

REVISITING AL-FARABI'S LEGACY

ENGAGING WITH THE CULTURE OF POLITICAL ISLAM

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Abstract

Political Islam as a reaction to onslaught of colonization and aggressive secularization sought to fight a political battle in the name of Islam. How far is this project intellectually sustainable and integrally orthodox or rooted in the Islamic tradition? Its rather depressing record so far at either political or other cultural fronts in achieving the objective of establishing the Ideal or Islamic State with all its cultural vibrancy and widespread apprehensions within the Islamic intellectual elite or Muslim communities as such calls for questioning both the construction of the project of political Islam and its reading of Islamic tradition. One way of clarifying the issue is considering how great thinkers of medieval Islam conceived the political project of Ideal State in Islam and how they encountered the philosophical and theological other in this connection. As it is certain dismissive reading of Modernity or contradictory attitudes towards its key notions like technology and democracy and an advocacy of what has been seen as essentialist monolithic fossilized view of religion implicating a strong rejection of both religious and political other (liberal democracy) in the ideologues of political Islam, we need to see if we can get some insights into the genesis and evolution and ideological stakes in the phenomenon by revisiting parallel process of engaging with the intellectual and political challenge during Middle Ages. Al-Farabi is here read as an exemplary Muslim thinker of Medieval Islam who engaged with the question of the political and religious and philosophical other that seemed to pose a challenge to the identity of the religious tradition he inherited. Further narrowing the focus to one key dimension of Al-Farabi's response viz. philosophy, I propose to explore the question of possibility of revisiting Al-Farabi in the backdrop of modern Muslim culture's (especially in the ideologues of political Islam) amnesia of Muslim philosophers or opposition to philosophy as such and argue why he is of seminal importance and needs serious consideration from the Muslim world suffering from twin tensions of fundamentalism and aggressive desacralizing secularism.

Keywords

Al-Farabi, Prophetology, Islamic State, Political Islam, Muslim Philosophy, Islamic Traditions, Medieval Islam, Western Philosophy, Islamic Doctrines.

Al-Farabi, one of the greatest medieval philosophers, has been made famous in modern political theory by Leo Strauss, an important modern political

philosopher who appropriated him but upheld certain views that traditional religious consciousness of Muslims finds deeply disturbing. Through Ibn Sina and Jewish philosopher Maimonides, who form vital links in Al-Farabi's reception by the West, Al-Farabi has been a significant thinker in the development of medieval philosophy. His deep affinities if not influence on some important Western philosophers have recently been noticed or emphasized. However, it is strange that in the modern Muslim history, he has not received much attention or its major thinkers have largely ignored him. His political philosophy hardly generated the debate or significantly influenced modern political thought in Islam. Even the perennialists in the Islamic world haven't extensively written of him, at least till few years ago. The question of appropriating or revisiting his legacy by modern Islam remains only tangentially touched so far despite a flurry of books and scholars now focusing on Al-Farabi. What he did for the world of Islam is still hardly recognized despite some good work of Al-Farabi scholars. What he meant to Maimonides, the greatest Jewish philosopher, he hasn't meant to Muslim thinkers and what he means to Leo Strauss in the twentieth century he has not meant to most political philosophers and arguably has been gloriously misunderstood as an elitist who wrote in codes and needs to be read too esoterically. We need to approach and rediscover Al-Farabi for the modern world or both political Islam and secular democracy are going to destroy it. Paren's point that "Although the Islamic world was incapable for whatever reasons of assimilating Al-Farabi's profound rationalism in the medieval period, it may stand to benefit from his instruction now" (Parens, 2006: 4) is what this paper would attempt to substantiate by clarifying certain notions that have been informing modernist and modern Muslim sensibility to facilitate better reception of his work. We begin by exploring the concept and role of philosophy that was central to ancients and medieval – and in Al-Farabi – forgetfulness of which seems to be crucially responsible for problematique of what goes by the name of political Islam today. We then proceed to approach the question of relation between faith and philosophy or Athens and Jerusalem /Medina and ask how to articulate prophetic viewpoint to an audience wedded to rationalist or empiricist epistemology. The twin challenges of fundamentalist and desacralizing secularism vying for space in politics would then be addressed by engaging with what could be delineated as Al-Farabi's critique of the idea of what goes by the name of political Islam.

What is Philosophy for Al-Farabi?

Accustomed to modern notions regarding philosophy as conceptual or linguistic analysis or problem solving enterprise or that raises questions and synthesizes knowledge of other domains it looks extremely anachronistic to assert little noticed functional definition of philosophy as preparation for death that Al-Farabi upholds with his master, Plato's Socrates. I wish to understand this claim in its proper setting in ancient traditional cultures to make sense of

Socratic claim and ground his arguments in cross disciplinary fashion.

Philosophy for ancients and Plato whom Al-Farabi takes as a model of a philosopher or more precisely a sage as the former term evokes in modern times is not a mere theoretical rational inquiry but a realization, intellection or noetic vision that transcends subject-object duality and demands something like ethical discipline. For perennialists and other advocates of traditional philosophy (that encompasses Indian, Chinese, Far Eastern, Islamic, Judeo-Christian and wisdom traditions of primitives) philosophy in the primordial sense of the term prepares one for death and assimilation to God as Plato said and is not a rational logical abstract discipline only and is allied to gnosis, a way of life or realization of the good. It is not a prerogative of ratio or mental faculty of reason but of nous, the supraindividual universal faculty of intellect. Philosophy, as Uzdavinys notes in his introduction to *The Golden Chain* (2005), in the traditional Orphic-Pythagorean sense is wisdom and love combined in a moral and intellectual purification in order to reach the “likeness to god.” It involves contemplation of Beauty and Good. In fact all contemplation is a form of death of self/mind. All meditation and contemplation, especially on the void called death, leads to death of the will, the will of the Other or non-self or what may be in theological terms called God is a sort of the death of the willing self. Virtue becomes possible only after this death of the soul, the soul as conative faculty. The Greek word nous covers, as Uzdavinys notes, both spirit and intellect (intellectus, ‘aql) of Medieval Christian and Islamic lexicon. Platonic philosophy should be understood as a spiritual and contemplative way of life leading to illumination or enlightenment; an intellectual discipline based on intellection culminating in union (henosis) with ideal Forms. This concurs both with “Orphic”-Indian conception of philosopher as one who seeks release from the wheel of cyclical term as with the view of perennialists who represent all traditional philosophies against modern rationalistic one. It is one of the key blunders of modern discipline called philosophy, according to traditionalist critics, that it has been largely forgetful of the Pythagorean-Platonic notion of philosophy as a pathway of communion with God. Indeed post-Aristotelian philosophy in general and modern philosophy in particular has been forgetful of the notion of what Heidegger calls thinking and Plato would perhaps call attention to death, pure receptivity to Being that reveals itself not to conceptual intellect but to intellection. Plato would dismiss much of modern philosophy as occupation with trivialities as Heidegger dismisses it from somewhat different though convergent angle. Receptivity to being achieved by fana in Sufism or consent to become nothing after transcending egocentric view in other traditions including Indian ones, is what is preparation for death. This alone gives the view of the world as full of wonder and beauty. Traditional aesthetics assumes that the joy of art arises from transcendence of ego by contemplating art forms. Modern philosophy has vetoed mystery and wonder and thus lost that great virtue of being humble and receptive

towards unrepresentable truth in phenomena. Plato's or Al-Farabi's insistence on preparation for death is not invitation for speculating on our posthumous states but achieving, with mystics across traditions, death in life, death to memory so that one achieves primal innocence that Adam has lost after the Fall that involves seeing objects as separate from subject or what amounts to the same thing as seeing things egoistically, dualistically or outside God. Sufis are supposed to die every moment so that they fully enjoy freshness of revelations of Being. God consciousness is identified in different traditions (especially in Zen and Sufism) with present moment or Eternal Now, achieved by dying to both past memories and future anxieties. Simone Weil's definition of God as "attention without distraction" expresses this notion of philosophy as cleansing and sharpening of perception. Philosophy in traditional sense gives us eyes to see, to perceive without distraction or colouring from egocentric desires and passions and ultimately to dissolve into objects so that only seeing is there without a seer and that dissolves all epistemological problems, so to speak. Philosophy has often or largely been reduced to epistemology after Kant and this has taken it to an abyss from which nothing is rescuing it today. It has been reduced to ontology after Aristotle and this too has proved problematic. It is easy for the likes of Heidegger and Derrida to make serious negative judgment of the history of philosophy and we see in the postmodern world many obituaries to the "dead" discipline. We again need philosophy as transformative practice that through rigorous ethical discipline (something absent in modern armchair discipline of philosophy as if it is learning new information or solving logical puzzles) results into a state of supreme clarity of understanding and joy and peace that passeth understanding. Philosophy as a practice of the self, as esoteric discipline allied to mysticism and needing proper initiation and not a profane discipline, logic chopping or linguistic analysis or calculus of abstractions or speculative exercises is what Plato stood for and no wonder we find the notion of preparation of death so anachronistic as we have forgotten what philosophy stood for in ancient times. Tolumin has also observed in his *Philosophers: East and West* that only sage can be a philosopher in oriental civilizations and in modern Western philosophy this is not a required qualification and even ideally it is a hindrance. Schuon suggests to reserve the name of philosophers for sages and to describe rationalists as profane thinkers. Philosophy, our perennialist notes, is according to the best of the Greeks, 'to express by means of reason certainties "seen" or "lived" by the immanent Intellect. I am tempted to quote from perennialists, much ignored critics of modern philosophy but great advocate of Plato and traditional philosophy. Perennialists, bringing in the witness of countless traditional sages throughout the world regard ancient philosophy as

essentially a way of life: not only inseparable from "spiritual exercises," but also in accord with cosmological myths and sacred rites. In the broader traditional sense, philosophy consists not simply

of a conceptual edifice (be it of the order of reason or myth); but of a lived concrete existence conducted by initiates, or by the whole theocentric community, treated as a properly organized and well guided political and “theurgical body” attended to the principle of maat -- “truth” and “justice” in the ancient Egyptian sense of the word (Uzdavinys, 2005: xi).

Ancient philosophers tried to awaken the divine light through the noetic vision (noesis) and to touch the divine Intellect. Perennialists reject the belief that philosophy is an abstract philosophical discourse based on rationalistic scientific method and its methodically obtained “truths.” Moksha centrism of traditional philosophies, as Harsh Narain explains, serves to:

giver purpose and direction to philosophy and proved to be a bulwark against battling in the clouds, which Sri Aurobindo calls the ‘besetting sin of metaphysics,’ and which is the bane of unbridled, directionless thinking for thinking’s sake. Praxiological commitment makes all the differences. Modern Western philosophy lacks such a serious purpose, direction and orientation. Nobody knows what it is out to do. Ancient philosophy aimed at enlightenment and felicity with or without salvation at the great denouement, whereas current philosophy aims at dry clarity and mechanical precision on their own account (Narain, 1996: 94).

Perennialist perspective on philosophy foregrounds moksha-centrism of different philosophies including premodern Western philosophy. Values are not written off in any traditional philosophy. That explains close association of religion and philosophy in traditional cultures. This explains ultimate religious-mystical aim of philosophy as preparation for death in Plato, in Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi.

Modern rationalist secularist orientation of philosophy finds it hard to understand how come Al-Farabi lives a life of a Sufi which appears quite ascetic from modern standards a philosopher normally enjoys or seeks. Corbin’s description of Al-Farabi’s life style is worth recalling here: “This great philosopher was profoundly religious in spirit, and a mystic. He lived extremely simply, and he even wore the garb of the Sufis. By nature he was essentially contemplative, and held himself apart from worldly things. On the other hand, he liked taking part in musical gatherings” (Corbin, 1962: 158). A philosopher in Islamic tradition is more akin to a mystic who lives the higher truths or virtues; he is ideally a sage, a seer. Many great mystics in Islamic history have been indistinguishable from philosophers; Sufi metaphysicians have been intellectual giants. A philosopher is understood with reference to key virtue of love of wisdom, a choice for certain life style, certain way of life that we ordinarily would classify as both moral and contemplative. He is allied to a poet than to a doubting ratiocinating, arguing “thinker” or scientist. He is capable of thinking that Heidegger defines and to which

philosophy as ordinarily understood proves to be an obstacle. A philosopher is not a dialectician, a disputant, an ideologue. His is not for unbridled use of reason but uncompromising ability to be open to pursuit or experience of truth. How a philosopher in the Islamic tradition engages with the central issues of ethics and religion may be gleaned from a quick look at two most important and influential philosophers Wittgenstein and Heidegger. This will help us understand Muslim philosophers like Al-Farabi's interest in ethics and religion that one may easily miss if we grant usual emphasis on the point that religion is only an imitation of philosophy and truths of religion are reducible to certain political or moral postulates that are more opportune than true as if deep existential aspect in the truth religion traditionally claims can be dispensed with. Philosophy's task is as an ally of religion and not a replacement of it. Though one can grant that saints or Buddhas would not need religion as Schuon has remarked but intellectual elite not knowing sublime ethics can't claim exemption and it is to noted that that saints and seers or Buddhas have never belittled religion or refused to participate in its universe.

Wittgenstein's view of Philosophy

Regarding Wittgenstein one may note his clear statements:

I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view.

My thoughts are one hundred percent Hebraic

And Kerr's statement about his work:

Wittgenstein's philosophical reflections are in large part, however indirectly, readings between the lines of the story of the soul in the Western metaphysical tradition.

Fergusson Kerr in *Theology after Wittgenstein* p.166

The mystics solve – for themselves at least – all important problems – intellectual and existential. In fact experiencing God dissolves all problems. For logical positivists what mattered most was what is in *Tractatus* but for Wittgenstein himself what mattered most was what was not in there, the unsaid part. That was not in the *Tractatus* because language could not handle that. That something is neither linguistic nor representable in any other way. However that shows itself and thus need not be spoken of or represented. Wittgenstein's most decisive move was thus away from linguistic representations and the most important job for the philosopher was to delimit what can be represented and thus related to what only shows itself. Ethics and aesthetics and the mystical all belong to this second category. Man does not live by bread of facts (science, instrumental rationality) alone but needs supernatural manna embodied in ethical/aesthetical/mystical. It is ironic that what mattered most to him has not been given due attention by his successors. All his endeavor

was to save the intelligence from the bewitchment of language. He was all for transcendence so that man becomes himself and lives truly, joyfully. In his search for happy life, life lived sub species aeternitatis he paid great attention to working of language, how language fails to represent reality and leads us astray by creating problems that are not there. It is how men lived that interested him rather than their speculative exercises. This alone solves the riddles of life. Language has no answers and answers can only be found when we step outside language.

As Wittgenstein was more interested in what cannot be linguistically represented his conclusions are radical. The most important things can't be talked about. Ethics, religion and aesthetics are transcendental. The very fact that things exist is mystical or linguistically and conceptually unrepresentable. We can only gaze at it and get lost in wonder. We can dissolve into this primordial mystery, love and celebrate it. Wittgenstein lived almost like a saint. He is the most mystical of the greatest philosophers of the modern Western history. He tried to show exit to philosophy. He found no problems once we let intelligence operate naturally and it shatters linguistic cobwebs. He fought against pervasive bewitchment of intelligence by language.

If we understand that God is what is and is missed when we attempt to think or imagine or make images of Him or attempt to comprehend the Mystery we can understand Wittgenstein. According to mysticism God is the case. The only thing is we don't see. We verbalize and babble and create theologies and metaphysics. Wittgenstein is a metaphysician in the same way Buddha is or Krishnamurti is. God is above speech. The Absolute has never been defiled by speech. But by metaphysics is here meant living or breathing the noumenal world, dissolving into it and not speculating about it with conceptual schemes. Metaphysics as the knowledge of the supraphenomenal reality is the soul of all traditional cultures or "epistemologies." Man is made for the Absolute, to die in It and thus to eternally live. Certainty is the requirement of intelligence and man is not absurdity. If man fails to access the most certain, the indubitable, the absolutely safe in Wittgenstein's terms, he has failed as a man. God is the greatest certainty – the greatest and most palpable of the present facts in Whitehead's words –and a philosophy or epistemology that doesn't account for this does not deserve to be called a philosophy. It is failure and betrayal of philosophy and of man and his intelligence if the real is not knowable though of course not conceptually knowable. Modern philosophy that is largely ignorant of God can't qualify as a genuine philosophy, as Indians or great traditional philosophers from other traditions understood philosophy as darsana, as seeing or vision.

The real question for traditional philosophies is how we become Godlike (theosis) or prepare for death in life (which is the same thing or means for it) or live and move and have our being in God. All else is vanity. Wittgenstein stood for this primordial heritage of man and that is why was misunderstood

by most of his friends and foes like. Needless to remark that he didn't consider Western civilization that refused to fully countenance the reality of the sacred as something of a monstrosity and like Gandhi a laughable "interesting" idea. He complained of Russell, the paragon of modern rationality or philosophy – to have fatally misunderstood him. In fact what he considered most important has been dismissed by many a modern thinker as folly. God (understood mystically or more precisely metaphysically) is the meaning of life for all religions including transtheistic one as for Wittgenstein. I wish to argue the point that Wittgenstein is to be read alongside great traditional philosophers that saw the Good above everything, had little use for fashionable pursuits of today, considered ethics as first philosophy and metaphysical discoveries as fruits or realizations of real ethical life, were centred on God rather than man and saw quintessentially human in living up to the divine image in him, in transcending himself. There is nothing new or original in Wittgenstein's mysticism as in fact there can't be anything new in matters transcendental. One can refer to many mystics while explicating central statements of him. So far we have read – with few exceptions– Wittgenstein as a philosopher or failed to appreciate how mysticism informs/grounds his philosophy.

Wittgenstein is not only a philosopher of mysticism but a mystic, a practical mystic of great standing. All his work was dedicated to the "glory of God" as he once said to his friend Dury (Rhees, 1984: 168) – an expression quite unexpected from modern profane philosophers. He didn't like philosophizing as a speculative/analytical exercise, as an academic pursuit as is the case now in modern academies or universities but something that Plato would appreciate or other ancient traditional philosophers would prescribe as a way of life and nothing short of preparation of death. That he wanted his legacy to change attitude towards ethics is hardly surprising. "I am by no means sure that I should prefer a continuation of my work by others to a change in the way people live which would make all those questions superfluous"(Wittgenstein, 1994: 61). Philosophy, as pursued by his contemporaries or today, is a disease of modern form of life that needs cure. And that cure is ultimately provided by seeing the futility of the game called philosophy. For ancients it was ethics and a vision and had little to do with language or concepts. It was, most probably, his deep conviction borne from experience regarding sacrality of the world and thus the truth of the supernatural/eternal that made him loath modern civilization that had banished the sacred. It is in light of mysticism that we can understand his unconventional attitude towards secular carriers or vocations, his renunciation of his property, his austerity in life and manners, his casual attitude towards dress, his independence in thought and action, his nostalgia for peasant life in Russia, his alienation from his times that he characterized as dark ages and many puzzles in his biography. His view of philosophy's aim, his attempt at transcending it for getting the vision of the things as they really are, his rejection of the claims of conceptual analysis or linguistic analysis

as explaining reality, his rejection of classical dualisms that have bedeviled Cartesian and post-Cartesian thought, his plea for convergence of the ethical and the aesthetic, his view that ethics is transcendental, his rejection of doing science and mathematics as the ideals of philosophizing endeavor, his critique of psychologism and rationalistic attempts at building a metaphysics and our addiction to use metaphysical notions in ordinary discourse at rational plane are all threads in the fabric of mystical tapestry that has so subtly woven. He rejected theological representations as many others before have done but he never rejected the symbolizandum.

Heidegger's View of Philosophy

“There is a thinking more rigorous than the conceptual” Martin Heidegger
For Heidegger philosophy meant something that reminds us more of Arab philosophers than modern Western post-Cartesian philosophers as he himself once said. It appears that the view of aims and definition of philosophy he approves of is more a kind of mysticism than philosophy as generally taken by the moderns. It is Being, Mystery, Death, Poetry, innocence of becoming or openness to experience or more precisely revelations of Being – the themes that have traditionally characterized mystics and mystical philosophers that occupied Heidegger. His central quest for Being is mystical project and the ways to it – thinking (tafakkur), poetry. His key complaint against philosophy is it has forgotten the true nature of being, the question of Being and this task has to be carried out by the poet. Heidegger calls for a kind of thinking that echoes what ancient Greeks and Muslim philosophers would call intellection. Instead of calculative thinking, he calls for a meditative thinking that “contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is”(Heidegger, 1966: 46) and that can consist simply in “dwell[ing] on what lies close to us and meditate[ing] on what is closest...” (Heidegger, 1966: 47). He proposes for accessing the Truth of Being something like “learned ignorance” of the mystics, attention to something that is too close to require “building complicated concepts.” Instead “it is concealed in the step back that lets thinking enter into a questioning that experiences...” (Heidegger, 1977: 255). The problem occurs only for representational thought to tackle such a primordial, prereflective encounter with fundamentally simple Being. Heidegger requires a kind of will-less waiting, or as he says, a kind of “releasement,” for this experiencing of Being (Heidegger, 1966: 62, 66) His call is for opening up the human spirit, standing naked before the Mystery, perfecting the faculty of attention, forgetting the manipulating, willing, technological self that modern man has been reduced to, to lose the self in doing, in work, and “letting the world light up, clear up, join itself into one in manifold self-appropriations, letting us find in it a real dwelling place instead of the cold, sterile, hostility which we find ourselves” (Hafstadter, 1971: xvii). Recalling the old mystical emphasis on being or realizing the truth rather than just knowing it second hand, conceptually

or as if from a distance because truth was an ontological issue rather than epistemological one. The Being Heidegger invites us to “is not conceived of as a thing, but as that which “transcends’ things thinking and talking about it in traditional terms becomes impossible.” Such a goal is strikingly similar to the goals of many of the world’s most prominent mystical traditions , as Jeff Guilford argues (Guilford, 2011). The metaphysics which Heidegger labels as nihilism is concerned with representing Being instead of “thinking” it as Being isn’t a being or a thing. As Marmysz paraphrases Heidegger’s point:

We are guilty of nihilistic thinking any time that we fail to recognize the fact that language, and the rational and logical tools it utilizes, necessarily chops up what “is” into fragments, and so falsifies and “covers over” Being -itself. ..Heideggerian thought implores us to accept everything that “is,” and simply to allow Being to speak to us through its beings. Instead of actively rejecting and overturning the way that things are, it asks us to open ourselves to the possibilities of what might be. It requests that we listen to Being and come to understand its full potential (Marmysz 2003: 77).

Al- Farabi as *Hakeem*

Al-Farabi’s central task of perfecting the virtues to remove veils that obstruct intellection or vision that results in happiness. Al-Farabi’s description of intellect is of immense value to help us approach Heidegger’s view on understanding and thinking although it is not new in the NePlatonic framework. Subdividing the human intellect into the theoretical or contemplative intellect, and the practical intellect, Al-Farabi talks about, in Corbin’s paraphrase, “the human intellect in a higher state, a state in which it is able to receive, through intuition and illumination, the Forms which are irradiated into it by the active Intelligence without passing through the intermediary of the senses. This is what happens in the case of the philosopher, because this union is the source of all philosophical knowledge. The union can also be effected by the imagination, in which case it is the source of revelation, inspiration and prophetic dreams.” What has traditionally been the prerogative of mystical and prophetic consciousness, Al-Farabi connects to philosophical consciousness and one can say poetic consciousness. This is what makes possible thinking as Heidegger conceives and what gives light to the poets to guide lesser mortals in destitute times. If it is not conceptual or discursive reason that undergrids Heideggerian understanding he proposes for unconcealment, what is it? Heidegger chose a remote space for living where virgin nature could be better accessed as a revelation of Being. His appropriation of Holderlin’s romanticism can be better explained with reference to the notion of the faculty of the heart as used in Muslim philosophical and Sufi literature. The theory of Imagination implicit in Al-Farabi but developed in great detail in Sufi authors such as Ibn Arabi offers a powerful approach to critique empiricist and rationalist

epistemologies on the one hand and engagement with theology on the other. The use of symbolism in Sufism and its appropriation in Muslim philosophers like Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina offers a possible exit from the morass of shallow criticisms of prophetic or revelation centric religious tradition that we find in abundance in modernity and to the dangers of which Leo Strauss has also drawn attention in his defense of Maimonides and Al-Farabi. However Leo Strauss's own view of philosophy and his reading of esotericism in political terms are formidable problems in reception of Al-Farabi in a secularized political landscape of the modern world. Corbin's "apolitical" interpretation of Al-Farabi though quite briefly argued needs consideration as a corrective to Leo Strauss's interpretation. Corbin's notion of prophetic philosophy is better able to explain explicit allegiance of Al-Farabi to Islam and his attempted Islamization of Plato.

The idea of esoteric or philosophical elite that can dispense with prophetic dispensation or scripture is mostly vacuous as illustrated in the history of serious engagement, both for personal or existential and socio-political reasons, with scripture in case of Muslim philosophers. Al-Farabi rather than rejecting or demythologizing religion secures for it a grounding in his theory of imagination. In fact his view of philosophy is an argument for prophet centric or prophetic philosophy. It rejects rationalist opposition of prophet and philosopher. It situates both

in traditional understanding of intellect and imagination. He didn't count himself as a member of any elite group that can supplant or defy prophetic authority. There is no such thing as authority imposed from without by any genuine claimant of prophecy. The authority belongs to the Universal Intellect that grounds the prophetic revelation. And the philosopher works hard on both moral and intellectual planes to participate in the revelations of the Intellect. If the highest degree of human happiness consists in union with active Intelligence and that union is in fact the source of all prophetic revelation and all inspiration, in Al-Farabi's view, how come we can establish any opposition between the prophet and the philosopher. In fact Al-Farabi's philosopher is more or less identifiable with Sufi sage. And Sufism we know has been seen by both its great figures and great modern scholars as dimension of Islam, of Revelation rather than fundamentally new or independent or autonomous discipline with a different or divergent epistemology. Sufi tradition identifies prophet's dimension of willayat or friendship of God that identifies mystics in Islam as more primordial one that even is required before he would qualify as a prophet. This implies that philosopher who sees higher truths or contemplates God who grounds all happiness necessarily "follows" the Prophet. Al-Farabi's prophetology subsumes philosophers in the larger or underlying background of prophet centric spiritual and intellectual tradition rather than the converse although it has often been thus misconstrued. It has mostly been philosopher centricism that Al-Farabi's approach has been seen without adequately

realizing the crucial significance of prophet to the whole enterprise of philosopher who would require a political system in which masses cooperate for general happiness of all or to use more familiar theological expression, collective salvation. The prophet broadcasts more effectively and to larger audience the truths philosopher sees only himself or with a narrow peer group of philosophical elite. For Al-Farabi acquired intellect is “the human intellect in a higher state, a state in which it is able to receive, through intuition and illumination, the Forms which are irradiated into it by the active Intelligence without passing through the intermediary of the senses” (Corbin, 1962: 162). One might ask isn't objective of the prophet, the saint, the philosopher (in the traditional – Farabian – sense defended here) the vision of Forms and isn't it agreed by all the three that senses are somehow to be transcended for achieving this vision? Corbin's following remarks about Al-Farabi illuminate the issue:

For al-Farabi, the Sage is “united with the active Intelligence through speculative meditation; the prophet is united with it through the Imagination, and it is the source of prophetism and of prophetic revelation. This conception is only possible because the Muhammadan archangel – Gabriel, the Holy Spirit – is identified with the active Intelligence. As we have already observed here, this is in no way rationalization of the Holy Spirit – rather, the contrary is the case. The identification of the Angel of Knowledge with the Angel of Revelation is actually demanded by a prophetic philosophy: this is the orientation of all al-Farabi's doctrine. For this reason it would be inadequate to say that he provided Revelation with a philosophical basis, as it would be inaccurate to say that he placed the philosopher above the prophet. Such a manner of speaking denotes ignorance of the nature of prophetic philosophy. Philosopher and prophet are united with the same Intelligence-Holy Spirit (Corbin, 1962: 164).

Al-Farabi's explication of the doctrine of recollection in Plato is on empiricist lines that empiricist epistemology would find hard to disagree with. He grants Aristotelian critique of Plato on this point that is on empiricist lines though he tries to defend Plato at the same time as well by noting that the process of formation of ideas from sensory experiences is so fast as to give to the soul an impression that it “it has had them all the time, so that thinking of them would seem to the soul like recollecting or remembering them. According to Al-Farabi, Plato held the same opinion when he said that to think is to recollect, for the person who thinks tries to get at what experience has written on his mind, and once he finds the object of his thought, then it looks to him as if he had recollected (Hammond, 1947: xiv). Like Iqbal in modern times, Al-Farabi's explication of revelation is on what may be characterized as rational or “naturalist” lines as he invokes intellect that is not so alien a notion to philosophers including some modern philosophers. Al-Farabi's prophet

is a philosopher who is also gifted in addition with what we may call a poetic symbolic faculty that couches philosophical truths in a language that better appeals to the generality of people. Epistemologically, philosopher and prophet have no fundamental difference; both make intellect the organ of perception of the supraphenomenal.

The question of superiority or inferiority of religion vis-à-vis philosophy is a product of a modernist attitude that has been deeply suspicious of the religious. Historically, the two have been closely wedded in Indian, Greek, Chinese and some other cultures. In the case of Islam, we find religion and philosophy so interwoven that many great Sufis can be described as philosophers and vice versa. We need to note that it is prophets who have established, or inspired the establishment of, great cultures and civilizations. Al-Farabi would reply that prophets speak to the multitude, philosophers to the elite. This fact only shows the superiority of prophet over philosopher. Historically, it appears that philosophers and prophets have been, in some cases, one and the same personalities. Buddha, Confucius, Lao Tzu, one can, probably, readily identify with prophetic and philosophical figures. There has been a debate within some Muslim circles regarding the prophetic credentials of Socrates. No less a man than Ibn Arabi called Plato, divine Plato. All this shows that the attempt to oppose philosopher and prophet or philosophy and prophecy that is fashionable in modern rationalism is unsustainable.

The true character of Greek wisdom championed by Al-Farabi, once investigated, becomes almost identifiable with prophetic-mystical enterprise. Schuon, a modern Sufi metaphysician, thus clarifies the point often missed by those who oppose philosophy (especially ancient Greek philosophy) and religion in each other's name.

Fundamentally, we have nothing against the word "philosophy", for the ancients understood by it all manner of wisdom; in fact, however, rationalism, which has absolutely nothing to do with true spiritual contemplation, has given the word "philosophy" a limitative coloring so that with this word one can never know what is really being referred to. If Kant is a "philosopher", then Plotinus is not, and vice versa.

With Sophia perennis, it is a question of the following: there are truths innate in the human Spirit, which nevertheless in a sense lie buried in the depth of the "Heart"- in the pure Intellect—and are accessible only to the one who is spiritually contemplative; and these are the fundamental metaphysical

truths. Access to them is possessed by the "gnostic", "pneumatic", or "theosopher"- in the original and not the sectarian meaning of these terms - and access to them was also possessed by the "philosophers" in the real and still innocent sense of the word: for example, Pythagoras, Plato, and to a large extent also Aristotle.

The very expression *philosophia perennis*, and the fact that those who have used it were mostly Thomists, and so Aristotelians, raises the question as to what, in this context, is the value of Greek wisdom, all the more so since it is generally presented as a merely human system of thought. In the first place, by Greek wisdom we mean, not just any philosophy of Classical Antiquity, but essentially Platonism with its Pythagorean root and its Plotinian prolongation; on this basis, one can even accept Aristotelianism, but on the express condition that it is combined - as in the spirit of the Muslim philosophers - with Platonism in the widest sense, of which it is then like a particular and more or less secondary dimension. Then one must take account of the following, which is essential: Greek wisdom presupposes, on the one hand, initiation into the Mysteries and on the other hand the practice of the virtues; basically it pertains to gnosis—to the *jñāna* of the Hindus - even when it deals with things that have no connection with knowledge; admittedly, Aristotelianism is not a *jñāna*, but it nevertheless derives from a perspective which specifically pertains to this order. Aristotelianism is a metaphysics which made the mistake of opening itself towards the world, towards the sciences, towards experience, but which is no less logically valid for all that, whereas Platonism contemplates Heaven, the archetypes, the eternal values. If on the one hand the Greek spirit - through Aristotelianism but also and above all through the sophists and the skeptics - gave rise to the aberration of profane and rationalistic philosophy, it also provided - especially through Platonism - elements that were highly useful not only for the various theologies of Semitic origin, but also for the esoteric speculations that accompany them and are superimposed upon them; we should not forget that for certain Sufis, Plato enjoys the prestige of a kind of prophet, and Meister Eckhart calls him “that great priest” who “found the way ere ever Christ was born” (Schuon, 2007: 246-247).

A few remarks about the traditional understanding of the Prophet as a teacher of *hikmah* that without necessarily contradicting Al-Farabi's view of prophet as a teacher of philosophical truths for the masses by means of imaginative symbolism, complements it as it creates warrant or room for philosophers proper. I think Guenon's distinction between theology and metaphysics largely corresponds to and illuminates Al-Farabian explication of distinction between religion and philosophy although the former clarifies terms like religion and philosophy as well but what he means by metaphysics is closer to what Al-Farabi means by philosophy.

For Al-Farabi modern rationalistic philosophy pursued in secular contexts and for mundane pursuits is not the philosophy proper of which prophets are the teachers. The Prophet teaches *hikmah* among other things according to the Quran (65:2). He, like traditional philosopher-sages, expressed by means

of reason certainties “seen” or “lived” by the immanent Intellect, as did the best of Greeks. Regarding the Quranic foundations for seeing philosophy as essentially Islamic discipline it is sufficient to note that the function of the Prophet includes teaching hikmah. The Prophet’s prayer “O God! Show me the things as they are in reality” is understood by the greatest modern Muslim philosopher-mystic Iqbal as search for rational foundations in Islam or what may be called an aspect of philosophy. From Hazrat Ali who can be called the greatest metaphysician amongst the Companions to Iqbal and Guenon we find great tradition of Islamic philosophers or philosopher-sages. Important names generally held to be Mujaddids have been philosophers or used the idiom of philosophy to carry out their mandate. Philosophers have been writing their own exegeses and there is a lot of similarity between more influential and prolific Sufistic exegeses of the Quran and philosophical exegeses. No one can dispute that the Quran can’t be philosophically understood or philosophical exegesis is illegitimate.

Philosophy is opposed on the ground that it is rationalistic and this is seen to contradict emphasis on faith and intuition of the vision of the heart that is emphasized in Islam. Now this objection is what philosophers like Al-Farabi have been successfully refuting by their explication of the doctrine of intellect that appropriates this vision of heart. Despite the persistence of Ghazallian view of great Muslim philosophers as rationalistic thinkers who are to be sharply distinguished from the Sufis, the people of unveiling following the school of realization, the fact of deep convergence between Muslim philosophical and Sufistic approaches remains and it has not gone unnoticed even in the case of Al-Ghazzali himself whose essentially NeoPlatonic epistemology and whose essentially philosophical (understood in the sense of ancient or Pythagorean-Platonic sense of the term philosophy) exegesis of Islamic doctrines are too evident to need elaboration. Al-Farabian project of showing philosophy as the supreme science that grounds religion in a way or that is given imaginative and symbolic colouring by the prophets stands essentially unquestioned if we take care to clearly distinguish the precise meaning of reason, intellect, heart, prophecy and symbolism of scriptural and theological language into consideration. Philosophy that the Quran implicates, that great Muslim philosophers have practised is not rationalistic but intellectualistic and there is a hell of difference between reason that post-Cartesian Western philosophy upheld and Intellect (that is intuitive intelligence, contemplative vision) that Platonic-Muslim philosophical tradition has upheld. Even so-called rationalist Ibn Rushd is not to be understood in terms of Western rationalism. And in fact, even in the history of Western philosophy, we find very few crass rationalists who deny God or transcendence altogether. So why oppose philosophy? Why oppose philosophy if it is nothing but preparation for death? Why oppose philosophy if it is clarification of intellectual content of religion? I reproduce a few more quotes from Corbin to state my point.

In fact, were Islam nothing but the pure legalistic religion of the shari'ah, the philosophers would have no role to play and would be irrelevant. This is something they have not failed to recognize over the centuries in the difficulties with the doctors of the Law. If, on the other hand, Islam in the full sense is not merely the legalistic, exoteric religion, but the unveiling, the penetration and the realization of a hidden, esoteric reality (batin), then the position of philosophy and of the philosopher acquires an altogether different meaning (Corbin, 1962: 21).

Further developing the same line of argument Corbin is able to present the case for philosophy in convincing terms that no exoteric or legalistic authority can ignore or question on its own terms.

Is Islamic religion limited to its legalistic and juridical interpretation, to the religion of the law, to the exoteric aspect (zahir)? If the answer is in the affirmative, it is pointless even to speak of philosophy. Alternatively, does not this zahir or exoteric aspect, which, it is claimed, is sufficient for the regulation of one's behaviour in everyday life, envelop something which is the batin, the inner, esoteric aspect? If the answer is yes, the entire meaning of one's everyday behaviour undergoes a modification, because the letter of positive religion, the shari'ah, will then possess a meaning only within the haqiqah, the spiritual reality, which is the esoteric meaning of the divine Revelations. This esoteric meaning is not something one can construct with the support of Logic or a battery of syllogisms. Neither is it a defensive dialectic such as that found in the kalam, for one does not refute symbols and philosophical meditation were called upon to 'substantiate' each other (Corbin, 1962: 25).

The significance and continuance of philosophical meditation in Islam can be truly grasped only so long as we do not attempt to see it, at any price, as the exact equivalent of what we in the West have for our part called 'philosophy' over the last few centuries. Even the terms falsafah and faylasuf, which derive from the transcription of the Greek terms and go back to the Peripatetics and neo-Platonists of the first centuries of Islam, are not the exact equivalents of our own concepts of 'philosophy' and 'philosopher'. The clear-cut distinction which exists in the West between 'philosophy' and 'theology' goes back to medieval scholasticism, and it presupposes a process of 'secularization' the idea of which could not exist in Islam, primarily because Islam has never experienced the phenomenon of the Church, with all its implications and consequences. (Corbin, 1962: xiv).

Philosophical enquiry (tahqiq) in Islam was most 'at home' where the object of meditation was the fundamental fact of prophecy and of the prophetic Revelation, with the hermeneutical problems

and situation that this fact implies (Corbin, 1962: xiv).

Referring to the formulation that states “philosophy is the tomb in which theology must perish in order to rise again as a theosophia, divine wisdom (hikmat ilahyah) or gnosis (‘irfan)” that Corbin quotes and builds upon (Corbin, 1962: 21) one may state the thesis on relationship between philosophy and religion in these words: Philosophy deepens our understanding of religion. It may even purify it. Philosophy helps identify and fight subtle forms of idolatry.

Al-Farabi devoted great deal of attention to logic and this calls for a clarification in view of usually perceived fierce antilogicalism of mystics. Osman Bakr’s work on Al-Farabi takes due note of this emphasis on logic from a traditionalist viewpoint that Schuon sums up in these words:

It is not for nothing that “logic” (logikos) comes from “Logos,” which derivation indicates, in a symbolical fashion at least, that logic – the mental reflection of ontology – cannot, in its substance, be bound up with human arbitrariness; that, on the contrary, it is a quasi-pneumatological phenomenon in the sense that it results from the Divine Nature itself, in a manner analogous – if not to the same degree – to that of intellectual intuition. Let us admit that human logic is at times inoperative; however, it is not inoperative because it is logical, but because it is human; because, being human, it is subject to psychological and material contingencies which prevent it from being what it is by itself, and what it is by its origin and in its source, wherein it coincides with the being of things (Schuon, 2013: 26-27).

While noting that “logic can either operate in accordance with an intellection or on the contrary put itself at the disposal of an error, so that philosophy can become the vehicle of just about anything” Schuon explains why it is erroneous to take as “the point of departure, not a direct cognition, but logic pure and simple and ; when man has no “visionary” – as opposed to discursive – knowledge of Being, and when he thinks only with his brain instead of “seeing” with the “heart,” all his logic will be useless to him, since he starts from an initial blindness.” (Schuon, 1959: 8). One can argue with Corbin, Nasr, Baqr and others that Al-Farabi’s position on logic (that logic inheres in Truth) and need of vision converges with the traditionalist position upheld by Schuon. Al-Farabi isn’t a mere “thinker” who “gropes alone through the darkness” (Descartes) but a visionary. Platonism is fundamentally about vision and Aristoteliinism an elaboration of that vision in logic rational terms. Al-Farabi does make use of arguments like any philosophy but, as Schuon would note, “an argumentation a man uses to describe to his fellow men what he knows is one thing, and an argumentation a man uses on himself because he knows nothing is quite another” (Schuon, 1959: 9).

Al-Farabi's perfect philosopher or sage is the Prophet. Plato and Aristotle are no doubt philosophers or sages for Al-Farabi but the qualities he requires from a perfect ruler are fulfilled by prophet and not them. It appears quite vain to privilege philosopher over the prophet or philosophy over religion that prophet calls for if we keep in mind such explicit statements as the following: or founder of religion.

This man holds the most perfect rank of humanity and has reached the highest degree of felicity. His soul is united as it were with the Active Intellect, in the way stated by us. He is the man who knows every action by which felicity can be reached. This is the first condition for being a ruler.

He should be able to lead people well along the right path to felicity and to the actions by which felicity is reached (Al-Farabi, 247).

In these (post) modern times, philosophy is not wisdom as the Greeks understood it. Ethics has hardly any role in approaching or appropriating truth. Philosophers need not be sages and ideally should not be. Philosophy has nothing to do with truth. Neither certainty nor truth is its aim. Philosophy can't be an aid in enlightenment. For many postmodernist thinkers philosophy is rhetoric, mere opinion from which Plato vainly tried to distinguish real knowledge. It is just a power complicit discourse or power game. In view of such a disturbing scenario and extremely constricted estimate of philosophy's scope, how are we going to argue for philosophy and centrality of the philosopher-king in Al-Farabi? A shift to prophetic view of philosophy that Corbin foregrounds and whose essential point is affirmed by traditionalist scholarship in its own way. It is what Heidegger's critique of philosophy as representational thinking doesn't question. In fact he dimly invokes it and it is the object of what he calls thinking. It is not what a Derrida could deconstruct. It is more an invitation to openness to the Question, to the Call of the Transcendent than what any propositional creedal formula or Gnostic possession. It is not what ordinarily falls under religion but what traditionalists call metaphysics, the science of the supraphenomenal, *scientia sacra*. Two clarifications regarding it follow.

Emphasizing, from the perennialist (more precisely the Guenonian reading of it) point of view, the difference between religion and metaphysics, Guenon points out the metaphysical point of view is purely intellectual while as in the religious or theological point of view the presence of a sentimental element affects the doctrine itself, which doesn't allow of it complete objectivity. The emotional element nowhere plays a bigger part than in the "mystical" form of religious thought. Contrary to the prevalent opinion he declares that mysticism, from the very fact that it is inconceivable apart from the religious point of view, is quite unknown in the East (Guenon, 2000: 124). The influence of sentimental element obviously impairs the intellectual purity of the doctrine. This falling away from the standpoint of metaphysical thought occurred generally and extensively in the Western world because there feeling was stronger than intelligence and this has reached its climax in modern times.

(Guenon, 2000: 125). Modern theistic appropriations of mystical experience by choosing to remain at the level of theology and not cognizing the metaphysical point of view cannot claim total truth as theology itself cannot do so. And it is not always possible to fully translate metaphysical doctrines in terms of theological dogmas.

A metaphysical reading of religion as applied by perennialists dissolves the major criticisms against religious thought or against religious basis of philosophy in the East. From a metaphysico-mystical viewpoint religion is not a narrative, a story, an explanation of things, belief in a set of propositions, so postmodern inspired critique of it is unwarranted though of course it may have certain relevance in critiquing exoteric literalist theology. Fundamentalism that reduces religion to an ideology and presents it as if it is a metanarrative could be critiqued on postmodern grounds but mysticism and even metaphysics if properly understood in perennialist terms, escapes postmodern critique because, ultimately in the vision of Nondual Reality, there is no privileging and marginalization of any term whatsoever, no binaries, no categorical conceptual linguistic vocabulary at all, no propositions with which the logician or rationalist dabbles. In the perennialist perspective metaphysics constitutes an intuitive, or in other words immediate knowledge, as opposed to the discursive or mediate knowledge which belongs to the rational order. Explaining the difference between rational and metaphysical knowledge, Shahzad Qaisar writes:

Metaphysical knowledge is attained by intellect alone. Intellect has a direct knowledge of the principles for it belongs to the universal order. Strictly speaking, intellect is not an individual faculty otherwise metaphysics would not have been possible. How is it possible for an individual to go beyond himself. The attainment of effective individual consciousness of supra-individual states - the objective of metaphysics is only possible through a non individual faculty. The metaphysical truth is not external to intellect but lies in its very substance. Knowledge is identified with the object itself resulting in the identity of knowing and being. A reciprocity is thus developed between thought and reality. The process of reaching the heart of Reality is by virtue of intellectual intuition for it is not obstructed by the yawning chasm of subject-object duality. Intellectual intuition is supra-individual as compared to intuition of certain contemporary philosophers which is infra-rational. The former is above reason imparting knowledge of the eternal and immutable principles whereas the latter is below reason tied to the world of change and becoming. Intellectual intuition is contemplation whereas the rational capacity is logical. The infallibility of intellect is derived from its own nature with absolute metaphysical certainty. Religion is existential formulation of metaphysical thought. From metaphysical point of view it binds man to a superior principle. Religion comprises

a dogma, a moral law, and a form of worship. Dogma belongs to the intellectual order and it does not divest itself from its essential metaphysical character. Feeling has a cognitive content and deepens intelligence and establishes a unique form of certitude. Moral law is dependent on the religious doctrine and has both metaphysical and social character. The form of worship is symbolic expression of the doctrine (Qasir: 33-34).

This makes it amply clear that oftenly highlighted contrast between religion and philosophy and privileging of the latter more distorts than illuminates the issue in Muslim philosophy. /If by rationalism is meant an attempt to build a closed system embracing the whole of reality and based upon human reason alone, then this begins, as Nasr points out, not with Aristotle (in whose philosophy there are metaphysical intuitions which cannot be reduced to simple products of the human reason) but with Descartes, since for him the ultimate criterion of reality itself is the human ego and not the Divine Intellect or Pure Being. This is rightly critiqued by both perennialists and postmodernists. If philosophy is defined as rational inquiry, staying within the limits of reason and not accepting any other faculty beyond reason (called intellect up to the 17th century) then certain developments in modern philosophy and postmodern turn has indeed discredited it. Metaphysics as Kant correctly perceived is riddled with antinomies as long as we approach it by means of reason. Traditional metaphysics is not the rational metaphysics. It is vision, illumination. That explains how Al-Farabi's prophetology presents itself and is not a rationalization of angelology. The active intelligence not concerned with the phenomenal world or even Being but invisibles or Unmanifest.

The most important task for philosophy, according to Ananda Coomaraswamy, is understanding comparative religion (Coomaraswamy, 1989). I think that Al-Farabi's approach to prophecy anticipates current discussion in a key area in comparative religion. Perennialists reread entire philosophical/metaphysical tradition, especially the Western tradition which they accuse of unforgivable sin of oblivion of true metaphysics and thus philosophy proper. Their rereading is challenging, provocative and seems to throw light on certain otherwise irresolvable debates in Western thought. They claim transcendent unity of religions (apparently divergent traditions of Buddhism and Islam are ingeniously interpreted to demonstrate this transcendent unity) and thus unity of all orthodox traditional philosophies. The concept of universal orthodoxy propounded by Schuon integrates and juxtaposes otherwise quite diverse and divergent trends in philosophical traditions of the world. Coomaraswamy has forcefully argued for the essential unity between Platonism and Vedanta. Taoism and Sufism are admirably integrated in a common paradigm by Izutsu. Semitic and non-Semitic traditions in religion are reconciled with great conviction by such masters

of Sophia perennis as Schuon. Although Al-Farabi does none of these things and he possessed, because of his times, little knowledge of different religious traditions but he does give us key insights that help us to see him anticipating this perennialist reading. His three points in this connection may be worth noting – “that religions differ only on their surface...discerning few could appreciate in higher form,” religion is an imitation of philosophy and philosophy is one because essence is one, but religions are necessarily many because there is no one, true image. And as Sweeney puts it: “The natural inability of the vast majority of human beings to know essences forces the philosopher not only to tolerate the existence of religions but to rule the multitude through religion. Tolerance of religion follows upon the almost universal limitation of human beings to imaginative knowledge (Sweeney 2011). And “The particularity, mutability, and contingency of images can only produce an approximation of the unity rooted in the universality, immutability, and necessity of essence” (Sweeney, 2011). Al-Farabi’s explicit condition regarding need for common religion in his virtuous cities as stated at the end of his *The Book of Religion* can’t be met except on the premise of a development of a hermeneutic like that of traditionalists who can demonstrate transcendent unity of religion.

It is clear, in addition, that all of this is impossible unless there is a common religion in the cities that brings together their opinions, beliefs, and actions; that renders their divisions harmonious, linked together, and well ordered; and at that point they will support one another in their actions and assist one another to reach the purpose that is sought after, namely, ultimate happiness. (Al-Farabi, 2001)

Religions will necessarily vary amongst people as they are symbolic representations only, not truth pure and simple. When he maintains complete, universal and unconditional reality or truth of philosophy he maintains something similar like Guenon or Schuon who distinguish limiting and partial formal universes of religions from what they call metaphysics though it remains to be shown if there are significant differences between the tools and objectives and cognitive claims of the traditionalists and philosophers like Al-Farabi. However the characterization of the First Principle, nous centric, transformative or realizational endeavour involving focus on actualizing access to the supraphenomenal and eschatological through knowledge and virtue in both will make prima facie case of similarity between them quite a strong one. In our times, it is traditionalists who have so strongly upheld the rights of “philosophy” or metaphysics – of the Absolute, of Intelligence, of objectivity – against all kinds of detractors from existentialists to postmodernists and dependence of religious or theological discourse on metaphysical intuition of the prophet-sage. Schuon calls himself a sage, takes heavily on Ghazzali for inveighing against Muslim philosophers and doesn’t lose sight of relativity of forms and even suggests distortion caused by human receptacle of the prophetic figure. Religions as symbolic representations is currently the most

widely accepted view amongst philosophers of religion, mystical thinkers and theologians and we can almost fully agree with Al-Farabi on the need of metaphysics or philosophy in grounding and clarifying true meaning of religion. Religion is directed, so argues Schuon in his various works including the magnum opus *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, not to narrating truths of higher order but saving people and it invokes various upayas including elliptical language of scripture and graphic evocative symbolism for this end. This distinction between religion directed to salvation of masses and philosophy or metaphysics for appealing to the intellectual elite has been cogently defended by almost all the Muslim philosophers and perhaps most eloquently Ibn Rushd to be revived with great force and battery of arguments by the traditionalists.

As religions can't but be many as Al-Farabi knew too well, the Quran itself also concedes because forms are contingent upon diversity of cultures, geographies, histories we encounter, we can only assert that common philosophical or metaphysical core of religions can be shown to be the case. Al-Farabi says at the beginning of his *Book of Religion*, "religion is opinions and actions, determined and restricted with stipulations and prescribed for a community by their first ruler, who seeks to obtain through their practicing it a specific purpose with respect to them or by means of them" (Al-Farabi, 2001: 93). This clearly shows how different is his conception of religion from his predecessor Al-Kindi who argued for a more intellectual view of religion or seeing it one with philosophical metaphysics and standard view of theologians who emphasized more cognitive view of religion or philosophical theology.

Even if Al-Farabi believed that philosophy was superior over religion or "purer" than religion in its claim to access to pristine truth, it needn't follow that he is somehow playing the card of philosophy against religion or rejecting any claim that religion has made for itself with regard to access to the depths and heights of the Real. His contribution was to distinguish between the two, identify their separate though somehow overlapping domains, reconcile their cognitive claims, recognize the role of both in respective spheres. Religion was not dispensable, even for the philosophical elite living in a community. Religion makes philosophical concepts understandable to the masses through the science of symbols. Noting that "each culture employed its own symbols to interpret the same philosophical truths" he opens up the space for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. His prophet is a philosopher and a poet of extraordinary imagination who is able to give his philosophical understanding an imaginative colouring. Al-Farabi's synthetic genius with which he is able to harmonize Plato and Aristotle helps reconcile two divergent orientations as he is able to present the common essence of wisdom linked to perfection of virtues and unfolding of intellect or the correspondence between the intellectual and the moral or the affective and the cognitive. Tendency to emphasize disagreement between Plato and Aristotle has been the business of historians of philosophy despite the great names from medieval period to

Whitehead and Voegelin in the twentieth century. Al-Farabi belongs to this tradition of creative appropriation and assimilation. In fact Al-Farabi, as Corbin argues, conceives his mission to revive ancient wisdom that has been lit from the lamp of prophecy and that preceded Greeks. He believed this wisdom had begun with the Chaldeans in Mesopotamia; that from there it had passed to Egypt, then to Greece, where it had entered history through being written down;" (Corbin, 1962: 157)

Modern thought began as a rebellion against traditional thought of the world and gave rise to hitherto unknown problems. Woeful limitations of rationalism and empiricism and attempt to construct a rational metaphysics and failure of such attempts and more recent cynicism with respect to the whole philosophical enterprise show how problematic has been the modern Western project. Sentimentalism, moralism, irrationalism, subjectivism and a host of other one sided ideologies that have flourished during the modern period are a sad comment on modern man's attempt to philosophize in the absence of intellection and intelligence capable of objectivity and certitude. It is difficult to see genuine basis for unity among philosophies in the framework of modern presuppositions and prejudices. In such a context perennialist discomfort with modern project and search for alternative foundations for philosophy is better appreciated. In the absence of moral purification there can be no pursuit of wisdom, no true knowledge according to traditional philosophers from different civilizations. The tragic divorce of fact and value, of phenomena and noumena, of samsara and nirvana, of knowing and being we find in modern philosophies necessitate search for such alternative perspectives such as the one provided by perennialists and decipherable in Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Isharaqi thinkers and others in the Islamic tradition.

Al-Farabi's argument that "Since essence is one, philosophers must be in agreement with each other; since images can only be like but never be the essence, there is no one, true image, and the necessary plurality of images means that nonphilosophers can never reach the consensus of philosophers" (Sweeney, 2011) clarifies the charge of mutually exclusive schools and consequent failure of unreliability in philosophy against philosophical enterprise. Sages are in agreement as Al-Farabi showed in the case of two great sages Plato and Aristotle. Philosophy wedded to ethics or philosophy as a way of life that has goal as a preparation for death, that involves something more than ratiocination or logic chopping by achieving vision or clarity of perception clouded by desires or passions and erroneous opinions or chain of reasoning based on merely sensory or rational means that ignore primary data from intellectual intuition. Mere thinkers who don't know the third eye, the eye of the heart, do disagree and would end up in either killing God or man and despair of life and philosophy. Love of wisdom that constitutes the essence of traditional philosophies is not dependent on this or that epistemological or linguistic or political debate that have become current in modern times. Philosophy is not epistemology pursued for its own sake or representational

thinking or what can serve as handmaiden of science or politics. Philosophy is seeking happiness, a preparation for death, a therapy against linguistic and other ideological cobwebs that cloud the vision. It is a quest for the most important “things,” the most enduring, the most beautiful, the most enjoyable “things.” Its goal largely converges with art, religion and mysticism. There has not been a question regarding object of art or religion or mysticism. They have been central to culture and civilization. And so has been philosophy in traditional cultures. Evolution of an autonomous discipline emasculated from twin sources of intellection and revelation, pursuing or serving something lesser than the Absolute, not getting hold of what intelligence demands by its very nature – objectivity and certitude, is a modern heresy in the history of thought. Al-Farabi considered the Platonic view of philosophy the true view and that view, contrary to impression given by many histories of philosophy, has not been refuted but set aside. As traditionalists have pointed out, Western philosophy having severed its ties with the pursuit of wisdom and substituted thought for intellection has been reduced to linguistic analysis and analysis of concepts and handmaiden of science and in fact is claimed to be dead by many postmoderns.

The dichotomy between religion and philosophy and Al-Farabi's plea for the significance of philosophy and his attempt to explain religion as a copy of or translation of its truths in imaginative and symbolic terms has been often understood by modern critics to downplay essentially religious and mystical inspiration of what Corbin called Al-Farabi's prophetic philosophy. Al-Farabi can't be claimed as their own by rationalists who “use reason to destroy religion or explain it away. He expressed his vision in rational philosophical terms, no doubt but was at heart a Neoplatonist and Sufi who practiced philosophy as an art of preparation for death, a way of life in which virtue is central and towards essentially a religious end of eudomonia. (Refuting the contrary interpretation that presents him as shrewd political thinker who uses religion as a means for political ends ignores his life style which is more ascetic than political or ambitious, his categorical references to the eschatological, his emphasis on immaterial and therefore immortal intellect, knowledge and virtue and never reducing the idea of eudemonia or sa'adah to merely worldly happiness and emphasizing its distance from hedonistic idea of pleasure.) Even the arch critic of philosopher, Al-Ghazzali, titled his great work *Alchemy of Felicity* thus essentially acknowledging philosophical formulation of the goal of life, both individual and social, as pursuit of happiness. In fact it has been argued that Ghazali has modeled his great *Ihya* on the Aristotelian model of practical and theoretical knowledge and it is not difficult to see essential convergence in aims of preparation for felicity in hereafter or science of knowledge of God in Al-Ghazzali and that of philosophy a pursued along essentially NeoPlatonic lines by Al-Farabi.

Nothing can be farther from truth than pitting philosophy against religion in Al-Farabi. On the contrary, philosophy is the inner truth of religion

using mythological and symbolic language. Philosophy thus provides an interpretation of religion. To claim that for Al-Farabi religion was only half truth or philosophy was purer than religion is to forget that his primary aim is to provide for a model state that is based on cooperation in virtues by all and sundry and ideally he would extend his ideal state to the whole world under one ruler. Achieving this end would require understanding religion rather than wishing it or explaining it away. Symbolic expression of truth is universal and primordial mode of cultural life. Not only art or poetry but even certain traditional sciences like, astrology, use it. In fact culture is mostly symbolic use of language. Ritual is central to only religion but some other cultural formations as well. Philosophers haven't been so significant in history as prophets. It is a Buddha or a Christ or a Muhammad who are central to their respective cultures. Philosophy is an aspect of religion if we understand the later in Iqbalian terms as involving the whole man. Man is affective and aesthetic creature and if religion preeminently caters for those aspects without denying the cognitive that in fact is inseparable from integral religion. "Put reason into life and life is gone" as Tolstoy observed in his epilogue to the War and Peace. Although ideally philosophy does take into consideration heart's reasons, passions, relationships and even art and religion but then it is idle to propose religion-philosophy binary. Philosophy as understood in the sense Al-Farabi proposes in distinction from religion would eschew use of symbolism and talk about truth pure and simple without any disguise in mythology or symbolism.

Is it possible, for the Muslim world at least, to return to Plato or to the best of Greeks or to the original formulations of wisdom in ancient cultures without any apprehension of loss of authenticity, of the heritage and legacy centred on Revelation it has bequeathed to humanity in what has been called Secular Age? Is it possible to philosophize with all the freedom, courage and boldness of spirit, in the best sense of philosophizing, in a world living under the threat of fundamentalisms? How are Muslims to take modernity in the postmodern age? Given the twin challenges of secularization and fundamentalism, how might a Muslim thinker respond with urgency? I think an affirmative or simple answer to all these questions is possible by revisiting Al-Farabi. (His importance in fighting fundamentalism has been underscored by many Muslim intellectuals.) It is strange that he has been so far overshadowed by other philosophers like Ibn Sina (whom he influenced decisively) and Ibn Rushd (who was appropriated by Latin Averroism) and Ghazzali's polemic in the public imagination and philosophical world although he did impact on Shiite philosophy.

Dawah Work

Al-Farabi's legacy may be invoked in engaging with the phenomenon of missionary spirit of Islam that has two aspects: Dawah work and Jihad. Dawah

work is aimed at preaching the Word and Jihad at removing the obstacles that prevent human response to the Divine Call and thus thwart full realization of potential for happiness or knowledge/gnosis. As Dawah work requires bearing witness to the Truth today in an age singularly known for confusion of tongues or proliferation of ideologies and conflicting narratives and relativism, it becomes rather tricky to present the truth of the Absolute to a vast disbelieving modernity. As the world considers itself post-theological and philosophers have increasingly abandoned their claim to membership of elite “people of demonstration” group who are capable of certain knowledge or access to the Absolute, as Al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd present their claim against dialectical class of theologians and other opinionated people, how does Al-Farabi speak to us today?

Despite widespread skepticism the calls for wisdom are heard respectfully by the postmodern man. The need for wisdom as distinguished from what Eliot called knowledge and information has never been so desperate as today. Philosophy understood as thinking in Heideggarian sense, as ethics in Levinasian sense, as critique of the establishment or ideology in left inspired philosophies, can't be dispensable. Al-Farabi's sublime view of philosopher and philosophy would never be more relevant than today if we could convince ourselves that such an entity does exist. How significant is the place of philosophy in Islam and in explicating its much debated, much misunderstood, doctrine of jihad as understood by Muslim philosophers like Al-Farabi needs to be underscored.

In Islam one is converted by proper use of intelligence. Proper use of aql leads to tawhid and salvation is linked to right use of intelligence. So every thinking person is converted by using philosophical acumen in the broad sense of the term. Only those established in knowledge or Ulama fear God, the Quran declares. Who are Ulama? What is knowledge in Islam? Isn't it inclusive of what goes by the name of intellectual or what I call philosophical disciplines as well? How can we ignore or reject Al-Farabi's claim, elaborated and more eloquently argued by Ibn Rushd, that philosophers, as the people of demonstration, have the primary claim to the class of true knowers or truly knowledgeable on whom the title of aalim applies? Who is best capable of interpreting the Prophet's word? Philosophers, according to both Al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd. Are not the greatest names in Muslim history largely classifiable as philosophers or philosophical theologians? Sufis have been preeminently claiming the qualification as urafa, as knowers. We know that the notion of hikmah has both prophetic and philosophical connotations. The Prophet is described as teacher of hikmah and given the position adopted by Muslim philosophers as enunciators of hikmah, we can safely assert that philosophy and prophecy are allies. Corbin's explication of the term is strongly arguing the case of the Prophet as a teacher of philosophy understood in the sense defended here. To quote him:

the term hikmah is the equivalent of the Greek sophia, and the term hikmat ilahyah is the literal equivalent of the Greek theosophia. Metaphysics is generally defined as being concerned with the ilahiyat, the Divinalia. The term ‘ilm ilahi (scientia divina) cannot and should not be translated by the word theodicy. Muslim historians, from al-Shahrastani in the twelfth century to Qutb-al-Din Ashkivari in the seventeenth, take the view that the wisdom of the ‘Greek sages’ was itself also derived from the ‘Cave of the lights of prophecy’ (Corbin, 1962: xiv).

If we can claim for philosophers as sages a pre-eminent place that has been reserved to scholars (theologian-jurist) and saints in Muslim imagination we can take a great leap forward for facing multiple challenges that Muslim community has been facing. If theologians adopting dialectics or jurists have such an influential place in the Muslim community and problems facing faith in its encounter with modernity are far from being effectively tackled through theological method as the audience is committed to more philosophical than theological orientation in approaching issues, isn’t it expedient to turn again to philosophers than to theologians who helped appropriate the Greek challenge in early Islam and put it to great use in development of Islamic intellectual and spiritual culture? If modern man has privileged philosophical idiom as the mode of expressing its deepest thought currents in a host of disciplines, isn’t it time to explore the power of this idiom for better introduction to Islam? Is the huge project on preaching Islam to the world that is preoccupying thousands of Muslim scholars and activists viable in absence of serious engagement with (post)modern philosophical or critical discourse? If a sizeable number of educated youth and ex-Muslims are expressing their reservations about theological cum juristic corpus for its supposed failure to convince on rational grounds, how can dawah workers avoid appropriating Muslim philosophers who have used an idiom that communicates much better to modern secular audience? To just give one example: Al-Farabi talks about seeking happiness at individual level and cooperating for the same at social level as the problem of man and proceeds to explain time tested contemplative and ethical teaching handed from ancients through Plato and what Suharwardi calls “the light of the cave of prophecy.”

One can sum up the reasons for study of philosophy in Islam, especially today: Because “all creatures desire to know” as rational creatures, because the Quran links salvation to right use of intelligence, because we have to live today in the world that is shaped by philosophy and science, because the Prophet of Islam (SAW) as a teacher of Hikmah called for learning or gaining knowledge and called for love of wisdom, for perfection of virtues, for preparation for death. Even seminaries or madrassahs need to teach philosophy as a subject. Today dawah work needs philosophical approach, at least in certain parts of the world or certain sections of addressees. If one doubts this it means one is living in medieval age and has not heard of Nietzsche or Heidegger or Freud or Derrida.

If philosophy or love of wisdom or preparation for death or perfection of virtues are important for salvation (these are synonymous for traditionalist historians of philosophy and for those who have cared to read ancient philosophers of any tradition with any seriousness), then how come one can deny it as part of Islam? If Islam endorses Hikmah and even if we grant it a moral-spiritual aspect only but not the intellectual one as usually understood in terms of philosophy, one opens the room for philosophy.

Why thinking or tafakkur is needed to understand scripture is lucidly answered by Mulla Sadra thus: "The Quranic revelation is the light which enables one to see. It is like the sun which casts light lavishly. Philosophical intelligence is the eye that sees this light and without this light one cannot see anything. If one closes one's eyes, that is, if one pretends to pass by philosophical intelligence, this light itself will not be seen because there will not be any eyes to see it" (Qtd in Nasr, 2006).

One needs to note an important qualification while seeking to appropriate Al-Farabi for dawah work. Al-Farabi would not be interested in conversions but inviting people through various means to work for virtuous state or at least their perfection or happiness, both this worldly and eschatological. His call for justice and ethic centric life would remind one of a Derrida or Levinas rather than any modern missionary of Islam. His commitment to Islam would be somewhat like that of Schuon who was more interested in Sophia perennis he thought expressing the esoteric/metaphysical core of Islam as of other traditions and addressing the world as a sage rather than a sectarian preacher or in the name of piety or some political ideology.

Political Islam: Al-Farabi's Critique

Political Islam is premised on certain assumptions

- That sovereignty belongs to a transcendent God whose will has been received through the last revelation that overrides previous revelations.
- That prophets are the best legislators and we have been vouchsafed by not only general principles underlying laws but also many concrete exemplifications or models that need to be emulated in letter and spirit.
- That there is a world of Islam and a world of Jahilliya. Much of what is central to modern outlook is rejected as complicit with the latter.
- That religious other is to be subjugated politically and it represents a degeneration rather than a possibly valid mode of responding to the Divine Call.
- That States need to be Islamized either by democratic or violent means.
- That it is the Laws of Islam rather than the principles underlying them that need to be implemented because it is the divine commandment.

Now before a few critical remarks on political Islam from Al-Farabian point of view, it needs to be clearly noted that against secular and democratic

prejudice that is premised on sovereignty of people, Al-Farabi's Platonic model is theocracy. In fact the traditional theory of politics is theocratic. Modernist Muslim thinkers have, in some cases, been led to opt for such extreme strategies as to declare corpus of Medinan verses as retrograde step. Orthodoxy of Muslim philosophers is seen in the case of Al-Farabi who has appropriated the model of Medinan State in light of Plato or vice versa.

Al-Farabi, despite his theocentrism and theocentric Platonic State and sharing the key assumption that God is the be all and end all of every endeavour and Divine Writ holds absolutely because it corresponds to our deepest or theomorphic constitution, would be poles apart from the project of political Islam for the following reasons or qualifications and criticisms he would suggest to the above mentioned points characterizing political Islam.

Sovereignty belongs to God but the notion of sovereignty need not be necessarily or primarily understood in politico-legal terms as implying recourse to any arbitrary or capricious will of a Despot Lawgiver who takes humans as subjects to be disciplined and punished for reasons that enlightened rational minds can't comprehend. It is not to be reduced to hakim-mahkoom relationship but other modes of relationship between God and man like Roab-marboob, (Sustainer-sustained) Beloved-lover, Merciful-mercy seeking creatures, co-partners in creatorship that are also there. The whole notion of divine sovereignty as constructed in political Islam primarily rests on an interpolation or manipulation of a verse taken out of context and subject to philological trampling as cogently argued by many scholars including Meddeb in *The Malady of Islam*. Al-Farabi's primary condition for virtuous city is knowledge of God in the subjects. Now the very idea of God presupposed in ideologues of political Islam would be far from the idea of the same in the Muslim intellectual and spiritual tradition by Muslim philosophers and Sufis and most of the well known theologians. The idea of God as Being upheld by Al-Farabi makes all the difference in the world to the idea of God upheld in voluntarist theology of Asharites and cosmic policeman of fundamentalists. For Al-Farabi, as for Guenon, the immediate metaphysical truth "Being exists" gives rise to another proposition when expressed in the religious or theological mode "God exists." But as Guenon says the two statements would not be strictly equivalent except on the double condition of conceiving God as Universal Being, which is far from always being the case in fact (Tillich comes close to holding this view of God), and of identifying existence with pure Being or what the Sufis call *Zat* or *Essence* which is metaphysically inexact. The endless controversies connected with the famous ontological argument are a product of misunderstanding of the implications of the two formulae just cited. It is the inadequate or faulty metaphysical background that contributes a lot to controversies on either side of the debate on religious experience in modern discourses of philosophy of religion.

For Al-Farabi Plato's philosophy was the standard or true philosophy. He accommodates both Aristotelean and NeoPlatonic current. This point changes the contours of his theocratic or "Islamic" state. I think we need to distinguish islam from Islam to better understand what Al-Farabi would plead for in his virtuous city. Lumbard has succinctly formulated the distinction between the two that is often glossed over.

Today, as for the past 1200 years or more, the word "Islam" is taken to indicate a particular set of beliefs and practices adhered to by a certain segment of humanity. But when the Quran was first revealed what did the word mean? As Toshiko Izatsu has demonstrated in his masterful books *God and Man in the Quran* and *Ethicio-Religious Concepts of the Quran*, the original meaning of this word in pre-Islamic poetry is not only to "to submit," but moreover to give over something that is particularly precious to oneself and which is painful to abandon, to somebody who demands it. So when the Prophet Muhammad first presented a "message" that claimed to be "islam", the words would have been understood far differently than what we understand today.

Moreover, the way this word is used in the Quran actually provides the raw material for a very eloquent understanding of religious pluralism, one wherein all revelations are seen as different ways of giving to God which is most difficult to give – our very selves (Lumbard, 2005: 101).

Many Quranic verses present Islam every previous revelation as a way of submitting, a way of life rather than a particular creedal system. Noah, Abraham and others declared themselves to be Muslims. But once "islam becomes Islam, an institutional definition or conception is formed and such verses become more problematic"(Lumbard, 2005: 102).

From a metaphysical or philosophical conception as formulated in Al-Farabi, Sufi metaphysical translation of Islamic Shahadah is 'There is no truth but truth,' 'There is no reality but Reality.' Islam invites everyone neither to a creed that it dogmatically asserts, nor to a proposition that could be doubted or approached in terms of truth / falsehood binary, nor to a belief that rational cum empirical inquiry could invalidate. Islam is not a totalistic or totalizing ideology or thought construct. To put in simple terms Islam is an invitation to take life seriously, to decipher its truth, to realize God or the ideals of truth, goodness and beauty, to be concerned with the ground of life, to enjoy life at the highest level or ananda – all these could be related to the notion of eudemonia or happiness Al-Farabi upholds. Philosophy for Al-Farabi and Sufi path for Sufis asks one to leave everything that obstructs our cognizance or perception of truth – the world of ego and slavery to passions that obfuscate heart's eye that perceives the essences, the whatness of things. Islam asks to discover truth, the truth of life, of being and becoming and this truth can't be

attained as long as man is not willing to sacrifice everything including his soul for its sake. It demands transcendence of everything that stands in the way of truth – ego, desires and passions. Islam is not an ideology, a metanarrative, a system of creedal propositions but existential response to the mystery of being, a vision of things as they are in their essences, “attention without distraction.”

Islam stands for Justice and seeks to preserve the earthly reflection of Divine Justice. It may necessitate taking arms against those who wish to perpetrate fasad, who disturb peace, who terrorize people, who enslave men, who take sovereignty in their own hands, who believe that the other, whether it be nature or other men are an object to be manipulated at will, who pollute environment, who create obstacles in realizing or perusal of such values as truth and goodness – in short all forces that alienate men from themselves and from others.

The distorted sense of jihad as war against other religious communities pursued primarily to establish supremacy of certain religion formulations or a certain community follows from the ideology that is antitraditional, anti-intellectual, nonspiritual, literalist and exclusivist and must not be confounded with the universal and primordial religion of Islam. For Al-Farabi’s the popular theological version of Islam pitted against other religions is subsumed under the wider philosophical truth that is itself amenable to varying formulations and the plurality of religions is demanded by the very structure of prophetic consciousness or imagination as deployed in prophecy.

Al-Farabi holds God as the center of the universe. For him the goal of man is to return to God. Thus far we see his theocentricism clearly emerging. However immediately the differences from theocratic system based on theocentrism as understood in the ideologues of political Islam as we note how this return or ascent to God is to be accomplished. For him this is to be accomplished by virtue and philosophical discrimination. He requires acquaintance with the natural sciences before study of philosophy and grants to mathematics a very significant place for training the mind of the young philosopher. Mathematics, we are made to note, familiarizes his mind with exact demonstrations and helps the student to pass easily from the sensible to the intelligible. Logic, being an instrument for distinguishing the true from the false, is also required for later undertaking study of philosophy (Hammond, 1947: xiv). Now comes the training of character through cultivation of virtues to help transcend the attachment to senses and passions that cloud the mind so that higher philosophical truths could be apprehended or received (Hammond, 1947 xiii-xv). If we closely attend to the following key passage from Al-Farabi’s Political Regime we find that elite vs. masses distinction breaks down and philosophy’s privilege appears hardly of significant value in comparison with religion as the task before man is felicity or salvation and it is virtues that help on this way and all people are alike in need of felicity and punishment can’t be averted.

The end of human actions is happiness. Happiness is something all men desire. The voluntary actions by which man attains the end of his existence are called good, and from them proceed the habits of doing good, known as virtues; while the voluntary actions which prevent man from attaining his end are called evil, and from them flow the habits of doing evil, known as vices. Good actions deserve reward, whereas bad actions deserve punishment. (Hammond, 1947: 66-67).

Another point to be noted is calling Aristotle and Plato sages which constitutes honorific intellectual-spiritual title that is privileged over the title saint that is primarily restricted to spiritual qualification. One recalls Schuon's verses that makes this distinction while also substantiating Al-Farabi's treatment of philosopher-prophet binary.

*The saint is rooted in will and love;
The sage, in knowledge and intelligence.
Certainly, the saint also can have wisdom -
There are many paths in the Spirit's land.*

(Schuon, 2007a)

*The prophet brings a form of faith - a religion;
The saint lives it; the sage opens
A luminous realm of Pure Spirit
Beyond form. Prophets are also wise men,
Yet about the highest Truth they speak softly;
To the sage, holiness bestows light.
God and our heart are united in eternity.*

(Schuon, 2007b)

As Febri Renaud puts it:

The personality of a saintly man is dominated by the will and the emotional element. Reason operates only a posteriori to canalize the celestial influx. On the contrary, in the case of the sage, the driving force of mystical inspiration is replaced by reason if he is only an earthly sage like Aristotle or by intellectual intuition if he is a true sage like Plato. This intuition, leading to transcendent knowledge, springs from an inward and more or less independent source, from that immanent divine spark that is the Intellect (Renaud, 2007).

Al-Farabi's linking of philosopher and prophet/imam implies overturning of the conventional religious privileging of the prophet over the philosopher. If the modern West has valued its philosopher-sages Al-Farabi would be happy. He would not dismiss great names in Western thought as pagan thinkers, arrogant rationalists. We do have many examples of approximating if not quite achieving the lofty standards of ethics required by Al-Farabi for a philosopher. If Plato and Aristotle qualify as sages, so would Aquinas and one can say, with some confidence, a number of great modern minds who shared a spiritual

orientation and largely the same view of objectives of philosophy. Two philosophers who shared some important things with him were Wittgenstein and Heidegger whom the West has taken seriously though their mystical ethics is largely underexplored but their almost mystical view of philosophy and key importance of death and contemplation in their philosophies would allow us to take their appropriation of the “light from the cave of prophecy” seriously.

Al-Farabi’s Plato is somewhat of a mystical figure, as is Voegelin’s, Coomaraswamy’s and Weil’s. This move helps to appropriate mystical philosophy as such into a tradition that has well recognized mystical aspect. If Sufis are authentically Muslim, so is Plato, the mystic of somewhat comparable character assimilable in the Sufi framework and that explains invoking the name of him and his teacher Socrates in initiation ceremony in some Sufis. He has no difficulty in squaring Plato’s philosopher-king with an Imam whose “understanding of truth is intuitive, who knows not only theoretical virtues but also the practical ones.” If his musical compositions are sung among some Sufi orders in Turkey and the Indo-Pakistani continent it means how deep is the connection between Sufism and traditional artistic expressions like music and how different a character of the Islamic state modeled on the Platonic-Farabian vision as distinguished from certain models that political Islam threw where there is hardly any scope for the great culture for philosophy, arts like music, natural sciences, mathematics that Al-Farabi requires and no room for such daring adventures as juxtaposing prophet and imam/philosopher, making room for the religious other and abandoning monopoly over salvation for a particular religion and talking in terms of existential categories (like happiness) instead of theological ones (like some creedal proposition) for approaching basic issues.

A few remarks about Al-Farabi’s thesis of compulsion to virtue in his ideal City are in order. Given the point that “Political rule and religion are inseparable because the many cannot grasp the good as noble apart from religious authority; virtue must be enforced through religion” and explicit engagement in both Plato and Al-Farabi with the question of coercion for ensuring establishment of virtuous city in which people cooperate for virtue thanks to his theocratic state, Al-Farabi would like to have compulsion to virtue – not conformity to law. His key terms are virtue, happiness, intellection rather than terms from juristic lore. It is perhaps not accidental that he has not written any book on juristic science. Despite the centrality of Prophet or Imam in his “system” he isn’t keen to impose a religious order. He focuses on transforming people from within and it is only in such a transformed elite that one can find a ruler he demands.

Al-Farabi has a conception of virtuous city not Muslim or Islamic city; he divides the world into virtuous and nonvirtuous cities rather than dar-al-islam and dar-al-harb. The compulsion to virtue thesis would hardly have anything resembling the fundamentalist State that are wedded to the necessity

of Shariah imposition identified with historical legal construction rather than a transhistorical quest for fundamental values of Ad-Din that evolving Shariah formulations seek to approximate and this quest can never fully succeed or must fail in some sense as Justice can never be done and evil never fully wished away. Plato's Laws or Muslim Law both are attempts to capture the Ideal and can never be absolutized in themselves. Modern philosophical attempts by Muslims to formulate increasingly sophisticated theories of justice in the face of so many totalitarian and other perversions that have marred modern social and political institutions are, generally speaking, all attempts to theorize Shariah for contemporary times.

Plato argued for orienting man and his communal institutions toward God and need for true constitution we can call divine or revealed constitution and dangers of those constitutions in which one part dominates against others and society is no longer an integrated whole governed by Justice that is God, although one can always see its ideal character in the sense that it will only be approximated and as Derrida would note justice is yet to come and justice can never be done. The question is why has the academic world has not duly appreciated this Platonic echo in any argument for Islamic State? Isn't it the case that so far ideologues of Islamic State have adopted a theological language that seems alienating or intimidating to many? In fact the dogma of separation of Church and State that has been enshrined in secular political theory has prevented appreciation of the argument put forth across traditional cultures and echoed in Plato, Evola and Voegelin in modern times in case of the Western world and among others Al-Farabi in case of the Muslim world. Voegelin's following passages succinctly sum up the essence of the argument for a theocratic State.

The Republic is written under the assumption that the ruling stratum of the polis will consist of persons in whose souls the order of the idea can become reality so fully that they, by their very existence, will be the permanent source of order in the polis; the Laws is written under the assumption that the free citizenry will consist of persons who can be habituated to the life of Arete under proper guidance, but who are unable to develop the source of order existentially in themselves and, therefore, need the constant persuasion of the prooemia as well as the sanctions of the law, in order to keep them on the narrow path (Voegelin, 2000: 275)

The political form is designed to serve the actualization of the spirit in the life of the community. The spirit lives in the laws. Hence the highest magistracy is devised as the board of the Guardians of the Law (Voegelin, 2000: 307).

Only when the divine spirit of the nous lives in the nomoi will obedience to the laws result in the eudaimonia of man and the community. Office in the polis of the nomoi thus becomes a "service

to the gods” (ton theon hyperesia), and the high magistrates are servants of the gods insofar as they are servants of the laws (hyperetai tois nomois (Voegelin, 2000: 307).

Plato’s standing challenge to secular history and politics is calling attention to the point that the order of the community can’t be achieved unless there is harmony with the divine Measure. Political Islam has a point and that is restating this thesis. However it is thinkers like Al-Farabi and not ideologues of political Islam who are able to translate this insight in the language that modern man would better understand. What constitutes the Divine Measure has been almost forgotten by Modernity. And this contributes, among other things, to tremendous ugliness of the modern city, its art and architecture. What it does in the political and social sphere is known to everyone who has cared to read the history of twentieth century totalitarianism, holocaust, countless ethnic, communal and other sectarian conflicts and wars, genocides, broken families and fragmented relationships, enormous growth in the number of all kinds of social and psychological pathologies. Alienation that is everywhere and so poignantly described in twentieth century literature is to a great extent traceable to this loss of Divine Measure. All those who call for Islam today or return to Tradition or to philosophy in the traditional sense of the terms are responding to this mess occurring from the loss of Divine Measure. What needs to be debated is whether one is called to a merely human interpretation or ideology in the name of return to the Divine Measure.

If we can agree – and I think neither great figures in religion nor in philosophy, East and West will object – that “We can achieve happiness only then when we have a beauty; and we have a beauty thanks to philosophy. The truth is that only because of philosophy we can achieve happiness. A man becomes a person thanks to the intellect” the essence of Al-Farabi’s philosophy may be stated to be a version of perennial philosophy that proposes the objective of human life to be happiness or felicity in all the worlds that may be there (in Buddhist terms one can put it as deliverance from suffering and thus felicity of nirvana, even secular humanist and other modernist thinkers who would not countenance transcendence as understood in classical or traditional religio-philosophical paradigm, one can phrase it as search for abundant living, deeper living, more meaningful living or less alienated life that is more joyful or happier). True happiness is the final goal of human life and it is unqualified good.

For achieving this objective its method is the old one, received from ancients – sages and prophets – the practice of virtue. Leo Strauss, one of the influential political philosophers who pioneered resurgence of Al-Farabi in political theory, argued for too esotericist a reading of him to allow for a serious consideration of him today. Strauss himself sided ultimately with Athens against Israel to be of much help in revisiting or appropriating Al-Farabi legacy in the world of Islam that can’t relinquish Medina in favour

of modern New York or ancient Athens. Al-Farabi's genius was to reconcile Athens and Medina as he identified the philosopher and the prophet in a manner that is wrought with great significance even today when we are struggling to engage with a Modernity that appears Faustian and Promethean bent upon desacralizing the world in the name of what can be called (post) modern secular missophic cults or ideologies of progress, development and other ideological thought currents. We can oppose the mess let loose today in academic thinking of modern sophists in the name of Socrates and the Prophets who upheld the rights of the Absolute or Truth above everything. We can question, with Voegelin, Strauss's view of revelation pitted against philosophy in the name of Al-Farabi's prophetology or more mystical understanding of revelation. In Straussian view the universalist claim of Revelation – Ad-Din-ul-Qayyim – continuing from Adam to Muhammad that traditionalist writers are able to link to Sophia Perennis, gets reduced to the thesis of “one particular divine code is accepted as truly divine; that one particular code of one particular tribe is the divine code. But the divine character of all other allegedly divine codes is simply denied, and this implies a radical rejection of mythology” he sees Judaic tradition as upholding. According to him Socrates maintains openness to the experience and eschews readymade answers that he sees revelation or faith forcing on us. Voegelin contests this reading and points out that revelation is best understood as approaching in all humility and seriousness the Quest/Question or “as man's loving and open-ended reply to an experience of transcendence.” Al-Farabi's upholds mystical view of religion when he defends it in philosophical terms while Strauss didn't recognize esoteric view of religion while recognized mystical view of philosophy. This makes it possible to embrace both Athens and Medina for him while Strauss is compelled to say goodbye to Israel for the sake of Athens. Al-Farabi by embracing the Medina and the Prophet who is described as “Mercy for the Worlds” ensures dignity of every individual and his or her participation in revelatory/mystical experience available through inculcating the love of the prophet and saints and in fact the whole institutional structure that transmits the sacred or grace. He is true to the Semitic insight that preserves dignity of every individual and what Voegelin sees as Christian insight that informs also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is really Judeo-Christian-Islamic insight. Elitism is a heresy that Prophet centric tradition can't countenance. Muslim philosophers and Sufis have especially guarded against this tendency by refusing to belittle the Law and fully participating in public religious life. Sufis have been intimate with the masses and guarded against elitism by emphasizing humility as key virtue. Ibn Arabi famously said that sharia is haqiqa and any esotericism that rejects literal sense of scripture is heresy. Esotericism transcends rather than rejects literalist exoteric understanding. Masses have not been ridiculed but their limited and more or less literalist or mythological understanding respected. This explains how Sufis became

popular in public imagination and philosophers were warning against public debate on deeper philosophical or esoteric sciences. It is true that masses can't entertain pure truth that esotericism discovers or philosophers preach but that doesn't imply they are denied entry into heaven for that matter. Even the most literalist of believers in ensured a share in beatitude. Faith alone is enough for salvation. Schuon clarifies the question of revelation versus "philosophy"/mysticism/metaphysics binary in these words in an interview. "The religious, dogmatic or theological perspective is based on revelation; its main purpose is, not to explain the nature of things or the universal principles, but to save man from sin and damnation, and also, to establish a realistic social equilibrium." Although religion is enough for saving people, "metaphysics satisfies the needs of intellectually gifted men." In connection with Voegelin's critique of elitism implicated by Strauss, a critic has well remarked: "If insight into truth is only possible for a select few, on the other hand, and the traditional beliefs of the many and of the world's religious traditions stand as the radical opposite of that philosophical quest for insight into the truth, then political philosophy does not concern itself with the dignity of all human beings except as an instrumental, inner-political."

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