

Title: Book of Religion (*Kitāb al-Milla*)

Author(s): Abu Nasr al-Fārābī translated by Mohamad Mahdi Davar and Mohammad Fakiḥ

Source: *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, vol. V, no. II (Summer 2026), pp. 37-54

Published by: *Memorial University of Newfoundland*



Disclaimer

The views, opinions, conclusions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this publication are strictly those of the respective author(s) and are not necessarily the views of *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, its editors, its editorial team, and Memorial University of Newfoundland (collectively, the “Publishers”). Authors are responsible for all content of their article(s) including accuracy of facts, statements, citations, and so on. The University gives no warranty and accepts no responsibility or liability for the accuracy or completeness of any information or materials contained herein. Under no circumstances will the Publishers, including Memorial University of Newfoundland, be held responsible or liable in any way for any claims, damages, losses, expenses, costs, or liabilities whatsoever resulting or arising directly or indirectly from any use of or inability to use the contents of this publication or from any reliance on any information or material contained herein.

Message from the Editors

The editors welcome letters on all subjects, especially if they discuss or comment on the works published in *Janus Unbound*. Please read our Guidelines for Authors prior to submitting your manuscript.



Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies is published by Memorial University of Newfoundland



*Janus Unbound: Journal
of Critical Studies*
E-ISSN: 2564-2154
5(2) 37-54
© Mohamad Mahdi
Davar, Mohammad
Fakih, 2026

Book of Religion (*Kitāb al-Milla*)

Abu Nasr al-Fārābī

Translated by Mohamad Mahdi Davar and Mohammad Fakih

Translators' Introduction

Before starting Abu Nasr al-Fārābī's text, we would like to say that Charles Butterworth, in *The Political Writings*, published his English translation of this treatise by al-Fārābī in 2001. We have examined that translation, and, in several places, refer in the notes to certain lexical differences. However, producing a new translation of this Farabian work remains important: the treatise is one of al-Fārābī's most foundational works on politics, civil science, and practical philosophy, a work that his later political writings are built upon as it presents his doctrines in a concise form, while the other treatises elaborate upon the concise principles set forth here. Moreover, retranslating this work enables a renewed engagement with the text and a fresh philosophical reading grounded in careful lexical precision, something that can mark a further step in the advancement of Farabian studies. At the same time, we have several criticisms of the previous translation.

Butterworth's translation, with its linguistic accuracy and stylistic fluency, is an acceptable one that conveys to the reader most of the meanings employed by al-Fārābī. However, from the perspective of Farabian scholarship, several conceptual criticisms may be raised. Some key concepts have been rendered into terms that carry predominantly modern, and even Christian, semantic connotations, while the Iranian and Islamic context embedded in al-Fārābī's vocabulary ought to be taken into account. For example, Butterworth renders *umma* as "nation." However, the meaning of *umma* is broader than that of nation and typically refers to a religious community. This is precisely why *milla* in al-Fārābī's terminology, and even in the language of other early Muslim thinkers, means religion rather than nation. Therefore, it is preferable to translate *umma* as "big community" or "religious big community." This choice also allows us to grasp more clearly the distinction between pre-modern forms of community and the modern nation-state. Furthermore, in some passages, the neutral tone of the translation fails to convey the Neoplatonic and metaphysical weight of this Farabian text, written within the context of the Iranian and Islamic tradition. For these reasons, another translation of this text is needed.

Abstract

Kitāb al-Milla is the title of one of Abu Nasr al-Fārābī's short essays on politics and civil science. Nonetheless, in this treatise, as in his other treatises on politics such as *al-Siyāsāt al-Madaniyya* (*The Political Regime*) and *Ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* (*On the Perfect State*), al-Fārābī discusses theoretical philosophy before beginning the civil and political discussions. In *The Book of Religion*, also, al-Fārābī sets out the subjects of theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy first, in brief; these theoretical discussions serve as the foundation of practical, civil, and political discussions. The significance of this essay: it may be regarded as the basis of al-Fārābī's civil philosophy, and his other civil and political treatises are shaped in accordance with it; in other words, al-Fārābī's other political works are the elaborated form of this one. We have added section titles to help orient the reader.

(I) Rulers

Religion (*Milla*)¹ is considered to be the doctrines and actions governed by specific rules set by the First Ruler (*al-Ra'īs al-Aḥmal*)² for a community. His goal in establishing such rules is to achieve a particular purpose or desire by way of the community or the people under rule. This community could be a city, a region, a tribe, a big community (*al-umma*), or a group of big communities.³ The First Ruler is virtuous, and his leadership (*al-rī'āsa*)⁴ is directed towards virtue.⁵ In this case, the ruler's goal in restricting doctrines is that he and everyone under his leadership achieve everlasting and ultimate happiness, which is the only true happiness. Therefore, this religion is considered a virtuous one.

However, suppose the leader's rule is ignorance (*Jahiliyyah*). In that case, his doctrine's goal is to fulfill the pursuits of ignorance, material desires, including essentials such as health, as well as hedonistic pleasure, glory, power, and domination. Moreover, only the ruler's happiness counts, while subjects are seen as tools to accomplish such. The ruler's intention may be to attain certain goods for himself and for the people; such a ruler is the most virtuous character among the ignorant. However, when leadership arises from misguidance, he enters an illusory domain and is perceived as both wise and virtuous. His subjects form this error, believing he aims for ultimate happiness, which is not the case. If the ruler's leadership is considered deliberate deception, intentional deception, his subjects may remain unaware; people will still assume him to be just and wise. He professes to rule them and himself with the aim of ultimate happiness, though, in actuality, he seeks to achieve worldly benefits for himself through his subjects.

The noble ruler who is virtuous governs based on divine revelation.⁶ However, the doctrines and actions shaping the virtuous religion are rooted in two ways, either in one alone or in both together: revealed formulated doctrine and the power of the revealer and revelation. At the same time, parts of religion are received directly, while others are divinely dictated. The process by which humans receive divine revelation has already been established and clarified within

theoretical philosophy, including the way this process awakens in the individual the capacity that flows from both the revealer and his act of revelation.

(2) Opinion

Theories and principles that exist in the virtuous community are either theoretical or voluntary opinions. What we call theoretical opinions concern:

- * God, angels, spiritual beings, and beings near to God, and their acts;
- * existence of the world and the parts of being, and the ranks of those parts;
- * the manner in which the first parts of being come into being;
- * explanation of how those bodies become the principles for other bodies, and for the ranks of bodies;
- * connection of the things of the world with one another;
- * explanation of justice;
- * explanation of how beings are connected with the truth, and with spiritual beings;
- * explanation of the existence of the human being and the acquiring of the human soul;
- * explanation of the intellect and its place in being, and its relation to God, and to spiritual beings;
- * explanation of what pertains to prophethood;
- * discussion of how revelation occurs; and
- * death, the life of the hereafter, the felicity of the righteous, and the wretchedness of vile individuals.

The second part, i.e., what we call voluntary opinions, consists of accounts of the good qualities and actions of the prophets, kings, leaders, and *imams* of the past, and the description of their lives and their communities. Likewise, the stories of ignorant kings and leaders of the past who dominated their communities are presented, and their evil actions are also described, including in what qualities they shared and toward what [worldly] and otherworldly end their own fate and the fate of their communities proceeded. The qualities of the good rulers of the present are also described, and in what respects they share with their predecessors and which good actions are specific to them. Similarly, it discusses the qualities of the rulers of misguidance who exist now, and in which qualities and in what things they share with those before them, and which actions are specific to them, and toward what end their fate will proceed. The qualities that exist in communities, including kings, rulers, servants, and all ranks, are examined in this part. The relations of individuals and the subordination of some to others are also counted among the opinions of the community.

(3) Regulation of Thoughts and Actions

Regarding actions, the most common are those deeds through which God is exalted. Next are those involving spiritual beings and angels that are revered, along with prophets, virtuous kings, *imams*,⁷ and leaders who are honored. Con-

versely, ignoble kings, wicked leaders, and *imams* of misguidance are vilified. On this basis, we may anticipate the ideas by which virtuous kings, rulers, and guiding *imams* are praised today, while others are dishonored. Accordingly, the regulation of thoughts and actions is set, by which the interconnection among the society's inhabitants is designed: whether concerning a person's desire to act or what to do in cooperation with others, or the virtuous aspects of fairness and justice throughout all parts of our actions. Hence, this forms the comprehensive structure that shapes the virtuous religion.

(4) Law and Doctrine

Religion and faith (*al-Dīn*)⁸ are represented as synonymous terms, as law (*Shari'ah*) and tradition (*Sunnah*)⁹ are often interconnected with one another.¹⁰ These latter terms, however, particularly refer to thoughts and actions forming religion. It is, still, possible to apply *Shari'ah* to specified doctrines and principles, including that of *Shari'ah* (law, especially religious law), *Millah* (religion), and *Dīn* (religion and faith), which all form synonymous designations. The religious structure, therefore, consists of two main components: beliefs and the regulation of actions. The first, known as doctrinal content, consists of two main streams. Doctrine can refer to the actual thing itself, where it is expressed by its exact name, or it can be expressed by an image representing the concept, which is identified by the name of likeness. Doctrines identified within a virtuous religion are either expressed as the truth itself or they indirectly represent it. In addition, truth forms the basis of human beings' ability to attain certainty, either immediately through our first knowledge or through demonstrative proof. Fundamentally, any religion whose followers cannot attain its doctrines, neither by themselves nor through demonstration, and which does not represent things symbolically that can be known by certainty, is a misguided religion (*Millah Dāllah*).¹¹

(5) Virtuous Religion and Philosophy

Virtuous religion is similar to philosophy. And philosophy is either theoretical or practical. Theoretical philosophy is the kind of philosophy that a human being comes to know but is not able to act upon, whereas practical philosophy is that in which action is possible. This is exactly like religion, which possesses two parts: beliefs and actions. The principles of the practical part of religion are established and outlined in practical philosophy. What is established in practical philosophy consists of principles that possess restricted conditions. Thus, those restricted matters are more specific than the absolute matters that lack conditions. For example, "a writing human" is more specific than "a human". Therefore, all virtuous laws and statutes belong to practical philosophy, while the demonstrative proofs of the theoretical opinions of the religion lie within theoretical philosophy and are counted among the presupposed principles of religion. On this basis, the parts of religion are counted as parts of philosophy. If something is a part of, or subordinate to, a science, it is so in one of two ways: either its demonstrations have been established in another science, or a higher science has set down the principles and has entrusted the branches to the lower science.

Practical philosophy, which is part of philosophy, provides the causes and the universal conditions that determine and specify actions, i.e., the cause and the goal of the action. Demonstrative questions are also part of the philosophy that undertakes the establishment of demonstrations, and on this basis, the proofs of the virtuous religion are established within the theoretical part of philosophy. For this reason, the task of governance in the virtuous religion is counted as part of philosophy.

(6) Argument and Persuasion

Since dialectic or topics (*al-Jadal*) creates a strong opinion (*Zann Qawī*) as demonstration (*Burbān*) provides certainty, and as rhetoric (*Khiṭābah*) yields persuasion in areas where demonstrative reasoning cannot be either appropriate or feasible, and dialectic cannot be entirely applicable; and as virtuous religion is not exclusively structured for scholars or those capable of apprehending discourse delivered purely in a philosophical manner, where it is directed toward broader social communities, many that are naturally, or, as a result of occupation, do not possess the capacity for analyzing philosophical arguments, this justifies how both dialectic and rhetoric play a significant role in the establishment of virtuous religion. However, those who are raised by religious doctrines and principles and are required to abstract their practices are not classified in the intellectual category for understanding philosophical reasoning. On the other hand, they are still capable of understanding commonly accepted opinions (*Mashburāt*) and persuasive arguments (*Muqni'āt*). In doing so, both dialectic and rhetorical forms are significant instruments for justifying religious doctrines and principles within our social community. The religious beliefs, hence, are considered credible and rationalized in the citizens' souls. Moreover, these instruments work to protect the religious doctrines from social threats, especially from those directed to undermine them through sophistic and subtle means, or those seeking to mislead the believers. Hence, both dialectic and rhetoric seek to protect and defend religious convictions from oppositions and argumentations, rather than being purely directed toward reinforcing them.

(7) Scope of Legislation

The First Ruler may not always be capable of devising and comprehensively determining all the necessary conditions. He may work on achieving most of them. However, in certain cases, some actions that he justifies may be incomplete, lacking fundamental and necessary conditions. This may justify necessary actions without prior determination. These omissions may occur for multiple reasons, where, e.g., the First Ruler may be overtaken before being able to complete the objective, which could be by death or warfare, or other obligations, that may not allow him to apprehend possible scenarios. Furthermore, it is still possible that the First Ruler does not consider legislative actions unless directed and informed by sudden events. In such cases, he legislates the actions performed in these situations. On the other hand, it is significant to consider that not all the contingencies take place during his lifetime, or within his city's restrictions. Further, many possible situations could arise in the future, where they

occur distinctly from his time and his country, requiring well-defined and interpreted actions, which he would not have legislated. Thus, the lawmaker focuses only on actions that he knows to be significant: those actions that will allow others to perform certain regulations, based on reason and analogy. By doing so, he establishes an example and leaves the rest, believing that those who follow his path will be able to legislate what is coming. Intentionally, and uniquely, he may begin legislating those actions holding certain significance and capacity to structure the city and the surrounding community. Following this way, he works exclusively on the foundational laws and defers the others, reasoning that he may have the chance to address them, or that others, whether in the present or future, can apprehend them following his model.

(8) Change in Law

The ruler who assumes authority after the First Ruler's death may also, like the First Ruler, determine actions and establish laws and statutes, i.e., he may determine what is most fitting in his own time; and, indeed, were the earlier ruler present, he would enact the very same measures. The new ruler may also alter certain laws, not because a law was in error or because the First Ruler was mistaken, but because such an alteration is beneficial in the present time. Were the First Ruler present at that same time, and were he to observe the circumstances, he would implement these changes. The same applies to the ruler who comes after the second ruler, i.e., the third and the fourth. They, too, may determine certain actions in such a way that, were the earlier ruler present, he would make the same determination.

(9) Jurisprudence

If one of those rulers, who is distinguished as a truth king, dies and is not followed by someone sharing his qualities in all respects, then it becomes indispensable to follow the authoritative beliefs of that predecessor without applying alterations or modifications. Everything that the ruler attained must not change. Regarding matters that require resolution but are not yet addressed by the predecessor, such ought to be inferred from the provisions explicitly attained by the First Ruler. Regarding these situations, it becomes significant to practice jurisprudence (*fiqh*), to enable an individual to infer the proper judgment for issues that remain undefined by the lawgiver, relying on the foundational ruling matters. Hence, the aim is to prove that any derivatives align with the lawgiver's purposes in instituting the religion for the legislated community. Moreover, this interpretation cannot be attained where the principles and beliefs of religion must be maintained, except by the virtuous person who embodies the virtues expressed by that religion, and this person is known as the jurist (*faqih*).

(10) Division of Jurisprudence

Just as religion is divided into opinions and actions, so the formulation of these opinions and actions is divided into these two parts. Therefore, one part of this discipline deals with opinions, and another part deals with actions. The jurist, with respect to actions, must be knowledgeable of everything that has been ex-

plicitly stated concerning actions by the one who instituted the *sharīʿah*. This explicit indication is either by his speech or by the act of the institutor of the *sharīʿah*. And the act of the institutor of the *sharīʿah* carries the same force as his speech. He should also know the statutes that existed at one time and were altered at another. He must be familiar with the language addressed to the First Ruler and should also know the linguistic usages of the people of his time. He must know indications and metaphors to attain true meanings. He must know what has been designated for what, and what is intended by the expression of any given matter. He should possess sufficient acuity to distinguish well between homonymous terms, and to recognize particular and universal, restricted and absolute, expressions. He must also recognize what is outwardly particular, though universality is intended, and when the purpose of an expression of a particular term is universal or absolute, in accordance with what appears from its outward form. He must also know the habits and well-known conventions of the people, what is ambiguous and what is divergent. And he must possess the faculty to distinguish what is essential to a thing from what is not essential to it.

These matters can only be attained through acuity and mastery of the discipline of jurisprudence. What pertains to speech is understood only through speech. And what has entered the *sharīʿah* through action is discovered through observing or hearing that matter. Such discovery occurs for the jurist either because he lived in the time of the institutor, belonged to his companions, and personally observed or heard the act, or because he attained it through reports. These reports are either well-known and accepted opinion (*mashhūr*) or persuasive (*muqniʿah*), and each of these is either written or unwritten. On the other hand, the jurist, regarding opinions, must also master everything that the jurist knows concerning actions. Jurisprudence regarding the practical matters of religion consists of those particulars whose universals have been established in civil science or politics (*al-ʿilm al-madani*) and is counted among the branches of civil and practical wisdom. Jurisprudence concerning the domain of beliefs also consists of particulars whose universals have been established in theoretical philosophy, therefore, that part belongs to theoretical philosophy.

(II) Civil Science and Happiness

Civil science¹² starts by explaining the concept of happiness (*Saʿādah*). It states that happiness is classified into two main kinds: one is considered to be such without truly being so, and the other is a genuine one. True happiness is that which occurs for its own sake, not as a means for another thing. All other things, however, act as a way of reaching this ultimate aim, which, once it is attained, ends the quest. This true happiness is realized in the other life, or the existence following this one; it is known as the ultimate happiness (*al-Saʿādah al-Quswā*).¹³ By contrast, things that are commonly related to happiness, which in reality are not, include wealth, material pleasures, honor, and other desires that ordinary people (*al-Jumhūr*)¹⁴ mistakenly classify as goods.

(12) Civil Science Continued

Then, [civil science, after discussing happiness,] discusses human actions (*al-af'āl*),¹⁵ courses of life (*al-siyar*),¹⁶ morality (*al-akhlāq*),¹⁷ natural dispositions (*al-shiyam*),¹⁸ and voluntary habits (*al-malakāt al-irādīyya*)¹⁹ comprehensively.

(13) Cooperative Community

According to [civil science] these human actions cannot exist within a single person; nor can a single person employ all of them. Rather, they can only be used and manifested in actuality when they are distributed among a group of people. When these actions are distributed across a community, it is not possible for the one to whom a certain type of task has been assigned to perform or exercise it without being assisted by another person, to whom another type of task has been entrusted; nor can that second person carry out what has been assigned to him or her without the cooperation of a third person entrusted with another type of task. Moreover, it is not impossible that among them there may be someone who cannot perform the task assigned to him or her without being assisted by several others, each of whom helps with the type of task assigned to him or her. For example, the one who is entrusted with the task of farming cannot complete his or her work without: the help of the carpenter, who prepares for him or her the wooden part of the plow; the blacksmith, who forges the iron part of the plow; and the ox-driver, who provides the oxen for plowing. Human actions and habits cannot achieve their intended purpose unless their various kinds are distributed among a large community, each individual possessing one or another [action or habit] in such a way that, through their collective actions and habits, the overall goal is completed by the community as a whole, just as the organs of a human being cooperate through their respective faculties to complete the function of the body as a whole. Therefore, such a community should live together in proximity, in a single dwelling place. There are several types of communities that live together in one habitation, some being civic communities (*jama' a madaniyya*),²⁰ non-civil communities (*jama' a ummiyya*),²¹ and others.

(14) Flourishing Life

[Civil science] then distinguishes the courses of life, morality, and habits, which, when practiced in cities or big communities, make their dwellings flourish and enable their inhabitants to attain good things in this worldly life, and ultimate happiness in the afterlife, separating them from those that are not so. The actions, courses of life, morality, natural dispositions, and habits through which ultimate happiness is attained are the only virtuous ones, the only truly good ones, and the only truly beautiful ones. All others among the actions and habits, though presumed to be goods, virtues, or beautiful things, are, in reality, evils.

(14A) Rulership and Politics

And [civil science] clarifies that what is meant to be distributed in the city, or in the cities, or in a big community, or among big communities, so that it may

be used in common, can only be achieved through rulership that secures those actions and habits in the city or the big community, and strives to preserve them among the people, so that they do not vanish or perish. And that rulership, through which those courses of life and habits are secured and preserved among them, cannot exist except by a profession and craft, and a habit and power, from which arise the actions by which [the courses of life and habits] are secured and preserved among the people. And this profession is the profession of kingship, the royal profession (*al-miḥan al-malikīyya*), or whatever one wishes to call it in place of the name “kingship.” And politics is the activity of this profession, i.e., the performing of the actions through which those courses of life and those habits are established in the city and big community and preserved for them. This profession is made coherent only through knowledge of all the actions by which the establishment is first achieved and preserved thereafter. And the rulership through which, in the city or big community, the courses of life and the habits by which ultimate happiness is attained are established and preserved for them, is the virtuous rulership. And the royal profession by which this rulership comes to be is the virtuous royal profession. And the politics that issues from this profession is the virtuous politics. And the city or big community that follows this politics is the virtuous city and the virtuous community. And the human being who is a part of this city or big community is a virtuous human being.

As for the rulership, the royal profession,²² and the politics²³ whose aim is not the attainment of ultimate happiness, which is happiness in truth, but rather the attainment of some good among the goods of this worldly life alone, i.e., those things that the multitude imagines to be goods: it is not virtuous. Rather, it is called ignorant rulership,²⁴ ignorant politics, and an ignorant profession. Indeed, it is not even called kingship, for kingship, according to the ancient [sages], is only that which is based on a virtuous royal profession. And the city or big community that follows the actions and dispositions established in it by the ignorant rulership is called the ignorant city or the ignorant community. And the human being who is a part of this city is called an ignorant human being. These forms of rulership, cities, and big communities are divided into many classes, and each one is named according to the aim it seeks among the supposed goods. These goals are either pleasures, or honors, or wealth, or something of that sort. And no one who is a part of the virtuous city may reside, whether willingly or unwillingly, in an ignorant city. Such a person would be, within that city, a foreign element, as an animal has, for example, a leg belonging to another species inferior to it. The condition of someone who is a part of an ignorant city, when he resides in a virtuous city, is similar: they are not, for example, like an animal whose head is that of a superior species. This is why the virtuous, who were compelled to dwell in ignorant cities due to the absence of a virtuous city, have needed to emigrate to the virtuous city, whenever it happened to exist at some time.

(I4B) Virtuous Rule

Virtuous rulership (*al-ri'āsa al-fāḍila*) is of two kinds: a primary rulership (*ri'āsa ulā*)²⁵ and a subordinate rulership (*ri'āsa tābi'a lil-ulā*).²⁶ The primary governs the city or big community through virtuous courses of life (*al-siyar al-fāḍila*) and virtuous habits (*al-malakāt al-fāḍila*). The other follows it and imitates it, yet differs from it in that it is separated from the virtuous courses of life and follows the ignorant ones (*al-siyar al-jāhiliyya*). The one who governs by means of the former rulership is the First Ruler, and the one who governs by means of the subordinate rulership, which suffices with preserving the first rulership and the one who governs by it, is called the ruler of the tradition (*ra'īs al-sunna*) and the king of the tradition (*malik al-sunna*), and his rulership is the rulership of the tradition (*al-ri'āsa al-sunniyya*).²⁷ The royal profession of the primary virtuous rulership (*al-mihna al-malakiyya al-fāḍila al-ulā*) consists in knowing all the actions by which the virtuous courses of life and virtuous habits (*al-malakāt al-fāḍila*) are established and preserved in cities and big communities, maintaining and guarding them from anything of the ignorant courses of life that may enter among them. For all of that endangers the virtuous cities, just as, for example, in the medical profession (*mihnat al-ṭibb*), health (*al-ṣiḥḥa*) is maintained in the human being and preserved from diseases by knowing all the actions that sustain and protect it and guard it from whatever may expose it to illness.

(I4C) Physician's Individual Attention

And the physician should make clear that opposites must be resisted by their opposites. They should also know that heat is resisted by cold, and that bilious fevers ought to be treated with barley water or tamarind water. And these three are of varying degrees of generality. The most general is that opposites ought to be resisted by their opposites. The most specific is that bilious fevers ought to be treated with barley water. Our statement that heat is resisted by cold is intermediate between the general and the specific. Except that when the physician treats, he treats only the bodies of individual persons, such as the body of *Zayd* or the body of 'Amr. It does not suffice, in treating *Zayd's* bilious fever,²⁸ to know of the principle that opposites ought to be resisted by their opposites, nor the rule that bilious fevers ought to be treated with barley water, without knowing, in *Zayd's* fever, something more specific than those things he knows from the craft. He examines whether this bilious fever ought to be resisted with barley water due to an abundance in his body of cold, moist things, or whether the barley water corrects the humoral mixture so that it should not be left to drain, and similar things. And if barley water ought to be administered, it is not sufficient to know this as an absolute knowledge, without knowing how much of it ought to be administered in quantity, the consistency, its thickness and thinness, at what time of the day it ought to be administered, and in what condition *Zayd*, the fevered person, ought to be in for it to be administered. Thus, the physician has estimated quantity, quality, and time, and they cannot estimate such without observing the patient. Their estimation is according to what they observe of the condition of this patient, who is *Zayd*. And this estimation can-

not be derived from the medical books they studied and trained with, nor from their ability to know the generalities and universal things established in medical books, but rather by another power that arises from practicing the acts of medicine on individual bodies one by one, and through prolonged observation of the conditions of patients and the experience they gain over time from engagement in treating and attending to persons.

Therefore, the perfect physician's craft is only completed when they can bring forth the acts arising from that craft by two powers: one is the ability to know the universals, which are the parts of their craft in the absolute, and to exhaust them so that nothing escapes them; and then the power that arises to them from the prolonged acts of the craft on individual persons.

(14D) Intellect

And so it is with the case of the primary royal profession, for it encompasses universal things. Yet it does not suffice to perform its acts merely by having comprehended the knowledge of the universals and by one's capacity for them, without having another power through prolonged experience and observation, by which one can determine the acts in their quantities, qualities, times, and all other conditions by which acts can be measured. These conditions may pertain either to a city, a community, or an individual, or according to a circumstance that arises at a given time. For the acts of the royal profession pertain to particular cities, i.e., this city and that city, or this community and that community, or this individual and that individual. The power by which a person can deduce the conditions by which acts are determined, based on what he observes in assemblies, city by city, group by group, or individual by individual, and according to circumstances arising in a city, a community, or an individual, is what the ancients called intellect. And this power is not attained merely by knowing all the universals of the profession and exhausting them, but rather through prolonged experience with individuals.

(15) Science of Particulars

Civil science is that part of philosophy which is confined to examining actions, courses of life, and habits, while the rest of philosophy examines universals and gives their definitions. It also investigates how, by what means, and to what extent particulars should be determined, and by what means they should not be determined, since estimation by actuality (*bi'l-fi'l*) pertains to another faculty beyond philosophy. Perhaps the conditions and accidents of this faculty are such that estimation by actuality is infinite, unbounded. This science consists of two parts. One part includes: the definition of happiness; what true happiness is; what things are thought to be happiness; the enumeration of actions, courses of life, natural dispositions, and habits whose nature it is to exist in cities and communities; and it distinguishes the virtuous from the non-virtuous among them. The second part includes the definition of those actions which render the cities and their people virtuous and preserve the virtuous habits and actions that maintain what has been established among them.

(16) Diseases of Cities

[Civil science] then investigates the kinds of royal professions that are non-virtuous and the number of their [rulerships], and it provides the descriptions of the actions performed by each of those royal professions through which they attain their purpose among the people of the cities under their authority. It shows that those actions, courses of life, and habits which are non-virtuous are the diseases of the virtuous cities, and that their courses of life and policies are the diseases of the virtuous royal profession. As for the actions, courses of life, and habits in the non-virtuous cities, they are the diseases of the virtuous cities.

(17) Corruption

[Civil science] then investigates the causes and factors by which, in most cases, the virtuous rulerships and the courses of life of the virtuous cities are liable to be transformed into non-virtuous ones, and it explains how these transformations into the non-virtuous occur. It also investigates and defines the actions by which the virtuous cities and their policies are preserved from corruption and prevented from turning into the non-virtuous, as well as the means by which, if they have been transformed and have fallen ill, they may be restored to their soundness.

(18) Intellection and Experience

The primary virtuous royal craft cannot have its actions accomplished perfectly unless the universal principles of this art are known, by conjoining it with theoretical philosophy, and by adding to it intellection (*al-ta'addul*), the faculty attained through experience that comes from long engagement with the actions of craft in the individual cities, and big communities, and in each particular group. This faculty is the capacity for accurately deriving the conditions by which actions, courses of life, and habits are determined for each group, or each city, or each big community, whether according to some short period of time or some long, but limited, period, or, if possible, according to the general temporal span. Determining them according to each state that occurs and each circumstance that arises, in the city, or in the big community, or in the group. This is what completes the primary virtuous royal craft.

As for the secondary one, whose rulership is traditional (*sunniyah*), it does not by nature require philosophy. The best and most excellent condition in the virtuous cities and big communities is that their rulers, who succeed one another through time, conform to the conditions of the First Ruler. [Civil science] explains how one ought to act so that the kings who succeed one another be in identical states of virtue, and what conditions must be examined in the children of the kings of the city so that, if these conditions are found in one of them, there may be hope that he will become a king in the same condition as the First Ruler. It explains how [a new ruler] ought to be educated and brought up, and through what discipline he ought to be trained until he becomes a king, completely.

[Civil science] also explains that the kings whose rule is ignorant do not need the universals of this craft nor philosophy; rather, each one of them may

attain his purpose in the city through experience acquired in the kinds of actions through which he reaches his intended aim among the supposed goods. If he has an evil disposition, and is strong in achieving what he needs, determining the actions he performs and the actions through which he employs the people of the city, his craft (which makes him a ruler) is thus composed of things acquired by experience, whether by his own experience or by the experience of someone else who shares his aim among the kings, whose aim is the same as his, and whom he imitates in this, or takes instruction from him; and he adds to it what he himself has experienced, together with what he has derived through his own natural disposition and cunning from the foundational principles he attained through experience.

(19) Rank

[Civil science] then defines the ranks of the things that are in the world. In general, the ranks of existents. It begins with the things that are most posterior in relation to the parts of the world; those that have no rulership over anything at all, and from which there issue only actions by which they serve, not actions by which they exercise rulership. And from these it ascends to the things that rule over them without any intermediary, which are the nearest of the things that rule over them. And it recognizes their ranks with respect to rulership, i.e., what those ranks are and the extent of their rulership. They do not yet possess complete rulership, and the natural dispositions and powers they have are not sufficient for them to hold rulership by themselves, and to dispense with being ruled by something else; rather, there must exist higher rulerships above them that govern them. [Civil science] then ascends from [these dependent things] to the nearest things that hold rulership over them, and it identifies their ranks in rulership, what those ranks are, and the extent of their rulership. They also do not yet possess complete rulership, and the natural dispositions and powers they possess are not sufficient for them to hold rulership by themselves, and to dispense with being ruled by something else; rather, there must exist higher rulerships above them that govern them. Then [civil science] ascends from these [intermediary things] to the nearest things that rule over them, and it identifies their ranks in rulership, what those ranks are, and the measures of their rulership; they also are not complete, although they are more complete than the rulerships below them; and their natural powers and dispositions are still not sufficient for their rulership to be by themselves so that they would have no ruler at all; rather, it is necessary that above them exist other rulerships that govern them. Then [civil science] ascends again to the nearest things that rule over these as well, and it identifies concerning them what it identified concerning the first ones.

[Civil science] continues ascending in this way from the things in lower ranks to the things in higher ranks, that possess rulership more complete than those below them; and thus, it ascends from the more perfect to the still more perfect among existents. It identifies that whenever it ascends to a higher rank and to an existent that is more perfect in-itself and more perfect in rulership, it follows necessarily that the number of existents in that rank is fewer, and that

each existent within it is more unified in-itself and less multiple. It also explains that multiplicity in a thing and the unity by which it is one proceed accordingly. [Civil science] continues ascending along the completion of this order from a rank of rulership to a rank of rulership more complete than it until it arrives at a rank in which there can be only a single existent, one in number and one with respect to every mode of unity, and above which no rulership can exist. Rather, the ruler that occupies that rank governs everything beneath it, and it is impossible for anything else whatsoever to govern it or to be superior to it, and it rules everything below it. It cannot possess deficiency in any respect whatsoever, and there cannot be a perfection more complete than its perfection, nor an existence better than its existence; whereas everything beneath it has, in some respect, deficiency, and the rank nearest to it is the most perfect of the ranks beneath its own.

(20) Service

And whenever things decline, the beings in each rank increase in number and decrease in perfection, until they reach the lowest of beings, whose actions are acts of service. And these lower beings are nothing more than remote in existence, and it is impossible for their actions to be acts of rulership at all. Also, the First One, the One Most Primordial, of whom nothing can be more prior, cannot have its action be an act of service at all. And each one of the intermediates, which occupy the ranks below the First Ruler, has actions that, in relation to those below them, are acts of rulership by which they serve the First Ruler.

[Civil science] also explains the concord and connection between things: their order, the order of their actions, and their mutual support, such that, despite their multiplicity, they form a single entity through the power of the governance of that One and His influence upon all of them; according to His rank and according to what is necessary for the being of that rank in existence, in accordance with its natural capacity and what it is required to entrust to it in terms of actions, whether serving, ruling, or both.

(21) Analogy to the Soul

Then [civil science] adopts the counterparts of this [hierarchy of the cosmos] within the faculties of the human soul (*al-quwā al-nafsāniyya al-insāniyya*).

(22) Analogy to Organs

Then it also adopts these analogues in the human body's organs.

(23) Adoption of Analogies

Then it adopts these analogies in the Virtuous City and considers the rank of the First Ruler [in society] like the rank of God toward all beings in the cosmos.

(24) Service of Intermediary Ranks

Then [civil science] continues to descend through the ranks until it reaches the classes of the inhabitants of the city whose actions are such that they cannot

rule through them but only serve, and whose habits are such that they cannot rule through them but only serve. The classes in the intermediate ranks perform actions by which they rule those below them and serve those above them. The closer a group is to the rank of the king, the more complete are their dispositions and actions. Therefore, their leadership is more perfect, until the order reaches the royal profession. This profession cannot be one through which a person serves at all, but rather it is a profession and a disposition through which one only rules.

(25) Rule without Service

[Civil science] then begins thereafter to ascend from the lowest ranks, which are the ranks of service (*marātib al-khidma*), to the next higher ranks of leadership. It continues to ascend, in discourse and description, from a lower rank to a higher one until one reaches the rank of the ruler of the city (*malik al-madina*), who rules but does not serve.

(26) The Faithful and the Exalted

Then [civil science] ascends from that rank to the rank of the ruler of the Virtuous City and the First Ruler of spiritual beings, who is designated as the Faithful Spirit (Gabriel). It is through him that God (the Exalted) communicates with the First Ruler of the city, so that he may contemplate his own rank and determine which rank it is among the ranks of the spiritual beings.

(27) World Governance

[Civil science] then continues thus to ascend in its definition until it arrives at God (exalted be His praise). And it sets out how revelation descends from Him, rank by rank, to the First Ruler; and how the First Ruler governs the city, or the big community, and the big communities, by means of the revelation from God (the Exalted). Governance likewise proceeds from the First Ruler to every division of the city, also in ordered sequence, until it reaches the final divisions. And [civil science] explains this by showing that God (the Exalted) is also the governor of the Virtuous City just as He is the governor of the world; and that His governance of the world is in one manner, while His governance of the Virtuous City is in another manner, yet there is a proportion between the two kinds of governance, and a proportion between the parts of the world and the parts of the Virtuous City or the virtuous community. And it further shows that there must also be concord, connection, order, and mutual support in actions among the parts of the virtuous community; and that just as the concord, connection, order, and mutual support in actions found in the parts of the world arise from the natural dispositions they possess, so too there must be their corresponding counterparts in the divisions of the virtuous community arising from the voluntary dispositions and virtues they possess. And just as the Governor of the world has placed within the parts of the world natural dispositions through which they come to be in concord, order, connection, and mutual support in actions, so that, despite their multiplicity and the multiplicity of their actions, they become a single thing performing a single act for a single

end, so too must the Governor of the big community establish and imprint within the souls of the divisions of the community and the city, voluntary dispositions and qualities that impel them toward that mutual concord, connection, and mutual support in actions, until the community, and the communities, despite the multiplicity of their divisions, the differences of their ranks, and the multiplicity of their actions, become a single thing performing a single act, by which it attains a single end. And something analogous to this becomes clear to one who reflects on the members of the human body.

And just as the Governor of the world has given to the world and its parts, along with the natures and innate dispositions He has implanted in them, other things by which the existence of the world and its divisions is preserved and maintained in accordance with the way He originally fashioned them for a very long duration, so too must the Governor of the virtuous nation act. For he must not restrict himself to the virtuous dispositions and voluntary qualities that he imprints in their souls, so that they may come to concord, connection, and mutual support in actions, without also providing, together with these, other things through which their preservation and continued steadfastness in the virtues and goods he implanted in them from the outset may be sought. And in sum, he ought to take God (the Exalted) as his model and follow the traces of the governance of the Governor of the world in what He has given to the various kinds of beings, and in what He has ordered for them, the innate dispositions, natural constitutions, and natural qualities He has placed and implanted in them, so that natural goods may be perfected for each class of beings, according to its rank, and for the totality of beings as well. Thus, he must likewise establish in the cities and nations their counterparts, of crafts and voluntary dispositions and voluntary qualities, so that voluntary goods may, in turn, be completed for each of the cities and communities, according to its rank and its worthiness, so that by means of this the groups of communities and cities may attain happiness in this life and in the life to come (other worldly life). And for this reason, it is also necessary that the First Ruler of the Virtuous City should have fully comprehended theoretical philosophy, for it is not possible to grasp anything of what is in the world of God's (the Exalted's) governance and to model oneself upon it except through that. And it becomes clear, in conjunction with this, that all of this can only be realized in cities that form a common community, in which their views, beliefs, and actions are shared, and in which their divisions come to concord, are connected, and ordered; and in that case, their actions mutually reinforce and cooperate until they achieve the intended end, which is ultimate happiness.

Biography

Mohamad Mahdi Davar is an MA Student in Philosophy at Memorial University of Newfoundland and he also holds a BA in Islamic Philosophy and Theology from the University of Tehran. His research is on Metaphysics, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, and Islamic Philosophy (especially on al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Suhrawardī, and his Philosophy of Illumination). He also works on

Political Philosophy, especially on Medieval Political Philosophy.
mmdavar@mun.ca.

Mohammad Fakiḥ is a philosophy student working on Medieval philosophy, metaphysics, epistemology, and virtue ethics. Through his research, he contributes to a universal philosophical and intellectual discourse. His current research focuses on the ontological foundations of medieval and classical philosophy, particularly the thought developed by Aristotle, al-Fārābī, Avicenna, St. Aquinas, and Mullā Sadrā. fakihmohammad967@gmail.com.

Notes

1. “Milla” (المِلَّة), or religion, in this sense, is more than just “faith,” as it refers to a comprehensive system of doctrines, laws, beliefs, and practices for ordering a community or communities. Furthermore, it reflects a fusion of political rule and religious guidance in al-Fārābī’s political philosophy and theology (regarding the term “political theology” see Belo (2021)). In addition, it seems that “Milla” in al-Fārābī’s philosophy refers to a religious community having divine law based on revelation.
2. In al-Fārābī’s view, the Prophet is the First Ruler (*‘Aql al-Fa‘āl*), because the Prophet is able to receive revelation from the Active Intellect as a main source of law (see al-Fārābī 2001, 69).
3. In Butterworth’s (2001) translation, “ummah” is translated as “nation”. Although “nation” is not an inappropriate rendering, it should be noted that the term “nation”, in the modern period, signifies a “nation-state”. “Millah” in Arabic and even in the contemporary Persian was used in the pre-modern Islamic context to mean “religion,” referring to a religious community. In this text of al-Fārābī, “ummah” designates the large religious community. For this reason, we have used “big community” in our translation.
4. The use of masculine pronouns for the First Ruler in al-Fārābī’s texts is because by the First Ruler is meant the Prophet, and the Prophet is male. Nevertheless, most of the attributes al-Fārābī’s assigns to the successors of the First Ruler are not gender-specific, and therefore it appears that the rulers of the Virtuous City after the First Ruler are not restricted to any particular gender.
5. Virtue here is connected to wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and knowledge of ultimate ends (i.e., happiness), and we can see some Platonic roots in this discussion, i.e., “the philosopher-king model”, in al-Fārābī’s view.
6. “Revelation” plays an important role in not only al-Fārābī’s philosophy, but also in Islamic thought in general; al-Fārābī uses Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ideas regarding the intellect together with Islamic prophethood, and revelation can inspire not only knowledge but a legislative faculty.
7. “Imams” in Butterworth’s (2001) translation, are “the righteous rulers”.
8. Butterworth (2001) translates “al-Dīn” as “creed”.

9. Butterworth (2001) also translates “Sharī‘ah” as “law” and “Sunnah” as “tradition”.
10. *Sunnah* or traditions mostly refers to Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) traditions, namely, his sayings, actions, and tactical approvals as the way of life for Muslims and all humankind. However, *Shari‘ah*, i.e., Islamic law, or law in general, refers to laws adopted from the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah*. *Shari‘ah* also can govern both legal and ethical dimensions of life.
11. Butterworth (2001) translates “Millah Ḍāllah” as “errant religion”.
12. Butterworth (2001) translates as “political science”, whereas al-Fārābī himself identifies civil science with politics or political science.
13. Butterworth (2001) also translates “ultimate happiness”.
14. Butterworth (2001) translates “multitude”.
15. Butterworth (2001) translates “voluntary actions”.
16. Butterworth (2001) translates “ways of life”.
17. Butterworth (2001) translates “moral habits”.
18. Butterworth (2001) translates “states of character”.
19. Butterworth (2001) translates “dispositions”.
20. Butterworth (2001) translates “civic association”.
21. Butterworth (2001) translates “natural association”.
22. Butterworth (2001) translates “kingly craft”.
23. Butterworth (2001) translates “regime”.
24. Butterworth (2001) also translates “ignorant rulership”.
25. Butterworth (2001) translates “first rulership”.
26. Butterworth (2001) translates “rulership dependent on it”.
27. The ruler of the tradition and the king of the tradition is the same, and because the ruler of tradition’s government is based on the First Ruler’s manners and traditions, al-Fārābī uses “tradition”.
28. Butterworth (2001) translates “jaundice”.

References

- Belo, Catarina. 2021. “Alfarabi’s Political Theology in the Virtuous City.” In *Islamic Political Theology*, edited by Massimo Campanini and Marco Di Donato. London: Lexington Books.
- al-Fārābī, Abu Nasr. 2001. “Book of Religion.” In *The Political Writings: “Selected Aphorisms” and Other Texts*, translated and annotated by Charles E. Butterworth. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- al-Fārābī, Abu Nasr. 2001. “Political Regime.” In *The Political Writings: “Selected Aphorisms” and Other Texts*, translated and annotated by Charles E. Butterworth. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.