

The Influence of Plato and Aristotle on Alfarabi

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Introduction

Alfarabi was the first philosopher to attempt to unite political philosophy with Islam. Alfarabi is important because he was able to recover the classical political tradition of Aristotle and Plato and place it within the context of Islamic religious principles. Despite the fact that there is general consensus amongst scholars that Alfarabi clearly draws from Plato in his interpretation of the philosopher-king, there is disagreement over the extent to which the appearance of Aristotle's citizen in Alfarabi's work modifies this philosopher-king and whether or not there is an active role for the citizen. Although Alfarabi never explicitly states how his citizen should function within a political or social context, this paper seeks to draw from different claims made within his works to provide an interpretation of the role of Alfarabi's citizen.

Background

Abu Nasr Muhammad Al-Farabi, often referred to as simply Alfarabi, lived from about 870 A.D. to 950 A.D. He spent most of his life in the Arab capital of Baghdad. Not much is known about Alfarabi's private life. He was born of Turkish descent in the Farab (now Otrar) district of Turkestan (Galston 12). Alfarabi was generally known as the "second master" amongst his peers, Aristotle being the first. He was known as a logician, physicist, metaphysician, musician, and an astronomer. However, his most notable achievements came when he began his comprehensive commentaries on both Plato and Aristotle. Many Muslims and even Jewish and Christian philosophers turned to Alfarabi for a fuller understanding of the controversial, intricate, and troublesome questions of philosophy (Galston 21). He strove to

“naturalize the philosophical learning of the Christians with the Islam. Combining Aristotelian cosmology and psychology with Neoplatonic metaphysics and a curious political Platonism, he made a unique contribution of political thought of Islam” (Zimmerman ix). Alfarabi created a recognizable school of intellect that was pursued and developed by many other philosophers (Netton, Al-Farabi, 3-4).

Alfarabi strived to promote political order against a background of instability and change. In the Muslim world, the leader of government was known as the Caliph, and his ruling dynasty as the Caliphate. The Caliph’s function was to represent the unity of Muslim beliefs within a political framework. Two competing regimes ruled the Muslim world which consisted of Iraq, Iran and Syria, in the ninth and tenth centuries: the Umayyads and the Abbassids. The Umayyad Dynasty, the ruling bloodline in Damascus, was ousted by the Abbassid Dynasty which resided in Baghdad. However, Abd Al-Rahman, of the Umayyads, was able to flee Damascus for Spain in an attempt to restart his reign. He established the “Umayyad Amirate of Cordoba” which became the Caliphate in Spain (Kennedy 44-48). Back in Baghdad, where Alfarabi lived, the Abassid Dynasty began to attempt to fix the economy and political failures of the past Umayyad regime. It is often said that the collapse of the rural economy of Iraq caused the long term fall of the Umayyad Caliphate. The long years of civil war in Iraq, the Umayyad’s most fertile and productive region, had seen bands of unemployed soldiers roam and pillage the countryside. Various competing groups of soldiers began to flood the land by breaching the irrigation canals in order to prevent their opponents from gaining a military advantage. This instability continued into the period of Abbassid administration of Iraq. “The decay of the once flourishing lands of Iraq was typified by an incident in 935 when a military adventurer called Ibn

Ra'iq, hoping to gain a temporary military advantage over a rival, breached the great Nahrawan canal which irrigated the flourishing towns and villages...The canal was never reconstructed and the settlements rapidly became what they have been ever since: dust blown ruins in a desolate landscape” (Choueiri 63). After this period of fighting, there were five different Caliphs in power in just nine years. This period of instability occurred right around the time that Alfarabi began his political writings (Choueri 63-65).

By the middle of the tenth century, the effective political and military power of the Caliphate had been greatly reduced. Military commanders gained significant control, becoming sultans, which means authority or power. “The Abbasid caliphs continued to reside in Baghdad and provided formal recognition to sultans” (Wuthnow 343). Alfarabi’s philosophical writings occurred during this period of cooperation between the military commanders and the Caliph.

Alfarabi lived in an era in which various factions had power during the tenth century in Baghdad and other Islam cities. Supreme power was vested in the Caliph. Below him, several judges had varying ranks and were assigned to decide trials and even advise the Caliph in economic matters. “Provincial governors, army commanders, masters of treasury, market-inspectors, and even officials in charge of the water supply all possessed powers of jurisdiction” (Coulson 120). All of these individuals made up the ruling class directly below the Caliph and directly below them the police (shurta) provided much of the authority in the investigation of crimes and arrest (Coulson 120-122).

The Caliph was responsible for picking the best individuals for office. According to the historian Ibn Taimiyya, “It is the duty of the man in office to look for the best of Muslims when he delegates the subordinate offices under him: to his viceroys in the provinces and to

representatives in the administration and the courts of justice, to the commanders of the armies, high and low officers, to the exchequers comprising the vizirs (associates and helpers), to scribes, to accountants and to the collectors of taxes and tithe... None should be invested with an office on the pretext that he had made an early application or that he thinks of himself as fit for it. On the contrary, such people should be excluded from all investiture” (Farrukh 15). The Caliph was to choose his assembly based upon their personal attributes and not their expressed loyalty or desire for a particular position. Assuming this held true, the Caliph picked the best citizens to become his ruling class, judges, police, and commanders.

The Abbasids were able to achieve a permanent political connection between the “kādī”, or judges, and the “sharī’a”, or religion. This was the first time a specified attempt was made to define the judge’s role as one adhering to and reasoning from Muslim religious beliefs. Judges began to justify, officially, their conclusions based on precedent set forth in the Qur’an. This had been established under Umayyad rule prior to the Abbasid rule of the tenth century as well; however, The Abbasid Caliphate instituted “a fixed rule that the kādī had to be a specialist in the sharī’a” (Schacht 50). Furthermore, the judges were no longer appointed by the leader but were appointed by the central government. Once appointed, the Judge was intended to be able to act without interference from the government; however, this independence was purely theoretical. “With its increasing despotism, the temporal power became more and more unwilling to tolerate the existence of any truly independent institution; the kādīs were not only subject to dismissal at the whim of the central government, but had to depend on the political authorities for the execution of their judgments” (Schacht 50). Because of their lack of power, the judges submitted to the ruling of the Al-Muqtadir, the Caliph, in Baghdad. Alfarabi’s Caliph for the

majority of his lifetime was Al-Muqtadir from 908-932 (Kennedy 235). “The Abbasid rulers maintained a firm grip, and the courts never attained that position of supreme judicial authority independent of political control” (Coulson 121). The Caliph presided over the ruling class directly below his status and had the power to control all of the outcomes in the courts.

Eventually the king transferred the administration of justice to the police. Some kādīs still maintained a significant amount of power, especially those appointed to privileged positions by the Caliph. The chief kādī advised the Caliph on the appointment of other judges and made recommendations concerning financial policy.

The Abbasids also set up a Court of Complaints where citizens could bring forth grievances against the kādīs. When citizens thought they were wronged by the government or its officials, they could bring forth a lawsuit. The Caliph was also given the ability to decide on these judgments. Ultimately, the Caliph was able to influence the entire judicial process by compelling the kādī to judge in a certain way or by overruling their judgment altogether. The Caliph however was to make judgments based solely on divine law: The Caliph had “not the right to legislate but only to make administrative regulations within the limits laid down by the sacred Law” (Schacht 50-58).

Alfarabi produced his philosophical works in an era in which the Abbasid Dynasty was beginning to form. Amidst a transition from the Umayyad Caliphate to the Abbasid Caliphate, much of the political structure, such as rank, was adopted and carried over. However, the Abbasids were the first to establish an official relationship between its ruling class and the divine in the form of their role of judges. Judges ruled based upon religious principles. The Abbasids sought to enforce religion by having their jurists cite the Qur’an and religious principles in their

judgments. We can understand Alfarabi in this context as seeking to define the religious connection between the divine, the ruler, ruling class, and citizens. Alfarabi did this in large part through his commentaries on Plato and Aristotle. We will turn to Plato first.

Plato's Influence on Alfarabi

Prior to Alfarabi, much of the Islamic world looked upon the works of philosophical thinkers as futile because of their inability to relate these ancient works to the most fundamental Islamic principles. Moreover, the Umayyad and Abassid emphasis on the religious connection with the ruler added to the distasteful response towards philosophical thinkers who traditionally, did not make that connection. However, Alfarabi became the first respected philosopher because of his ability to draw on the philosophical ideas of his predecessors and connect them to the important Muslim religious doctrine. He drew on Plato's philosophy of how to set up a political community and placed it within an Islamic context. In order to understand how Alfarabi ultimately defines his citizen, we should first explore how Alfarabi uses Platonism to set up the structure of his ideal society.

Plato believes that the citizen does not have an active role in politics. The role of the individual can be divided into three certain classes within the community. The Guardians, or gold class, possess wisdom, "The quality of good judgment" (The Republic, 428b) exercised by the most knowledgeable. While the Guardians rule by reason, the Auxiliaries, or silver class, exercise spirit under the rule of reason by the Guardians. They possess courage, which is a learned and intrinsic awareness of what to fear. The largest class of workers, or bronze class, has self-discipline and control over certain desires. They agree to have their appetites ruled by

reason and spirit. Similarly in Alfarabi's Perfect State, he sets out the rank and order of each of the classes: Each citizen must "guide and imitate [the superiors] according to their capacity, choosing to aim precisely on the strength of its established rank in the universe" (Alfarabi, On The Perfect State, 239). However despite the fact that the citizens strive to mirror the actions of their superiors, they are confined to their natural rank with little or no opportunity for advancement. "The excellent city ought to be arranged in the same way, all its parts ought to imitate their actions the aim of their first ruler according to their rank" (Alfarabi, On The Perfect State, 239). Alfarabi's words clearly imply that although each citizen should strive to imitate those above them, they are restricted to their natural class with no opportunity for advancement to another class.

Scholars recognize the similarities between the works of Alfarabi and Plato. Leo Strauss, for example, states that "there are a number of striking resemblances between many of the fundamental features of Islam and the good regime envisaged by classical political philosophy in general, and by Plato in particular" (207). Both Alfarabi's On The Perfect State and Plato's The Republic begin with a God as the ultimate cause of legislation and claim that the citizen must understand the essential beliefs of the divine in order to be able to contribute to a good political regime. In both, the rulers must attempt to make accessible to the citizenry the fundamental truths about the divine. Also, both claim that its citizens must be conducive to virtuous action in their journey to attain ultimate happiness. "Both consider the functions of the founder and legislator, and after him his successors in the leadership of the community, of absolutely central importance for its organization and preservation" (Strauss 207). The preservation of order was extremely important for Alfarabi, as it was for Plato.

Strauss believes that Alfarabi draws upon Plato to organize the “citizens hierarchically so that each class can attain the perfection of which it is capable and yet serve the class above it” (Strauss 208). Strauss points out the similarities between Plato and Alfarabi to determine that the citizen is ruled by the classes that are superior to him. “The supreme ruler teaches the few in his capacity as philosopher, and he presents similitude’s and prescribes rewards and punishments for the many in his capacity as prophet. These should be accepted by the citizens, as true, fixed, and permanent; that is, the citizens should expect definite rewards and punishments for belief and unbelief, and for obedience and disobedience” (Strauss 209). Strauss believes that the role of Alfarabi’s citizen is to accept a subordinate status to those with more knowledge and to obey those with control over them.

Walzer concurs with Strauss’ assessment: “Alfarabi seems to be convinced that the ordinary man is born to be dependent on his superiors and is simply the product of the reigning political life” (Walzer 468). The best state for Alfarabi is one that is comprised of true justice, proportionate equality, and a body of citizens who are willing to fulfill the tasks naturally endowed to them. The citizen is asked to execute duties which they are born to do with no opportunity for advancement or profession in politics.

Alfarabi’s people have predefined roles, roles defined by God. If they are born to be a ruler they will have that opportunity; however, if they are born to some other profession they will have no opportunity to be actively engaged in politics. According to Fakhry, “the First (the philosophical elite) is far from being accessible to human reason” (Fakhry Al-Farabi, 122). Alfarabi believes that no man can reason himself into the role of the ruler. His ascension to ruler must be one of destiny: “Men are destined both by nature and by habit to either be rulers or be

ruled” (Fakhry, Al-Farabi, 128). Alfarabi’s distinction amongst classes is taken directly from Plato’s concept of three separate classes: the gold, the silver, and the bronze. The rulers, or gold class, have supreme knowledge and are the only type of individual suited for governance: “The man in whom these conditions are fulfilled is worthy of the office of chief ruler, since he is better than anyone else” (Fakhry Al-Farabi, 103). The rulers are born to rule and are given that ability by the divine. This means that no other citizen can achieve this level because he is naturally less well-off.

If the citizen has no opportunity for advancement, can he achieve happiness? After all, happiness for Plato and Alfarabi lies in the fulfillment of one’s natural compatibilities to reason. Can the citizen achieve this in an environment where his reason may be hindered at the expense of the ruler? According to Galston, “The harsh fact is that happiness is in principle outside the grasp of virtually all men except for a philosophic elite” (Galston 7). Galston asserts that the best happiness can only be attained by those in power. Although they are supposed to seek the best good for the citizenry, the citizens succumb to their beliefs of the ideal state. “The question of the character of the citizens’ excellence may thus be complicated by the circumstance that only those highest in authority actually pursue the ultimate goal of the city of excellence” (Galston 165). Although each individual is working towards achieving the best city-state, the happiness of the citizen may be compromised by the elite if they so choose. Alfarabi sets up a strict sense of order within his ideal state just like his predecessor, Plato.

Aristotle's influence on Alfarabi

While there is extensive evidence and scholarship confirming Plato's influence on Alfarabi, there is significantly less discussion of Aristotle's effect on Alfarabi. Although Alfarabi clearly sets up a Platonic society with strict order amongst the classes, he also hints at an acknowledgement of Aristotle. When attempting to define Alfarabi's citizen and the citizen's activities, Aristotle's concept of the citizen and the citizen's ability to deliberate seem to be important for Alfarabi.

Aristotle raises the question "Who is a citizen?" (Aristotle, Politics III: i, 168). Aristotle defines his citizen in terms of his eligibility for office of the state: "what effectively distinguishes the citizen proper from others is his participation in giving judgment and in holding office" (Aristotle, Politics III: i, 169). By "office" Aristotle is not just referring to kings, leaders, and chief political and judicial posts in the state, but also other official posts including juries, tax collectors, etc. Aristotle's citizen is eligible for membership of assemblies and juries. His definition of the citizen states that "as soon as a man becomes entitled to participate in office, deliberative or judicial, we deem him to be a citizen of that state; and a number of such persons large enough to secure a self-sufficient life we may, by and large, call a state" (Aristotle, Politics III: i, 171). Therefore, while specific details of political regimes may vary from state to state, the term citizenship is valid for all forms of governance so long as the government permits some form of participation and entitlement. As we will see, Alfarabi also believes in the importance of citizen engagement, but not to the extent of Aristotle.

There is controversy amongst scholars about the role of Aristotle in Alfarabi's writings. Alfarabi's works, as Strauss suggests, aim toward presenting ideas in a way that are "couched in

terms understandable to the citizens” (Strauss 208). According to Strauss, “The virtuous regime can be defined as the regime in which men come together and cooperate with the aim of becoming virtuous, performing noble activities, and attaining happiness. It is distinguished by... the concerted effort of the rulers and the citizens to teach and learn these things, and to develop the virtuous forms or states of character from which merge the noble activities useful for achieving happiness” (Strauss 208). Although Strauss most certainly argues that Alfarabi draws upon Plato, even he points out language that resembles ideas of Aristotle as well. It is important to note, however, that there is “considerable controversy over his [Strauss] views on this topic, and that the Straussian interpretations of Muhsin Madhi, generally recognized as the world’s premier Farabi scholar, have not gone unchallenged” (Rowson 339). The root of the controversy stems from competing interpretations of how Alfarabi organizes his society, and whether he adheres to a strict order or allows his citizen to participate in politics.

Mahdi believes that Alfarabi focuses more on the attainment of the highest happiness rather than worldly happiness. “Concern with...citizens is set aside; knowledge of the things are pursued” by the ruler (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 48). Mahdi believes that Alfarabi does not focus on the citizen. He also states that because the citizens do not know what “theoretical perfection” consists of, they can not participate and offer their opinions in that matter (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 54). However, Mahdi concludes that the citizen must actively participate in affairs that do not pertain to religion. “Nevertheless, all the citizens of the virtuous regime must have some common notions about the world, man and political life” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 129). Mahdi concludes that if the ruler does not strive to make the best decisions for its citizens, then the citizen must be able to recognize this and overthrow the ruler and find a replacement.

Furthermore, Galston concludes that the “happy” citizen does have an active role in politics. “The happiness a citizen attains will be a function of the perfection he acquires through political activities and it is consistent with the description of political life and happiness provided by the political achievements that are not a part of philosophy” (Galston 169). What are these political activities and achievements? What does Alfarabi envision for his citizen? Alfarabi envisions a more active role for his citizen than many scholars give him credit for. Alfarabi does this through two features: his definition of *the citizen* and his concept of *deliberation*.

The Citizen and Deliberation in Alfarabi

Alfarabi never devotes a book or an essay to explain the role of his citizen. Some suggest that he does this because he does not want to explicitly tell the public that they have a limited role in society. Others suggest that Alfarabi may not want the ruler to know that the citizen actually does achieve some power and ability to check the ruling class and hold them accountable. Whatever the case may be, to understand his notions of the citizen, we need to look at two related concepts. First, we must examine the citizen himself and his role within the political framework. We will see that the citizen retains some Aristotelian aspects; however, it ultimately takes on a more Platonic form in nature. Secondly, we must explore how Alfarabi utilizes the important Aristotelian concept of deliberation for his citizen. I will argue that this aspect of deliberation takes on an Aristotelian form and ultimately that Alfarabi’s concept of the citizen draws upon the elements of both Plato and Aristotle, despite the fact that most scholars assert that he creates a strictly Platonic citizen.

The Citizen

Following Plato in The Republic, Alfarabi explains the most important principle of democracy to be its freedom. Mahdi explains that of the six regimes of types of governance, including tyranny and oligarchy, the regime of democracy “occup(ies) the privileged position of supplying the most solid and the best starting point for the establishment of the virtuous regime and for the rule of the virtuous human beings” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 144). A democracy promotes the concept of “rule by the people.” Although Alfarabi never promotes the concept of a democratic government, he praises democracy for its ability to promote rule by the people. He also calls a democracy a “free” regime. “Freedom means the ability of everyone to pursue anything he desires and to be left alone to do anything he chooses in the pursuit of his desires” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 145). Alfarabi enjoys this concept because he believes his citizen should be able to equally engage in whatever they may choose. He believes this because “the actions that are determined and directed toward happiness strengthen the part of the soul that is naturally equipped for happiness, and actualize and perfect it- to the extent that the power resulting from the perfection is achieved... through political activities (Alfarabi, On Political Science, Jurisprudence and Theology, 38). Alfarabi upholds that the citizen does have consent to participate in political activities, even if in a limited role, because the citizen must strive for happiness by utilizing his ability to reason. The foundation of “rule by the people” and equal engagement are the two principles that define the basis of Alfarabi’s authoritative powers: “Authority is justified only on the basis of the preservation and promotion of freedom and equality” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 145). Alfarabi faults democracy, however, for allowing the rulers to become instruments of the people. The ruler therefore rules only at the will of the citizens. “A

close investigation of the democratic regime shows that, ultimately, there are really no rulers and ruled; there is one supreme will, which is that of the citizens, and the rulers are instruments serving the desires and wishes of the citizens” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 146). Alfarabi maintains that the rulers should be able to maintain power and not be forced to succumb to wavering political ideas of the citizenry.

Alfarabi, like Plato, defines in great detail his model of classes. The ruler-prophet is perfect, necessary, self-sufficient, eternal, uncaused, and is “not susceptible of being defined” (Fakhry, History, 121). He has divine attributes and possesses unity, wisdom, and supreme knowledge, enabling him to establish a direct connection with the divine. The ruler is equipped to rule because he has a direct connection with the divine. According to Alfarabi, “not every man is equipped by natural disposition to receive the first intelligibles [the Divine’s principles], because individual human beings are made by nature with unequal powers and different preparations” (Alfarabi, On Political Science, Jurisprudence and Theology, 35). Some men have a natural deficiency preventing them from being able to receive the wisdom from the divine and communicate with the prophet. The ruler does however have this connection and is therefore more fit to rule because they can learn the divine’s intentions. As discussed in the section *Plato’s Influence on Alfarabi*, Alfarabi clearly explains how the ruler-prophet becomes the ruler-philosopher in his ideal political society. However the question remains, what is the role of the citizen in Alfarabi’s ideal society?

Alfarabi clearly states the citizens are entitled to a subordinate status as compared to the ruling class. “The virtuous city is then compared by Alfarabi to a sound body, whose organs cooperate in ensuring the health of the animal, as well as its survival. Like the body, whose

organs differ in rank or function, the parts of the city differ in rank and function too” (Mahdi, Essays, 102). The role of the citizen is to support and provide for the rulers like a vein supports and provides for the heart. Alfarabi, in Attaining Happiness, maintains that “Philosophy is for the lawgiver (ruler) what habit (hexis) is for the masses; what in his knowledge is certain insight, is with them persuasion and imagination” (Rosenthal 44). While the ruler is concerned with philosophy, the citizens must exercise habit and succumb to the philosophy of the ruler. Citizens obtain jobs as farmers, bricklayers, innkeepers, scribes, bookbinders, grain merchants, and other typical professions to earn a living and support the community as a whole. Their professions serve not only to generate an income for themselves, but to provide goods and services for the entire city, effectively facilitating the attainment of happiness for all.

In a political context, the citizen does not have an effective means of participation. “The supreme ruler is the source of all power and knowledge in the regime, and it is through him that the citizens learn what they ought to know and to do” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 133). Citizens cannot vote nor stand against the laws and ideas of the philosopher king. Alfarabi believes that his citizen must have a profound trust in their rulers. “As God or the First Cause of the world directs everything else, and as everything else is directed toward Him, the case ought to be the same in the virtuous city; in an orderly fashion, all of its parts ought to follow in their activities in the footsteps of the purpose of its supreme ruler” (Alfarabi, On The Perfect State, 57.1-3). He possesses unlimited powers and cannot be subjected to any human being or political regime or laws” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 133). Alfarabi believes that the prophet-king has an established connection within the Gods and because of this connection, he is able to foresee concepts that the common man cannot perceive. Therefore, it is impossible to doubt his intellect or his command

because the citizenry has inferior knowledge and wisdom on which to base their disapproval. The prophet-king “has the power to confirm or abrogate previous divine laws, to enact new ones, and to change a law he had legislated at one time for another if he deems it better to do so” (Political Regime 80.16). He alone has the power to order the classes of people in the regime and assign to them their ranks (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 133).

Alfarabi envisions a society in which the ruler has both supreme power and supreme knowledge. The citizen is constrained by his lack of wisdom, therefore preventing him from participation in politics. The entire class of citizens must assume that the rulers are acting in the best interest of allowing the citizenry to attain the ultimate happiness. Citizens must “accept and preserve that which he entrusts them” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 133). Alfarabi’s citizen cannot have a political function because of their inherent lack of knowledge. Only those with a direct connection with the divine are capable of political participation.

As far as the character of the citizen is concerned, Alfarabi expects his citizen to live a life of temperance. “A chief characteristic of a virtuous person is moderation, defined as the ability to determine ‘the time the place, the agent, the patient, the origin and the instrument of the action as well as the reason for which the action is done’. Virtuous actions are so regarded because of their moderate quality. They include: 1) courage, which is the mean between cowardice and foolhardiness; 2) generosity, which is a mean between ‘squandering wealth’ which is an excess, and niggardliness which is a defect; 3) temperance, which is a mean between excessive pleasure-seeking and defective moral torpor; and 4) good cheer, which is a mean between the excess of playfulness and the defect of boorishness or insensitivity” (Fakhry, Al-Farabi, 94). Alfarabi’s citizen is to live a life of commonality. As far as Alfarabi is concerned,

each citizen can go about his daily routine without ever becoming actively engaged in the political realm. In other words, the citizen is not to question the norms of society; rather, he is expected to simply go about his daily business and live a life of moderation. The citizen is never to act against society or act to try to shape society. They are simply a conduit through which the city as a whole can obtain happiness and must effectively serve that purpose. Alfarabi assigns these virtues to the citizen; whereas he outlines different virtues for the ruling class including: wisdom, practical reason, reflection, acumen, cunning, and duplicity. These virtues are far more complicated and presume a greater intellectual ability in the ruling class. In the fifth chapter of On Political Science, Jurisprudence and Theology, Alfarabi says that “Political science inquires into the [various] kinds of actions, and conscious volitional ways of life, and into the habits and natural dispositions which produce these actions and ways of life” (Alfarabi, On Political Science, Jurisprudence and Theology, 119). Political science does not simply seek to rule the citizenry, but seeks to find the best way to promote happiness with the citizenry. Alfarabi maintains that true happiness is most easily achieved when there is an “orderly co-operation between citizens and authority” (Rosenthal 119). This connection facilitates the attainment of happiness. Alfarabi shows that his citizen must have an active role in pursuing happiness and that the ruling class must allow for the citizen to actively use his faculties to reason.

Alfarabi further defines his citizen by explaining the non-ideal citizen. He points out several qualities of the citizen that are opposed to a good city. Alfarabi disapproves of societies in which men seek personal advantage. This occurs in cities that grant their citizenry too many freedoms. “The truly freemen, by contrast, are those, who in seeking the good or avoiding the bad, will not attach any importance to the pleasure or pain attendant on the choice; but will

choose an action for its own sake” (Mahdi, Essays, 98). This principle establishes that men will naturally work towards personal interests if they are given the chance. Therefore, Alfarabi is justified in his limited role for the citizen within his society. Because they do not have supreme knowledge, their actions only lead them toward personal gain and not towards the attainment of happiness for the society as a whole.

In addition, the citizen that Alfarabi does not seek to promote is defined as one who “imagines happiness and the first principles, but is not able to apprehend them, owing to their limited intelligence, and thus will never attain the rank of apprehending truth. As a result they tend to suspect those who have attained that rank of being liars prompted by the desire for honor or conquest, or are simply moved by arrogance or self conceit” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 112). Alfarabi discusses this negative quality because he wants to show the consequences of disobeying the ruling class. Citizens must have a high level of trust in their rulers. Because they are subordinate, the citizen must rely on the knowledge of others to guide them towards achieving happiness: “the citizens of cities and nations ought to be instructed...” (Alfarabi, The Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, 66). Citizens do not have personal qualities or abilities that can give them the ability to judge the ruling class, they must simply learn from the ruling class. Therefore, they must accept the rule of others without question.

Alfarabi cannot achieve his ideal citizen in a democratic system. He explains how the citizen is an undesirable citizen in a democratic city. “Freedom in this city eventually generates a variety of perverse traits, pursuits and desires, leading ultimately to widespread division and chaos” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 110). Freedom is the downfall to Alfarabi’s political system. He asserts that granting the citizen freedoms will cause the ruler to “continue to be subject to the

will of the public” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 110). Additionally, Alfarabi believes that “the ruler is either their [the citizens] equal or their inferior” (Alfarabi The Political Regime, 50). The ruler is their equal when he provides the citizens with good things to keep them happy and satisfy their want and desire. The ruler is their inferior when he does not act in accordance to the citizen’s wishes because they can dispose of him instantly. In order to achieve happiness, the ruler is to answer to one and only one body, the divine. Furthermore, Alfarabi describes that there is an explicit rank in his idea system: “The ranks and order among the citizens of the city, as regards ruling and serving, vary in excellence according to their natural dispositions and according to the habits of character they have formed” (Alfarabi, On Political Science, Jurisprudence and Theology, 39). Alfarabi maintains that although there is some opportunity to enhance one’s own rank through virtuous reasoning and actions, the citizen will always have a “subordinate status” as compared to that of the ruler (Alfarabi, On Political Science, Jurisprudence and Theology, 39). In a democratic city where the ruler must appease the people to maintain power, he may be forced to compromise the interests of the divine in order to keep his popular support. This will not allow the city to attain ultimate happiness because it is the divine and the divine only who understand how they citizens can achieve their happiness. Therefore, Alfarabi contends that a democratic city is not the ideal city-state.

With regard to education, Alfarabi does allow for learning and the promotion of knowledge. However, Alfarabi’s idea of education is a specialized one, only seeking to instill values that will endorse his political system. “These classes or ranks must be ordered by the ruler, who should also organize the education of the citizens, assign them to specialized duties, give their laws, and command them in war. He is to seek, by persuasion, and compulsion, to

develop in everyone the virtues of which he is capable and to order the citizens hierarchically so that each class can attain the perfection of which it is capable and yet serve the class above it” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 116). By inculcating values that will lead citizens to lives of “moderation,” Alfarabi establishes the most fundamental requirement for his regime: the obedient citizen. Alfarabi’s system relies on a trusting citizenry who will accept the wisdom of the ruling class despite the fact that it may at times counter their personal desires.

The citizen is not simply a pawn of the ruling class. Alfarabi tries to explain that the citizen has a substantial input in governance. He claims that the citizen has an important rational faculty that can be utilized to achieve happiness. The citizen’s reasoning can challenge the ruler’s reasoning, to ensure that “the virtuous city is governed through reason and its citizens aspire to the happiness that comes from an intellectual development which, at its highest and best, culminates in the serene contemplation of the truths of the Active Intelligence” (Collinson 30). The citizen is responsible for trying to achieve happiness for both himself and his fellow citizenry. The citizen must investigate virtues and good deeds and distinguish them from obstacles such as vices and evil deeds. He must collect “knowledge of the nature of these things, their modes and relationships with each other until he gains a rational understanding of their working. This is political science; it is the science of the things through which every citizen attains, by political association, the happiness to which his natural disposition conditions him” (Rosenthal 121). It is in this political association that the citizen must share his knowledge and opinions. Alfarabi believes that the best way to do this is through reasoning and intellectual development that occurs through the process of deliberation. As we will see, deliberation is a key concept for Alfarabi’s citizen.

Deliberation

Although the discussion thus far would seem to support the view that Alfarabi's politics draws almost exclusively on Plato, Alfarabi's discussion of deliberation makes Aristotle's influence more prominent. The most important aspect of citizenship for Aristotle is deliberation. Aristotle believes that deliberation is fundamental for a society to function. The process of deliberation is one that presupposes an end and seeks to find a means to attain this end by working backwards from the desired result to the current instance. Man then discusses the various means of attaining the end and decides which is most desirable. Aristotle believes that "we deliberate about things that are in our power and can be realized in action" (N.E., 3.3). Effective deliberation can only occur when the people have the power to evoke change. Alfarabi confirms that Aristotle believes that deliberation is an important concept in society. In Alfarabi's translation, Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, he argues that because man is a rational being, he naturally wishes to discuss and reflect about his personal purpose and the goals of society as a whole. Alfarabi defines deliberation as being the "mental process involved in all reflection on the means to promote specific ends. Alfarabi evaluates deliberation along two dimensions, the effectiveness of the means it discovers in realizing the end sought after and the value of the end it seeks" (Galston 77). Simply put, Alfarabi holds that deliberation is assessed by the means in which it occurs and the result it establishes. Aristotle's citizen is able to deliberate about politics and become actively engaged in decision making. Alfarabi's citizen, though, does not appear to have much of an opportunity or voice to evoke change in politics. Most critics, in fact, believe that Alfarabi does not create an open environment for citizen participation and deliberation: the ruling class' principles "should be accepted by the citizens, as true, fixed, and permanent; that is,

the citizens should expect definite rewards and punishments for belief and unbelief, and for obedience and disobedience” (Strauss 209). Strauss asserts that the citizen has no opportunity to disagree with the ruling class and implies that deliberation is non-existent. Nevertheless, as we will see, Alfarabi does ultimately assert that deliberation is an important tool for his citizen.

This deliberation is not unrestrained. Most importantly for Alfarabi, citizens do not have the fundamental knowledge that the rulers possess: “Consequently, he (man) hesitates about many of his needs and does not act upon them until he considers, thinks, investigates, and deliberates. Usually he attempts to obtain this knowledge from others: he asks and consults with them about what he does not think he can infer and discover fully by himself” (Mahdi, Alfarabi, 74). Alfarabi contends that man must rely on the philosopher-king in order to obtain the knowledge necessary to deliberate because the citizen is not naturally inclined to be given such knowledge from the divine. Man can learn and through consideration, deliberation, and reason he can gain a greater understanding. Alfarabi explains that the political deliberative virtue “enables one to excel in the discovery of what is most useful for a virtuous end” (Alfarabi, On Political Science, Jurisprudence and Theology, 64). This deliberative virtue allows the citizen to find an effective means to achieve a desired end. However, in times when he is perplexed or unable to reach a reasonable conclusion, he must call upon the superior ruling class to give him guidance.

The ruling class communicates directly with God to determine which principles will allow the society to reach their ultimate happiness. The ruler-king “knows the end of human deliberation, moral acts, and practical arts, and this knowledge enables him to distinguish those of them that serve man’s perfection from the ones that do not, or that obstruct man’s perfection”

(Alfarabi, On Political Science, Jurisprudence and Theology, 180). The ruler therefore is expected to step in and guide the people when their own decision making is either clouded or misguided. Furthermore, Alfarabi states that “it is incumbent on the individual man to meditate on the states of his soul in these conflicts and to follow the discerning power, and on the people of the city altogether, if they are unable to discern by themselves, to accept the truth from their legislators and from those who follow in their path and those who state the truth about them and the good and virtuous” (Alfarabi, On the Perfect State, 17). Alfarabi sets out that each class is dependent upon the class above it. Aristotle also states that “When great issues are at stake, we distrust our own abilities as insufficient to decide the matter and call in others to join us in our deliberations” (Aristotle, N.E., 3.3). Alfarabi asserts that the lower class is entitled to deliberate about their future and to make rules and goals for themselves; however, the ruling class is expected to oversee the development of the lower class and to step in and guide when necessary.

Some critics argue that the citizen should never need assistance from the ruler: “It would seem that the reasonable individuals do not need guidance by the legislator (11, 5-17)” (Walzer, 341). However, Alfarabi responds that the average citizen does not have sufficient knowledge to always make proper conclusions. According to Alfarabi, “a person deliberating about the means to achieve a particular goal ordinarily relies upon generally accepted opinions held by people at large or upon premises the person recognizes as a result of his own experience or observations” (Galston 79). Because the average citizen cannot have a personal experience with the divine, they do not have that premise upon which to base their arguments.

However, despite the fact that Alfarabi’s citizen cannot communicate effectively with the divine, he still deserves the right to deliberate about politics. Alfarabi suggests that men should

have the opportunity to deliberate about “the essential properties and causes of justice as such, as opposed to a specific kind of justice; human happiness, understood in terms of the nature of the rational animal and not in terms of a particular group of people or specific individuals; the organization and operation of political communities as such, without reference to particular governments; and moral virtue as a state of soul acquired through practices or education...” (Galston 78). Deliberation does not limit the citizen to simple social issues but permits man to consider issues of justice and organization of government.

Alfarabi permits the Aristotelian concept of deliberation in his society because he believes that it is the nature of man to want to deliberate: “It is in the nature of all men to form universal judgments on the basis of a number of particular observations” (Alfarabi, Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretations, 321). To deny man his natural inclinations would be damaging to society. Additionally, Alfarabi maintains that deliberation by citizens creates a healthy society: “It is reason, he (Alfarabi) maintains, that is the means to the highest happiness and its exercise is required in every aspect of community and individual life” (Alfarabi, Fifty Eastern Thinkers, 29). Alfarabi promotes reason because he believes that ability to reason, whether it be deliberating, communicating, or thinking, is the best means to attain happiness. “The virtuous city is governed through reason and its citizens aspire to the happiness that comes from an intellectual development which, at its highest and best, culminates in the serene contemplation of the truths of the Active Intelligence” (Alfarabi, Fifty Eastern Thinkers, 30). Clearly, Alfarabi envisions a society in which man can gather, discuss what is best for society, and determine how to best reach society’s goals. Alfarabi does not want to restrict

deliberation not only because man is naturally inclined to deliberate, but because he believes that deliberation is necessary for a healthy society.

Deliberation serves as a check on the ruling class as well. Although the citizen naturally does not have the opportunity for political advancement, it appears as though Alfarabi grants him the power of deliberation as a sort of check on government. Alfarabi explicitly states that, “those who are engaged in the acquisition of knowledge... must be capable of discovering implicit premises used by those with whom discussions are held. Alfarabi gives this condition so as to make sure that the possessors of certain knowledge are well versed in the logical arts, dialectic, and rhetoric” (Haddad 100). Alfarabi establishes deliberation as a means for checking the rulers. If the citizen can deliberate and “out-deliberate” a philosopher than that philosopher does not truly have the knowledge necessary nor the knowledge acquired from God that is needed to be a legitimate philosopher. Although this would be an extremely difficult feat, as the citizen must assume that any of the philosopher’s ideas from the divine are true, the citizen has a check on the political regime.

Alfarabi never openly declares that deliberation is a citizen “power” but surely believes that deliberation is necessary to assess the actions of the ruling class so as to ensure that the society as a whole is moving towards reaching its ultimate happiness. He clearly follows Aristotle’s precedent and allows his citizen to have the power to evoke change. Although his citizen does not have the ability to advance politically, he has the ability to check the power of the ruling class. Deliberation appears to be the only means through which the citizen can participate in politics; however, it is essential for citizens to deliberate about the good of the society in order to keep the ruling class in check.

Conclusion

Scholars have been varied in their assessment of Alfarabi's beliefs. Strauss believed that Alfarabi's citizen was to accept everything as "true, fixed, and permanent" with no opportunity to deliberate (Strauss 209). Walzer concluded that Alfarabi's citizen was "born dependent on his superiors and simply the product of the reigning political life" (Walzer 468). Collinson insisted that "Alfarabi transposes his pattern of structure into the political realm, producing a theory of the state that is both hierarchical and authoritarian" (Collinson 29). This breed of thought originates because Alfarabi never explicitly devotes a work to the idea of "the citizen." While there is evidence of a clear structural order within Alfarabi's politics, Alfarabi concludes that the citizen does in fact have role in politics. He shows that the citizen can step outside the boundaries of the strictly ordered society and participate in politics. Alfarabi does this because he asserts that the citizen must have a realm to use his ability to reason. The citizen can use active reasoning to discover his ultimate happiness. The key to finding the role for Alfarabi's citizen lies not just in understanding his close replication of Plato's citizen, but in exploring the subtle nuances of Alfarabi's development of the Aristotelian concept of deliberation. Deliberation, after all, serves a dual purpose. First, it provides a "check" on the ruling Caliphate so that they adhere to Islamic religious principles. Second, it satisfies man's natural urge to reason. It is in man's ability to reason that he finds happiness. Alfarabi repeatedly maintains that "the actions that are determined and directed towards happiness strengthen the part of the soul that is naturally equipped for happiness...It is evident that the kinds of happiness attained by citizens of the city differ in quantity and quality as a result of the difference in the perfections they acquire through political activities" (Alfarabi, On Political Science, Jurisprudence and

Theology, 38). The virtuous reasoning of the citizen can best be developed through political activities. In deliberating, Alfarabi's citizen is able to achieve a greater understanding, and thus, a more effective means of attaining happiness.

What is interesting about Alfarabi is that his true political belief is couched in terms and interpretation of both Plato and Aristotle's works. While many philosophers seek to directly answer fundamental questions about politics, liberty, and justice, Alfarabi never fully explains his vision for the citizen. Alfarabi tried to move Islamic philosophy in a particular direction. He sought to grant the citizen more rights and more of a role in politics. It may seem as though Alfarabi sells out to higher powers by never fully addressing the issue of the citizen; however, we can praise him for the way he revolutionized the concept of the citizen amidst a time where such ideas were out of favor. Alfarabi walked a fine line in attempting to combine aspects of both Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. Yet he was able to create a citizen that was the perfect fit within Islamic religious principles. He draws upon the important concepts of Aristotelian deliberation while placing them within a strictly ordered Platonic society. We can admire Alfarabi for his ability to leave open the role of the citizen.

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