Active Intellect, emerges the person who combines

the qualities of the wise, the philosopher and the prophet (Al-Fārābī, 1985: 245). It is of the utmost importance that, in contrast to the Muslim tradition, the prophetic charisma of the ruler is considered inferior to the qualities of the philosopher. On the other hand, al-Fārābī's forerunner, al-Kindī, used to assign a primary role to the prophets, whose knowledge he regarded as superior to the knowledge of philosophers. As al-Fārābī has repeated on many occasions, revelation is not connected to religion, but to philosophy. They both concern the few and not the crowd (Walzer, 1985: 441).

### Political philosophy, political science and religion

Another aspect of the political problem, which certainly does not escape the attention of al-Fārābī, is the relation between politics and religion. Notwithstanding the various interpretations of his thought (Arioli, 2014: 547-561; Corbin, 1964: 225; López-Farjeat, 2016: 38-60; Steiris, 2014: 151-189), al-Fārābī does not seem to have a strong and systematic preference for mysticism. His philosophy approaches a kind of religion that does not rely on revelation, but rather on logic. His, more or less, contemporary, al-Rāzī, had also rejected any kind of revelation-centered religion, by considering philosophy as the only truth, which does not address a limited minority, but to the entire humanity. Al-Sarakhsī was also in tune with this approach (Crone, 2005: 172-173; Walker, 1992: 82-92). Al-Fārābī diverts from the line of al-Kindī, however, who had ascribed to religion the role of an *ancilla*. Al-Fārābī's view is simple and akin to Plato's (Walzer, 1965: 778-781): religion and philosophy lead humans to the truth, but via different approaches. Religion addresses the wide, uneducated public, whereas philosophy addresses the selected few. Religion, which is posterior to philosophy, expresses a logically founded, philosophical truth through imagery and symbols. For many contemporary scholars this view consists al-Fārābī's greater innovation (Al-Fārābī, 2004<sup>2</sup>: 88; Galston, 1990: 76; Lerner, 1987: 510-517; Marmura, 1983: 87-102). Thus, only philosophy is directly conducive to the truth, to unassailable knowledge, of which religions only offer symbolic representations. In contrast to Aquinas, al-Fārābī is convinced that religion cannot add anything to philosophical knowledge, as also Porphyry had supported (Altman, 1978: 1-19; Chase, 2008: 25-27; Watt, 1967: 179-180). Al-Fārābī seems to be inspired by the protobyzantine tradition, as expressed, for instance, in an anonymous treatise, according to which, the

salvation of the human race will only come about from the cooperation of philosophy and politics (Barker, 1957: 72-74; O' Meara, 2002: 49-62; Steiris, 2013: 121-141; Watt, 1998: 265-277). From the total corpus of his writings, it becomes evident that al-Fārābī's main concern is the salvation of the political community and not of the individual (Mahdi, 2001: 60).

Religion is not necessary for those who can pursue and attain their perfection by relying on their nature and education. It is, however, indispensable for the survival of the political community, since moral perfection does not concern all citizens. As Averroes puts it, a few centuries later, if everyone attained virtue, they would become rulers, but the existence of rulers presupposes the existence of subjects to be ruled (Rosenthal, 1956: 69). In contrast to Averroes, though, who viewed philosophy as imposed by God's word, al-Fārābī regards philosophy as in need of some religion, so as to guide the mass, yet also in need of protection from the ignorant (Strauss, 1973: 17-18; Strauss, 1995: 59). In a reading slightly stretched forward, in his attempt to base the political status of a city on philosophy, al-Fārābī can be seen to end by rendering philosophy an *ancilla* of politics (Colmo, 2005: 16). However, this interpretation is a bit dangerous, as it focuses on al-Fārābī's practical philosophy, by understating the fact that he had also dealt with other philosophical topics, which he by no means treated as subservient to practical philosophy. Rosenthal's interpretation is also profoundly conservative and, at the same time, quite far-fetched, in holding that al-Fārābī considers the quality of a good Muslim as superior to the quality of a good philosopher, thus denying the obvious innovation of al-Fārābī's thought (Rosenthal, 1958: 123-124). Parens supports that al-Fārābī's goal consists in proving that philosophy was not something self-contradictory or eristic. Philosophy and revelation-centered religion can coexist. What demands greater attention from all scholars is that many of al-Fārābī's arguments are drawn, to an extent, from the pseudo-Aristotelian *Theology of Aristotle* and not from the authentic philosophical tradition, in spite of al-Fārābī's probable awareness of the work's lack of authenticity (Galston, 1977: 13-32).

Strauss's approach is more reasonable, as it attributes to al-Fārābī the politicalization, so to speak, of the apocalyptic religion, an endeavor tainted with platonic colors (Janssens, 2008: 128-129). It has to be noted, though, that in a letter attributed to al-Fārābī, the author admits that the actions of the philosopher have to imitate those of the creator, within the limits of human nature, of course. It is evident

that the letter in question cannot stand comparison to the treatises, as regards the systematicity of the presentation; however, the information provided should by no means be disregarded (Berman, 1961: 56).

On the other hand, al-Fārābī does not conceal his critical attitude towards religion. He is annoyed by the fact that religion is used as a means for the achievement of personal political goals and offices. Another means for political deception is the belief that God intervenes in human affairs through the mediation of inferior deities. Political power establishes and reinforces public religious practices and ceremonies, the ultimate goal of which is the supposed attainment of a postmortem happiness. Those who do not conform to the practices are threatened with severe penalties in the afterlife. What al-Fārābī finds particularly irritating is the people's reaction to this deception attempted by corrupt politicians. The people approves of politicians who act as if they scorned material goods, to such an extent that they present a divine-like behavior. So capable are they in deception, that they make sure that their physical appearance matches their behavior. Al-Fārābī does not hesitate to parallel those politicians to beasts that are willing to resort to any kind of violence or fraud so as to achieve their goals. Things are much worse when it comes to truly religious people. Al-Fārābī points out that the latter become the object of sarcasm and ridicule from the mass, while many seek to exploit their property, which the sincerely religious easily forfeit (Fakhry, 2002: 116).

Al-Fārābī mocks all those who maintain that God and spiritual entities exist and govern nature, who addresses prayers and hymns to them, who believe to a postmortem reward or punishment, depending on the kind of life that each has adopted. All those actions add up to nothing more than tricks, which are used by people at the expense of other people; in fact, by the weak who cannot gain power in any other way. What is most amazing is that many individuals are ready to give up at least part of their belongings, while falling prey to these deceivers. The aims of the latter are so well hidden that everyone else believes that they are not interested in the material profits they obtain for their own sake. The deception goes so far that, sometimes, the deceivers are honored on account of the fake image they have created for themselves (Al-Fārābī, 1985: 305-309).

Regardless of al-Fārābī's criticisms, he does conjoin the Platonic legislator and the Muslim prophet in one person (Davidson, 1992: 58). The combination of divine and political sciences demands the clarification of religious dogmas and the

structure of the universe. There can be no enduring power without the support of philosophy and prophecy. In a sense, the philosopher-ruler and the prophet-ruler coincide. This person has to be an instructor and a leader; he must possess knowledge and intellectual perfection, which comes about only through contact with the Active Intellect. The ruler who satisfies all these conditions will be in a position even to revise divine laws and apply new ones (Mahdi, 2001: 128-133).

Al-Fārābī accepts that jurisprudence and theology concern the nations and the states at a particular stage of their evolution. The former helps people clarify and interpret things, whereas the latter defends and protects religion. They do not, however, constitute universal sciences, but they receive as many different forms as there are religions on the globe. They do not examine the postulates of religion in depth. This lies principally within the scope of philosophy (Mahdi, 2001, 90-91). The primary field of research of jurisprudence is the study of particulars, whereas the universals fall under political science, as do scientific matters. The universals of the practical part of jurisprudence are included within political science and not in practical philosophy. In this way, political science becomes the link between religion and philosophy, since it constitutes at once the part and the subject of philosophy. By analogy, religion is part of and inferior to philosophy, since it constitutes part of political science. This is one of the most essential contributions of al-Fārābī to medieval thought (Mahdi, 2001: 92-93).

The emergence of philosophy and political science does not presuppose nor does it indicate the existence of an apocalyptic religion, theology or jurisprudence. Their coexistence in the Islamic paradigm, that al-Fārābī has in mind, is coincidental and does not thereby create a historical precedent. Notwithstanding this position, al-Fārābī does not hesitate to ascribe to the divinely-inspired legislator elements that pertain to the ruler or even the king (Mahdi, 2001: 92-93). However, religion contributes to politics in yet another way, namely, by offering political training by means of its practices and ceremonies. While public religious practices become an object of commentary and interest for al-Fārābī, it is not so with private religious practices. He bypasses the latter without serious losses (Plato, *Laws*, 828a-829e; Al-Fārābī, 2007: 179-180).

To sum up, close attention must be paid to the fact that al-Fārābī does not consider acceptable the kind of religion which does not subject its postulates to verification via proof or insight. It is

the philosopher's duty to examine religion and this ceases to be the case as soon as he becomes entangled in theological debates or takes on the role of the advocate of any religion. The nature of religion and its directness in our everyday lives do not permit us to envisage a philosophical or a scientific religion. Besides, religion includes a theoretical part, which concerns matters that humans may come to know but cannot actualize and a practical part, which concerns matters that humans can bring to reality provided that they come to know them. A corollary to this thesis is the fact that religion is inferior and subject to practical philosophy (Mahdi, 2001: 108-115). Al-Fārābī insists that, in philosophical terms, the philosopher, the king, the ruler, the legislator and the imam describe one and the same notion (Al-Fārābī, 1969: 46-47). The same tendency of using the terms interchangeably is evinced in Persian texts at the time of al-Fārābī (Crone, 2005: 153).

### Conclusions

Even though it has been maintained that al-Fārābī never attempted anything other than a proof to the effect that philosophy, especially in its Platonic version, may reinforce the Muslim faith, I would say that such views underestimate the originality and the innovatory aspects of his philosophy. It is not a simple endeavor within the limits of Muslim dialectic theology, namely of Kalam. It is a purely philosophical endeavor, which tries to maintain its balance between philosophy and the pressing

historical reality of a powerful, winning Islam. The story which al-Fārābī tells in the beginning of his *Talkhis nawamis Aflatun*, the one about the person who was disguised so as to deceive the guards and escape the city before sharing the fate of Socrates (Al-Fārābī, 2007: 139-140; Fortin, 2002: 27), could lend support to this interpretation and also indicate how the ignorant cannot understand philosophy, even when the latter is delivered to them in its purest form, without silencing or concealing any messages. Like Maimonides and Averroes who followed, whatever reasons al-Fārābī had for not letting the fanatics and the philosophically ignorant understand his writings so as not to accuse him, he had as many reasons to reveal, in his work, that philosophy in general and his philosophy in specific are fully compatible with the Muslim dogma and tradition (Leaman, 1980: 525-538; Strauss, 1952: 68-107; Strauss, 1957: 319-334). And this simply because philosophy is superior, it is the womb from which the true religion of Islam came into existence. Islam could not have emanated from a false philosophy, so as to share the fate of false religions, as al-Fārābī has described. A powerful state and a prosperous society presuppose a religion established upon philosophy and the involvement of philosophers in the exertion of political power. Al-Fārābī's argument was so innovative that even his faithful pupil Ibn 'Adi felt the need to reject it when he claimed that the Christians did not borrow their religion from the philosophers (Rashed, 2009: 68).

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