

PLATON VE FARABİ'DE İDEAL DEVLET

*Talip KABADAYI**

ÖZET

Bu çalışma Platon ve Farabi'nin toplum ve siyaset felsefesiyle ilgili düşüncelerini gözler önüne sermeyi ve bu bakımdan birbiriyle karşılaştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Kanımca Platon ve Farabi bir anlamda toplum, devlet ve devlet adamı kavramlarının farkına varan ilk filozoflardır. Her iki düşünür için de iyi bir yurttaş olmayla iyi bir devlet olma arasında yakın bir ilişki olduğunu söylemek sanırım yanlış olmaz. Nasıl iyi bir yurttaş ve birey olunur düşüncesi ile nasıl iyi bir toplum ve devlet olunur düşüncesi arasında yakın bir ilişki olduğu olduğu kabulünden hareketle insanlar Platon ve Farabi'nin toplum ve siyaset felsefesi görüşlerinden hareketle yaşadıkları toplumları daha yaşanılır kılabilirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Düşünce, toplum, devlet, devlet adamı, yurttaş.

The Perfect State In Plato And Al-Farabi

ABSTRACT

In this study I am going to argue and focus on both Plato and Abu Nasr Mohammad Al-Farabi's conceptions of political and social philosophy so as to set forth and compare their political ideas with those of each others. It strikes me that they were the first philosophers being conscious about the concepts of society, of state and of states man in a sense. As far as I see, for both of them, there is a close connection between being a good citizen and being a good state. If there is a link between the idea of how to become a good person and citizen and of how to become a good society and state, then people may improve not only their conditions of life but also their society by taking advantage of departing from Plato and Al-Farabi's views of political and social philosophy.

Key Words: Conception, society, state, statesman, citizen.

* Yard.Doç.Dr.; Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi Felsefe Bölümü Öğretim Üyesi.

Introduction

According to Irwin Edman, there has been a long tradition, hardly ended today, of the organic theory of the state, the notion that just as the individual is an organism of cells and organs, so the commonwealth is an organism individuals, the health of the one and of the other being inextricably involved with each other. It is also for this point of view that the happiness and even the character of men themselves is a function of the society or the social and economic arrangements under which they live, the theme of “the just man in the just state”, the belief that there cannot be healthy souls in a sick society (Edman 1945: 109-110). Plato and Al-Farabi’s ideas on the ideal state involve the belief and the hope that a reasonable arrangement of human relations is possible. However, they involve the further belief that no such reasonable arrangement is possible unless the authentic conditions of men’s place in nature and reality are studied. Political direction must be removed from those knowing only and providing only illusion. Only a group of wise and disinterested minds, which are acquainted with the true proportions in the affairs of men, ought to rule or be able to rule with wisdom and justice. Since the different passions and shifting opinions of men are not trustworthy, men can be ruled to their own good only by the discipline imposed by the wisest and the best. In sum, for both Plato and Al-Farabi, an ordered soul is possible only in an ordered society; besides, such an ordered society banks on the disciplined reading of the order of the universe by a group of disciplined minds and disinterested hearts. Now it is time to look into Plato and Al-Farabi’s ideas akin to the social and political philosophy. In order to set forth my ideas about this subject, in the first place, I will try to analyze Plato’s thoughts concerning the ideal state and statesman. In the second place, I will attempt to examine Al-Farabi’s opinions about the same issue; and finally, I will do my best to compare their social and political philosophies to clarify their similarities and differences.

*

PLATO ON THE PERFECT STATE

Plato’s great dialog, *The Republic*, in which his ethics finds its best statement, contains also his social-political theory, a philosophical vision of the perfect state and a critique of another forms of government. Plato, who was born in 427 B.C. and died in 347 B.C. at Athens, had become a pupil of

Socrates before he began to do philosophy. After meeting Socrates, Plato founded a school known the “Academy” where he continued his philosophical activities until he passed away (Russell 1972: 95-105). It strikes me that Plato’s philosophy is to be divided into epistemology, the doctrine of forms, ethics and social and political philosophy, it is this last topic with which I am concerned. After these preliminaries about Plato’s life and system of philosophy, I would like to move on his ideas regarding the state and society which he puts forward in his well-known dialog *The Republic* that I am going to review so as to disclosure its important thoughts akin to the state and statesman.

If I am not mistaken, *The Republic* consists of three parts. The first from the beginning to near the end of Book V, consists in the construction of an ideal commonwealth. The second section, Books VI and VII are concerned to define the notion “philosopher” and the third section is composed of a discussion of various kinds of actual constitutions and of their merits and defects. The main purpose of *The Republic*, to my mind, is to define “justice”. Since one of the sophists, Thrasymachus, had defined justice by stating that “justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger” (Plato 1942: 236), Plato responds to him in this work. In order to reply to sophists’ understanding of social justice, society and moral relativism, he creates a method to define and display what he believed justice to be. According to Plato, since everything is easier to see in the large than in the small, it is beter to inquire what makes a just state rather than asking the question what makes a just individual. His method is based on the similarities between an individual and a society, that is to say, micro cosmos and macro cosmos. In Plato’s words:

... is not a state larger than an individual? Then in the larger the quantity of justice is likely to be larger and easily discernible. I propose therefore that we inquire into the nature of justice and justice, first as they appear in the state, and secondly in the individual, proceeding from greater to lesser and comparing them. When the state is completed there may be a hope that the object of our search will be more easily discovered (Plato 1942: 267).

Plato states that since we are not self-sufficient, the source of the state is our needs, to wit, man requires one another. Thus, the original purpose of the state is an economic end, and from this follows the principle of the division and specialization of workers. Since different people have different

natural talents, they are going to serve to the community in different ways. As a result of this, Plato begins by deciding that the citizens are to be divided into three classes: the workers, the soldiers and the guardians who will be the rulers of the ideal state.

Guardians must be spirited and gifted with the wisdom, but they must also be philosophic. In addition, they need to be educated. To Plato's mind, education is very important to make people realize their nature and capacity in a society. Education begins with music including narrative such as stories and legends; however, legends about the gods told by Hesiod and Homer will not be taught to children and admitted into state because they displayed the gods as indulging in gross immortality, taking various forms and so forth. According to Plato, "God is to be represented, not as the author of all the things, but of good only" (Plato 1942: 283). In addition to music, gymnastics will play a part in the education of the young citizens of the state.

Gymnastics cares of the body while music is necessary for training soul. Besides this, Plato mentioned another kind of education called the science of dialectic in Book VI of *The Republic*, but since it is mainly related to his epistemology rather than his political philosophy, I will not examine it in this paper. However, I can just say that dialectic means in Plato the science of first principles. For Plato, while workers are going to produce food and other necessary material for life and for society, soldiers will protect the society and state against the enemies of the state.

Now the question arises, who are to be the rulers of the state? Plato replies that they will be carefully chosen from the class of guardians. They must be the best men of their class, adult men, intelligent and powerful. It strikes me that in Plato's *Republic*, that the rulers should be a distinct and specialised class, follows upon this view of the attitude of mind which government expresses. Not in all is there this reason issuing in love, and those in whom it is most to be found are carefully, and by an elaborate system of moral tests, to be selected from the ranks of the soldiers and set to govern the state. In fact, the real ruler, as Plato ultimately tells us, must be a philosopher; and the philosophic nature is reserved for a few rare souls.

The real ruler must be a philosopher, in the sense of knowing the "idea" or essence of justice, and of beauty, and of temperance in order that he may fashion into their likeness the characters of those whom he rules. Finally, he must know the idea of good, which means the purpose of all

doing and of all being. In addition to this, Plato considers four chief or cardinal virtues, which are necessary not only for being a good citizen but also for being a good state, in *The Republic*. These are wisdom, courage or fortitude, temperance and justice. Wisdom is the virtue of the rational part of the soul, courage of the spirited part, while temperance consists in the union of the spirited and appetitive parts under the rule of reason. Justice is a general virtue consisting in this, that every part of the soul performs its proper task in due harmony (Plato 1942: 310-315). I think that this is one of the definitions of justice at which Plato arrived in *The Republic*.

Plato argues that not only must the citizens have these virtues but also the state must have wisdom, courage, temperance and justice as well. Wisdom is the special virtue of the rulers. The state is wise in so far as the men at the head act wisely on its behalf.

The courage of a state is manifested in its army. Soldiers are not the only brave men in the state, but they are the state's representatives when fighting has to be done, and the state is brave or cowardly in accord with the measure of their courage.

Temperance or self-control is the characteristic virtue of the workers and is displayed by them in obedience to superiors. Temperance consists in the people's general recognition that it is the right of the superior to rule and the duty of the inferior to obey. Then, a state may be said to be temperate when the ordinary citizens willingly submit to the rulers. Plato finds the definition of justice at last in a phrase in common use which urges everyone to do his own business, his business being that work for which he is fitted by capacity and education. "Justice" means for Plato is that everyone attends to his own job without interfering with anyone else's (Plato 1942: 323).

Up to now I have tried to outline Plato's state, citizens and rulers as well as their virtues. However, *The Republic* also considers several corrupt forms of governments in Books VIII and IX.

Plato maintains that the corrupt forms of government are timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny. Timocracy depends on the recognition of honour as the highest value; as such it destroys the necessary balance of the perfect state because it substitutes virtue for honour. Oligarchy is a form of government founded on wealth understood as the highest value which replaces the rule of virtue with the rule of wealth. As a result of oligarchy, democracy is going to be established which prepares the tyranny. Finally,

after democracy, tyranny is going to be set up which is the real nuisance of mankind because instead of a philosopher, anybody who got the power will govern the state (Plato 1942: 429-477). Let us cite Tsanoff's interpretation and explanation so as to clarify what Plato means about corrupt forms of government.

Plato considered his aristocracy as the ideal perfect state, but he had no illusions that men had ever realized it on the earth. He took into consideration the various existing forms of government as more or less corrupt. In the ideal aristocracy the ruling class stands for man's highest faculty, i.e. reason. Yet, as men often make mistakes in preferring a strong will to a wise one, so states let the chief authority be assumed by generals and warriors famed for extraordinary ability. This is timocracy, a government of strenuous men of courage. A further corruption of society is seen when a small class of wealthy men gain control of the state. This is oligarchy in which people are judged by their possessions, not by their personal value. Where appetites and greed thus dominate people's lives, the poor multitudes might readily seize their chance to unseat the rich oligarchs and to establish a government of the masses in which no standard of better or worse, of higher or lower, is recognized, and only numbers and the prevailing wind of popular opinion decide everything. Plato called this rule by the masses democracy. The term in its ancient Greek sense was derogatory. Where no standard of value is acknowledged, some crafty demagogues might influence the unthinking multitude by appeals to passion and greed and might with the people's blind support usurp power in the state. This is tyranny, the worst of all governments (Tsanoff 1964: 57-58).

In the final analysis, in *The Republic*, Plato described a city state in which social justice was fully realised. The natural source of the state was to fulfill human needs like economy, social order as well as social and material orders (Önal 1998: 32). According to Plato, the aristocratic state is the best and happiest of states because it is based on human excellence as the highest value. As we have seen, excellent people will rule the state where people get at the real happiness. I can draw the conclusion that the highest happiness for the man who lives in accordance with the politics of the perfect state, that is to say, one who lives the philosophical life in a state or society. Since I finished up setting forth Plato's ideas concerning with the state and statesman, I would focus on Al-Farabi's point of view about this issue.

AL-FARABİ ON THE PERFECT STATE

Abu Nasr Mohammad Al-Farabi, who was born in 870 in the district of the city of Farab in Turkestan, of Turkish descent and died in 950 at Damascus, is the greatest islamic philosopher of the world. He was known as “the second teacher”- Aristotle was the first- moreover, Al-Farabi commented on many of Aristotle’s works and wrote a number of independent Works (Hyman 1987: 211-214).

In order to figure out Al-Farabi’s social and political philosophy very well, one had better inquire into his philosophy as a general. According to Hammond, Al-Farabi’s philosophy is entirely theocentric in the sense that it holds God as center of the universe. God is One; this one is the absolute transcending everything. The goal of man is to return to God. Furthermore, in Al-Farabi’s point of view, philosophy is studied primarily to obtain a knowledge of God as the creator and efficient cause of all things, the one, immovable. For Al-Farabi, philosophy is nothing else than thought, to wit, the science of concepts. The end of philosophy is to know God as the creator of heaven and earth (Hammond 1947: 1-3) .

Now it is time to examine Al-Farabi’s version of political philosophy including concepts of state and statesman by taking advantage of reading his book called *Al-Madinah Al Fadilah* which consists of 5 sections and 19 chapters. I am planning to examine particularly chapter 1 which is related to the first cause and chapters 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 concerning with the best state, excellent ruler and various kinds of faulty states.

First of all Al-Farabi starts by defining the “First Cause” in his work. The first cause is the highest excellence and perfection, besides it is unceasing actuality. It is eternal, ungenerated and everlasting. Nothing equals it in esence and rank. It is immaterial and hence without form. With his words:

The first existent is the First Cause of the existence of all the other existents. It is free of every kind of deficiency, whereas there must be in everything else some kind of deficiency, either one or more than one; but the First is free of all their deficiencies. Thus its existence is the most excellent and precedes every other existence... The First is without beginning and everlasting in its substance and esence, without being in need of any other thing, which would provide its permanence in order to be eternal; its

substance suffices for its permanence and its everlasting existence (Al-Farabi 1985: 57)

Consequently, according to Al-Farabi, the First is neither matter nor is it at all sustained by a matter ; the existence of which is free of all matter and substratum. Nor does it have form, because form can exist only in matter. The First cannot have a contrary and it has no magnitude and is absolutely incorporeal; besides its distinction from all the others is owing to the oneness which is its essence (Al-Farabi 1985: 63–67). From the beginning of *Al-Madinah Al Fadilah* to chapter 13, Al-Farabi deals with a resume of the principles covering the divine being, the emanation of the celestial intelligences and the relation of human intelligence as well as imagination to the spiritual universe. I do believe that his real purpose is to understand the nature of being and intellect and to attain a spiritual vision of reality. I think his principal concern is the person of the philosopher, who must know the truth and be responsible for actualizing it in human society.

To my mind, the main argument in *Al-Madinah Al-Fadilah* in chapters 13, 14 and 15 is that people need to live associate with others to achieve their best state, that is to say, that ultimate perfection or happiness is primarily within the confines of communal life (Al-Farabi 1985: 229). In addition to this, *Al-Madinah Al Fadilah* contains the classic description of the city of excellence, which is the city that aims, through the association contained therein, at cooperation for the things by means of which real happiness is acquired (Al-Farabi 1985: 230).

As Farabi has it, the ultimate goal of the city of excellence is “real happiness”. In a nut shell, Al-Farabi asserts emphatically that ultimate perfection and the most excellent human good are not possible in prepolitical associations, to wit, people need a state for living in peace and for being excellent. As mentioned earlier, Al-Farabi copies with the best state, various kinds of faulty states and with their rules in chapter 15 of his work. He states that, in order to preserve himself and to gain his highest perfections, every human being is by his very nature in need of many things that he cannot provide all by himself. As a matter of fact he is in need of people everyone of whom supplies him with some particular need of his. Therefore man cannot attain the perfection unless many people who co-operate come together each of whom supplies everybody else with some particular need of his, so that as a result of the contribution of the whole community all the things are brought together which everybody needs to preserve himself and

to attain perfection. Consequently, human individuals have come to exist in great numbers and have settled in the inhabitable region of the earth, so that human societies have come to exist in it, some of which are perfect, others imperfect (Al-Farabi 1985: 229).

Al-Farabi goes on to say that, “there are three kinds of perfect society; great, medium and small. The great one is the union of all the societies in the inhabitable world; the medium one the union of one nation in one part of the inhabitable world; the small one the union of the people of a city in the territory of any nation whatsoever (Al-Farabi 1985: 229). According to Al-Farabi, the most excellent good and the utmost perfection is attained in a city, not in a society which is less complete than it. Felicity is not attainable in every city. The city, in which people aim through association at co-operating for the things by which felicity in its real and true sense can be gained, is the excellent city; and in addition to this the society in which there is a co-operation to acquire felicity is the excellent society (Al-Farabi 1985: 231).

Al-Farabi employs an analogy to explain his perfect state by stating that “the excellent city resembles the perfect and healthy body, all of whose limbs co-operate to make the life of the animal perfect and to preserve it in this state” (Al-Farabi 1985: 231). Al-Farabi argues that “a ruler is the man who knows every action by which felicity can be reached. Moreover, he should be a good orator and able to rouse other people’s imagination by well chosen words... he is the first sovereign of the excellent city; he is the ruler of the perfect nation and the sovereign of the universal state” (Al-Farabi 1985: 247). It can be put forward that Al-Farabi’s social and political thought is not separated from religious concepts because for him the ruler of the state whom we can call as a philosopher who has attained a theoretical vision of the truth is the only person qualified for ruling, instructing his people, forming their character in accordance with moral principles, teaching them practical arts and rousing them to do good acts so as to make them reach their highest possible perfection.

Al-Farabi comes to illustrate now his version of imperfect states. According to him, in opposition to the excellent city are the ignorant city and the wicked city. First of all, I will try to explain the ignorant city. “The ignorant city is the city whose inhabitants do not know true felicity... Even if they were rightly guided to it, they would either not understand it or not believe in it ... The only things they were recognize are some of those which

are considered to be the aims in life, for instance, bodily health, wealth and enjoyment of pleasures. Therefore, according to the citizens of the ignorant city, each of these is a kind of felicity” (Al-Farabi 1985: 255-56). In the light of these, “the ignorant city is divided into a number a number of cities called the city of necessity, which is the city whose people strive for no more food, drink, housing... than is necessary for sustaining their bodies and they cooperate to attain this; the city of meanness, which is the city whose people are interested in acquisition of wealth and riches; the city of depravity and baseness, whose people are fond of the pleasure connected with the senses; the city of honour, which is the city whose people engage in attaining honour; the city of power, which is the city whose people are interested in getting power and democratic city, which is the city whose people are fond of their freedom” (Al-Farabi 1985: 257). In addition to this, “the wicked city is a city the views of which are those of the excellent city; it knows felicity, God Almighty, the existents of the second order and everything which as such is to be known and believed in by the people of the excellent city” (Al-Farabi 1985: 257-58). However, “the actions of its people are the actions of the people of the ignorant cities. Moreover the kings of these cities are contrary to the kings of the excellent cities” (Al-Farabi 1985: 259).

In the final two chapters of his book, I mean in chapters 18 and 19, Al-Farabi looks into two of the other faulty states which are ignorant and misguided states. According to him, these states do not come into existence unless the religion which their citizens accept is based on corrupt views to be found in the books of the ancient Greeks. With Al-Farabi’s words, “the cities of ignorance and error arise only when their religion is derived from a pernicious view of the ancients” (Al-Farabi 1985: 287). According to M. Saeed Sheikh, Al-Farabi suggests to build a society on reason, devotion and love. With such a society alone there is hope of creating the ideal city of which Al-Farabi gives an elaborate account (Sheikh 1974: 95).

It seems that Al-Farabi held the view from Plato’s *Republic* that politics and ethics should be employed as a foundation for establishing an ideal state and nation as well as a perfect world state the same as the modern United Nations. Al-Farabi put forward that man has a powerful will to partake in community life that can only happen in a state (Önal 1998: 153). In other words, the human being has an innate capacity for community life; accordingly, he only attains happiness within the state.

Since I wrapped up setting forth Plato and Al-Farabi's version of political and social philosophy, I would start comparing Plato's ideas related to ideal state with those of Al-Farabi.

First of all, the source of state is people's needs for both Plato and Al-Farabi. It is because people need to live and associate with others to achieve their best state.

Second, unlike Plato, Al-Farabi's perfect ruler should have prophetic qualification and is the founder of the good state. To Plato, philosophers must be king; however, for both them, the city, which is governed by a perfect ruler is the best and excellent city.

Third, differing from Plato, Al-Farabi holds God as the center of the universe and creator of all things. Plato insists on stating that God is to be understood as the author of all good things.

Fourth, Plato holds four corrupt forms of government which are called timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny. According to Al-Farabi, the corrupt forms of government are two which are known the ignorant city and the wicked city; yet, the ignorant city is to be divided into a number of cities called the city of necessity, of meanness, of depravity, of honour, of power and democratic city.

Fifth, while Plato takes into consideration the aristocratic state as the best state, Al-Farabi states that there are three kinds of perfect society, namely, great, medium and small.

Sixth, as mentioned, happiness is political happiness and it is likely only in a state for both of them; in addition to this, morality arrives at perfection in a perfect and just society in both of them.

Finally, following Plato, Al-Farabi thinks that people are happy if and only if they fulfill the function for which they were created. Since human beings are not equal because they have various capacities for public service, it is, thus, the duty and the task of the state to secure or ensure that its citizens are placed in which their true nature can best be realized and utilized.

In conclusion, it can be put forward that both Plato and Al-Farabi's versions of social and political philosophy is to be referred by human beings to advance their states and societies and they might employ Plato and Al-Farabi's ideas to figure out some vital concepts germane to the state and

statesman. To repeat, there are some concepts indispensable for mankind's welfare and well-being to live happily in peace and to prevent the society from chaos and anarchy and to struggle with moral relativism. As I have it, the object of human social existence should be the happiness of the people. This thought may not be regarded very original in our era, but it appears to me that it follows from this thought that there is a close link between being a good state and being a good citizen.

*

REFERENCES

- Al-Farabi (1985). *Al Farabi on the Perfect State*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Edman, Irwin (1945). *Four Ways of Philosophy*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, In.
- Hammond, Robert (1945). *The Philosophy of Al Farabi*, New York: The Hobson Book Press.
- Hyman, Arthur and James J. Walsh (1987). *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Indianapolis:Hackett Pub. Com.
- Önal, Mehmet (1998). *Wisdom and Philosophy in Islamic Thought*, Lampeter: Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wales.
- Plato (1942). *The Republic*, New York: Walter J. Black, Inc.
- Russell, Bertrand (1972). *A History of Western Philosophy*, New York: A Touchstone Book Press.
- Sheikh, M. Saeed (1974). *Studies in Muslim Philosophy*, Pakistan: SH. Muhammd Ashraf Publishers, Booksellers & Exporters.
- Tsanoff, A. (1964). *The Great Philosophers*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.