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Philosophy and Religion in the Political Thought of Alfarabi

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Abstract: Philosophy and religion were the two important sources of knowledge for medieval Arab Muslim polymaths. Owing to the difference between the nature of philosophy and religion, the interplay between philosophy and religion often takes the form of conflict in medieval Muslim thought as exemplified by the Al-Ghazali versus Averroes (Ibn Rusd) polemic. Unlike the Al-Ghazali versus Averroes (Ibn Rushd) polemic, the interplay between philosophy and religion in the political philosophy of Abu Nasr Alfarabi takes the form of harmonious co-existence. Although, for Alfarabi, religion is an inferior form of knowledge as compared to philosophy, the present article will show that philosophy and religion play equally significant roles in Alfarabi's virtuous city and that in the absence of either philosophy or religion, the political system proposed by Alfarabi cannot exist.

Keywords: Alfarabi; philosophy; religion; political philosophy; virtuous city; medieval Arab philosophy

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1. Introduction

There are three major historical events due to which Greek philosophy reached the medieval Muslim world: (1) the Christianization of the Roman empire, (2) Persia becoming the new breeding ground for Greek philosophy, and (3) Muslim conquests and the Arabic translation movement (Ali 2022a). Muslims' encounter with Greek philosophy is one of the significant events in the history of philosophy. Because medieval Muslims were the followers of monotheistic religion they already had Islam as a source of knowledge which is derived from divine revelation. When the Greek philosophical corpus reached them, philosophy became the second source of knowledge for them which is created through reason and rational thinking.

Scholars hold different views regarding the influence of philosophy and religion on medieval Muslim thought. One group of scholars attempts to tone down the influence of Islamic religion or theology on medieval Muslim thought and argues that Greek philosophy is the decisive factor that shaped medieval Muslim thought. Leaman is one of the proponents of this approach. According to Leaman (1980, pp. 525–38), Greeks taught the Arabs new ways of thinking and influenced them in politics, metaphysics, ethics, and logic. Leaman adds that medieval Muslim thinkers deal with philosophy as the cornerstone of their work, and the issues in philosophy are different from those in theology. They (medieval Muslim thinkers) dealt with philosophy, not religion. Dimitri Gutas (2002, pp. 5–25) also rejects various approaches which see medieval Muslim thought through the prism of Islamic religion and theology. He concludes that medieval Muslim thinkers were interested in nothing other than philosophy. Similarly, Walzer (2007, pp. 108–33) sees medieval Muslim thought as a continuation of Greek philosophy. He argues that almost all medieval Muslim concepts and ideas are derived from Greek philosophy. Likewise, Walker (2005, pp. 85–101) comments that the encounter of Islamic thought with ancient Greek science and philosophy is noteworthy as the influence on Islamic culture of various modes of Greek thinking, primarily in its connection with philosophy, was deep and profound.

Another group of scholars tries to tone down the influence of Greek philosophy on medieval Muslim thought and views Islamic theology or religion as the decisive factor that

shaped medieval Muslim thought. Nasr (1996, pp. 68–90) sees the "Quran and Hadith as the sources of inspiration" for medieval Muslim thought. Similarly, Erwin Rosenthal also emphasizes the influence of Islamic theology on medieval Muslim thought. According to Rosenthal (1958, pp. 1–12), Muslim polymaths deemed philosophy in contrast with theology; one was based on revelation and the other on mythology, and because of the limitations imposed by theology, they were incapable of understanding philosophy correctly. Leo Strauss and his followers argue that medieval Muslim thinkers attempted to align their views with the Islamic theological view. Strauss (1945, 1989) suggests that Muslim polymaths lived and worked in a hostile environment and, therefore, they were bound to present their views "in conformity with Islamic religion". Charles Butterworth also proposes the same view, particularly about Islamic political philosophy. He (Butterworth 1972, p. 187) argues that "Islamic political philosophy has always been pursued in a setting where great care had to be taken to avoid violating the revelations and traditions accepted by the Islamic community".

Although scholars debate the relative influence of Greek philosophy and Islamic theology on medieval Muslim thought, the impact of either philosophy or religion on medieval Muslim thought cannot be utterly denied. Philosophy and religion, both, attempt to address the same social, political, ethical, metaphysical, and cosmological questions. Therefore, owing to the difference between the nature of philosophy and religion, the interplay between philosophy and religion often takes the form of conflict in medieval Muslim thought as exemplified by the Al-Ghazali (2000) versus Averroes (1987) polemic.[1] However, unlike the Al-Ghazali versus Averroes (Ibn Rushd) polemic, the interplay between philosophy and religion in the political philosophy of Abu Nasr Alfarabi takes the form of harmonious co-existence. Abu Nasr Alfarabi was one of the most prolific and eminent 10th-century medieval Muslim philosophers who is considered the founder of Islamic Neoplatonism and political philosophy (Fakhry 2002, pp. 2–4).[2] Alfarabi proposes his political system in the form of his theory of the virtuous mainly in his political treatise *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila* (Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City). The present article attempts to analyze the role and function of philosophy and religion in the political system proposed by Alfarabi. Since Alfarabi's understanding of philosophy and religion is quite different from the traditional view, before any discussion about the role and function of philosophy and religion in the virtuous city of Alfarabi it is essential to understand Alfarabi's views about philosophy and religion. Therefore, after the introduction, Section 2 of the article will explore the views of Alfarabi about religion, philosophy, and their mutual relation as presented in his writings. Section 2 of the article will show that Alfarabi views religion as the symbolic imitation of the philosophical truth. For him, philosophy, the knowledge of things as they are, is a superior form of knowledge and only the gifted superior minds of the philosophers are capable of acquiring it. On the other hand, he views religion, the knowledge of the symbolic representation of things as they are, as an inferior form of knowledge as compared to philosophy which, according to him, is suitable for the inferior minds of the common masses. Despite the fact that he views religion as an inferior form of knowledge suitable for the inferior intellect of the common masses, Section 3 of the article will show that Alfarabi makes religion, in addition to philosophy, an equally significant source of the knowledge of the ruler of his virtuous city. Unlike the philosopher-king of Plato's *Republic*, the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city is a philosopher-prophet who receives divine revelations from God. In addition to the philosophical knowledge associated with the rational faculty of the soul, Alfarabi makes it essential for the ruler of his virtuous city to acquire religious knowledge through divine revelations. This situation leads us to an obvious and important question: if Alfarabi views religion as an inferior form of knowledge suitable for the inferior intellects of the common masses, why does he make it necessary for the ruler of his virtuous city to acquire religious knowledge in addition to the superior philosophical knowledge? I will attempt to answer this question in Section 4 of this article. The virtuous city of Alfarabi consists of philosophers and non-philosophers. I will argue in Section 4 that the ruler of Alfarabi's

virtuous city needs philosophy to rule the philosophers, whereas he needs religion to rule the non-philosophers of the virtuous city. In Section 5 of the article, I will conclude that although, for Alfarabi, religion is an inferior form of knowledge as compared to philosophy, philosophy and religion play equally significant roles in the political system proposed by Alfarabi. The political system proposed by Alfarabi can neither exist nor function properly in the absence of either philosophy or religion.

2. Alfarabi's Views on Philosophy and Religion

Alfarabi explains the nature of philosophy, religion, and their mutual relationship in chapter 17 of his political treatise, *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila*. According to Alfarabi (1985, pp. 279–85), philosophy is the knowledge of things as they really are, the ultimate truth. This knowledge can only be obtained through strict demonstrations and insight. To know things as they really are, the ultimate truth, one must possess a superior mind gifted with the capacity to know the ultimate truth. Thus, Alfarabi (1985, p. 279) tells us that only the philosophers and "those who are close to the philosophers" can know the truth. While philosophers know the truth "through strict demonstrations and their own insight", the people who are close to the philosophers know it "through the insight of the philosophers" by "following them, assenting to their views and trusting them".

The things as they really are can be represented through symbols. This symbolic representation of things as they really are, according to Alfarabi (1985, p. 281), is religion. In other words, for Alfarabi, religion is the symbolic representation of philosophy. Alfarabi (1985, pp. 279–83) explains that those who are not philosophers or close to the philosophers lack the capacity to know things as they really are, but they can "know them through symbols which reproduce them by imitation" (Religion). The symbols used to reproduce the things as they really are for a specific nation are those which are best known to that specific nation. Since what is best known varies among nations, the symbols used to reproduce the truth vary among nations. This explains the existence of different religions among nations. Alfarabi ranks religions on the basis of the closeness or remoteness of the symbols that constitute a religion to the things as they really are or the truth. The closer the symbols of a religion that imitate the truth are to the truth, the higher rank it holds among the religions.

It is well established from Alfarabi's writings and other relevant secondary literature that Alfarabi subordinates religion to philosophy and considers the knowledge of the philosophers to be superior. In *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila*, Alfarabi (1985, pp. 279–81) explicitly states that "the knowledge of the philosophers [philosophy] is undoubtedly more excellent" as compared to the knowledge of the symbolic representation of philosophy, religion. In his other works, *The Political Regime* and *The Book of Religion*, he expresses the same views about the relationship between philosophy and religion (Alfarabi 2011a, pp. 24–35; Alfarabi 2011b, pp. 36–55). In *The Book of Religion*, Alfarabi argues that there are two parts of religion: one, the theoretical part; two, the practical part. He explicitly adds that "the two parts of which religion consists are subordinate to philosophy" (Alfarabi 2011a, p. 27). Likewise, in his book, *The Attainment of Happiness*, Alfarabi is more explicit about the relationship between philosophy and theology. He argues:

> "*When one acquires knowledge of the beings or receives instruction in them, if he perceives their ideas themselves with his intellect, and his assent to them is by means of certain demonstration, then the science that comprises these cognitions is philosophy. But if they are known by imagining them through similitudes that imitate them, and assent to what is imagined of them is caused by persuasive methods, then the ancients call what comprises these cognitions "religion" . . . . religion is an imitation of philosophy . . . . In everything of which philosophy gives an account based on intellectual perception or conception, religion gives an account based on imagination . . . Finally, philosophy is prior to religion in time*" (Alfarabi 2011c, pp. 68–69).

In addition to the works of Alfarabi, Alfarabi's views on the relationship between philosophy and religion are well documented in the secondary literature. According to

Fakhry (2002, p. 14), in his discussion about the relation of philosophy to religion, Alfarabi affirms "the pre-eminence of the former and argues that, to the extent a given religion is farther from philosophy, the farther it is from truth". Similarly, Walzer (1985, p. 14) argues that Alfarabi "is altogether no enemy of religion in its Hebraic or any other form as long as it remains subordinate to philosophy; its appeal is restricted to one group of people whereas philosophical truth is universally valid".

Alfarabi (1985, p. 281) argues that it is not possible to find any "ground for disagreement by argument" in philosophical knowledge because it is "known through strict demonstrations". However, it is possible to find grounds for objection on religion because, in religion, the truth is known through the symbols which imitate the truth. The farther the symbols of a religion that imitate the truth are from the truth, the more obvious the grounds for objection on that religion are and, thus, the easier it is to find those grounds for objection. In this context, Alfarabi explains the ascent of an individual from an inferior religion to a superior one and, possibly, from religion to philosophy provided that this individual seeks the right path, possesses the intellectual capacity, and finds grounds for objection on the religion he has:

> "*When one of them rejects anything as false, he will be lifted towards a better symbol which is nearer to the truth and is not open to that objection; and if he is satisfied with it, he will be left where he is. When that better symbol is also rejected by him as false, he will be lifted to another rank, and if he is then satisfied with it, he will be left where he is. Whenever a symbol of a given standard is rejected by him as false, he will be lifted to a higher rank, but when he rejects all the symbols as false and has the strength and gift to understand the truth, he will be made to know the truth and will be placed into the class of those who take the philosophers as their authorities. If he is not yet satisfied with that and desires to acquire philosophical wisdom and has himself the strength and gift for it, he will be made to know it*" (Alfarabi 1985, pp. 281–83).

In his *Ihsa al-Ulum* (Enumeration of the Sciences), Alfarabi expresses his views about the conflict between philosophy and religion. According to Alfarabi (2004, pp. 81–84), the followers of a religion see a conflict between their religion and philosophy just because they lack the awareness of the fact that the principles of their religion are nothing more than the symbolic representation of the philosophical principles. This lack of awareness often results in animosity between religion and philosophy. In this situation, philosophers are compelled to explain the relation between philosophy and religion to the religionists. They are compelled to confront the religionists and assure them that they are confronting the claim that there is any sort of contradiction between philosophy and religion, not the religion.

3. The Superior Knowledge of Alfarabi's Virtuous Ruler: Philosophy and Religion

In *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila*, Alfarabi proposes his theory of the virtuous city. According to Alfarabi (1985, p. 231), the virtuous city is a city "in which people aim through association at co-operating for the things by which felicity in its real and true sense can be attained". Thus, the purpose of association in Alfarabi's virtuous city is the attainment of "felicity in its real and true sense". The real and true felicity, Alfarabi (1985, pp. 205–7) argues, is the utmost perfection of the soul "where it is in no need of matter for its support, since it becomes one of the incorporeal things and of the immaterial substances and remains in that state continuously forever". In Alfarabi's virtuous city, the real and true felicity is attained through virtuous actions. It is the virtuous ruler of Alfarabi who establishes the virtuous actions in the virtuous city and leads the people toward the attainment of real and true felicity. To do so, Alfarabi's virtuous ruler must possess superior knowledge which, among other things, includes: (a) the knowledge of the real and true felicity as distinguished from the presumed felicity[3]; (b) the knowledge of the right path which leads to true felicity; and (c) the knowledge of the actions which are conducive for the attainment of true felicity. The superior knowledge of Alfarabi's virtuous ruler entitles him to the position and authority as ruler. There are two sources of the superior knowledge

of Alfarabi's virtuous ruler: one, reason, which is associated with the rational faculty of the soul; and two, divine revelation, which is associated with the imaginative faculty of the soul. The knowledge obtained by Alfarabi's virtuous ruler through the rational faculty of the soul is philosophical knowledge, whereas the knowledge obtained by him through the imaginative faculty of the soul is religious knowledge.

Reason or the rational faculty of the soul, according to Alfarabi (1985, p. 165), is that faculty by which one knows the "intelligibles", "grasps the arts and the sciences", and "distinguishes between good and evil". It consists of two parts: one, the theoretical rational faculty, the faculty by which one obtains the knowledge of the things that cannot be created or altered by human agency; and two, the practical rational faculty, the faculty by which one obtains the knowledge of the things that can be created or altered by human agency (Alfarabi 1952, p. 98). The virtuous ruler of Alfarabi must possess the most perfect rational faculty. That is, his rational faculty must be actually intellect and actually intelligible. However, as the rational faculty is a "disposition in matter", it is only "potentially intellect" and "potentially intelligible". Alfarabi explains the transformation of the rational faculty from "potentiality" to "actuality" with the help of the imagery of the sun. It seems that Alfarabi has borrowed this imagery of the sun from Plato's *Republic*. Like Plato (1991, pp. 187–89), Alfarabi (1985, pp. 201–3) tells us that, in the absence of sunlight, the eyesight is only potentially sight and the colors are only potentially seeable. The sun provides light which makes the faculty of sight actually seeing and the colors actually seen. Likewise, there is an agent, corresponding to the sun in the imagery of the sun, that provides something to the rational faculty, corresponding to the sunlight. In this way, all potentially intelligible things become actually intelligible and the rational faculty is transformed from potentially intellect and potentially intelligible to actual intellect and actually intelligible. Alfarabi identifies this agent as the active intellect. According to Alfarabi's theory of emanation, ten intellects emanate from the highest metaphysical principle, the First.[4] The active intellect is the tenth intellect that emanates from the First. The emanation from the First through the mediation of the active intellect into the rational faculty of the ruler enables him to attain philosophical knowledge, the knowledge of things as they really are.

On the other hand, the imaginative faculty or the faculty of representation, according to Alfarabi (1985, p. 165), is that faculty by which we preserve the imprints of things sensed by the five senses. However, this faculty is not just a storeroom for the sensibles. Rather, it actively connects and disconnects the sensibles stored in it in various ways. In addition to this, perhaps the most important activity of this faculty is "reproductive imitation" (mimesis). Reproductive imitation is the activity of the faculty of representation by which it imitates and simulates the intelligibles, the sensibles, the appetitive faculty, the nutritive faculty, and the temperament of the body through the imprints of the sensibles stored in it (Alfarabi 1985, pp. 211–13). In addition to the most perfect rational faculty, the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city must possess an imaginative faculty that has attained its utmost perfection. This imaginative faculty of utmost perfection enables the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city to receive prophecy or prophetic knowledge. Alfarabi (1985, pp. 219–25) explains that the perfect imaginative faculty sometimes receives the intelligibles and the particulars from the active intellect whose proper place is in the theoretical reason and the practical reason, respectively. However, the imaginative faculty does not have the capacity to receive the knowledge of the things as they are. Therefore, it imitates them through the sensibles stored in it and receives their symbolic imitation which constitutes the religious knowledge. The symbolic imitation of the intelligibles received from the active intellect by the perfect imaginative faculty of the ruler provides the ruler with the prophecy about the divine things, whereas the symbolic imitation of the particulars received from the active intellect by the perfect imaginative faculty of the ruler gives him the prophecy about the present and future events. Thus, the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city is a philosopher-prophet who not only possesses the knowledge of the things as they are (the philosophical knowledge) but also the knowledge of the symbolic imitation of the things as they are (the religious knowledge).

4. The Function of Philosophy and Religion in the Political System of Alfarabi

It is clear that Alfarabi views philosophy as the superior form of knowledge which can only be acquired by the philosophers since only they possess the superior intellectual capacity for acquiring superior knowledge. It is also clear that he views religion as an inferior form of knowledge as compared to philosophy which is suitable for the common masses who possess an inferior intellectual capacity as compared to that of the philosophers and can only know the symbolic imitation of philosophical knowledge. Notwithstanding the inferior nature of religion, Alfarabi gives an equally significant and central role to religion in the political system proposed by him. Unlike the philosopher-king of Plato, the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city is a philosopher-prophet who is endowed with divine revelations. In addition to the philosophical knowledge associated with the rational faculty of the soul, he must possess religious knowledge which he receives through divine revelations (*Wahy*) associated with the imaginative faculty of the soul. As I and Qin have discussed elsewhere, by making revelations, in addition to reason, the source of his ruler's superior knowledge, Alfarabi "associates him with the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, rightly guided Sunni caliphs and Shia Imams who received guidance from God through revelation" (Ali and Qin 2019). However, the question that is of paramount significance here is why does the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city need religion in addition to philosophy? In other words, when the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city knows the things as they are, why does he need to know the symbolic imitation of the things as they are? When he possesses the superior philosophical knowledge, the truth, why does he need to possess the inferior religious knowledge, a mere symbolic imitation of the truth?[5]

To answer the above questions, first of all we need to know some of the important functions of the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city. Alfarabi (1985, pp. 235–47) tells us that the ruler of his virtuous city is the one who organizes the virtuous city and arranges its people "in the ranks which are proper to them". He is the one who is responsible for removing any "disorder" found in the people of the virtuous city. Because he is the one who knows the true felicity, the ultimate goal of the virtuous city, and the actions by which this true felicity can be attained, he should "lead people well along the right path to felicity and to the actions by which felicity is reached". He should make the true felicity the goal of the people of the virtuous city and should establish the voluntary actions in them by which the true felicity can be attained. Lastly, he should make the people of the virtuous city take him as "their guide", "follow" him, and "imitate" his aim in their actions. These are the crucial functions of the ruler on which the whole political system of Alfarabi, the virtuous city, stands. Now, the question here is how will he carry out these functions? It is clear that the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city can carry out these functions only if the people of the virtuous city submit to his commands unconditionally and unquestioningly. Thus, perhaps the first and the most important task of the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city is to achieve a complete, unconditional, and unquestioning submission of the people of the virtuous city to his commands. For a complete, unconditional, and unquestioning submission of the people of the virtuous city to the commands of their ruler, it is essential that the people are convinced that their ruler is legitimate and infallible. In this context, another important question is how can the people of Alfarabi's virtuous city be convinced that their ruler is legitimate and infallible? To answer this question, first we need to know the people who constitute the population of Alfarabi's virtuous city.

In his *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila*, Alfarabi (1985, p. 233) provides some information about the composition of his virtuous city. He tells us that his virtuous city consists of people who are divided into various ranks in the form of a hierarchy. This hierarchical rank ordering is based on the difference in the "natural disposition" of the people. The first and topmost rank in this hierarchy consists of the ruler and those who are close to the ruler. Those who are close to the ruler perform their actions "in conformity with the intention of the ruler". The second rank of the hierarchy consists of those people "who perform their actions in accordance with the aims" of the people who are close to the ruler. The people of the second rank are followed by the people of the third rank "who

perform their actions according to the aims of the people" of the second rank. The rank ordering of the people of the virtuous continues in this manner until the last and lowest rank of the city which consists of those people who "perform their actions according to the aims of others, while there do not exist any people who perform their actions according to their aims". This description of the composition of Alfarabi's virtuous city in *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila* does not give us information about the total number of ranks in the virtuous city and the exact identity of the people of each rank. Fortunately, this information is provided in Alfarabi's *Fuṣūl al-madanī* (Aphorisms of the Statesman). In his *Fuṣūl al-madanī*, Alfarabi (1952, p. 113) tells us that his virtuous city consists of five ranks. The first rank includes those who are "wise", "intelligent" and "prudent in great matters". The second rank consists of the "orators, the eloquent, the poets, the musicians, the secretaries and the like". The third rank consists of "the accountants, the geometers, the doctors, the astrologers and the like". The fourth rank is composed of "the army, the guards and the like". Finally, the fifth rank includes those people "who gain wealth in the city, such as farmers, herdsmen, merchants and the like".

If we combine the above-mentioned two descriptions of the composition of Alfarabi's virtuous city, it can be said that the first rank of the virtuous city consists of the ruler and those who are close to the ruler and that they are wise, intelligent, and prudent in great matters. It is safe to say that the first rank of the virtuous city represents the ruling class of the city. The people of the first rank are those who can access knowledge of things as they are, the philosophical knowledge. The ruler of the virtuous city, a philosopher, is the most perfect among the members of the first rank of the virtuous city. He possesses the most perfect and superior knowledge, the knowledge of things as they are, the truth, through strict demonstrations and his own insight. As I mentioned in Section 2, the people who are close to the philosopher access the truth through the insight of the philosopher by trusting him, following him, and assenting to his views. The members of the first rank of the virtuous city who are close to the philosopher-ruler are convinced about the legitimacy of the ruler because they know that he is the best and most perfect among the citizens of the virtuous city since he possesses the most superior and perfect knowledge, philosophical knowledge. They are convinced about the infallibility of the ruler because they know that his decisions and actions are based on pure reason and knowledge of the truth. They are convinced that he is the one who can lead them to the felicity since he knows the true felicity and the path that leads to true felicity. Thus, they follow him and submit to his commands completely, unconditionally and unquestioningly.

The philosophical knowledge of the ruler is sufficient to convince those who are close to the ruler about his legitimacy and infallibility. Thereby, they follow the intentions of the ruler in their actions. However, the first rank of the virtuous city represents a very small portion of the population of the virtuous city. The other four ranks of the virtuous city represent the majority of the population of the virtuous city, the masses. Because the people of these four ranks are neither philosophers nor close to the philosophers and lack the intellectual capacity to know things as they are, the philosophical knowledge of the ruler cannot convince them about the legitimacy and infallibility of the ruler. And because they cannot fathom the superiority of the philosophical knowledge of the ruler, it is unlikely that they will follow the intentions of the ruler in their actions because of the philosophical knowledge of the ruler. To convince them about the legitimacy and infallibility of the ruler, the ruler must be superior in the knowledge which they can understand. As I mentioned in Section 2, those who are not philosophers or close to philosophers can know the symbolic imitation of philosophy, religion. Thus, the ruler of the virtuous city needs religion to convince them about his legitimacy and infallibility. The majority of the people of the virtuous city who are neither philosophers nor close to the philosophers are convinced about the legitimacy of the ruler because they believe that he is chosen by God since he is the one who receives guidance from God in the form of revelations. They are convinced about the infallibility of the ruler because they believe that his words and actions are guided by God. Since God is infallible, he is infallible too. They are convinced that he knows

felicity and the path to felicity because they believe that God has given him this knowledge through revelations. They follow his aims and intentions in their actions and submit to his commands completely, unconditionally, and unquestioningly because they believe that his aims, intentions, and commands are, in fact, the aims, intentions, and commands of God which are provided to him through revelations.

5. Conclusions

Alfarabi's understanding of philosophy and religion is grounded in the distinction between the knowledge of things as they truly are and their symbolic representation. According to him, philosophy represents the ultimate truth and can only be grasped through rigorous demonstrations and insight. Those who possess superior minds, namely philosophers and those close to them, have the capacity to attain this knowledge directly. On the other hand, religion serves as the symbolic representation of philosophy, allowing individuals who lack philosophical capacity to access the truth through imitative symbols.

There is no doubt that, for Alfarabi, religion is an inferior form of knowledge as compared to philosophy. However, in the absence of either philosophy or religion, the political system proposed by Alfarabi can neither exist nor function properly. The virtuous city of Alfarabi consists of the philosophers or those who are close to the philosophers and the non-philosophers. The ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city uses his superior philosophical knowledge to rule the philosophers and those who are close to the philosophers. However, the philosophers and those who are close to the philosophers represent a very small portion of the population of the virtuous city. For the existence and smooth functioning of Alfarabi's virtuous city, it is necessary that the non-philosophers also believe in the legitimacy and infallibility of the ruler and submit to his commands unconditionally. Because the non-philosophers lack the intellectual capacity to access philosophical knowledge the superior philosophical knowledge of the ruler cannot convince the non-philosophers about the legitimacy and infallibility of the ruler. They would neither accept his rule nor submit to his commands because of his philosophical knowledge. Therefore, the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city utilizes religion, the knowledge which the inferior minds of the non-philosophers can access, to convince the non-philosophers about his legitimacy and infallibility, to submit them to his commands, and to rule them. Thus, philosophy and religion are equally significant for the existence and proper functioning of the political system proposed by Alfarabi.

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Notes

1 For a detailed discussion on Averroes versus Al-Ghazali polemic, see Montada (1992).

2 Traditionally, the Neoplatonists are known for their lack of interest in political philosophy. Therefore, the co-existence of politics and Neoplatonism in Alfarabi is often denied. The scholars who provide the Neoplatonic reading of Alfarabi tend to deny the status of Alfarabi as a political philosopher. On the other hand, the scholars who consider Alfarabi a political philosopher tend to refute the Neoplatonic reading of Alfarabi. Elsewhere, I have refuted the arguments against the co-existence of politics and Neoplatonic metaphysics in Alfarabi, and have concluded that Alfarabi is indeed a Neoplatonist as well as a political philosopher. For details, see Ali (2022b).

[3] In his *Enumeration of the Sciences*, Alfarabi distinguishes between true felicity and presumed felicity. He argues that some mistakenly presume that things such as wealth, honor, and pleasure are felicity. This is presumed felicity, which is completely different from real and true felicity. For details, see Alfarabi (2004).

[4] For a detailed discussion on Alfarabi's theory of emanation, see Ali (2022b).

[5] Leo Strauss (1945, 1989) and his followers, such as Butterworth (1972), argue that the environment in which the Muslim Arab philosophers, such as Alfarabi, worked was hostile and that these philosophers were compelled to align their views with Islamic religious beliefs to avoid persecution. Therefore, the Straussian scholars may answer this question by telling us that by making revelation or religion, in addition to philosophy, an important source of the knowledge of his ruler, Alfarabi is trying to align his views with Islamic religious beliefs so that he can avoid persecution. However, elsewhere I have refuted the Straussian view and shown that this view is based on unsound grounds. For a detailed discussion on the Straussian view and my refutation of the Straussian view, see Ali (2022a, 2022b).

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