

Revised Version of 'Strauss's Farabi'

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Abstract:

This short inquiry is the abstract of the paper "Strauss's Farabi". It considers a contentious comparison between the Farabi's political view and the Strauss's one. At one part, it shows that how Strauss skillfully diverged from Farabi's path, although common sense has always been emphasized on their homogeneity. At the other part, it shows the other possible interpretation of Farabi's works out of Strauss authority. For this purpose, and because of the wide range of works from both thinkers, I will consider Farabi's "The philosophy of Plato" and Strauss' "Farabi's Plato". These two works are already linked together with a view to the context of this article. It must be discussed and analyze that how and why Strauss took such an interpretation from Farabi's works in the *Farabi's Plato*. And whether he was fair in this respect?

Introduction:

To-day, it is very likely to hear about the "the crisis of modernity" and the fundamental political aspect of it among who are concerns with the modern political thoughts. Also, it is common to consider this issue with respect to "the Ancient Greek Thoughts". It has been admitted that the same attitude was taken, proposed, and cultivated by one of our contemporary thinkers: Leo Strauss. One cannot fully understand of Strauss' "critique of modernity" before one has studied the politics of Farabi.

Indeed, Strauss not only formulate but also assess the notion of the crisis of modernity (Strauss 1959). Yet, his sources were medieval political thinkers, namely Farabi and Maimonides, and from Ancient Greek philosophy, namely Plato and Aristotle.

That make us wonder why he had an eye on the modern days, yet he returned to these traditional thinkers? To begin with, one must be familiar with Farabi's works as well as Aristotle's and Plato's political theories. What can catch our eye, initially, is that they all were party concern with the theory of the state. For them, a state consists of a long list of components, and most importantly to comprehend them we need the interdisciplinary knowledge of theology, philosophy, and politics. This point attracted Strauss. He followed the path which had taken by Maimonides and Farabi. Yet, Farabi was not enough legitimate for him without Plato.

I. Historical Approach

It is obvious that to know the characteristic of the time which each thinker lives in would be a determining factor to understand his or her thought and the way of thinking of him. It is crucial to say that no thinker, particularly no philosopher, can be reduced to his time and condition and be regard as the mere figure of political, social, religion, cultural, economical, situations, but denying these aspects of life as one of the effective element, even the weakness one, is sorely unfaithful to the history itself and to ourselves since we are harming our judgment.

Farabi born and lived in a restricted Islamic world. He witnesses the lack of intellectual and ethical aspects, on the contrary, a whole mighty apparatus of politics. Thinking, criticizing, analyzing for the sake of moral principles were not a popular and favorable practice of the time since all one needs, as they believed, "were sent down to us". The principles were known as the *Sharia'a*. Strauss, on the contrary, lived in the world in which rationality and politics merged together. They were inseparable, where the theology is locked out. So, we have to ask, what Strauss interpreted as the crisis of modernity while he was establishing his theory on the interpretation of Farabi's political works.

II. Political- Theological Approach

State and theology are bound together. The nature of this link is constantly examined in the realm of politics (Schmitt 1932). Farabi was aware of a possible conflict between philosophy and religion and he was the first philosopher who articulates a solution¹ to the crisis of his time who found out the way to the happiness- *eudaimonia*- depends on re-

¹. By solution, I mean reconciliation in the favor of ration and awareness of political society. If we do not consider this element, then we can say that the first philosopher who found this conflict was Mohammad Ibn Zakariya Razi (865-925) known as Rhazes or Rasis

shaping an ethical, theological and political approach together. He, as a political philosopher, was up to save the both worlds: to reach ultimate perfection in both worlds. The crisis of his time was not a moral crisis, in some sense, or the nihilism. The crisis of his time, some may say, is the same of ours. The crisis of "rationality" and "theology", i.e. feebleness of being wise in which the moral significance is lost. To address this crisis, he tried to establish his school on the restoration of the political. Borrowing the unity of metaphysics and psychology from his Greek predecessors, he has open his way toward a new political doctrine. Like Plato and Aristotle, he designed his system of thought according to the cosmological approach. Noble being known as "unmoved mover", "first cause" or better say "the pure *de facto* Intellect" located in the supreme stratum of the universe. The human body as a system had drawn as similar as the universe with the view to the Greek cosmological idea. Whereas as both universe and man combined with "mind and body" or "intellect and form", the sublime and noble place is intellect in both. Thus, Farabi argued that the pure intellect² and the human intellect rule over universe and body respectively (Farabi 1985). With this view, intellect in general, and human intellect and rationality, in particular, take their nobility and credit from the existentialistic approach. This way of thinking reveals the character of Farabi's politics and theology. Like Plato, and also Aristotle, his politics are strongly connected with cosmology, psychology, and metaphysics. And his theology is strongly connected with moral values and rational premises (Seeskin 2005, p.193-194). For instance, *The Virtues City or On Political Governments* contains a strong philosophical approach. Yet, Farabi's work are concerning more with the structure of the state as a political unit. This unit, in Farabi's political thought, consists of the Individuals. He argued that just like body and also the whole universe, the state should be hierarchical, so it naturally has different levels and grades. The assessment of such hierarchical theory of the state, on the one hand, invites us to ask about the notion of power which is based on the politics, and on the other hand, the character of the leader of the state. The aim to ask these inquiries is to pose a final question: how they can help us in the understanding of the crisis of modernity.

III. Strauss' Approach

Although Plato's and Aristotle's works were the main sources of Farabi, he was not a mere imitator of his predecessors. Thus, we must understand his school in two possible ways: First, we shall understand his school through his interpretations. It is important to

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know how he was connected to his Greek predecessors and then we shall understand his school by itself.

Indeed, he was not only a reader but a philosopher who carefully established his political school on the basic and fundamental principles of theology. To do so, he must be familiar with every one of the works which have come down to us as Platonic and Aristotelian works. Farabi, with such a sense of responsibility for nuance survey and investigation, did not write such a topic like “the philosophy of ...” or “...its parts...” without being sure that he has already seen all of the works of that philosopher. Our contemporary scholars may not happily do that. To be realistic, both “*The philosophy of Plato*” and “*The philosophy of Aristotle*” are proofs of our claims (Farabi 1962).³ Just a quick look at “*The Philosophy of Plato*” can reveal the familiarity of the writer to almost every one of Plato's dialogs. Thus, one might ask: what was the first impression of Farabi on Strauss? Our main interest is to know whether the Strauss approach to Farabi is fair? Furthermore, we have to ask whether his intention in addressing what he present as “the crisis of modernity” is genuinely emerged from his philosophical approach?

According to Strauss, and he was right, that Farabi depicted the main goal of Plato's *Republic*, a mature philosophical work which shows that the notion of Happiness-*Eudaimonia*- undoubtedly starts with the political question of "How?" (Strauss, 1945). The insufficiency of accepted ways led Plato, as Farabi said, to investigate the "other way". This "other way", which is the substance of happiness- *eudaimonia*-, is identical or certainly consist of a “certain knowledge (γνώση) or science (επιστήμη)” and a “certain way of life (βίος)”. In this way, for Farabi, the findings of ‘philosophy’ and ‘politics’ are inseparable from the presence of ‘Philosopher’ and ‘king’. While this approach makes the first group related to "that science", the second group is related to "that way of life”. That is where Strauss initially began to establish his idea which manifests itself right at the end of his work, ‘Farabi's Plato’: the impossibility of virtues city and its leads toward the desired way of life (Strauss 1945).

According to Strauss, it is paradoxical since when we consider Farabi's view toward Plato is either essentially political approach or philosophical one (see Strauss 1945). Yet, he was not clearly elaborate on this point. Moreover, we see that Farabi himself attributed to philosophy with a clear intention: that the essential political approach manifests the

³ The full articles are “*The philosophy of Plato, its part, the rank of order of its part from the beginning to the end*” and “*The philosophy of Aristotle, the part of philosophy, the rank of order of its parts, the position from which he started and the one he reached*”

metaphysical and theological principles (Farabi 1962; 1965; 1962). The paradoxical critique of Strauss may be apprehensible when we respect "philosophy" as a science or knowledge completely separated from "the way of life" as a "practical science or wisdom" (Strauss 1945, 15, 23, 32). Strauss believed, or he apparently pretended to, that whenever we are talking about happiness- *eudaimonia*-, we are considering a "desire way of life" (Strauss 1945, 32), in which there is an inherently positivist approach that lacks any definition of "virtues way of life". As the first approach is political, the latter is the philosophical approach, hence the role of "*de facto* philosopher" must be in the consideration. Obviously, Strauss negated, on the one hand, the link between the notions of 'virtue' and 'praxis' –practice, and on the other hand, the link between the notions of 'wisdom' and 'sophisticate theoretical faculty'. These links were the main foundation for the theory of political-theology (Plato *Apology, Crito, Law, Erastia, and Menexenus*; Aristotle *NE, Politics*; Farabi 1981, 1985)

In Farabi's theological approach, it can be seen that the nuance relation between philosophy, politics, and ethics has established a practical link between the philosopher and the ruler, between virtues and knowledge. Yet, the very intention of Strauss in 'Philosophy and Politics' is to deeply separate these inseparable elements by referring to the notion of *eudaimonia* (Strauss 1945). Yet, Farabi clearly emphasized that the question between philosophy and politics is only existential. They may have different methods, yet from the teleological point of view, they are inevitably looking for the same end. This teleological end, in Farabi's view, is that a state reaches an end which is desirable for its own sake: happiness or *eudaimonia* (Farabi 1962, 2001). Strauss, on the contrary, seems to believe that the cosmological approach as the foundation of metaphysics must be objected indirectly to the Farabi's political approach. He argues that a statesman whirls political power based on the "that knowledge". It is, in other words, based on politics as a mere instrument.⁴ This interpretation of Strauss implies that politics is not a good thing; and it is that which is not truly useful (Strauss, 1945). On the contrary, the theological approach of Farabi implies that *homo philosophy* and *homo rex* are in the same position in the virtues state as well as politics and moral foundation are inseparable (Farabi, 1985, ch.8; 1962, 20-25). The question is why Strauss attempt to interpret the philosophy of Farabi in a way that illustrates a natural inequality between philosophy and politics and tried to argue for the insufficiency of both. In other words, he interpreted Farabi's

⁴ The knowledge (γνώση) has the same root with cognition (γνώσις) which depicted the structure of knowing something with the "attempt" of knowing that thing. That is the deliverance of a man from perception to cognition which is related to a mere intellectual realm.

political philosophy by using a restrictive approach to the Plato political teleology. Strauss argued that the political theology which implies the desired way of life leads to an "impossible" end. In contrast, the virtues way of life which implies happiness- *eudaimonia*- as an end is attainable one, but it is not human's ultimate perfection (Strauss, 1945, p.32)

On the contrary to Strauss interpretation, Farabi, as he referred to Plato's *Protagoras*, found that 'that knowledge' is attainable and does 'exist' in the manner that still leads to human's perfection. Based on the linguistical approach, using the words such as "attainment", "investigation", "thinking", we can speculate that the goal, i.e. perfection, is not something imaginary, which as Strauss said at the beginning of 'Farabi's Plato' (1945). In Farabi's through, philosophy is not only a knowledge, which can only affect on the theoretical wisdom, causes flourishing of intellect but also move from knowledge to the basis of the royal art (Farabi 2001) supplied by "that knowledge" to lead the state toward happiness- *eudaimonia*. This is a completely theological, philosophical and political approach. Thus, for Farabi, philosophy comprises the royal art- that is politics- and moral values- that is theology- since it supplies the virtues way of life- that is teleology. On the other hand, the royal art comprises philosophy since it supplies "that knowledge".

Strauss tried to separate politics from philosophy as he believes they aim at the different goal. He also tried to substitute philosophy with a mere theological view. Yet, if philosophy and theology are separated, how we can practice critique on the fundamental notion of 'happiness' in Farabi's political philosophy? This may be a start for the future inquiries.

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