



Politics is Metaphysical? Yes and No.

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Abstract: Chaos, disorder, and uncertainty are self-evident in the manifested inward and outward reality of the day and age, which we vividly experience. Politics, namely the will to power, has become in the metaphysical realm as universal, essential, triumphant and fortified and metaphysical realities, namely the seeking of the truth and the examination of the mysteries of existence are camouflaged with commodity, use-value, and particular blind following of craving desires under the pestilential winds of the pursuit of political power. In turn, the realm of the intelligible, namely knowledge, wisdom, justice and human virtues, has become only a footnote to the political discussion. Under such conditions, instead of metaphysics, politics and its politicking element permeates everything starting from the street and day to day conversations to the intellectual and academic fields, including science, history, philosophy, and artistic work. At such terms of the current circumstances of reality, politics is the means and the end in and of itself.

Following the preceding examination, I shall dedicate this scholarly writing with the aim to conceptualize, elaborate, and clarify the 'nature of the politics and political order'. I demonstrated that the politics and political order is neither independently self-existent nor an emergence of the melancholy-driven nostalgia of the past, neither altogether transcendent nor wholly earthly. Rather, using the political plethora of the Islamic and Western philosophical worldview, namely an comparative approach to study of the political thought of Al-Ghazali and Sheldon Wolin, I conclude that the politics, political order, and political knowledge are proceeded, categorized, and established by the universal eternal principles of metaphysics and the three attachable elements of politics have their right condition, place, and station within the largest scheme of the hierarchy of life, being, reality, and metaphysics.

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The Philosophy of Politics: What it is, Why it is and How it is – The Western Worldview!

In search of the lost practical wisdom of philosophical definitions, politics/political order/the political in their current usage necessarily needs such ones, adding the unnatural inconsistency of the current flip-flopping definition, they need time-less and mostly space-less defining plethora. To start with, using Oxford Learners Dictionary, even represented in a grossly over-simplified manner, politics is defined as “the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a society”. Notwithstanding its simplicity, in a timeless mode of further explanation, fully worth quoting him, Aristotle in *Politico*, the English translation provided from Benjamin Jowett (1984) describes the two path-ways, which an individual can choose to live accordingly in a virtuous polis, which is his implicit definition of politics as well:

“For it is evident that these two ways of life are the ones intentionally chosen by those human beings who are most ambitious with a view to virtue, both in former times and at the present—the two I mean are the political and the philosophic. It makes no small difference on which side the truth lies, for a sensible person, at any rate, must necessarily organize matters with a view to the better aim both in the case of human beings individually and for the regime in common”

Interestingly enough, the definition of Aristotle for the man as a rational animal, and its ending goal or telos: the happiness within the polis, applies consistently to its due categorization of the branches of sciences into three types (contemplative – including metaphysics and physics, practical sciences and productive sciences), from which politics or political science is categorized under the “contemplative one” (Deslauriers and Destreè, 2013). That is so since it concerned the happiness of the citizens primarily, but most fundamentally the need of study of the proper duty of the politician or statesmen, in his role as lawgiver, in order to establish and endure customs, law, and constitution for the city-state in order to produce order, justice, and entail happiness or felicity ultimately. Plato’s inquiry for the nature of politics, is something of ‘unique and distinctive’ from other dimensions of life, as provided by Sheldon Wolin (1996), in his book “Politics and Vision”. Nevertheless, unified in the interrelated functions of the coherent



interconnected whole of the divine principles, philosophical wisdom, and the implementation of political art in society:

“That name is one which I believe to belong to this art and to this alone, the name of Statesmanship. When the supreme power in man coincides with the greatest wisdom and temperance, then the best laws and the best constitution come into being; but in no other way”.

Lord of Kames (1778) defined politics as the task of man “to fabricate images without any foundations in reality”, implying the designated forms of political assertions and formulations without any life and need, in the betterment of practical functionality of reality. Furthermore, the founding fathers of the U.S., namely Thomas Jefferson and the committee of five (1776), in the famous Declaration of Independence, conceptualized the arrangement of the holistic approach towards politics, government and the state, heavily influenced but shifting narrowly from the mechanistic philosophical worldview of Lockean root hypothesis of the ultimate end of man as a protector of property, to the following declaim signifier of ending associations of unalienable rights and ultimate happiness:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness.”

The above-mentioned elucidation of the philosophy of politics may be constrained as somewhat imaginative or a stretch of imagination, yet the theoretical inquiry laid out the practical implementation of the worldview of the civilization itself. Yet, let’s return to the momentary reality of the “business of politics”. To add a contemporary tonality to the field of political philosophy, Francis Fukuyama (2011) in his book “The Origins of Political Order and Decay” defined the state as a “long-run struggle against family”, this particularly after “the peculiar English path of industrialization



period". Furthermore, he adds, the state accomplishes itself neither to the "neopatrimonialism" nor to the belongingness of ideological/philosophical/theoretical categories, rather to the paramount role of individual in the competent-based impersonal universal society regulated minimally by the state itself. The pronouncement of the 'death of God' from Zarathustra, the 'visionary' character employed from the iconoclastic Nietzsche (1887) tangents that, what remains after the "Death of God", in the realm of existence is nothing else except the "Will to Power", 'slave morality' – under which politics is categorized in the "Genealogy of Morals", and politicians/a politician divides mankind into two classes: tools and enemies, thus augmenting in a way truthfully the troubling nihilistic, sense of senseless, and the element of decay in the current chaotic, uncertain, and lofty hubris of the modern/postmodern state of the world, either in the East, name it the Islamic World, but most penetratingly in the West.

Naquib al-Attas, one of the most prominent contemporary Islamic philosophers, in his seminal scholarly work "Islam and Secularism" published in 1993, has a lot to say about the "deen of development", blind imitation, raving of slogans, and desacralization of politics from human affairs, and is worthy hereby to quote him in full length consequently:

"But the philosophical and scientific process which I call 'secularization' necessarily involves the divesting of spiritual meaning from the world of nature; the desacralization of politics from human affairs; and the deconsecration of values from the human mind and conduct. Remember that we are a people neither accustomed nor' permitted to lose hope and confidence, so that it is not possible for us simply to do nothing but wrangle among ourselves and rave about empty slogans and negative activism while letting the real challenge of the age engulf us without positive resistance. The real challenge is intellectual in nature, and the positive resistance must be mounted from the fortification not merely of political power, but of power that is founded upon right knowledge."

Further, he in a definitive conclusory remark articulates:

"We are now again at the crossroads of history, and awareness of Islamic identity is beginning to dawn in the consciousness of emergent Muslims. Only when this awareness comes to full



awakening with the sun of knowledge ‘will there emerge from among us men and women of spiritual and intellectual maturity and integrity who will be able to play their role with wisdom and justice in upholding the truth. Such men and women will know that they must return to the early masters of the religious and intellectual tradition of Islam, which was established upon the sacred foundation of the Holy Qur’an and the Tradition of the Holy Prophet, in order to learn from the past and be able to acquire spiritually and intellectually for the future; they will realize that they must not simply appropriate and imitate what modern secular Western civilization has created, but must regain by exerting their own creative knowledge, will, and imagination what is lost of the Muslims’ purpose in life, their history, their values and virtues embodied in their sciences, for what is lost can never be regained by blind imitation and the raving of slogans which deafen with the din of ‘development’; they will discern that development must not involve a correspondence of Islam with the facts of contemporary events that have strayed far from the path of truth; and they will conceive and formulate their own definitions and conceptions of government and of the nature of development that will correspond with the purpose of Islam. Their emergence is conditional not merely upon physical struggle, but more upon the achievement of true knowledge, confidence and boldness of vision that is able to create great changes in history.’”

Politics Proceeding from Metaphysics - Politics in the Islamic Worldview: The Case of Al-Farabi

Abu Nasr Al-Farabi (879-952), known as the second teacher after Aristotle, is one of the most systematized Islamic philosopher, whose unprecedented comprehensive philosophical writing encompasses the fields of metaphysics, cosmology, ontology, epistemology, and most importantly in an profound groundwork, political philosophy as well, where he is hardly unequal among other Islamic thinkers and philosophers (Butterworth, 2015). In the present day and age, where politics lays predominantly in the domain of power distinction between the friend and enemy, exercised multi-polarly in an anarchic international system, prevalently embarking chaos, disorder, war, and most severely, and most recently, a return to a tribal worldview of human being, Al-Farabi through his masterpiece “Al-Madinat al-Fadilah” or the Virtuous City,



which shall be used to realize such forgotten guide of the present lived, tasted, and experienced reality, communicated to us the importance of achieving political order, unavoidably as a mean not as an end to the ultimate goal of the metaphysical inquiry, named conscientiously the 'ultimate happiness'. As I contended hitherto, such kind of Farabian perplexity, namely the integrated character of politics within and connectedly to the metaphysical inquiry shall serve as a furthering guide to postulate in an hierarchical order the vision, mission, and intentionality consciousness of politics as such, namely political order and knowledge in the grounded culminated totality of metaphysics theoretically and virtuous life practically, in the society, city, nation-state, and ultimately culminating in emerging the universal state.

The notion of a virtuous contemplative life, and the accompanied meaning to live, such a life pushed Al-Farabi, neither as the custom of his time dictated nor a thorough blind imitation of Aristotle and Plato, to start deliberately the Chapter 15 titled "Perfect Associations and Perfect Ruler; Faulty Association", of the "Virtuous City", in the thorough and critically edited translation provided from Richard Walzer (1998), with the following strikingly remarks representing the man not as the center of universe, but rather as a political animal:

"In order to preserve himself and to attain his highest perfections, every human being is by very nature in need of many things which he cannot provide all by himself; he is indeed in need of people who each supply him with some particular need of his".

Undoubtedly, Al-Farabi, in the same chapter examines also the function of the excellent cities as a mean towards the bottom realization of the attainment of the ultimate perfection, throughout the content of ultimate felicity or happiness, in direct relation to the function of the natural born condition of the human nature, not in a rough solitary life, but in cooperation and associative togetherness of the society (Walzer, 1998):

"Therefore man cannot attain the perfection, for the sake of which his inborn nature has been given to him, unless many societies of people who cooperate, come together supply each and 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 that everybody needs, in order to preserve himself and achieve perfect happiness"



The ultimate felicity or happiness and a good life, as an ontological central sequencer of Al-Farabi, obeyed closely the “Nichomochean Ethics” of Aristotle and the Plato’s Republic (Mahdi, 2000). However, the breaking point in terms of the difference between the aforementioned and Al-Farabi, in terms of the political philosophy, is the employment of the emanationist scheme of existence (Galston, 1990) via the analogous similitude principle of the “Active Intellect”:

“God Almighty grants him revelation through mediation of the Active Intellect, so that the emanation from God Almighty to the Active Intellect is passed on to his Passive Intellect through the mediation of Acquired Intellect and then to his faculty of representation. Thus, he is the wise man, the accomplished philosopher, and the sovereign of the universal state (the oikumene)”

The similitude principle of the “Organs of Body” is omnipresent as well in Al-Farabi, following Walzer (1998) translation:

“The heart comes to be first and then becomes the cause of existence of the other organs and limbs of the body, and the cause of the existence of their faculties in them and of their arrangement in the ranks proper to them, and when one of the organs is out of order, it is the heart, which provides the means to remove that disorder. In the same way, the ruler of this city must come to be in the first instance, and will subsequently be the cause of the rise of the city and its parts and the cause of the presence of the voluntarily habits of its parts and their arrangement in the ranks proper to them”

Al-Farabi continues further to definition of the twelve natural qualities that the ruler of the universal state should have as the paver of the road to the ultimate felicity or happiness of the citizens within the excellent city. The list he gave is as follows:

“But this state can be achieved by a man in whom twelve natural qualities are found together: He should have limbs and organs which are far from deficiency and are strong, he should by nature be good at understanding and perceiving everything said to him, he should be good at retaining what he comes to know and forget almost nothing, he should be well provided with ready intelligent and brightness, he should have a fine diction, he should



be fond of learning and acquiring knowledge, he should by nature be fond of truth and truthful men, he should by nature not crave for food, drink and sexual discourse, he should be proud of spirit and fond of honor, dirham and dinar and the other worldly pursuits should be of little amount in his view, he should be fond of justice and of just people, he should be strong in setting his mind firmly upon the things which in his view, ought to be done, and daringly and bravely carry it out without fear and weak-mindedness."

In opposition to the excellent city, there are ignorant cities which, by Al-Farabi characterization and classification, have truly one thing in common: "The lack of the inclination to achieve the true felicity" (Fakhry, 2002). While, all things considered, the citizens of such cities share the following common characteristics (Walzer, 1998):

"the aims in their life is bodily health, wealth, enjoyment of pleasures, freedom to follow one's desires, and being held in honor and esteem"

The ignorant cities are grouped in different cities, but all share again one commonality: "indulgent in passion and outward design" (Walzer, 1998), yet there is a hierarchical differentiation of them in the following:

"The city of necessity, that is the city whose people strive for no more food, drink, clothes, housing, and sexual intercourse. The city of meanness: the aim of its people is to cooperate in the acquisition of wealth and riches. The city of depravity and baseness, the aim of its people is the enjoyment of the pleasure connected with senses, imagination, entertainment and idle talk"

The detailed account of Al-Farabi's subservient means of the differences between the cities of excellence and cities of ignorance, the similitude analogy between the active intellect as part of the strict emanationist scheme and the ruler of the city of excellence, demonstrate firmly one thing: the account of metaphysical enquiries invades the domain of politics. To be careful in order to not put the horse before the cart, namely to not enter into the realm of ad-infinity linguistic games, politics is cross-related to metaphysics, and if not at its paramount, the resident realm of the practical manifestation of metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology. To pursue such a factual occurrence further, on Al-Farabi's "Al-Madinal al-Fadilah", the architectural anatomy of the philosophical program presented



from him, is such that, the political knowledge follows after/ is proceeded by the metaphysical principles. Al-Farabi, himself, using Galtson (1990) excellent study of the political side of Al-Farabi philosophical legacy, starts in “Al-Madinat al-Fadilah”:

“with an account of metaphysical principles and heavenly bodies—their hierarchy, origin, and operation proceed to a discussion of the sublunar sphere and the hierarchy, origin, and operation of its elements, including matter and form, possible beings, and the plant and animal kingdoms (hereafter the “theoretical” half of these work. It is after this, that the progress of political life is discussed”

Galtson (1990), further argues that the investigator of the ultimate felicity is initially acquainted to the first cause and principles of natural bodies, and what follows afterward, is the enjoyment of the plurality of the diversity of existential perfections, including the establishment of political science, political life and political knowledge. Analyzing Al-Farabi account:

“Initially, the foundations of human science and political science are further obscured by the fact that Alfarabi identifies the subject of human science variously as “the purpose” of human existence and “the perfection that man must achieve” (Sa’adah 63:4—6/15:16—18). Earlier, when the investigator’s inquiries into natural bodies pointed to principles outside nature, Alfarabi described the investigator as becoming acquainted with “the ends and ultimate perfection” for the sake of which man came into existence (Sa’adah 60:17—19/13:10—11”

Al-Farabi’s account of religion, from another point of view, is intimately related as well with the art of ruling, namely religion is comprised from opinions and is a result primarily of the ruler’s activity, yet representing a kind of disconnectedness with the metaphysical foundational truth, which is the highest one in the largest scheme of the hierarchy of being:

“Religion is opinions and actions, determined and restricted with stipulations and prescribed for a community by their first ruler, who seeks to obtain, through them, practicing a specific purpose... If the first ruler is excellent and his rulership truly excellent, then he prescribes what he seeks only to obtain, for himself and for everyone under his rulership, the ultimate happiness that is truly happiness; and that religion will be the excellent religion”.



Al-Farabi account on politics may look outdated, complacent, and ridiculous in front of the fleeting images of hyper reality, tremendous accumulation of wealth and technological innovation, and the fourth stage of governmental internationalized institutionalization, nonetheless it strikes the importance of linkage between the life in the polis, metaphysics, and the realm of intelligible truths beyond the world of encapsulated and imprisonment of desires and worship of the self. Nonetheless, however, the greatest merit of Al-Farabi is the matter of the fact that political science is informed from metaphysics, with the highest aim to supply and support the understanding and achievement of the perfected felicity and happiness, and individuals in the virtuous city. In the terrain of practical level, there are multiple peculiar risks encountered in Al-Farabi's conclusory remarks, namely the profound explanation that all that is left to the natural duty of humanity is philosophy, specifically the pursuit of happiness, is not easily graspable and to some extent enormous pressure is put on the accommodated capacity of philosophy in its total inquiry, but relatedly, likewise, as well enormously mitigates the practical impact of the politics and the politics to convey the truth, in an associative or helpful way to the present and at hand metaphysical and ontological immaterial realities. Nevertheless, there is a threat towards the Farabi's peninsula of political thought, however, the optimism, solidarity, and the will to attain knowledge, wisdom, compassion, and the truth are more than needed in the current reign of quantity and the mitigated wonderous signs of the time when we are living.

Al-Ghazali: Judicial Order instead of Anarchy and Peace or Conflict

Al-Ghazali, whose polymath stature needs little introduction, provides a different account pertaining the domain of politics, as a subfield of knowledge, life, and daily practical activity. In his autobiography named "Deliverance from Error", the translation and critical edition provided from Montgomery Watt (1953), he made the following noticeable observations pertaining politics:

"All their discussion of this is based on considerations of worldly and governmental advantage. These they borrow, from the Divine scriptures revealed through the prophets and from the maxims handed down from the saints of old."



In the remarkable letters of advice sent to Nizamuddin Fakhru'l Al-Mulk, the Vezir of Seljuk Empire at that time, Al-Ghazali, a semi-translation followed from a commentary added by Jonathan AC Brown (2006), stressed the importance of the state as a mechanism enabled to be functional in order to produce order out of chaos through disciplining three types of emerging manifested forces of the souls of individuals in the scope of community life:

“Lust, which misdirects one to unhealthy and immoral activities, Anger, which incites to murder, and Greed, involving dishonesty and corruption. If these chiefs could be presented in material form, the first would assume the form of a pig, the second of a dog, and the third that of a devil”

Furthermore, on Al-Ghazali's political theory, as stressed from Brown (2006), the most important instrument of the states as a hierarchical orderly structure that generates power and regulate chaos, is the judiciary branch, and this is revealed from the following:

“Grave consequences would not follow if a king entrusts the office of a minister or that of an executive officer to an inefficient person, but it would be disastrous if he appoints an undesirable man to a post relating to judiciary, since an executive job or ministership is intended to run the affairs of worldly institutions, while on the contrary judiciary is expected to perform the duties delegated by our Prophet Muhammad, praise and peace be upon him. Judges are required to arrive at their decisions in accordance with the commands of Allah.”

In Moderation in Belief (al-Iqtisad fil al-Itiqad), Al-Ghazali, as cited in “State and Government in Medieval Islam” from Lambton (1981), examines the relationship between temporal power, exercise of the sovereignty of the people, anarchy, order, the judiciary, and kingship:

“There are those who hold the imamate is dead, lacking as it does the required qualifications. But no substitute can be found for it. What then? Are we to give up obeying the law? Shall we dismiss the qādīs, declare all authority to be valueless, cease marrying and pronounce the acts of those in high places to be invalid at all points, leaving the population to live in “sinfulness”? Or shall we continue as we are, recognising that the imamate really exists and that all acts of the administration are valid, given the circumstances of the



case and the necessities of the actual moment? The concessions made by us are not spontaneous, but necessity makes lawful what is forbidden. We know it is not lawful to feed on a dead animal: still, it would be worse to die of hunger. Of those that contend that the caliphate is dead for ever and irreplaceable, we should like to ask: which is to be preferred, anarchy and the stoppage of social life for lack of a properly constituted authority, or acknowledgement of the existing power, whatever it be? Of these two alternatives, the jurist cannot but choose the latter”.

Interestingly enough, James Madison in the Federalist Paper 51, makes an attachable similar point pertaining government:

“In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.”

Ibn Sina, in his *Shifa*, elaborating in the concept of human collaboration, civilization and politics, through remembrance of the Medinan Prophetic experience, underlines two factors constituting such the world of political life: the proper path of truth in life accompanied from higher metaphysical and moral principles, followed from justice (Kalin, 2016). What follows subsequently is a good life based on virtues, compassion, mercy, mutual understanding, and truth. Such eternal principles are forgotten in the day and age of domination, power games, heavy consumerism, and endless craving desires and entitlement of the human being as an entity of mechanically reducible commodity. Notwithstanding this, Samuel Huntington (1968) in his work “Political Order in Changing Societies” is remembering us that “the political order is a goal, not a reality”, and politics is not about “form of government”, rather, it is about the “degree of governance”, pointing out to the continuous transformable nature of the political order, political knowledge, and interrelated elemental epistemological signifiers in the metaphysical hierarchy of being.

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