

An Analysis of Al-Farabi's Conception of Being

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Abstract

This study is an examination of Al-Farabi's conception of being, as well as his categories of essence and existence. The paper traces his background, influence, and identified factors that underpin his argument on the conception of being. Despite the influence of Aristotle on his discourse, the concept being is spread all over his works, most of which were translated from Arabic to English. The starting point in his discourse on the concept of reality is found in his conception of human nature, according to which human nature is not harmonious but variegated depending on the individuals. In an attempt to justify the variegated nature of the individuals, Al-Farabi failed to offer coherent arguments to justify his position. He rather defended the thesis of the disparity in the essence of human nature and the individuals. The implication here is that rather than defending his arguments of the variegated nature of the individuals, he rather introduced and support the differences of the being, essence and existence. Being he contends cannot be in isolation and that it can only be actualized in conjunction with the divine. To buttress his point Al-Farabi examines the concept of happiness in order to establish or justify the link between being, essence and existence. The paper, therefore, highlights the major issues raised in his conception of being vis-a-vis his notion of happiness as linked to essence and existence. The paper concludes that Al-Farabi's conception of reality is rather lost in his attempt at explicating his notion of being, essence and existence.

Key Words: Al-Farabi, Being, Essence, Existence, Happiness, Supreme Happiness, Perfection.

Introduction

Al-Farabi can be considered one of the great minds in ancient classical philosophy. His conception of reality was expressed in different aspects of his works. Some of which were translated by Islamic scholars. Several factors could be said to have influenced his idea of reality and the nature of

being. One such factor is his Islamic background which fundamentally affected his theorization. Another factor was his environment and finally the prevailing school of thought in his time, for instance, Al-Farabi was greatly influenced by Aristotle, although some scholars tend to argue that he came in contact with some of Plato's writings but was more inclined to Aristotle's due to proximity of ideas with that of the later. Al-Farabi conceives reality as emanating from human nature, accordingly, he believed that despite this fact, human nature is not harmonious but rather variegated depending on the individual's experience.

Al-Farabi believed that from the inception of human existence there are transformatory experiences or changing dimensions of nature and this tends to affect his notion about reality, Al-Farabi holds that the emergence of life, and later the end is a process of change that intrigues man, which includes the fact that humanity is not only undergoing shattering stress, disorientation, but also experience meaninglessness. However, our interest in this paper is to show that rather than justify his notion of variegated human experience in the understanding of reality, he rather introduced and defended the thesis of the disparity in the essence of human nature and the individuals. Al-Farabi argued that the essence of man can be found in his search for happiness which he unlike Aristotle can be found in the divine and not the mean of Aristotle nor knowledge in Plato. The paper apart from showing that he was unable to justify his position also examines his notion of happiness as the essence of being he concluded with.

The paper apart from the introduction is divided into three parts. The first part examines the various factors that affected Al-Farabi's conception of reality. The second part analyzes his position and finally, draws conclusions based on its findings.

The Influences on Al-Farabi's Notion of Reality

Discourse on the concept of Being emanated from the classical era of ancient Greek philosophy. However, it took a different twist in the philosophies of the late modern to contemporary philosophers. Historically, the concept of the ontology of being, has a dual analysis, on the one hand is the Islamic philosophers' conception of the ontology of being and on the other hand is Western thought translations and interpretations. In this study however, our emphasis is on the Islamic philosophical tradition. The choice of this tradition is based on the influence of the writings and scholarship of Al-Farabi. Al-Farabi was heavily indebted to Western thought, his Islamic background provided the

basis of his discourse on the concept of ontological being, essence and human existence. The starting point of this section therefore is the examination of the ontology of being, essence and existence in Islamic philosophy and philosophers.

The first distinctive feature of the conception of being in Islamic philosophy is that, they consider existence to be merely an abstraction not corresponding to any external reality that consists solely of existents. Islamic philosophy distinguishes clearly between the concept of existence and the reality to which it corresponds. The concept of 'being' is the most universal and known of all concepts, while the reality of existence is the most inaccessible of all realities, although it is the most manifest. They strongly hold that it is the only reality for those who possess the knowledge that results from illumination and "unveiling" (Mohaghegh and Izutsu, "Metaphysics" 1968, p.4). This position was buttressed by Nasr, when he contends that "Being and existence in itself and its relation to quiddity or essence is central to Islamic philosophy". Islamic philosophy is most of all a philosophy concerned with *being* or existence (*wujud*) and hence with its distinction from quiddity or essence (*māhiyyah*). This position was re-echoed by Toshihiko Izutsu, when he asserts that:

The distinction between 'quiddity' and 'existence' is undoubtedly one of the most basic philosophical theses in Islamic thought. Without exaggeration the distinction may be said to constitute the first step in ontological-metaphysical thinking among Muslims; it provides the very foundation on which is built up the whole structure of Muslim metaphysics. (Toshihiko Izutsu, 1983, p. 49)

Nevertheless, the language of this metaphysical doctrine revolves around *being* or existence in most schools of Islamic thought. Hence, the discussion concerning the distinction between *being* or existence and quiddity or essence and their relation remains central to Islamic metaphysical thought even while most Muslim gnostics and metaphysicians have remained fully aware of the supra-ontological nature of the Supreme Reality and have not limited metaphysics to ontology, which they traced to Al-Farabi

The discourse on the Western front the concept of the ontology of being and existence is traced to Aristotle and Theophrastus, however before them was Plato. These served or provided the essential ingredient for the writings of Al-Farabi, but it must be noted that, Al-Farabi was from an Islamic background which influenced his writings especially on the subject matter of

being. The Qur'anic teachings about Allah as the Creator of the world played a crucial role in the development of Islamic philosophy, as far as the study of existence (*wujud*) is concerned. On the one hand, it made central the importance of the ontological hiatus between Being and existents and, on the other hand, bestowed another significance on the distinction between existence (*wujud*) and quiddity or essence (*māhiyyah*) by providing a meaning to the act of existentiation or the bestowal of *wujud* upon *māhiyyah* other than what one finds in Aristotelian philosophy as it developed among the Greeks.

In his *Fusul al-hikmah* Al-Farabi, he distinguishes clearly *huwiyyah*, which in the early Islamic philosophy terminology means “that by which something is actualized” (Nasr, 1971, p. 65). Ibn Sina, deeply influenced by Al-Farabi, makes this distinction the cornerstone of his ontology and treats it amply in many of his works, especially the metaphysics of the *Shifā'* (Healing) and the *Najāh* (Salvation) as well as in his final major philosophical opus, *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbihāt* (Directives and Remarks) (Rahman, “Essence and Existence in Avicenna” 1-16; Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* 197ff). Notably, we opine that there is a way of thinking based upon the distinction between existence and essence by appealing to the immediate perception of things. Most fundamentally, a man seeking to understand the nature of the reality he perceives can ask two questions about it: (i) Is it (*halhuwa*)? and (ii) What is it (*mā huwa*)? The answer to the first question relates to existence or its opposite ('*adam* or nonexistence), and the answer to the second question concerns essence (Fakhar, 1983, p. 65).

Essentially in Islamic philosophy terms are carefully defined, but in the case of existence, it is impossible to define it in the usual meaning of definition as used in logic that consists of genus and specific difference. Moreover, every unknown is defined by that which is known, but there is nothing more universally known than existence, and therefore nothing else in terms of which existence can be defined. In traditional circles, it is said that everyone, even a small baby, knows intuitively the difference between existence and its opposite, as can be seen by the fact that when a baby is crying, to speak to it about milk is of no avail, but as soon as “real” milk, that is, milk possessing existence is given to it, it stops crying (Fakhr 1983, p.66).

In *The Polarization of Being* that rather than define existence, the Islamic philosophers allude to its meaning through such assertions as “existence is

that by which it is possible to give knowledge about something” or “existence is that which the source of all effects is” (Rosenthal 1990, p. 182). As for essence, it is possible to define it clearly and precisely as that which provides an answer to the question “What is it?” There is, however, a further development of this concept in later Islamic philosophy that distinguishes between 'essence' in its particular sense (*bi'l-ma'na'l-akhass*), which is the response to the question “What is it?” and 'essence' in its general sense (*bi'l-ma'na'l-a'amm*), which means “that by which a thing is what it is”. It is said that 'essence' in this second sense is derived from the Arabic phrase *mā bihi huwa huwa* (that by which something is what it is). This second meaning refers to the reality (*haqiqah*) of a thing and is not opposed to *wujud*, as is the first meaning of '*māhiyyah*' (Fauzi 1971, p.3).

Etymologically, the derivation of the term *wujud* is an Arabic term related to the root *wjd*, which possesses the basic meaning “to find” or “come to know” about something. It is etymologically related to the term *wijdān*, which means “consciousness,” “awareness,” or “knowledge,” as well as to *wajd*, which means “ecstasy” or “bliss” (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 1). The Islamic philosophers who were Persian or used that language also employed the Persian term *hasti*, which comes from Old Persian and is related to the Indo-European terms denoting being, such as *ist* in German and *is* in English.

Again Nasr maintains that the '*Existence*' or '*Wujud*' as used in traditional Islamic philosophy cannot be rendered in English simply as existence. Rather, it denotes at once Being, being, Existence, and existence, each of which has a specific meaning in the context of Islamic metaphysics. In the light of this understanding the term 'Being' refers to the Absolute or Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujud*); being is a universal concept encompassing all levels of reality, both that of creatures and that of the Necessary Being Itself. Existence (capitalized) refers to the first emanation or effusion from the Pure or absolute Being, or what is called “*al-fayd al-aqdas*,” the Sacred Effusion in later Islamic philosophy; while existence refers to the reality of all things other than the Necessary Being (Alon 2001, p.66).

Nasr fundamentally observes that technically speaking, God is, but He cannot be said to exist, for one must remember that the English word 'existence' is derived from the Latin *ex-sistere*, which implies a pulling away or drawing away from the substance or ground of reality (Alon, 67).

Thus it is a well fact that the very rich vocabulary of Islamic philosophy differentiates all these usages by using '*wujud*' with various modifiers and connotations based upon the context, whereas the single English term 'existence' cannot render justice to all the nuances of meaning contained in the Arabic term (67). Based upon this background we contend that in Islamic philosophy it is most appropriate that we use the Arabic word '*wujud*' rather than a particular English translation of it. Furthermore, we observe also that there are some terms derived from '*wujud*' that are of great philosophical importance, especially the term *mawjud* or "existent," which Islamic philosophy, especially of the later period, clearly distinguished from existence as the "act of existence" (67).

In Islamic metaphysics, the difference between the terms *ens* and *actus essendi* or *Sein* and *Dasein*, are followed until it leads to conclusions, this very different from those in the West thought. Although Henry Corbin his work on Mulla Sadra's *Kitab al-masha'ir* contends that "there exists significant comparison between the Islamic philosophy of being and Heidegger's thought on the subject of existence" (67). Most essentially, we note that the similarity, on the whole, is based on conceptual analysis and not based on the external world where no essence is ever to be found without existence. Fundamentally, the whole of reality is nothing but the stages and grades of existence, and the quiddity of each object that has been brought into existence is nothing but the abstraction by the mind of a particular determination of existence. The essences of things are not realities to which existence is added, but abstractions made by the mind of a particular state of being that is called "existent" merely because the untrained mind perceives only the external and apparent aspect of things (Nasr, *Islamic Intellectual Tradition* 278ff). Outwardly, we can argue that in this context existents seem to be quiddities that have gained existence. But true awareness created through the disciplining of the intellect and spiritual vision allows the perceiver to see everything for what it is: namely, the very act of existence, each of whose instances appears as a quiddity to which existence is added; whereas in reality it is only a particular act of existence from the limitations of which the quiddity is abstracted (Al-Mashriq, 1968, p 10). The ordinary man is usually aware of the container, whereas the sage sees the content that is at once being (existence), presence, and witness.

Islamic philosophers often insist on the identity of existence, because their vision has penetrated the depth of Reality, which is at once being and

knowledge, awareness, and presence. The degree of awareness of being is itself dependent upon the degree of awareness of the knower, the degree and mode according to which he is. The more man is, the more he can perceive being. The universe itself is a series of presence that man can comprehend and penetrate, to the extent that he, himself is present.

The first determination of this Principal Reality is Being, which itself is the source of creation. The first effusion of Pure Being is at once the Intellect and Universal Existence, what the Sufis call the “Breath of the Compassionate” (*nafas al-Rahmān*) and that is ultimately the very substance of the created order. Schuon asserts that particular modes of existence are themselves the rays of Universal Existence extending from the Divine Essence through the various stages of existence to the world of spatio-temporal existence (Charles Butterworth, 1992, p.12). Yet, despite the multiplicity of the levels of existence, there is but one Being, and all the presences are ultimately the Presence of the One who alone is.

The philosophy of being of the Islamic philosophers has a direct bearing on man and his entelechy. Modern existentialism limits itself to the existence of individual man, and for many of the philosophers of this school, this existence comes to an end with the death of the individual. However, from the Islamic perspective, existence is not an accidental and faltering flame to be extinguished by the wind of death. Death is the gate to a more intense degree of existence, whether this be natural death or initiatic death accomplished through spiritual practice. Annihilation, which is the goal of the spiritual life, ends, not in extinction in the ordinary sense of the word, but in subsistence in the Divine and, therefore, in the most intense mode of being possible. The Muslim poet and mystic, Rumi according to Reynold A. Nicholson attested to this truth that through spiritual death man becomes never less than what he was but more (Soliba 1999, p. 103).

The study of being by the Islamic philosophy is related profoundly to the practical import of its teachings for human life, for it is inseparable from the practice of an inner discipline, which is the sole guarantee of a true understanding of the meaning of existence. The ordinary man is too deeply immersed in things, in existents, to become aware of the great mystery of existence itself. It is easy to perform this or that act, but it is very difficult simply to exist. It is much easier to play with concepts than to still the mind and to create an awareness to enable man to perceive the mystery of existence itself, to realize that “all things are plunged in God” (Rist 1967, p.

100).

Furthermore, Islamic philosophy is concerned with the analysis of the concepts of 'existence,' 'quiddity,' 'necessity,' 'contingency,' and the like. Beneath this rigorous logical analysis there stands the invisible presence of the profound spiritual experience of pure existence and ultimately of Being Itself. Therein lies the great message of this school for the modern world, which suffers profoundly from the divorce between conceptual knowledge and the mode and manner of one's being. Man is not only what he thinks, and his being does not necessarily follow his thinking; rather man's thought is the function of what he is. The *cogito ergo sum* of Descartes, which turned ontology in the West away from the study of Being to the analysis of its mental reflection, would be corrected by the sages of this sapiential tradition as *sum ergo est Esse*, to quote a formulation of (Frithjof Schuon 1968, p.44). Schuon also quotes Franz von Baader's formulation to the same effect, the German philosopher had said, in answer to Descartes, *cogito, ergo cogito et sum* ("I am thought [by God], therefore I think and I am") (44). What is being attested to here is the fact that "I am; therefore God is; Pure Being is" (Nasr, *Islamic philosophy from its Origin* 100). Thus Being is inferred from human existence itself, provided one turns toward the Center of oneself to experience. and Being, rather than fleeing from the Center into the bosom of congealed forms, whether they be external objects and acts or concepts running through an agitated mind, and also provided that the human mind turns to the call of prophecy that issuing from Being and the Intellect can enable us to repose again in the Infinite Source of all that is (Nasr 100). The more one *is*, the more one can understand being which invariably connotes that the best way to study Being is to live in conformity with His demands.

However, the central message of the later tradition of Islamic philosophy and theosophy is that the study of being begin with the concept of being, but it must be with its reality. Suffice it that we should note that man might study the concept of being without ever transcending the confines of his limitations and the prison of his accidental nature. This would be, not *hikmah*, but mental acrobatics (Gaslton, 1990, p. 100). In contrast, the veritable study of the reality of being, which is the goal of *hikmah*, brings with it freedom and deliverance from all confinement, for it opens the limited existence of man to the revivifying rays of a Reality that is at once being (*wujud*), consciousness (*wujdan*), and joy or bliss (*wajd*). The correct study of being leads to that state of wonder that is the origin of all wisdom,

as well as to participation in that joy or bliss the attainment of which is the goal of all knowledge and the end of human life itself, and that is woven into the very texture of the substance of human nature.

Al-Farabi's Notion of Reality

The starting point of Al-Farabi's notion of ontology of being, essence, and existence is his conception of human nature. He contends that human nature is not the same in all individuals (Walzer, 1985, p. 43). Thus it varies by the physical qualities of individuals within the virtuous city. Certainly, some individuals can easily grasp the first intelligible or the first known things, while in other ways some individuals do not receive them directly. Again it is equally certain that some individuals do not receive anything from the first intelligible in a natural way at all. And some others receive them in a way different from theirs. Furthermore, there are still others who receive the intelligible in respect of their selves. Human beings in this third group are different from defects because their nature is homogenous, prepared to receive intelligible which are common to them and through which they advance to the affairs and actions that are common to them. After this stage, they differ from one another, as some receive those intelligible which are peculiar to them and are not common to others. Those belonging to this group endeavor towards a particular genus without allowing anything else to share it.

Similarly, human beings excel one another in the faculties through which they derive the objects of one genus, some having the ability to derive all the individuals of a genus and others perceiving only a few individuals thereof (*Kitab al-Siyasah* 44). Again, it is noted that sometimes it so happens that two individuals, one being swift and the other slow, or one being swift in deriving all the individuals of a genus, and the other perceiving only a few individuals thereof. It is equally possible that sometimes it so happens that two individuals do not prove to be equal in their capacity of deriving the external objects, one being swift and the other slow, or one being swift in deriving the genus of the greatest excellence and the other in deriving the basest of the genus. It is also possible that both are equal in power, but one is able enough to teach what one has derived and can offer guidance to others, But the other has no such power of teaching and guiding others. They can also differ in performing corporeal deeds (Al-Farabi 44).

Natural dispositions do not necessarily oppose one another, nor do they

insist on action. Here, we can say that the individuals facilitate performance, and are not moved by anything external towards opposite actions. However, even if they are moved in opposite directions the individuals can resist and offer certain resistance against the external objects. It must be stated that all these natural dispositions require a suitable teacher. Hence, the individuals are trained in matters that prepare them to be at their highest or nearly highest perfection. Suffice it that some are even trained in mean things which produce excellent actions from a mean genus (*Kitab al-Siyasah* 46).

For Al-Farabi, people have different calibres by nature. This is to say that people vary in rank by the ranks in genus, arts, and sciences for which they have naturally been prepared or disposed of. People also differ in the capacity of training and giving guidance. Some individuals are stronger than others, and, hence they differ in receiving training. Some other individuals can be trained for the whole of the genus of the work, and some can be trained for a part of the genus only. Now, he who is an expert in imparting training and guidance is thus called the *chief* (*Kitab al-Siyasah* 47). One would have expected that Al-Farabi would have justified the dichotomy he had created to enable him to connect his conception of reality to the linkage with his notion of human essence and reality. Due to his Islamic background, he believes that essence cannot be found like man but rather in the divine especially in the divine. That the existential nature of humanity is not only undergoing shattering stress, and disorientation but also experiencing meaninglessness in being human, hence his essence cannot be found in nature but rather in divinity. To buttress his point he introduced the concept of happiness to justify his claims to the variegated nature of human reality. To what extent was he able to do that will be our focus in the next section.

Al-Farabi's Notion of Happiness as Basis for Essence

To justify his conception of variegated individual experience as the basis of human nature and reality, Al-Farabi introduced the concept of happiness as the basis of the search for essence vis-a-vis human nature. To have a proper comprehension of Al-Farabi's perception of the attainment of happiness, it is important to start with his definitions of happiness, ultimate happiness, and perfection as discussed thus. In Illai Alon's treatise *Al-Farabi's Philosophical Lexicon* (616-618), we find a plethora of Al-Farabi's definitions of happiness and supreme happiness leading to perfection. According to Al-Farabi:

Happiness is the utmost object of desire for all humans. Anyone who directs himself towards it does so because it is a kind of perfection. ...Happiness is good which is pursued its own sake, never at any time for gaining something else, and there is nothing greater beyond it for man to gain...Happiness is the most preferable, the greatest, and most perfect of (the kinds of) the good...Happiness is the absolute good...Happiness means that the human soul reaches the degree of perfection in (its) existence where it is in no need of matter for its support (any longer). (This is so) because it joins the incorporeal things and the immaterial substances, in which state it remains permanently forever (Millah 2001, p. 52, *Fusul* 1985, p.121; *Tahsil* 1969, p. 32; *Jalinus* 1985, p. 39; *Siyasah* 1968, p.55).

What exactly is happiness? Al-Farabi tells us in *Madinah* that felicity or happiness means that the human soul reaches a degree of perfection in (its) existence where it is in no need of matter for its support. This is so because "...it becomes one of the incorporeal things and of the immaterial substances and remains in that state continuously forever. But its rank is beneath the rank of the Active Intellect...Felicity is the good which is pursued for its own sake and it is never at any time pursued for obtaining something else"(Walzer, 1985, p. 6). Furthermore, Al-Farabi tells us that happiness is achieved by certain voluntary actions. Some of these actions are mental and others are bodily (Walzer, 1985, p. 13). Yet there is a noted variant adduced in *Siyasah* according to which perfected man achieves the rank of the Active Intellect, not the rank beneath the Active Intellect (Winosvsky, 2003, p.10).

In furtherance to our examination of the various definitions of happiness and perfection in this context, it should be noted that the concepts of happiness and perfection come to Al-Farabi from numerous sources and we are in no way arguing that it comes to him solely from Plotinus—although Plotinus uses these terms. It is simply being argued here that the knowledge of happiness or rather how man comes to possess knowledge of happiness—can and perhaps should be examined within a Neoplatonic construct among other sources.

Al-Farabi in his discourse on being, is the primary perfection of man to properly situate his theory. Al-Farabi does provide an obvious description of what appears to be the ultimate perfection which only includes the

ultimate perfection of the “philosopher-prophet-lawgiver” (Walzer, 1962, p406). Al-Farabi argues as to when virtuous citizens of all ranks achieve this ultimate perfection. Walzer, in his discussion of perfection, notes:

After it has been established beyond doubt that a particular superlunar intellect affects the human mind and enables it to function, the development of man's rational faculty becomes the main topic. Its successive stages have to be indicated. Its highest level is at the same time the highest felicity that human beings can reach: its last perfection presupposes the ultimate separation of body and mind: it establishes the unending and ever-increasing felicity of the immortal souls of the citizens of the Perfect State (Walzer, 2003, p. 406).

Al-Farabi claims that those who are perfect have both theoretical and practical perfection and can lead others to these perfections. Also in *Kitab al-Siyasah*, Al-Farabi insists that happiness can be known and perceived only by the theoretical rational faculty while the practical rational faculty deliberates and decides what to do to attain it. S. A. Shaida puts it, that Al-Farabi clearly distinguishes between theoretical and practical sciences (Shaida 2021, p.209). Still, we must ask: what are the means to attain this final perfection and thereby achieve supreme happiness? Is it theoretical; thus, essentially contemplative? Or is it practical, such that its perfection is in the realm of action? Al-Farabi typically defines theoretical perfection as the perfection of the theoretical rational faculty. The function of theoretical reason is “to become aware of the intelligibles which cannot be translated into action” (Walzer, 2003, p.14). And practical perfection is the perfection of the practical rational faculty. The function of practical reason is “to direct action towards present and future particulars” (*Farabi Madinah* 14:7).

Miriam Galston's account of the various ambiguities perceived in this aspect of Al-Farabi's philosophy. She attempts to clear up some of the murkiness ensconced in his writings by arguing that Al-Farabi's “works proceed on several levels simultaneously because they are dialectically written” (Galston, 1990, p. 10). In arguing this, Galston admits that she is essentially in agreement with both Muhsin Mahdi and Fauzi Najjar, who alluded to the fact that “the philosopher was guided by a master plan or an overriding purpose in the composition of many of his works” and there does not seem to be an evolution in Al-Farabi's works (*The Theoretical and*

Practical Dimensions of Happiness as Portrayed in the Political Treatises of Al-Farabi, 3). And that he used this analysis to argue his position on the ontology of being, essence, and existence, as stated although, murky ambiguous and complex his explanation was targeted at not only given theoretical explanations but practical accounts for example using the concept of happiness to give account of the three concepts.

Al-Farabi views theoretical and practical philosophy as anything that deals with human happiness and misery, and it is this view that leads to the ambiguity found in his writings.

Galston presents Al-Farabi's foundational view thus:

Practical philosophy is not what investigates everything subject to human control, in whatever manner or condition it occurs. After all, mathematics investigates many things that tend to be the product of voluntary action—for example, the science of music, the science of military strategy, and much of the contents of geometry, arithmetic, and the science of optics. Likewise, natural science investigates many things that result from art or volition. Yet not one of these sciences is part of political science. Rather, they are parts of theoretical philosophy, since they do not inquire into these things from the perspective of what is base or noble, nor from the perspective of what makes human beings happy or miserable when they do them. When, however, the objects of inquiry in these arts are taken up from the perspective of human happiness or misery that results from doing them, they belong to practical philosophy (Galston, p. 55).

Galston further notes that modern scholars perceive at least three distinct views of happiness in Al-Farabi's thought and she argues that the difficulty seems to be that these scholars have chosen to place Al-Farabi in a narrow category of either theoretical or practical philosophy. The three views of happiness put forth by scholars are theoretical activity exclusively, practical activity exclusively, and a combination of both theoretical and practical activity (Galston, *Politics and Excellence*, pp.56-58; Berman, *The Political Interpretation of the Maxim*, pp. 53-61; Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam* 31, 52; Pines, *Translator's Introduction*, p. xxxvi). Galston examines the three views of happiness found in Al-Farabi's text. Happiness defined by political or practical activity exclusively is found only in Al-Farabi's commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. As we are told

this text has not survived, but we have reports claiming that Al-Farabi considers happiness as political or practical happiness as evidence points to the view that both Ibn Bajjah and Ibn Tufayl have discussed this text (Pines, *The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides*, p. 9; Hawi, *Aspects of Al-Farabi's Thought in the Light of Ibn Tufayl's Criticism*, pp. 297-303.) Happiness defined as purely political or practical focuses on happiness in this life, which suggests that Al-Farabi excludes happiness in the afterlife.

Theoretical perfection identified with human happiness is found in other works of Al-Farabi such as *Madinah, Risalah fi al-'Aql, Siyasa, and Fusul* (Galston, *Politics and Excellence* 60-61). Theoretical happiness is typically regarded as the ultimate or supreme happiness but does not appear to include the notion of happiness on earth. And finally, the combination of both theoretical and practical activity defining happiness is found in *Kitab al-Tahsil* which supports the claim that happiness can be found and attained both in this life and in the afterlife (Galston 64; Bonelli 80). However, we thus aver that evidence abounds in these treatises of Al-Farabi (*Madinah, Risalah fi al-'Aql, Siyasa, and Fusul*) which provide credible support for the possibility of both theoretical and practical activity leading to human happiness.

Conclusion

In this study, we examined Al-Farabi's notion of being and how it associates with essence and existence. We also examined the background and the major influences on his ideas as related to his conception of being and how this conception influence his position on essence and existence. Al-Farabi demonstrated his position by examining the concept of happiness. He sees happiness not just as a moral virtue as seen by Epicureans, however unlike the Epicureans, he connects happiness with his metaphysics, especially in his conception of being. But failed to connect how an individual's differences affect his ontology. In the process of justifying his position, he developed his theory of essence in his discourse on happiness which he believes can only be possible in the divine.

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