

## **The ideal State/Society of Plato and al-Farabi : A comparative analysis**

Muhammad Rafiqul Islam \*

**Abstract :** Abu Nasr Muhamad Al-Farabi is known as the founder of Islamic Neo-Platonism. He has not been well studied and his political theory is not well known. It is therefore essential to study al-Farabi and compare his theory with the one propounded by Plato. This study found many similarities between the two philosophers but it also found that al-Farabi has taken stand on several issues which is not in conformity with the opinion held by Plato in his *Republic*. It has to do with the fact that al-Farabi was a Muslim and his theory bears clear evidence of his adhering to Islamic tenets and principles.

**Keywords :** Al-Farabi, Plato, Ideal State, Islam, Political thought and administration.

### **Introduction**

The concepts and theories of modern politics and public administration have flourished through the contribution of the political and administrative thinkers of the past. Although the contributions of the ancient Greek political thinkers like Plato and Aristotle are widely known in the discipline of political science, a little is known about the contribution of the Muslim political and administrative thinkers of the Mediaval period. Such a political thinker of the time is al-Farabi who was largely influenced by the political writings and thoughts of Plato and Aristotle. Both Plato and Farabi developed a theory of ideal state. This paper attempts a comparative analysis of the concept of the ideal state as propounded by Plato and al- Farabi.

### **Plato and his life**

Plato was born in 428 B. C in a great political family of Athens, Greece.<sup>i</sup> His father, Ariston, was a descendent from Codrus, the last king of Athens and his mother, Perictione, was closely related to the great Athenian lawmaker, Solon.<sup>ii</sup> Plato in his boyhood was a wrestler and he won the wrestling prize twice at the Isthmian Games, although he did not win the title of the Olympics of Olympia.<sup>iii</sup> In his boyhood, Plato also wanted to become a tragic poet, but failed to impress the judges in the competition. Before he became the

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\* Dr. Muhammad Rafiqul Islam is Associate Professor, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Dhaka University, Bangladesh. Previously he served as an Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia. E-mail : umedpurbashi@yahoo.com

disciple of Socrates, Plato was a student of Cratylus who was a follower of Heraclitus. Plato first became the student of Socrates when he was twenty years old.<sup>iv</sup> Plato not only was a thinker philosopher, but also a drama artist and an impassioned moral and religious teacher, as well one of the most severe and consistent logicians.<sup>v</sup>

### **Plato's theory of the ideal state and its nature**

Plato devoted himself to the scientific study of government, politics and the search for ultimate law of nature. In his classic book *The Republic* Plato had written that truly good government would only be possible when a king is a philosopher, or a philosopher is the king. This is because in such a combination, the knowledge of sound principles of government and the power to embody them are united in the same person.<sup>vi</sup> In the *Republic* Plato presented a theory of an ideal state and a just society.

Plato's first principle about the ideal state is the institution of marriage and its relationship with the state. He ruled out the marriage in the realm of his ideal republic. Plato argued that marriage might presumably be fit only for the people of lower orders.<sup>vii</sup> People of higher order will copulate with the people of the similar rank without wedlock. Children would be removed from their mothers soon after birth and educated communally. In this imaginary state of Plato, the children would regard the state as their parents, and all their contemporaries as siblings. Plato suggested that child rearing falls in the hands of the state. The first step is education which is multi-staged. Until the age of twenty, children would be educated in gymnastics and music.<sup>viii</sup> Those who fail to show sufficient appreciation of their physical and musical education at the age of twenty would be weeded out, and would be sent to do menial works, such as peasantry and business. Successful students would continue studies in mathematics and astronomy for ten years. In turn, those students who fail in mathematics would be sent to serve in the military.<sup>ix</sup> After their success in the above subjects, the students would be permitted to study philosophy for five more years until the age of thirty-five, and then for fifteen more years, the students would engage themselves in the practical study of government. At the age of fifty, after fifteen years of practical knowledge in governance, the students would be considered fit for ruling the state.<sup>x</sup>

The ruling class of Plato's Republic is a political community held together by bonds of fraternal love.<sup>xi</sup> The whole of the ruling class will become a single communal family, where no one is an outsider and everyone is "a brother or sister or son or daughter" or other kin to everyone he meets.<sup>xii</sup> The philosopher-rulers, according to Plato, would live together in a communal barrack where they possess no private property. There is complete equality of men among them. The communal and self-interest-free lives of the philosopher-rulers would lead them above bribery and make them just rulers of the state, who are called the guardians.<sup>xiii</sup> In that ideal republic, women, children, servants and slaves as well as livestock are considered common properties of the state.<sup>xiv</sup> Plato recognized only one ultimate standard of justice, and that is the interest of the state. Plato, like Socrates, believed that the supreme goal of all human endeavors is the improvement of the soul i. e., the moral improvement.<sup>xv</sup>

A second element of the ideal state is the need for a professional full-time army. These professional armies, according to Plato, are the guardians of the state because they defend the state not only from the attack of other enemy states, but also from the unnecessary appetites, which are the basic causes of such conflict.<sup>xvi</sup> Since these desires exist both inside and outside the state, the guardians of Plato's republic have a policing function from the very commencement of the state.<sup>xvii</sup>

In order to be the guardians, citizens of Plato's republic must be naturally quick to see things, naturally fast and strong, and naturally brave and high spirited and they should possess the aptitudes of a good soldier.<sup>xviii</sup> Moreover, the guardians must be steadfast and unchanging of character. In order to gain the qualities or prerequisite characteristics of a good guardian, the potential guardians of the state must undergo a long training of music and gymnastic.<sup>xix</sup> The guardians are brave and mightier than the producers whose functions are to produce goods and products to the society. In fact it is the guardians from whom the ruling class emerges.<sup>xx</sup>

The most important element of Plato's ideal state is the philosopher king who is a wisdom-lover. Because it is knowledge or wisdom the philosopher-king loves, he must love everything that one can learn.<sup>xxi</sup> However, the fundamental characteristic of a philosopher is his true love of wisdom that distinguishes him from the sightseers and craft-lovers.<sup>xxii</sup> To Plato, the philosopher king will not be like the ordinary absolute ruler, free "to do whatever he likes."<sup>xxiii</sup> The philosopher-king would receive two or three years of intensive physical training from the age of twenty to thirty-five. The philosopher-king will acquire education about moral philosophy. The philosopher is ruled by the desires in reason. He should long for gaining pleasure of learning and knowing the truth. A philosopher identifies justice with justice itself, and happiness with happiness itself.<sup>xxiv</sup>

According to Plato, the ultimate goal of human being is the knowledge of good. Plato believes that for the savior of society, the one thing that is necessary is certain and immediate knowledge of values, the ends which all life, private or public should realize.<sup>xxv</sup> In the realm of his ideal state, Plato described social life as a domain in which all forms of "art" or specialized skill have their several fields, each with its distinctive goals, such as medicine producing health, the art of war victory, business wealth and so on.<sup>xxvi</sup> Plato argued that above them all is the Royal Art, or Art of Statemanship that views these special ends as means of attaining the ultimate end or perfection of human life, human well-being or happiness, all 'the Good for man'. Plato contends that all efforts will be debased and falsely oriented if this end is misbelieved if the statesman, for example, believes that his nation should look for imperial domination or unlimited wealth, or even if an individual thinks that power, wealth or pleasure will make him happy.<sup>xxvii</sup> Plato rejected the popular beliefs of "pleasure" as human good. Instead, he viewed the search for knowledge as the human good.<sup>xxviii</sup> The philosopher-kings of Plato's "Ideal Republic" would often find it necessary or useful to lie to the guardians and producers—lie about governing part of himself.<sup>xxix</sup>

In contrasting his ideal state, Plato contended other types of states as faulty. The first degenerate form of constitution is “Timocracy”, a state in which the ambitious man loves to look for honor, glory and praise.<sup>xxx</sup> A second such form of states is oligarchy which is governed by a group of wealthy people who are small in number.<sup>xxxi</sup> Plato states that the oligarchic individuals are always engaged in accumulating wealth. He believes that the poor can never exercise power in an oligarchic state.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Plato despised democratic state most. He argued that the direct rule of many violates the fundamental principle of justice.<sup>xxxiii</sup> However, Plato viewed that democracy is superior to oligarchy, but not to timocracy.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Plato viewed despotism as another degenerate form of state in which a ruler becomes an absolute unconstitutional ruler generally known as “tyrant”, whose modern name is “dictator”. In the despotic state, the despotic ruler kills his opponents and probable rivals.<sup>xxxv</sup> Plato mentions that in a despotic state the people will find more of lamentation, sorrow and pain.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

### **Al-Farabi and his political writings**

Abū Nasr Muhammad Al-Farabi, generally known as al- Farabi, was born in 870 in Transoxiana in the district of Farab and studied both in Khorasan and Baghdad.<sup>xxxvii</sup> In 942, al- Farabi left Baghdad for the court of the Syrian Prince Sayf al-Dawla in Aleppo and died at the age of eighty in Cairo in 330 A.H./950 C.E.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Al- Farabi was the first Muslim philosopher who headed a “school” and became well known as a teacher. By dint of his comprehensive knowledge of science, ethics, religion and political thoughts as well as Platonic and Aristotlian influence al- Farabi received the title of “the second teacher,” Aristotle being the first. Al- Farabi also gained the reputation of a logician well regarded by the commentators of Aristotle and Ibn Rushd. His commentaries on Aristotle’s writings, however, positioned him the teacher of logic, physics and metaphysics.<sup>xxxix</sup> He was also regarded as the true founder of philosophy in Islam. Subsequently, al- Farabi also re-established the importance of Platonic ideas and placed himself as the supreme authority on political philosophy and the search for human and divine laws.<sup>xl</sup>

Al-Farabi’s works on science and philosophy can be divided into five important subdivisions, such as : (1) the science of language, (2) logic, (3) mathematics, (4) physics and metaphysics, and (5) political science, jurisprudence and dialectical theology.<sup>xli</sup> Al-Farabi wrote several books on politics, science and philosophy. Of his political writings, Al-madīna al-fāḍilah (the Ideal State), the Kitāb siyāsa madaniyah (Government of the City State) and Kitāb tahsīl al-sa’āda (Attaining Happiness) are of great significance.

### **Al- Farabi and his ideal society/city**

According to al- Farabi, political science investigates the various types of voluntary actions and ways of life; the positive dispositions, morals, inclinations, and states of character that lead to these actions and ways of life; the ends for the sake of which they

are accomplished; how they must exist in human being; how to order them in human in the way in which they must exist in him; and the way to preserve in him. While defining happiness, al- Farabi explained that some of the actions performed by humans are true happiness, whereas others are presumed to be happiness although they are not. The true happiness, according to al- Farabi, cannot perhaps be attained in this life, but in another life after this.<sup>xlii</sup>

In categorizing rulership, Farabi explained that rulership is of two kinds : (i) a rulership that builds the voluntary actions, ways of life, and positive dispositions, with which to achieve what is true happiness. This rulership of true happiness is the virtuous rulership, in which the cities and nations that submit to this rulership are the virtuous cities and nations; (ii) a rulership that sets up in the cities, the actions and the states of character with which to attain the things that are presumed to be happiness although they are not. This kind of rulership, according to al- Farabi, is the ignorant rulership that mainly pursues wealth, which is known as the “vile rulership”.<sup>xliii</sup> Al-Farabi further explained that the virtuous royal craft is composed of two faculties. The one is the faculty for general rules, while the other is the faculty that man achieves through long practice in political deeds, dealing with the morals and the individuals existing in actual cities, and becoming particularly wise through experience and long observation.<sup>xliv</sup>

Al- Farabi discussed three types of perfect human societies. The largest societies, according to al- Farabi, consist of many nations that associate and cooperate with one another; the medium ones consist of a nation; and the smallest perfect political associations/societies consist of a city. However, associations in villages, quarters, streets and households have been described by al- Farabi as imperfect associations/societies. Al-Farabi also mentions that the political or civic society is a part of a nation, and the nation is divided into cities.<sup>xlv</sup>

### **Farabi and the virtuous city**

Al- Farabi’s virtuous city is, to some extent, similar to the ideal state of Plato. However, his theory of virtuous city is based on the Islamic philosophy. In his *Virtuous City-State*, al- Farabi discussed twelve principles that a virtuous ruler might possess. However, since al- Farabi was aware that the twelve qualifications are impossible to be found in a perfect ruler except the Imam in his ideal state, he was satisfied if the ruler had six or even five of these qualifications. Al- Farabi mentioned that the Prophet would be succeeded by the second ruler who must fulfill six conditions.<sup>xlvi</sup> This ruler according to al- Farabi must be a philosopher, and must know and keep the laws and ordinances of the first ruler. The ruler then would observe all the laws and ordinances of the first ruler in his own actions and as an obligation on himself as well as an example to others. This ruler must have capability to settle the points of laws, which had not existed before in the rule of the first Imam (leader). He must have the insights and vision of knowledge in grasping new problems that was unforeseen by the first ruler, and able to find out the solutions for the utmost benefits of the state. Moreover, the ruler must be capable of making deductions

from the laws established by the first imams and guide and direct his subjects in their application. Furthermore, the second ruler must master the major and subordinate arts of war.<sup>xlvii</sup> In fact, al- Farabi described ideal state as the state that is ruled by the Prophet, who is at the same time philosopher-king, lawgiver and imam, from the points of view of human end and supreme happiness.<sup>xlviii</sup>

The first ruler is the virtuous ruler who does not need anyone to rule him in anything whatever, but has, in fact, acquired the science and every kind of knowledge, and has no need of a man to guide him in anything.<sup>xlix</sup> He is able to understand each of the particular things that he ought to do. He is capable of guiding well all others to everything in which he instructs them, to employ all those who do any of the acts for which they are equipped, and to determine, define and direct these acts toward happiness. He is the only one who possesses superior and natural dispositions, when his soul is in union with the Active Intellect (Allah). He is the one who receives revelation which enables him to understand how to define things, and actions, and how to direct them toward happiness.<sup>1</sup> The rule of the first ruler is the supreme rule and all other human rulerships are inferior to it and are derived from it.<sup>li</sup>

According to al- Farabi, men governed by the virtuous ruler are also virtuous, good, and happy men. If under the virtuous ruler, a nation is formed it would be a virtuous nation, and if the people are associated in a single dwelling-place, then the dwelling place under the rule of the virtuous ruler would be a virtuous city. If the virtuous men are not associated together in a single dwelling place, but live in separate dwelling places whose inhabitants are ruled by rulership other than the virtuous ruler, then these people would be the virtuous men who were strangers in those dwelling places.<sup>lii</sup>

Al- Farabi also identified different kinds of cities that are opposite to the virtuous cities. These different types of cities include (1) the ignorant city, (2) the immoral city, (3) the erring city, and (4) the weeds in virtuous cities.

### **The ignorant city**

Al- Farabi viewed the citizens of the ignorant city as political beings. There are varieties of cities and political associations formed by the ignorant people, such as (i) indispensable associations, (ii) the association of the vile men in the vile cities, (iii) the association of base men in the base cities, (iv) timocratic association in the timocratic city, (v) despotic association in the despotic cities, (vi) free association in the democratic city and the city of the free.<sup>liii</sup>

The indispensable city is the societal association in which the inhabitants cooperate with each other in acquiring the bare necessities for the subsistence and safeguarding of life, such as food, drink, clothing, living place and other physiological gratifications.<sup>liv</sup> However, the different ways of acquiring these necessities include husbandry, grazing, hunting, robbery and the like. Both hunting and robbery in this indispensable city are practiced either secretly or openly. The inhabitants of this city select the best man who

has outstanding skills in management and performance of achieving the bare necessities. The ruler of this kind of city is one who is skillful in governing city and employing those outstanding skilled people who are expert in acquiring the bare necessities.<sup>lv</sup>

Vile cities are those whose citizens cooperate with each other in gaining wealth and prosperity, and excessive possession of indispensable things and/or money.<sup>lvi</sup> The accumulation of money and wealth and avoidance of spending money except for the bodily purpose is another characteristic inherent in those vile citizens. The citizens of the vile city are wealthiest persons. The ruler of this city is skillful in employing and managing the wealthy people in order to acquire more money. Wealth is obtained in this city through the methods of obtaining bare necessities, such as husbandry, grazing, hunting, robbery, and also through voluntary transactions.<sup>lvii</sup>

The base city is the association or gathering of those people who cooperate to enjoy sensual pleasures or imaginary amusement, or both.<sup>lviii</sup> They enjoy the pleasures of food, drink and other carnal gratifications. The inhabitants regard those people as the best and the happiest people who possess more resources and wealth for play and pleasures.<sup>lix</sup>

The Timocratic city, people respect those persons who gain honor, glory and fame.<sup>lx</sup> For instance, if honor is based on ancestry, then the ruler will be that person who ought to have a more distinguished ancestry than others.<sup>lxi</sup> However, the basis of honor may be ancestry, wealth or both or any criterion as regarded by the citizens of the city honorable.

The despotic city is such kind of ignorant city whose inhabitants love to achieve domination over others. The ruler of the despotic city is the person who shows greater strength in governing and managing the mightier people who dominate others.<sup>lxii</sup> The rivalry and contentions are the inherent traits of the inhabitants of the despotic city. Despotic cities, according to al- Farabi, are more often tyrannical than timocratic.<sup>lxiii</sup>

The democratic city is the one in which the citizens do whatever they want to do.<sup>lxiv</sup> All the characteristics of ignorant cities are prevalent in this city in the most perfect manner. This city is the most admirable and happy city to them. Everybody loves to live in this city because it fulfills all kinds of human wish or desires.<sup>lxv</sup> In this type of city both virtuous/philosophers and ignorant people can reside.

### **Comparative discussions**

It should be apparent that there are similarities and differences in the ideal states of Plato and the ideal cities of al- Farabi. Commencing our discussion on the governance of the state/city we find that both the ideal states and ideal cities of Plato and al- Farabi are ruled by the philosopher-kings, who are the seekers of ultimate happiness and wisdom.<sup>lxvi</sup>

The philosopher-kings, such as the imams or princes of al- Farabi's "Virtuous Cities/Societies" receive almost the same type of education and training that the philosopher-kings of Plato's Republic obtain before they attain the highest positions of

the states. In this respect, in discussing the qualifications of the imam or prince of the ideal society/city Farabi wrote :

“They [the princes and imams] should be habituated to use all the logical methods in all the theoretical sciences. And they should be made to pursue a course of study and form the habits of character from their childhood until each of them reach maturity, in accordance with the plan prescribed by Plato. Then the princes among them will be placed in subordinate offices and promoted gradually through the ranks until they are fifty years old. Then they will be placed in the office with the highest authority”.<sup>lxvii</sup>

However, regarding education and training of the philosopher-kings Plato wrote that at the end of primary education to the age of eighteen and two years of intensive physical training,<sup>lxviii</sup> those who have performed well receive ten years of systematic education in mathematics, receive five years of systematic education in philosophy until they are thirty-five years old.<sup>lxix</sup> “Those who succeed in dialectics and principles of morality in the fifteen years apprenticeship training in practical art of state management will be considered fit for ruling the state. From thirty-five to fifty, practical experience of life will be gained by the public service in subordinate posts. However, when they are fifty years of old and have succeeded all the courses of study with the highest performance both in practice and in theory will become the philosopher-kings”.<sup>lxx</sup>

It becomes obvious from the examination of the education and training of the philosopher-kings or rulers, both Plato and al- Farabi suggested the same methods of education for the philosopher-kings or rulers. Like the philosopher-king of Plato’s ideal Republic, the philosopher-ruler/imam/prince of al- Farabi’s ideal city would study mathematics, philosophy after they succeed their primary education prescribed by Plato. Like Plato’s philosopher-kings, the philosopher-kings or imams/princes of al- Farabi’s ideal society/city also receive practical education and training about the art of politics. In fact, al- Farabi adopted exactly the same method of education and training for the philosopher-kings/rulers. Moreover, both Plato and al- Farabi mention that before being placed in the highest positions of the state/city as philosopher-kings/rulers they should be placed in different subordinate positions in the public services. Plato in the *Republic* has mentioned that a philosopher in his republic is ruled by the desires of reason, while al- Farabi mentions that the princes or imams should be habituated to use the logical methods in sciences, which connotes the same characteristic of a ruler.<sup>lxxi</sup> However, unlike Plato, al- Farabi distinguishes between education by certain proof (methods of implanting speculative virtue in the ruler) and education by persuasion, which is applicable for attaining other virtues and arts.<sup>lxxii</sup> Al- Farabi not only suggests the same education as Plato for the philosopher-ruler of his ideal city-state, but also mentions that no citizen can attain perfection and happiness without education, which is similar to the idea of Plato in the Republic. Furthermore, both the philosopher-kings of Plato and al- Farabi would master the art of war through practical military training.

Plato in his *Republic* mentions that only his ideal state ruled by the philosopher-king is perfect, while the states ruled by rules other than the philosopher-king are imperfect states. Al- Farabi in his ideal city-state (Madinah fadilah) mentions that the ideal city/society ruled by virtuous philosopher imam or prince is the virtuous city/society, while city/society ruled rules other than the virtuous philosopher-king/imam/prince is one of the ignorant cities, immoral cities, the erring cities and so on.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Al- Farabi further goes on to explain that virtuous people may live in a city other than virtuous city, and if the virtuous people live in any city other than the virtuous city than they would be strangers in their opinions in that dwelling place.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

It is imperative to note that both Plato and al- Farabi mention that the ultimate happiness in human beings is attained through acquiring knowledge of human good. Plato in his ideal state mentions that knowledge of good or wisdom is virtue, which is supported by al- Farabi in his Madinah *fadilah* and other writings. Plato mentions that there are four fundamental qualities or traits that constitute the whole of virtue in the ideal state.<sup>lxxv</sup> These are wisdom, courage, temperance and justice of the state. Plato views wisdom in the conduct of state affairs as the practical prudence or good counsel of the deliberative body. He further mentions that only the philosophic rulers can possess the necessary insights into what is good for the state. Plato also envisions courage in terms of fighting or protecting the states from the attack of the enemy. Plato views temperance as the lowest order of virtues possessed by both the ruler and the ruled in his ideal state, while he uses justice as a means of attaining individual's due rights. Plato also contrasted justice to injustice, which he means invasion and encroachment upon the rights and duties of others.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

Al- Farabi also mentions four basic types of qualities that constitute virtue. These four categories of virtues through which the ruler and the ruled of al- Farabi's virtuous cities can attain happiness include the theoretical virtues, deliberative virtues, moral virtues, and practical arts.<sup>lxxvii</sup> Al- Farabi's theoretical virtues consist of two components, such as primary knowledge as defined by Plato, and the rest, is acquired by meditation, investigation, inference, instruction and study. Al- Farabi goes one step further than Plato in explaining the deliberative virtue of the ruler that encompasses political deliberative virtue, economic deliberative virtue, military deliberative virtue and consultative deliberative virtue. The third category of virtue i. e. the moral virtue is different from Plato's category of virtues. Unlike Plato, al- Farabi mentions that the most powerful deliberative virtue and the most powerful moral virtue are inseparable. Moreover, the theoretical virtue, the deliberative virtue, the moral virtue and the practical virtue are inseparable, while without theoretical virtue the three other virtues of the ruler or the citizens of the cities will be unsound, imperfect, and without complete authority.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

Although Plato mentions that the philosopher-king should acquire education about moral philosophy, he did not relate it to religion. Plato's dialogue in the *Republic* about religion was centered around his stories about ancient Greek mythology.<sup>lxxix</sup> Al- Farabi

obviously mentioned that moral virtue is a specific part of religion. In this respect, Farabi wrote :

“Virtuous ends are either virtuous and good according to generally accepted opinion, virtuous good according to particular religion, or truly virtuous and good. No one can discover what is most noble according to the followers of a particular religion unless his moral virtues are the specific virtues of that religion”.<sup>lxxx</sup> Furthermore, in terms of the characteristics of virtuous nations al- Farabi wrote : “consequently, there may be a number of virtuous nations and virtuous cities whose religions are different, even though they all pursue the very same kind of happiness”.<sup>lxxxii</sup> This is al- Farabi who mentions that people of different religions may share the same kind of happiness despite their religious differences. Another point of difference between the ideas of Plato and al- Farabi is that the former mentions that only the philosopher-king can secure complete happiness, while al- Farabi believes that the philosopher-king/imam/prince as well as the virtuous people ruled by the philosopher-imam can attain complete happiness.

The prophetic qualification of the first ruler discussed by al- Farabi in the *Madinah fadilah* and the *Siyasah madaniyah* is completely different from any qualifications of the philosopher-king discussed by Plato in the *Republic*. Farabi distinguishes a theoretical and practical reason in man, who is naturally endowed with imaginative and rational faculties. Al- Farabi mentions in the *Madina al-fadila* that the first ruler is the imam who received revelation that makes him a philosopher. Unlike Plato’s philosopher-king, the first-ruler of Farabi’s ideal city/society does not need anybody to rule him in anything whatsoever. He has also acquired the sciences and every kind of knowledge, and no need of a man to guide him in anything. Moreover, al- Farabi mentions that through the Active Intellect, God mediates to the first ruler’s theoretical reason a revelation which first makes him a philosopher and then affects his imaginative faculty, and practical reason, that makes him capable of heralding people to their happiness. Such a ruler has reached the highest degree of perfection and utmost happiness, and his soul is united with the Active Intellect.<sup>lxxxii</sup> The first ruler, the imam or the philosopher is the same prophetic ruler over the ideal city-state, over the ideal nation and over the whole earth.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Those people ruled by the first ruler are the excellent, best and happy citizens.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

Al- Farabi’s four types of “ignorant cities”, the vile cities, timocratic cities, despotic cities and democratic cities, purport similar connotations of Plato’s imperfect states, such as oligarchic states, timocratic states, despotic states and democratic states, respectively. In Plato’s oligarchic system of government, the state is ruled by a group of wealthy people who are small in number. Plato also opines that the poor can never exercise power in the oligarchic system of government. Plato in the *Republic* wrote, “a government resting on valuation of property, in which the rich have the power and the poor man is deprived of it”.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Plato further wrote, “and in proportion as riches and rich men are honored in the state, virtue and the virtuous are dishonored”.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Al- Farabi’s vile city is similar to Plato’s oligarchic state in that the citizens of the vile city cooperate with each other in acquiring wealth and prosperity, and excessive possession of indispensable things

and/or money. However, al- Farabi's vile city also seems to be distinct to some extent from Plato's oligarchic state because al- Farabi did not mention that the citizens of the vile city are ruled by a "body of the few" as Plato did.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Rather, like Plato's oligarchic state, the ruler of the vile city is skillful in employing and managing the wealthy people in order to acquire more wealth/money. Al- Farabi's timocratic city and Plato's timocratic state are the same in the sense that the citizens of timocratic city/state are the lovers of victory, glory and fame, and they respect those persons who acquire honor, glory and fame. Al- Farabi goes onto mentions that like Plato, the timocratic city is the best among the ignorant cities.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> While explaining democracy Plato mentions that even the lawless type of democracy is superior to oligarchy but worse than timocracy.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Al-Farabi further classifies honor into two groups. The first kind of honor is achieved by a person because of the virtue inherent in him, for which people respect him, and because he recognizes him as a superior. The second kind of honor is, however, shown to men because of their wealth or victory.<sup>xc</sup>

Plato and al- Farabi's despotic rulers possess similar characteristics because of the fact that both rulers of Plato's despotic state and al- Farabi's despotic city are tyrannical who aim at dominating others. It becomes clear from Plato and Farabi's explanation that despotism is the worst form of government. However, it also seems that tyranny has more variation in al- Farabi's explanation than that of Plato's explanation of despotism. Al-Farabi both in his *al-Siyasah al-madaniyyah* and *al-madinah al-fadilah* explains two types of tyranny. The first form of tyranny characterized by in the absolute mastery of the tyrant and his associates over the citizens of the city,<sup>xc</sup> while the external tyranny appears through the domination of another state or people.<sup>xcii</sup> Plato and al- Farabi admit that in a democratic state/city, people enjoy more freedom. Although Plato mentions that the direct rule of many people infringes the basic principle of justice, he also admits that even the lawless type of democracy is superior to oligarchy but not to timocracy. On the other hand, al- Farabi argues that the democratic city possesses both good and evil to a greater degree than the rest of the ignorant cities. Al- Farabi also emphasizes that it is not impossible that the most excellent virtuous people can grow up with the passage of time in a democratic city or state.<sup>xciii</sup>

Al- Farabi also categorized different kinds of ignorant cities, such as indispensable cities, base cities, immoral cities and weeds in virtuous cities. These are significantly different from Plato's categories of degenerate state.<sup>xciv</sup> The citizens of al- Farabi's indispensable city cooperate with each other for acquiring the bare necessities and the ruler of that indispensable ignorant city is expert in employing and managing the outstanding persons who are skilled in acquiring these bare necessities, such as food, clothing and living place. The base city of al- Farabi is the association of those people who cooperate with each other for enjoying sensual pleasures or imaginary amusement or both, and the persons who possess more resources and wealth are best regarded by inhabitants. However, this base city also seems somewhat similar to Plato's timocratic state. Al- Farabi's immoral city, erring city or weeds of the virtuous city are different

from Plato's any of given state since they do not fall into Plato's defined forms of state or government. As mentioned earlier, the citizens of al- Farabi's immoral city do not know what true happiness is, although their actions are like the people of ignorant cities, while the people of erring city are engaged in imitating other matters than described in the ignorant cities. However, al- Farabi's weeds in virtuous cities are distinct from Plato's any form of government or city-state. Al- Farabi's explanations of different classes of people, such as opportunists, misinterpreters of the law of supreme ruler, apostates and falsifiers of the law of supreme ruler<sup>xcv</sup> are not found in Plato's explanation of any form of government or state.

One significant distinction between the ideal state/city of Plato and Farabi is that Plato had objection to "rhetoric" or "good orator" quality of a ruler. Al- Farabi took stand against Plato and insisted on "good persuasion" and "imagination" found that a ruler must be a good orator.<sup>xcvi</sup> Plato viewed orators as serious rivals to the statesman, al- Farabi did not believe that orator could be a rivals to rulers of his ideal city since the ruler of his ideal city is a good orator. Al- Farabi's opinion about the persuasive and oratory qualifications can be best understood from his following statement :

"They [the princes and imams] should be habituated in the acts of practical virtues and practical arts by either of two methods. First, by means of persuasive arguments, passionate arguments, and other arguments that establish these acts and states of character in the soul completely so as to arouse the resolution to this acts willingly."<sup>xcvii</sup>

Al- Farabi further wrote, "he [imam and prince] should devise methods of political oratory with which to arouse the resolution to such acts in nations and cities"<sup>xcviii</sup> Plato conceives of poets as the rivals to philosophers of his ideal state. He argues that while philosophers are the seekers of truth, poets are far away from the attainment of ultimate truth. Plato supports Socratic argument in the Republic about the poets. He wrote :

"We may conclude, then, that all poetry, from Homer onwards, consists in representing a semblance of its subject, whatever it may be, including any kind of human excellence, with no grasp of the reality. We were speaking just now of the painter who can produce what looks like a shoemaker to the spectator who, being as ignorant of shoemaking as he is himself, judges only by form and color. In the same way, the poet, knowing nothing more than how to represent appearances, can paint in words his picture of any craftsman so as to impress an audience which is equally ignorant and judges only by form of expression; the inherence charm of metre, rhythm, and musical setting is enough to make them think he has discouraged admirably about generalship or shoemaking or any other technical subject"<sup>xcix</sup>.

Plato further mentions that dramatic poetry is full of emotion without notion of reasoning or logic.<sup>c</sup> Al- Farabi on the other hand, does not conceive of poets as rivals to the philosophers. Al- Farabi wrote :

“Consequently, it is quite possible that, with the passage of time, virtuous men will grow up in it [the democratic city]. Thus it may include philosophers, rhetoricians, and poets, dealing with all kinds of things”.<sup>ci</sup> Unlike Plato al- Farabi thinks that having the knowledge of poetry is a kind of virtue<sup>cii</sup>.

In terms of occupation of the people of his ideal state, Plato mentioned that a person should have only one occupation. Plato wrote : “but we would not allow our shoemaker to try to be also a farmer or weaver or builder, because we wanted our shoes well made. We gave each man one trade, for which he was naturally fitted; he would do good work, if he confined himself to that all his life, never letting the right moment slip by”.<sup>ciii</sup> Al- Farabi stated that a person might have more than one occupation. Moreover, Farabi mentions that since man has different need he might be dependent on several persons for satisfying his physiological needs.<sup>civ</sup>

Plato’s law seems very severe and unkind, in his ideal state, to invalids and infants. In book 3 of the *Republic* in his discussion with Asclepius, Plato said, “Asclepius knew the kind of medicine that enables someone suffering from a fatal disease to cling to a life filled with nothing but medical treatment, but he did not teach it to his sons, because he knew that everyone who lives under good laws has a prescribed task in the polis at which he must work, and that no one has leisure to be ill and to be under treatment throughout life.”<sup>cv</sup> Asclepius wrote clearly :

“When a carpenter is sick, I said, he expects the physician to give him an emetic or purge, or to get rid of his disease by cautery or surgery. If someone prescribes a lengthy regimen for him, telling him that he should rest with this, he would soon say that he has no leisure to be ill, nor is such a life- paying attention to a desire while neglecting the work at hand – of any profit to him. After that, he would goodbye to his doctor, return to his usual way of living, and either recover his health, and live doing his own work, or, if his body could not tolerate the illness, die, and escape from his troubles... Because if he could not perform his own work, it would not profit him to go on living.”<sup>cvi</sup>

Like the physically ill-health people, Plato also suggests that people *who* suffer from incurable mental illness should be put to death. Thus, Plato wrote, “the ones whose psyches are naturally bad and incurable they will kill”<sup>cvii</sup>. Similarly, Plato’s view about the infants in his republic is also harsh and contradictory to not only al- Farabi’s virtuous society, but also to the modern states. Because Plato mentioned that deformed guardian infants born to inferior guardians, and infants born to guardians who are beyond the optimum ages for childbearing are to be allowed to die of exposure.<sup>cviii</sup> In this respect, Plato wrote, “the children of inferior parents, or any child of others born deformed, they [the nurses in charge of rearing pens] will hide, as is appropriate, in a secret and unknown place”<sup>cix</sup>.

Although Plato advocated justice, morality and fairness in his ideal state, he did not write against slavery while almost one third of the people of Athens were slaves and

servants during his time. His writings in the *Republic* indicate that he accepted slavery as a social convention of his time. The laws in Plato's *Republic* give ruthless advice about how slaves should be treated.<sup>cx</sup> In book 4, Plato includes slaves in a catalogue of the members of the state. Plato writes of his "perfect state as being present in children and in women, in slaves and in firemen, in producers, rulers, and ruled"<sup>cx</sup>. In another place, Plato writes that while the ideal state must never enslave fellow Greeks, it "must behave toward barbarian enemies as the Greeks now do towards each other"<sup>cxii</sup>. It is evident that since the Greeks enslaved their captives, whether Greek or Barbarian, Plato advised the inhabitants of his perfect state not to enslave the Greeks, but the Barbarians.<sup>cxiii</sup> However, regarding the servants in his ideal state Plato also wrote :

"Then we must once more enlarge our community. The healthy one will not be big enough now; it must be swollen up with a whole multitude of callings not ministering to any bare necessity : hunters and fishermen, for instance; artists in sculpture, painting and music; poets with their attendant train of professional reciters, actors, dancers, producers; and makers of all sorts of household gear; including everything for women's adornment. And, we shall want more servants : children's nurses and attendants, lady's maids, barbers, cooks and confectioners."<sup>cxiv</sup>

In the *Republic*, Plato mentions that women, children and slaves are the common properties of the state. Regarding the status of women and children in the Republic Plato wrote, "and so, Glaucon, we have arrived at the conclusion that in the perfect State wives and children are to be common; and that all education and the pursuits of war and peace are also to be common".<sup>cxv</sup> An examination of the ideal "virtuous city" of al- Farabi reveals that he neither treated wives and children as the common property of the state nor considered the existence of slavery system in his "virtuous cities". Al- Farabi believed that men become slaves to the despotic or tyrannical rulers in the ignorant cities/societies not in the virtuous cities. In this respect, al- Farabi wrote,

"The rest of the citizens of the city, too, are slaves to that one (subjugator), serving his every wish; they are submissive and humiliated, possessing nothing whatever of their own. Some of them cultivate the soil, others trade, for him. In all this, he has no other purpose beyond seeing a certain group subjugated and dominated and submissive to him alone, even though he derives no benefit or pleasure from them except that of seeing them humiliated and dominated".<sup>cxvi</sup>

Another point of differences between the ideal state/city of Plato and Farabi is that Plato mentions that a philosopher-king will find it necessary to lie to the guardians and the producers. In this respect, Plato makes a distinction between two types of lie. The first is "the true lie" or "what is really a lie,"<sup>cxvii</sup> while the second is "the verbal lie" or "the lie in words, which is the imitation of the affection in the psyche."<sup>cxviii</sup> Plato mentions that although the true lie is not good, the verbal lie is useful in the affairs of the state. Al-Farabi, however, did not mention whether it is essential to lie on the part of the philosopher-king to his subject since a philosopher-king/imam is a just ruler.

Al- Farabi's distinction between the rulers and their subjects seems similar to Aristotle's distinction between the rulers and the ruled, rather than that of Plato. Al-Farabi explains the distinction between the ruler and the ruled, and between master arts and subordinate arts and crafts by making an analogy between the state and the human body. Al- Farabi mentions that the members of the body are designed and arranged in a hierarchical order in which highest is the Chief who is compared to the heart of the body. As compared to the state, those members nearest to the heart both rule and are ruled, while those farthest from the chief only serve. Therefore, in al- Farabi's ideal state, all components of the state serve the purpose of the chief or the ruler.<sup>cxix</sup>

### Conclusion

It goes without saying that there are similarities and differences between the ideal state/society of Plato and al- Farabi. One very common similarity is that both the ideal state/city are ruled by the philosopher-kings whose ultimate happiness lies in the search for true knowledge and wisdom. Another commonality between the two is found in the system of education and training for the philosopher-kings/rulers/imams/princes. Al-Farabi suggested to adopt the system of education and training prescribed by Plato in the *Republic*. Therefore, like the philosopher-king of Plato's *Republic*, the philosopher-imam/prince would receive education in mathematics, dialectic and practical art of politics in different stages of their lives as mentioned earlier. The philosopher-kings/imams/princes of both Plato and al- Farabi's ideal state/city would also be placed in different subordinate positions of the state/city at the age of fifty. However, unlike Plato, al- Farabi distinguished between education by proof (method appropriate to the speculative virtues to be inherent in the king) and education by persuasion, which is conducive for acquiring the other virtues and arts.<sup>cxx</sup>

Although there are many similarities, the first ruler of al- Farabi's ideal society seems to be distinct from the philosopher-king of Plato's *Republic*. The first ruler of Farabi's ideal society is the Supreme ruler who has prophetic qualification by virtue of the fact that he received revelation from God so that his soul is united with the Active Intellect, God. That is why, the first ruler does not need anybody to teach him anything because he has knowledge in all kinds of sciences. The first ruler/imam/philosopher is the prophetic ruler over the ideal city-state, over the ideal nation, and over the earth.<sup>cxxi</sup>

Plato in the *Republic* has rejected the rhetoric and good oratory qualification of the philosopher-king. He ruled out the need for poets in his ideal state because he believes that poets are the rivals of a philosopher-king. He believes that poets are far away from the truth because their dramatic poetry is full of emotion rather than any notion of logic or reality. Al- Farabi neither rejected the importance of orators nor the poets in his ideal society/city. He insisted on "good persuasion" and "imagination". He mentioned that a ruler should devise methods of political oratory with which to arouse the resolution to such acts in nations and cities.<sup>cxxii</sup>

Plato views women, children, slaves and servants as the common properties of the state. His opinion regarding the invalids both in case of physically sick or mentally sick people was also very severe in the ideal state. He leaves no place in the ideal *Republic* for those who are unable to work because of any physical or mental illness. Al- Farabi in his virtuous city never considers women or children as the common properties of the state nor he thinks about the existence of any slave in his ideal city.

Al- Farabi's four different types of "ignorant cities", such as the vile cities, timocratic cities, despotic cities and democratic cities are similar to Plato's oligarchic states, timocratic states, despotic states and democratic states, respectively. However, al-Farabi also explained different types of cities such as, indispensable cities, base cities, immoral cities, weeds in virtuous cities are significantly distinct from Plato's any kind of degenerate form of ideal state.

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