

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 2

2022

MEHMET OZALP
Editor-in-Chief

ZULEYHA KESKIN
Managing Editor

MIRELA CUFUROVIC
Assistant Editor



Published online: 4 December 2022



[Submit](#) your article to this journal



[View](#) related and/or other articles in this issue

Introducing Al-Farabi's Political Philosophy to Modern Politics (Correlating Al-Farabi's Philosophy With Modern Politics)

Anggi Azzuhri

To cite this article:

Azzhuri, Anggi. "Introducing Al-Farabi's Political Philosophy to Modern Politics (Correlating Al-Farabi's Philosophy With Modern Politics)." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2022): 22-35.

INTRODUCING AL-FARABI'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY TO MODERN POLITICS (CORRELATING AL-FARABI'S PHILOSOPHY WITH MODERN POLITICS)

Anggi Azzuhri*

Abstract: Al-Farabi categorised cities, the smallest political association, into five types: the virtuous, the ignorant, the wicked, the diverted and the erring. Al-Farabi's terminology indicates morality is the red-line that differs the nature of each city, although it lacks straightforward statement in his treaties. Many admirations by later philosophers on Al-Farabi's political philosophy do not guarantee his concept from being considered as utopia. However, utopianism does not imply the irrelevancy of Al-Farabi's politics in real condition. The question is regarding to what extent Al-Farabi ideas work with politics, particularly modern politics. This study correlates Al-Farabi's ideal concept and modern politics, which significantly is characterised with secular democratic. The methodology of this research is qualitative conceptual analysis since the two variables are in the theoretical realm. It can be concluded that politics in Al-Farabi's notion is strongly connected with morality rather than authority. Establishing an ideal state is possible through collective consciousness of true felicity, by which the types of cities is divided. Although Al-Farabi's political philosophy is inapplicable, its role as the highest political principles is undeniable. The essential aspect of Al-Farabi's politics for the modern context is his fundamental idea, i.e. ethical society. Establishing an ethical state is more critical than Al-Farabi's theory.

Keywords: *Al-Farabi politics, Islamic ethics, Al-Madinah Al-Fadilah, political ethics*

INTRODUCTION

Al-Farabi (d. 950) is prominent as a political thinker due to his *magnum corpus: The Opinions of the Ideal City People* in which he represents the Platonic concept of the ideal city. At a glance, Al-Farabi's political philosophy is a translation of Platonic philosophy because he uses Platonic terms, such as virtuous city. However, Al-Farabi has made a significant development of Platonic political philosophy and it is possible to say his political philosophy is a distinguished concept.

* Anggi Azzuhri is a doctoral student in Islamic studies at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia (UIII). He focuses on Qur'anic studies, Islamic ethics, political ethics, legal studies and *usul fiqh*. At the doctoral level, he works significantly on Islam and constitutional law issues. Author email: anggi.azzuhri@student.uiii.ac.id.

In his treaty, Al-Farabi categorises cities, the smallest scale of a political association, into five types: the virtuous city, the ignorant city, the wicked city, the diverted city and the erring city.¹ This distinction is not based on the question of authority like democracy and monarchy, nor on the ideologies to which the citizens and leaders adhere like communism or fascism. Al-Farabi's division goes beyond the question of ideologies and authority and reaches the essential aspect of humankind; that is, ethics.

Several modern Islamic thinkers, such as Taha Abdurrahmanne, Malek Bennabi (d. 1973), and Tariq Ramadan, attempt to redefine human beings from the reason or logic distinction to ethics as the main difference from other creations.² They thought that certain kinds of logic are also possessed by animals, corresponding to Al-Farabi's idea on will.

Assuming logic is the only indicator of Al-Farabi's division, then the ignorant city is sufficient to be the opposite of the virtuous city. In fact, Al-Farabi adds more types of cities in opposition to the virtuous city. Moreover, the term "virtuous" does not semantically relate to logic or reason. It is an ethical term that Al-Farabi discusses further in *Attainment of Happiness*. Nonetheless, stating that reason has no place in the definition of "virtuous" is also a big fault. Reason is the most important faculty of the soul that leads a person to virtue.³

Despite much admiration by later philosophers on Al-Farabi's political philosophy, his concept is still considered a utopia.⁴ Al-Farabi's ideas are somehow too idealistic that modern circumstances cannot accommodate them. Also, it seems no historical account mentions any (Islamic) empire applying Al-Farabi's ideas on politics. Even Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) criticises Al-Farabi's concept based on the pragmatic perspective of civilisation.⁵ However, an idealistic concept can play the supreme guideline, bounding the realistic application. It is correct that Al-Farabi's political philosophy is highly inapplicable, but this concept deserves a place in modern nations as a guideline. Nevertheless, the question is how to implement Al-Farabi's philosophy to a condition that is significantly different from his era.

Also, there is no clear statement from Al-Farabi that this classification is grounded in ethics; thus, there is a possibility of other criteria on which Al-Farabi separates cities. This leads to the question of what is the primary principle of Al-Farabi's political philosophy, particularly concerning the distinction of the ignorant city, wicked city and so on? Then, to what point should Al-Farabi's idea be given a role in modern political conditions, regardless of a monarchy

¹ Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*, trans. Richard Walzer (Michigan: Clarendon Press, 1985), 228-29.

² Amin El-Yousfi, "The Anthropology of Islam in Light of the Trusteeship Paradigm," in *Islamic Ethics and the Trusteeship Paradigm: Taha Abderrahmane's Philosophy in Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Mohammed Hashas and Mutaz al-Khatib (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 197-199, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004438354_011.

³ Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 80-81.

⁴ Alireza Omid Bakhsh, "The Iranian and Islamic Heritage of Utopianism," *Utopian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.24.1.0041>.

⁵ Şenol Korkut, "Ibn Khaldun's Critique of the Theory of al-Siyâsah al-Madaniyyah," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 36 (2008): 549, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853108X327074>.

or republic state? This question evaluates Al-Farabi's self-criticism of his political idea and alternative concept when the main concept fails.

MORALITY AS THE GROUNDS FOR AL-FARABI'S CLASSIFICATION OF CITIES

In many discussions regarding the philosophy of politics, which further generates the political system or government system, the main concern is the question of authority. Delineation of this question produces several ideologies, which later encounter the political interest and state condition. Discriminating any form of government or political power from the authority and responsibility status is the most concrete and practical classification since it is discernible. For example, the monarchy system contrasts the republic system because the former gives the king or ruler the highest authority, while the latter bestows it to the people. Furthermore, winning the contest for authority is a goal of Machiavellian politics, a prevailing idea in modern politics.⁶

Al-Farabi's thought on the political system, however, is a special concept. He tries to formulate an unprecedented system. In his day, the most used government system was empires or kingdoms.⁷ Supposedly, a thinker in this circumstance would likely produce a concept established on a monarchy government basis. Al-Mawardi (d. 1058) is a good example of this regard; his *Ahkam Al-Sultaniya* seems to be written under the monarchy context, indicated by an objection to the rebellion movement discourse, especially his strict opposition to rebels and the terminology of offices.⁸ Moreover, Al-Mawardi was a supreme judge (*Qadi Qudat*), which perhaps led him to his stance on the governance official viewpoint in his treaty, although his book is more about governance theory instead of specific political themes. Al-Farabi's idea, however, emerges from all forms of the existing political system. Instead of favouring one system, Al-Farabi allows another form of government, i.e. the republic, as an alternative and focuses more on government quality rather than discussing power. Perhaps his interaction with Greek philosophy books introduced him to democracy, oligarchy and anarchy. These government types had existed before his era, particularly in Persian, Roman, Hellenistic and Arab civilisation.

Additionally, the Umayyad and Abbasid empires – in which Al-Farabi lived – promoted the theocracy ideology to defend their political status.⁹ Some groups and sects within Muslim civilisation preferred an Imamate leadership, such as the Qaramites, or decentralised tribal government, such as the Bedouin. This fact leads to that Al-Farabi already knew that certain ideologies influence the political system.

⁶ P. H. Partridge, "Politics and Power," *Philosophy* 38, no. 144 (1963): 120-21.

⁷ Al-Farabi died in 950 CE/339 AH. The Abbasid empire was under Buyid control during this era and other regions were ruled under a monarchy.

⁸ Abul Hasan Al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam As-Sultaniyya* (Cairo: Dar Al-Hadith, 2006), 200.

⁹ Louay Safi, *Al-Fikr Wa An-Nuhud* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2018), 61-63.

Instead of appointing the authority status as the main indicator, Al-Farabi identifies city types based on peculiar qualities. However, before analysing the qualities on which he makes his categorisation, it is necessary to see the types of cities and their nature according to Al-Farabi. The classification is discussed in Al-Farabi's main work, *The Opinions of the Ideal City People*, in the book's final section.

The first type of city is foremost, i.e. the virtuous city (*Al-Madinah Al-Fadilah*) from which the book is named. Al-Farabi borrows this term from Plato's *Republic*.¹⁰ It seems Plato (d. 348 BCE) used a different word, *Kallipolis* (Ideal City), but semantically "virtuous" and "ideal" share certain meanings.¹¹ Some discussions say Al-Farabi follows Plato in politics due to similarities in terminology. However, the contextual and historical gaps make resembling Al-Farabi and Plato an inaccurate claim.¹² For example, Al-Farabi lived in an Islamic empire, with a holistic government and religious life, while Plato lived in a *polis* and said he is not religious. Hence, Plato's ideal city and Al-Farabi's virtuous city are not similar.¹³ The translation of both words into English is also problematic. Plato used *Kallipolis* to simplify his ideal polis concept, while Al-Farabi's keyword is "virtue" (*al-fadilah*). Inconsistency in translation could indicate ambiguity between the two key terms.

Al-Farabi describes the virtuous city through an analogy of the human body led by the noblest organ, i.e. the heart. The lower ranked organs work according to the order of the heart based on their distinguished functions. The harmony of all organs and the heart's ultimate perfection bring the human body to work properly and reach a purpose. This analogy applies to a city since a leader rules a city and its citizen followed the order of the ruler/s. When all elements in this city realise what they are looking for and can co-operate with the order of the leader, then felicity can be attained.¹⁴ Al-Farabi adds that felicity is only attainable by the collective consciousness and this kind of consciousness only exists in the virtuous city. This designation also means felicity is not attainable in some cities; hence, other city types are classified on this basis.

In defining the ruler of the virtuous city, the explanation is dialectical – but downwardly – since Al-Farabi begins with the most expected type of ruler, then excusing certain characters because a person with that perfection could not exist. Also, giving an alternative if that perfection separately occurs in two persons or more; thus, they must lead the city cooperatively, opening an idea of a parliamentary government. According to Al-Farabi, the ideal ruler must "be predisposed for rulership by his inborn nature and have acquired the attitude and habit of will for rulership which will develop in a man whose inborn nature is predisposed for it."¹⁵ A

¹⁰ Majid Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism: His Life, Works and Influence* (Oneworld Publications, 2002), 104.

¹¹ Ishraq Ali and Mingli Qin, "Distinguishing the Virtuous City of Alfarabi from that of Plato in Light of his Unique Historical Context," *HTS Theological Studies* 75 (2019): 2.

¹² Farouk Sankari, "Plato and Alfarabi: A Comparison of Some Aspects of their Political Philosophies," *Vivarium* 8, no. 1 (1970): 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴ Al-Farabi, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*, 253.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 238-239.

ruler must have nine natural qualities, which Al-Farabi lists after discussing the importance of felicity awareness. These qualities are physical perfection; a good speaker and has no articulating and expressing issue; great analytical skills in receiving and seeking proof; a resilient person; not a pleasure or wealth seeker; tendency to the truth; ability to avoid shameful action; hatred toward injustice and oppression; and great bravery.¹⁶ The last and perhaps most important aspect of a ruler is unity with the active intellect; thus, he knows every action leads to felicity.¹⁷ It seems Al-Farabi is inspired by Prophet Muḥammad's personality (pbuh) as the perfect ruler because these qualities are found in him.

Tracing these qualities in the personality of Prophet Muḥammad can be done by extracting the narrations from some *Sirah Nabawiyah* and *Shamail Muhammadiyah* books. The first quality was revealed in Imam Bukhari's narrations on the Prophet's physical description.¹⁸ Another narration states Prophet Muḥammad was the only perfect articulator of the Arabic letter *dhad*,¹⁹ which indicates his perfection in delivering speech. The Prophet was also a great analyst under God's direct guidance: he refused a wealthy life when it was highly possible; put effort into preventing his people from wrongdoing; advocated for all citizen of Medina equally by implementing the Medina Constitution; persuaded people to free their slaves; and was directly involved in most major battles whereas other leaders were reluctant. These facts clearly indicate the Prophet's personality is the inspiration for Al-Farabi in his discourse. Speaking of the Medina Constitution, the Prophet clearly advocated the equality of Medinan citizens and assured their safety internally and externally, regardless of their religion since the charter also protects religious freedom. The constitution reveals the Prophet stood against oppression and injustice of the citizens and decentralised the society *pro bono*.

Al-Farabi admits that a person who possesses those nine qualities²⁰ is scarce; the alternative is finding someone who possesses six or five qualities.²¹ Furthermore, Al-Farabi also forecasts the alternative would be impossible at a certain time. He thought, when there is no single man who fulfils the requirements, but two or more men are acquire them in collaboration, these men should rule the city.²² Al-Farabi's dialectical opinion is an indication that he probably advocated for two government types in terms of authority: monarchy and republic. In his most ideal concept, the monarchy system is evident since the ruler has the authority to give orders and citizens are required to follow the order, ensuring stability and harmony. Simultaneously, the last alternative is a republic because several people hold the ruling position, as previously mentioned similar to a parliamentary system. Yet, Al-Farabi never considers a monarchy or

¹⁶ Fakhry, *Al-Farabi*, 103-104.

¹⁷ Al-Farabi, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*, 238-239.

¹⁸ Abu Isa Al-Tirmizi, *Ash-Shama'il Al-Muhammadiyah, Book 1: The Noble Features of Rasoolullah* (Dar Al-Hadith, 1988), *hadith* no. 2, 8.

¹⁹ Imam Baihaqi mentioned this *hadith* in his *Sha'bul Iman*; however, Ibn Kathir rated it as accurate in meaning but the text is *gharib* (conveyed by only one narrator).

²⁰ Physical perfection; a good speaker and has no issues with articulating and expressing; great analytical skills in receiving and seeking proof; a resilient person; not a pleasure or wealth seeker; tendency to the truth; ability to avoid shameful action; hatred toward injustice and oppression; and great bravery.

²¹ Al-Farabi, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*, 249-251.

²² *Ibid.*, 253.

republic as the indicator of good government or good politics. Again, his main concern is not about authority, but morality.

He later discusses the virtuous city's opposition: the ignorant city. It is characterised by citizens who do not know true felicity. However, instead of a designation due to a lack of knowledge, conformity of knowledge to the truth is the main reason.²³ Felicity or happiness in their notion is different from what the virtuous city citizens understand. The ignorant city, furthermore, is divided based on the definition of felicity according to its citizens. First, the city of necessity in which its citizens distance themselves from food, drink, clothes, housing and sexual intercourse. Next on the list is the city of meanness, where the citizens see wealth as the sole aim in life, resembling the hedonic life in the modern sense. Then, in the city of depravity, its citizens pursue pleasure related to food, drink and sexual intercourse. Next, a city where its residents seek reputation; thus, Al-Farabi names it the city of honour. Then, the city of power, looking for overpowering others. Last, the city of populist in which the people want to do whatever they desire.²⁴ Al-Farabi puts these cities under the ignorant city's sub-types.

Al-Farabi does not stop at this classification because the previous description is still under one indicator, i.e. the misconception of felicity. Furthermore, he elucidates other types of city that already knew the truth, yet the people do not believe in it (the wicked city), make alteration (the changed city) or go astray from the right path (the erring city). These four cities – the ignorant city, wicked city, changed city and erring city – are governed in the opposite way of the excellent city and influence the residents' life.²⁵

According to each city's given detail, it can be concluded that Al-Farabi classifies these cities on one main indicator: felicity or happiness. In the eudaimonian tradition, which Al-Farabi strongly held, felicity means the human has gotten out from reliance on matter and become a Divine being by uniting the active intellect, which can only be reached by knowledge and an ethical life. This is the main goal of humans and supposedly all people pursue this goal. There is a possibility that a person or people aware of true felicity but do not attain it like the wicked city's resident. This fact corresponds to two of Al-Farabi axiological works: *Tahsil As-Sa'adah* (Attainment of Happiness) and *At-tanbih' ala sabili as-sa'adah* (Direction to the Path of Happiness), both concerning the purpose of having good ethics.

Therefore, ethics is the main indicator in Al-Farabi's division of political association. Although he did not utter or explain explicitly and imperatively concerning his rationale in the division of cities. Another fact that supports this conclusion is the way Al-Farabi discriminates the types of ignorant cities. Every city is described by axiological problems, particularly the question of the goal of life, such as honour seeker, depravity and boundless desire. These are against the ethical principles that Al-Farabi and other philosophers – also the theologians and Sufis – advocated.

²³ Ibid., 252-253.

²⁴ Ibid., 251-52.

²⁵ Ibid., 257.

It seems Al-Farabi defends the importance of ethics and puts effort into keeping its role in politics. As was mentioned, Al-Farabi provides solutions for possible critics on his concept. However, instead of diverting to a more pragmatic principle, Al-Farabi retains morality as the primary standard. Moreover, despite his implicit acknowledgement of the republic system, Al-Farabi still emphasises the realisation of ethical principles in the ruler's personality. This means authority is not necessary in Al-Farabi's notions. Either monarchy or republic, when all people of a city acquire morality, actualising justice is effortless.

SECULAR DEMOCRATIC: MODERN POLITICS' PRINCIPLE

However, can Al-Farabi's politics perceive or influence modern politics? Before answering this question, a problem exists regarding the context gap between modern and classical politics, and clarification of this problem is necessary before moving to the previous question. This discussion centralises the issue of features of modern politics in terms of its constructive definition due to the historical events such as the French Revolution and Western colonialism, and socio-philosophical transformation such as the enlightenment, Islamic reformism, modernity and post-modernity.

It can be said that modern politics is a reduction of classical politics. Most classical political thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Hasan Al-Bashri, Al-Mawardi and Al-Farabi identified politics as a comprehensive thing that includes all aspects of public life.²⁶ In their writings, politics also covers citizens' horizontal relationships besides the vertical relationship between the residents and government. The government system is not the only concern in classical politics; how citizens behave toward the government is also a political issue. This notion is not only conceptual, but practically speaking, the people at the time of those thinkers tend to obey their leader and prefer to stay down if disagreement between citizens and the ruler occur.

Religion plays a great role in imposing citizens' obedience toward the ruler. Christian tradition recognises the church–state alliance, especially in Catholic and Anglican states. Meanwhile, in Islamic civilisation, many scholars place obedience to the ruler as a doctrinal issue rather than legal discourse. In fact, in either Western or Eastern tradition, religion and politics are inseparable. The ruler of England, starting from King Henry VIII, was not only the political leader of Great Britain, but also held the so-called title Defender of the Faith, in this sense the Anglican Church.²⁷ Islamic history gives more similar examples as well, even lying in the earliest Caliphate since the first four leaders: Abu Bakr, Umar bin Khattab, Uthman bin Affan and Ali bin Abi Talib; besides heading the state politically, they took a role as a religious leader.²⁸ Hence, in addition to mutual behaviour between the ruler and ruled, classical politics features obvious entanglement of religion and government.

²⁶ Sankari, "Plato and Alfarabi," 2.

²⁷ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Defender of the Faith," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 29, 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/defender-of-the-faith>.

²⁸ Abdurrahman Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah; An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton Classics, 2015), 274.

Modern politics, however, is characterised by a democratic society and secular government, in which religion is partially or entirely excluded from the state in administration and politics. The secular idea gained great popularity following the French Revolution and the Enlightenment era in Europe. This thought was then introduced to the Islamic world through three gates: the French campaign in Egypt, where many French experts influenced Egyptian society;²⁹ the reformist Muslim scholars who took education in Europe;³⁰ and the rise of nationalism in the Muslim world.³¹ Moreover, politics has significantly shifted to be more pragmatic since the Nicolo Machiavelli era. His philosophy carried a new definition of politics from managing the society to “how to gain political power –in this sense authority- and defend that power for a longer time.”³² Even when the politics turns to the citizens’ side, particularly when conflict occurs, the offered solution is earning sovereignty from the ruler. In a brief sentence, “if the leader ruled disappointingly, citizens should take the rulership from him and send another person from people to rule.” This means politics is circling in the authority and power discourse.³³ Additionally, modern politics put a great portion on how to select a man for leadership, which is the central question of sovereignty and authority.

Wael Hallaq delineates five crucial form properties that a modern state is inconceivable without: the constitution, created by specific and local historical experience; the will to representation, which generates so-called state sovereignty; the legislative monopoly and legitimate violence; the bureaucratic machinery; and cultural-hegemonic engagement in the social order.³⁴ These five properties indicate the main features of a modern state that could be simplified as democratic–secular. An abortion of religion’s role in politics excludes most of the classic’s political philosophy, which gave religion a significant or insignificant role. It also drags Al-Farabi’s philosophy since his idea heavily centralises on the metaphysics of God and the urgency of a Prophetic leader who accommodates religious and non-religious matters. The next chapter collaborates and seeks a possible position for the idealistic ancient Al-Farabi’s politics in the given modern context.

AL-FARABI’S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY IN COLLABORATION WITH MODERN POLITICS

Al-Farabi never discusses in any books about how the ideal election or voting for leadership works, despite his awareness of the democracy system from Greek philosophy, on the grounds that he follows Plato’s politics. Al-Farabi wrote on the monarchy’s context since it was the most – if not the only – adopted government system in his era; thus, the leadership is transferred inherently within the royal families, and such conflict between leader and resident should never

²⁹ Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (London: Penguin UK, 2009), 90.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 378–79.

³² Alan R. Ball, “Politics, Power and Authority,” in *Modern Politics and Government*, ed. Alan R. Ball (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1988), 25-26, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-19347-9_2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁴ Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity’s Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 23.

occur otherwise the state destabilise.³⁵ His analogy of the city with the human body also shows the harmony of hierarchical order is crucial and there is no room for a political revolution of other organs to seize leadership from the heart. Otherwise, the analogy becomes invalid. Again, Al-Farabi also never elucidates how the initial ruler becomes a ruler because his explanation shows the city – excellent and others – already exists and runs.

Probably, the key term for this issue is “found” or “availability”, assuming an excellent city consists of ethical people; hence, the natural-born leader takes rulership without any rejection from the citizens since people recognise their capacity. The only thing Al-Farabi mentions as problematic in a rulership case is when a natural leader is not found; thus, his ideal concept is not applicable in this regard, for which Al-Farabi has provided an alternative.

Al-Farabi does not conceptualise his political thought based on real conditions. He tries to generate ideal politics without referring to a single factual example or presumably he refers to the Prophetic society, as mentioned earlier.³⁶ It must be noted, even the Prophet assured that future generations decelerate to a lower quality; hence, the idea that Al-Farabi proposed goes toward unsuitability. Since the reference, which is to the Prophetic society, surpasses the quality of the later generation in which Al-Farabi lived.

Moreover, this sort of politics does not place authority or power as the central concern. Placing ethics and felicity as the grounds for politics indicates Al-Farabi was convinced that politics aims to create an organised society, which is capable to tackle particulars for a practical problem without a need to theoretical reference, since an ethical society has *a priori* knowledge or the capability for encountering political problems such as an authority issue.

Nonetheless, it seems Al-Farabi missed two things in his political discussion: First, the conflict between residents and ruler. In modern politics, conflict management is a crucial topic either in a monarchy or republic country because it cannot be avoided and handling it determines the stability of politics and the rulership lifespan.³⁷ Second, how the first ruler obtains their leadership; due to this lack, Al-Farabi’s politics is not for a recently established government or country.

The nature of secular democratic society is another issue that makes Al-Farabi’s idea hard to collaborate with modern politics, since the civilisation in which he lived and addresses is a philosophical, religious and less heterogenised society. He seems to presume the city would be more demographically homogenised, at least in term of religion adherence, which in Al-Farabi’s context are believers of God’s existence. It is not a firm conclusion since he had not uttered it straightforward in his treaty. But this conclusion comes from these premises. First, Al-Farabi began *the opinion of the citizen of the ideal city* by elucidating the ontological topics, i.e. God’s existence, which strongly relates to faith matters. Hence, the pre-requisite for his politics is that the people hold belief in God’s existence. Second, as mentioned earlier, Al-

³⁵ Ira Lapidus, “The Golden Age: The Political Concepts of Islam,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 524 (1992): 17, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1046702>.

³⁶ Safi, *Al-Fikr Wa an-Nuhud*, 233-240.

³⁷ Christopher Morris, “The Modern State,” in *Handbook of Political Theory*, ed. Gerald F. Gaus and Chandran Kukathas (London: Sage Publishing, 2004), 199.

Farabi likely places the Prophetic Medinan society as the inspiring reference for the ideal city and its ruler, and the Medinan people were Muslims and *ahl Kitab*, who both believe in God. Third, the citizens of the ideal city are aware and unite for the ultimate goal: attainment of felicity. These premises inductively conclude that the entire ideal city's people must believe in God existence, possess what the Prophetic society set as value and attain a common goal. Therefore, they are homogenised in term of these variables.

This notion becomes an obstacle to Al-Farabi's idea for the contestation towards modern politics. Since the modern state would likely consist with highly diverse population, either their religions, ethnicities, languages, education level or social classes. For instance, Singapore, despite its high education level index, has diversified people in term of ethnicity and religion, some are even irreligious.³⁸ Also, it can be assumed not all Singaporeans are united in pursuing the state goal, some could live apathetically and prefer to pursue personal goals. Even if one counters this argument by citing countries like Saudi Arabia or Turkey, as both are statistically homogenised in term of religion, Al-Farabi's thought remains inapplicable because the entire country must consolidate for a supreme goal. This consolidation is nearly impossible given the political interests of each people diverge the definition of an ultimate goal.

However, these facts do not rule out Al-Farabi's politics from the contest with contemporary politics. Despite being an idealist concept, which seems impossible to be applied in reality and lacks two crucial political aspects, Al-Farabi's politics still has or can be given a role in current politics. It is wrong to say that idealism has lost its crucial role in modern politics. Each political philosophy school has ideal concepts that they are pursuing, also arranging their interest and goal. This ideal concept then bounds the dialectical development for their endeavour when it encounters reality. For instance, Karl Marx's communism is an ideal concept, but Vladimir Lenin and Mao Zedong modified many details because they found that some of Marx's concepts were somehow inapplicable.³⁹ Despite this modification, Marx's general ideas/principles remain as the limit of communism; any ideas that break these principles will not be considered communism.⁴⁰

An idealistic concept functionalises as the crucial bound of a particular thought or beyond a particular philosophy. It can be set as the crucial mindset of people in a city or nation. Despite the explained issues regarding Al-Farabi's politics, this philosophy can give the main principles that a nation firmly adheres. It is right that, at a certain point, Al-Farabi's politics has a less significant role, such as in leadership election, conflict resolution and encountering a secular-democratic society. However, a constitution can be built on Al-Farabi's philosophy, collaborating with a more practical political philosophy. For instance, Al-Farabi explains that education is critical in producing a qualified person who can attain happiness, which happens to be the common interest of ideal city residents; this idea leads the modern government to

³⁸ Chew Hui Min, "No Religion: Why More in Singapore are Turning Away from Traditional Faiths," Channelnews Asia, July 1, 2021, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/no-religion-humanist-society-singapore-census-2003576>.

³⁹ Peter Wiles, "Marxism Versus Leninism: What will Remain of Either, for the Third World?," *Asian Perspective* 14, no. 1 (1990): 220-21.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 221.

explicate the education system in accordance with the national vision. The Hegelian dialectic concept is useful in understanding how Al-Farabi's ideal thought plays its role in modern politics. Citing the education system example, the dialectical process would refine the system concept due to its synthesis process, either to the gate of reformation or actualising the initial vision. Although the direction of dialectic does not necessarily run to the absolute idea, like Hegel suggests in his "dialectic,"⁴¹ because the ideal thought analogically grabs a position as a supervisor for the practical reality instead of a goal; hence, the completely reform concept remains open.

The last question: what are the necessary prerequisites to apply Al-Farabi's philosophy of politics in collaboration with the modern system? Perhaps Taha Abderahmane has a clue to answer this question. As was mentioned at the beginning, according to Taha Abderahmane, man is an ethical animal rather than a rational animal.⁴² Ethics is the crucial aspect, particularly in Al-Farabi's philosophy, to discriminate the human from other creations, even categorisation of society based on ethics is a sound method. More specifically, in Al-Farabi's notion of ethics, awareness of true felicity and its pursuit are what a city or country must have to reach the virtuous city status. Hence, it is less important for a country to implement Al-Farabi's political philosophy entirely. Instead, building an ethical society is more essential in this regard. An ethical society's sustainability in facing political, economic and social problems is stronger than less ethical societies. When a country can guarantee the morality of its citizens, the political system is not an issue anymore for the stability and sustainability of the country. Moreover, when all citizens can recognise the good and evil in *a priori* knowledge, political conflict would rarely take place; hence, harmony is highly probable.

CONCLUSION

Politics in Al-Farabi's notion is strongly connected with ethics and morality, rather than authority. An ideal state can be actualised by the collective consciousness of felicity, man's main purpose. The absence of true felicity awareness and pursuit can lead to an ignorant, wicked or diverted state. Although Al-Farabi's political philosophy is inapplicable, particularly in the modern age, it can play a role as the highest principle that a nation should hold in its politics. The essential aspect of Al-Farabi's political employment in the modern era is his fundamental idea, i.e. ethical society. Establishing an ethical state is more important than Al-Farabi's politics application since, in the modern era, the main concern of politics is authority, which caused many conflicts in a state. An ethical society could make the authority problem less significant in their country.

⁴¹ Julie Maybee, "Hegel's Dialectic," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford University, Winter 2020), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-dialectics>.

⁴² Taha Abdurrahmane, *Ruhul Hadathah: al-madkhal ilaa ta'sis al-hadathah al-Islamiyyah* (Maghreb: ad-Dar al-Bayda', 2006), 20-29.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdurrahmane, Taha. *Ruhul Hadathah: al-madkhal ilaa ta'sis al-hadathah al-Islamiyyah*. Maghreb: ad-Dar al-Bayda', 2006.
- Al-Farabi, Abu Nasr. *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*. Translated by Richard Walzer. Michigan: Clarendon Press, 1985.
- Al-Farabi, Abu Nasr. *Tahsil As-Sa`adah*. Beirut: Dar maktabah al-Hilal, 1995.
- Al-Mawardi, Abul Hasan. *Al-Ahkam As-Sultaniyya*. Cairo: Dar Al-Hadith, 2006.
- Ali, Ishraq, and Mingli Qin. "Distinguishing the Virtuous City of Alfarabi from that of Plato in Light of his Unique Historical Context." *HTS Theological Studies* 75 (2019): 1–9.
- Al-Tirmizi, Abu Isa. *Ash-Shama'il Al-Muhammadiyah, Book 1: The Noble Features of Rasoolullah*. Dar Al-Hadith, 1988.
- Bakhsh, Alireza Omid. "The Iranian and Islamic Heritage of Utopianism." *Utopian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2013): 41–51. <https://doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.24.1.0041>.
- Ball, Alan R. "Politics, Power and Authority." In *Modern Politics and Government*, edited by Alan R. Ball, 19–36. London: Macmillan Education UK, 1988. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-19347-9_2.
- El-Yousfi, Amin. "The Anthropology of Islam in Light of the Trusteeship Paradigm." In *Islamic Ethics and the Trusteeship Paradigm: Taha Abderrahmane's Philosophy in Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Mohammed Hashas and Mutaz al-Khatib, 197–217. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004438354_011.
- Fakhry, Majid. *Ethical Theories in Islam*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991.
- Fakhry, Majid. *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism: His Life, Works and Influence*. Oneworld Publications, 2002.
- Hallaq, Wael. *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Ibn Khaldun, Abdurrahman. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Translated by Franz Rosenthal. Bollingen Series, vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton Classics, 2015.
- Korkut, Şenol. "Ibn Khaldun's Critique of the Theory of al-Siyâsah al-Madaniyyah." *Asian Journal of Social Science* 36 (2008): 547–70. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853108X327074>.
- Lapidus, Ira. "The Golden Age: The Political Concepts of Islam." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 524 (1992): 13–25. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1046702>.
- Maybee, Julie. "Hegel's Dialectic." In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford University, Winter 2020. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-dialectics>.

- Min, Chew Hui. "No Religion: Why More in Singapore are Turning Away from Traditional Faiths." Channelnews Asia, July 1, 2021. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/no-religion-humanist-society-singapore-census-2003576>.
- Morris, Christopher. "The Modern State." In *Handbook of Political Theory*, edited by Gerald F. Gaus and Chandran Kukathas, 195-209. London: Sage Publishing, 2004.
- Partridge, P. H. "Politics and Power." *Philosophy* 38, no. 144 (1963): 117–35.
- Rogan, Eugene. *The Arabs: A History*. London: Penguin UK, 2009.
- Safi, Louay. *Al-Fikr Wa an-Nuhud*. Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2018.
- Sankari, Farouk. "Plato and Alfarabi: A Comparison of Some Aspects of their Political Philosophies." *Vivarium* 8, no. 1 (1970): 1–9.
- The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Defender of the Faith." In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. November 29, 2011. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/defender-of-the-faith>.
- Wiles, Peter. "Marxism Versus Leninism: What will Remain of Either, for the Third World?" *Asian Perspective* 14, no. 1 (1990): 217–36.