

AL-FÂRÂBÎ AS A SOURCE OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY AND OF ITS DEFINITION*

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Al-Fârâbî says that philosophy comes to us from the ancient Greeks,¹ especially from Plato and Aristotle who have founded and perfected it.²

Historians of philosophy begin their topics, after citing the name of Homer, with those of the "Seven Sages" among whom Thales is cited first. All the people who are interested in philosophy, know that the word philosophy is composed of *philia*, that is quest and love and *sophos*, that is wisdom. It seems that the word philosophy is an invention of the Pythagoreans.³

In the literature, the following questions have been asked rather frequently: "What is wisdom?". "What is the relation between wisdom and philosophy?". "Is the wisdom an invention of ancient Greeks or a contribution of other cultures?" It seems to me that it is possible to ask these questions now with reference to Plato, Aristotle, Beressos, Ibn Newbakht, al-Fârâbî, Ibn Meymûn, Roger Bacon, Mikloş Daczi Yanoş⁴ and, to the recent studies on ancient Mesopotamia.⁵

With this paper, we ask all these questions to ourselves; and, we utilise the works of al-Fârâbî, his definitions and his terms as a referable source. And we see, that according to him, wisdom has come to us from the Chaldeans; and that it is the basis of philosophy and science, as well as religion, and, that it differs, for containing intelligibles with certainty, from religion which lets us know the truth by image through similitude and offers us conviction, belief and persuasion. The starting point of al-Fârâbî in these subjects is certainly found in his very important little book, entitled "The Conditions of Certain Truth."⁶ All these discussions are also revealing to us the beginning of the history of philosophy.

As regards to the ancient or new bibliographic and bio-bibliographic sources⁷ it is well known that al-Fârâbî has written many treatises on the

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definitions of philosophy, its apparition and its transmission from a culture to another and the meaning of the philosopher's names, as well as the necessary things before beginning to study philosophy.⁸ We have at hand some of these books, while we don't have some others.⁹ But al-Fârâbî has, always, taken these subjects into consideration directly or indirectly in his main books;¹⁰ at the same time he has given to us the definitions of the wisdom and the philosophy. These following are the definitions of the not divine but human wisdom given by al-Fârâbî to us: 1. "Wisdom is the knowledge about the First One from whom all the creatures have gotten their virtues and perfections."¹¹ 2. "Wisdom is the knowledge about the ultimate and supreme principles of creatures."¹² 3. "Wisdom is the veneration before the most venerable subject by knowing it by means of the most venerable knowledge."¹³ 4. "Wisdom is searching on the ultimate happiness."¹⁴ 5. "Wisdom is the virtue of the parts of the rational soul¹⁵ like the intelligence, the reason, the understanding, the cleverness, just like courage, righteousness and altruism are the virtues of the parts of the animal soul like concupiscence and passion."¹⁶ Indeed, according to al-Fârâbî, the virtues are either "theoretical" or "deliberative" or "moral" or "practical" for all people or "nations" (*Milla*).

All aforesaid definitions of wisdom are the same by essence although they seem different in the first view. Because, this is the theoretical virtue of man and his searching on the "*certain truth*" that is the wisdom itself.¹⁷

We could appreciate this point also in taking into account the outlines of philosophy of al-Fârâbî and his definitions of philosophy.

It is well known that, according to the philosophical views of al-Fârâbî, the existence *per se* is only for God Himself. This means that God exists necessarily, while His creatures are existent only by God. God is the one and absolute existent *per autrui* whose essence is His own existence.¹⁸ God possesses wisdom and intellect. Thinking His essence, God, gives their existence to His creatures as well as to man. And so, from the First One emanates the Intellect, the Soul and the Matter. The essence of God being wisdom, and since *Intellectus*, *Intelligens* and *Intellectum*, all the Universe, including men, are emanated from His knowledge, all the Universe should be constructed according to the divine wisdom. For this reason, the knowledge of man about God, and His creatures as they are, should be the human wisdom itself and the search of man on these subjects is the theoretical virtue itself.

The wisdom of God is identical with His life which is "the intellection about the most venerable subject by means of the most venerable knowledge." "The most venerable subject" is God Himself. When man finds the "ultimate happiness" in the searching of the knowledge about God, this means that man comes to imitate God's wisdom and life and that the response of man to the "*Creatio Dei*" is only by "*Imitatio Dei*", such as the response of man to the "*Tajalli*" (manifestation) of God is only by the "*Ittisâl*" (contact, conjunction) of man with Him, according to the philosophical view of Ibn Sînâ. "*Imitatio Dei*" is then, the man's theoretical virtue itself. According to al-Fârâbî, the purpose of man to study philosophy is to know God in order to imitate Him as much as possible.¹⁹ Further, "philosophy is to know the being as being."²⁰ "The end of philosophy is to know all beings as they are."²¹ Philosophy concerns all being, as in theoretical or practical philosophy. Mathematics (including Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy and Music), Physics and Theology are theoretical philosophy, while moral, economical and political sciences are practical ones.

With all these views, al-Fârâbî establishes a parallelism between wisdom and philosophy on the one hand and a connection between wisdom and moral and political sciences on the other. He proposes wisdom as the way to the "attainment" of the ultimate happiness which is also attainment to the "*certain knowledge*" about God. One could attain to knowledge with certainty about God, when he studies all beings as they are or being as being. These topics are studied in the "*Book of Lambda*", part of the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. These subjects are called sometimes as "metaphysics", sometimes as "theology".²² Theology comes "*after*" physics. Its place is "*higher*" than it. For, to study the principles of beings and the subjects whose separation from matter is not imagery like those of Mathematics, but ontological, is the most venerable thing to do for man. All these subjects are the most venerable ones. One knows all these "most venerable subjects" by mean of the "most venerable science" which is both the "*certain truth*" and the "*theoretical virtue*". One attains to the "ultimate happiness" by integrating his "theoretical virtue" with the "deliberative" and "moral" virtues as well as with the "practical arts".

With these considerations, al-Fârâbî puts also wisdom on the basis of philosophy, and science, as well as that of religion. Then, it is clear, why in the Turkish language Physics and Biology are called for a longtime as "the wisdom about nature" or "the natural wisdom" (*Hikmet-i tabiiyye*).

For, according to al-Fârâbî, man possesses the "*certain truth*" as the human intellect concerns a being and the knowledge about it is exactly being the same as it is. Both this being and the knowledge about it are called "*truth*" or "*truthfulness*". When there is no doubt within the human mind about the knowledge about a being that it is exactly the same as this thing itself, this "*truth*" becomes "*certain*". Then, this state of human mind is called "*certain truth*". When any human intellect does not concern to any being this being does not become "*truth*"; it rests alone as a being. When the human intellect is concerning the Eternal Being with certainty, man has then, the "*certain truth*" the "*true science*", the "*most venerable science*".

Man attains to it by asking the following questions and taking their "*certain*" responses which are similar to the mathematical definitions: "Whether the thing is", "What is it?", "By which, from which, for which is it?", "Why is it?". These questions and their responses are called the "Principles of instruction". Man attains to the First Principle by asking all the time to himself the following questions: "Whether the thing is", "Why the thing is", and having their "*certain*" responses.²³ The "Principles of Being" are the following questions and their "*certain*" responses: "What", "By what" and "How the thing is", "For what it is." In some subjects, like the mathematical ones, the "Principles of instruction" are the same as the "Principles of being", while in some subjects it is not.²⁴ There is not any "*true science*" about the changing objects, of course.²⁵ Man attains to the "*true science*" through "*apodeictic*", that is, "*certain demonstration*" starting with premises which are true, general, and necessary. To attain to the "*true science*" or the "*most venerable science*" is to attain to the "*certain truth*".

According to al-Fârâbî, this "most venerable science" that the ancient "Greeks used to call the *true wisdom*, is the *highest wisdom*. They call the acquisition of it *science* and the scientific state of mind *philosophy*, by which they meant the quest and the love for the *highest wisdom*. They held that, potentially, it subsumes all the virtues. They called it *science of science*, the *mother of sciences*, the *wisdom of wisdoms* and the *art of arts*. They meant the art that makes use of all the arts, the virtue that makes use of all the virtues and the wisdom that makes use of all wisdoms. Now *wisdom* may be used for consummate and extreme competence in any art whatsoever when it leads to performing feats of which most practitioners of that art are incapable. Here wisdom is used in a qualified sense. Thus, he who is extremely competent in art is said to be *wise* in that art. Similarly, a man

with penetrating practical judgment and acumen may be called wise in the thing regarding which he has penetrating practical judgment. However *true wisdom* is this science and state of mind alone.²⁶ When the theoretical sciences are isolated and their possessors do not have the faculty for exploiting them for the benefit of others, they are *defective philosophy*. To be truly perfect philosopher, one has to possess both the theoretical sciences and the faculty for exploiting them for the *benefit* of all others according to their capacity. Were one to consider the case of the true philosopher, he would find no difference between him and the supreme ruler."

According to al-Fārābī, "There are two ways of making a thing comprehensible; first by causing its essence to be perceived by the intellect—this is the method of "*certain demonstration*"— and, second, by causing it to be imagined through the similitude that imitates it—this is the method of persuasion—. When one acquires knowledge of the beings or receives instruction in them, if he perceives their ideas themselves with his intellect and his assent to them this is by means of certain demonstration; then, the science that comprises these cognitions is *philosophy*. But, if they are known by imagining them through similitudes that imitate them and assent to what is imagined of them is caused by the persuasive method, then the Ancients call what comprises these cognitions *Religion*. And, if those intelligibles themselves are adopted and *persuasive* methods are used, then, the religion comprising them is called *popular, generally accepted, and external philosophy*. Therefore, according to the Ancients, religion is an imitation of philosophy. Both comprise the same subjects and both give an account of the ultimate principles of the beings. For both supply knowledge about the first principle and cause of the beings, and both give an account of the ultimate end for the sake of which man is made—that is the supreme happiness—and the ultimate end of every one of the other beings. In everything of which philosophy gives an account based on intellectual perception or conception, religion gives an account based on imagination. In everything demonstrated by philosophy, religion employs persuasion.²⁷ Philosophy gives an account of the ultimate principles as they are perceived by the intellect. Religion set forth its images by means of similitudes of them taken from corporal principles and imitates them by their likeness among political offices. It imitates the divine acts by means of the functions of political offices. It imitates the actions of natural powers and principles of their likeness among the faculties. States and arts

have to do with the will, just as Plato does in the *Timaeus*. It imitates the intelligibles by their likenesses among the sensibles: For instance, some imitate *matter* by *abyss* or *darkness* or *water*, and *nothingness* by *darkness*. It imitates the classes of supreme happiness by their likenesses among the good that are believed to be the ends. It imitates the classes of true happiness by means of the ones that are believed to be happiness. It imitates the ranks of the beings by their likenesses among spatial and temporal ranks. And, it attempts to bring the similitudes of these things as close as possible to their essences. Also, in everything of which philosophy give an account that is demonstrative and certain, religion gives an account based on persuasive arguments. Finally philosophy are prior to religion in time,²⁸ and the subjects of wisdom or philosophy are more comprehensive than those of religion. In the last analysis, the meanings of "*Milla*", "*Sunna*", "*Umma*" and "*Shari'a*" should be the same.²⁹ Likewise, the "ultimate happiness" should be the same for all *umma*'s, while their symbols are different.³⁰ This means that the essence of all the religions is the same, although their external forms or their symbols are different. The idea of the true philosopher, supreme ruler, prince, legislator and *Imam* is but a single idea. But, religion is the instruction of people by persuasion and imagination. Because according to al-Fârâbî, when the logic, with which one searches what is common for all languages is used in the parts of philosophy, one attains to the certainty. Thus, the "*certain demonstration*" is used in philosophy. The "*certain demonstration*" is a kind of syllogism formed with premises which are certain.³¹ The "*certain demonstration*" is attainable only through the "*certain affirmation*".³² There are also other kinds of affirmations which are nearest to the certainty, giving to us opinion or persuasion or conviction. All these other kinds of affirmations are used by religions as rhetorical, popular and generally accepted arguments.³³

The "*certain demonstration*" is other than the certainty itself. Therefore, the "*certain demonstration*" is a scientific syllogism formed with the premises which are general, true and necessary, while certainty is a state of mind to which one attains by starting from the premises which are true, necessary, general, primary, immediate, indemonstrable, first, more intelligible than and prior to the conclusion and causes of the conclusion.³⁴

The proposition which informs us the necessary existence of a thing is inversible with the proposition which is necessarily certain and informs us about it.³⁵ There is not any being which is necessary with the excep-

tion of God. The only being which is necessary is God Himself. Other beings are possible in the different degree of majority, equality, minority and eventuality. If there were not the eventual things, the existence of social life, pray and horror would not be possible.³⁶ The natural things are not necessary but possible in the degree of majority. The thing which is possible in the degree of equality is called contingent, that is not possible to say neither "is" (true) nor "is not" (true) about it. They who give us "true demonstration" about creation and attain to the "certain truth" about it, are the philosophers —The Turkish wise poets Has Hâcib in his *Kutadgu Bilig* and Yûnus Emre in his *Divân* have used the term of "certain truth" (*al-Hakk al-yakin*)—. ³⁷ They who give us the "persuasive demonstration" are theologians.³⁸ But, the "true demonstrations" of philosophers are superior and most venerable.³⁹ It is just in this point that Ghazâlî has opposed to the philosophers in his "Incoherence of Philosophers", as saying: The philosophers have not any *certain demonstration* in theology as they have it in the Mathematics; then, one should not abandon the religion as if they have any certain demonstration in theology.⁴⁰

According to al-Fârâbî, the revelation is to receive which is emanated from the Active Intellect to the Acquired Intellect, by an elect. The true is this Active Intellect itself, when man is in conjunction with it.⁴¹ The wise men know the truths emanated from the Active Intellect by means of the "eyes of their hearts",⁴² that is "sure insight". —The "eye of heart" is the basic term for the Turkish wise men before and after Islam. It is "köngül" of the Uygur literature, "Köksî közi" of *Kutadgu Bilig*, "Gönül gözü" of Yûnus Emre.⁴³ According to al-Fârâbî, man knows God and divine subjects by means of intellect.⁴⁴ The intellect is the nearest being to God. It is a part of the "most honorable world".⁴⁵ It is the "most honorable part of human soul."⁴⁶ It is a part and a faculty of the human soul by means of which man comprehends the "certain truth".⁴⁷ When God created the beings, He gave the most convenient nature to man to receive the intellectual soul. Man should be a man only in a society. Out of society he is only a "wild beast" (*Sab⁶*). The first place for the human soul is in the heart⁴⁸ which is one of the parts of the human body.⁴⁹ The knowledge about the First One is the attainment to the ultimate happiness which is the specific perfection of man.⁵⁰ This is the First and Eternal One who gives to the beings as well as to the man their virtues and perfection.⁵¹

The first ruler who occupies his place by nature and not merely by will could not let his people attain to the ultimate happiness unless he is not wise;⁵² then he should know the "certain truth" and the "certain demonstration". A virtuous man becomes virtuous only in a virtuous city. He should hurry up to leave the city where he lives, unless it is a virtuous one, in order to immigrate to a virtuous city. According to al-Fârâbî, the idea of Philosopher, Supreme Ruler, Prince, Legislator and *Imâm*, is but a single idea among the majority to those who speak "our language"⁵³ —Indeed, "*Bogü*", "*Bilge*", "*Bogü Bilge*", all these Turkish words have such a meaning that they correspond to what al-Fârâbî says—. The theoretical and practical subjects are philosophy when they are in the soul of the legislator; they are the religion when they are in the soul of the multitude. They are religion for others, whereas, so far as he is concerned, they are philosophy; such then, is *true philosophy* and *true philosopher*. God reveals to the Supreme Ruler through the Active Intellect⁵⁴ whose place is in the Moon. The Supreme Ruler prepares his people to the virtuous city by instruction with "certain truth". There is a parallelism between God, Universe, Society and Peoples. The people of the virtuous city are those who know the wisdom and the justice. One attains to the *Milla* through the "certain truth" or similitude as we said before. It is clear now from all these explanations that, "*true wisdom*" is the "*most honorable science*" or the "certain truth" according to al-Fârâbî. According to him "it is said that this science existed anciently among the Chaldeans⁵⁵ who are the people of 'I-raq, subsequently reaching the people of Egypt, from there transmitted to the Greeks, where it remained until it was transmitted to the Syrians, and then to the Arabs. Everything comprised by this science was expounded in the Greek language, later in Syriac and finally in Arabic."⁵⁶ We have also very detailed informations coming from al-Fârâbî, included in '*Uyün al-Anbâ*' and appreciated by Max Meyerhof on the transmission of philosophy from the Greeks to the world of Islam.⁵⁷

Ancient and new archeological studies on the literature of wisdom and science in Ancient Mesopotamia and especially in Sumer made by many cuneiformists, especially by Thureau-Dangin, Neugebauer, Thomson, Arno Poebel, Landsberger, Van Dyck, Kramer, affirm the main thesis of al-Fârâbî.

Indeed, all Gods of the Sumerian pantheon, either creator or not are "nursed" by Nin-Khursag, the Mother Goddess who could be the prototype of the *Materia Prima* or *Chaos*. The chief God of the pantheon is

Anû, God of Heaven, who inhabits the equator and is responsible for the justice in the world as well as in the society.⁵⁸ He appoints a man as a ruler by means of Nanna, God of the Moon, who is in the place of the seals and could be the prototype of the *Dator Formarum* or *Active Intellect*. In every year, Gods write together on heavens their laws, calling *Nam*—The Uygurs call it *Nom Kutu*—. The divine act of creation attains his term only by calling the names of creatures by Gods, called *Mu*'s. Each created being takes the orders of Gods, *Me*'s whose meaning perplexed the cuneiformists.⁵⁹ It seems to me that, it should be the prototype of *Mâ Hiya* (essence, *to ti en einai*). Anû, copulating with Ki, Goddess of Earth creates all other beings. Lil, God of Weather, creates the celestial bodies: Stars, satellites, Moon, Sun and so on, copulating with Ug, the Light. He creates plants, animals, and man, copulating with Earth. Enki, the God of Water, is informed about all which passes in the hearts of Gods. He could be the mind of Gods or the Soul of Universe. He is divine consciousness and the God of Wisdom. This could be the origine of God's wisdom and knowledge.

By Sumerians, there is also the conception of the "Seven Sages" who have constructed the walls of Ur. Enki is the owner of the "*Table of Heaven*" on which have been written the names of all the creatures, either natural or social, or cultural. He is, also, the owner of the "*Boat of Heaven*" in which he transports his "*Table of Heaven*". He is responsible for both for them. He offers to Inanna, Goddess of Culture, who is responsible for men, the cultural items from his "*Table*". She is the sister of Utu, Sun God, who is the guide for all travellers in the darkness. Gods, who are "good fashioners" formed for their services, the man "in their figure", from argil, the women from his rib and gave them the eternal breath from their soul to live. This could be the origin of the term "*turaten*" in the Aristotelian theory of Intellect. After creation of man, the Gods indicated the human heart as a residence for them.⁶⁰ I believe that all the keys which will open with the doors to the question why "*Creatio Dei*" should be brought into correspondence "*Imitatio Dei*", are there. By the Sumerians, the unique difference between Gods and Man is the looking of Gods with eternally "open eyes", while man is pensive and forgets and dies. The origin of the divine attribute of life could be there. When man revolts against divine orders, Gods destroy the "Seed of mankind" with a deluge. The only human being attained to the Dilmun Paradise is the Sumerian ruler, the just and wise Ziu Sudra. Because, he saved by means

of a ship constructed by his wisdom and technology all the creatures of Gods without any difference from the deluge. He has understood what kind of a thing the justice and the wisdom concerning Gods, Universe, Society and Man each were. He has seen the parallelism between them. I believe, one could find also there the origin of the most ancient humanism as we find the same idea by Yûsuf Has Hâcib's saying: "The rising sun does not say: "This is clean" or "That is unclean", but sheds its light upon all and is not depleted thereby."⁶¹ Sumerian Gods did not give the paradise to the Kilkamiş the Ruler, who was a warrior with personal motives against the divine laws, enterprising to kill the dead itself. In the view of the Sumerians, the most important virtue of the ruler is to know justice and wisdom and to practice them for the benefit of all creatures. The Sumerian word of justice *nig.si.sa.* comes from the word *si.sa.* that is to put the animal to the right way keeping it by its horns; the Arabic word *Hikma* has the same ethymological origin. The word *Rta* in Sanskrit, *Tao* in Chinese, *Kannagara no Michi* in Japanese, *Kosmos* and *Logos* in Greek, *Ratis* in Latine, *Şari'a* in Arabic, *Tüz, tenk* in Turkish implicate the same meaning, that is, the righteous way. The symbol of justice by Sumerian kings is the right stick of the shepherd. We have the first code by Sumerians, as the code of Urukagina, Urnanshe, Urnammu, Bilalamma. All these codes are before of the Hittit and the Assyrian codes especially those of Hammurabi's.⁶² In the views of Sumerians, man is a "Social animal". Out of society, he is only a "wild beast" as Enkidu.

As a result, we could say that, although al-Fârâbî says that philosophy comes to us from the Greeks, especially from Plato and Aristotle, both the definitions and the history of wisdom, in the light of works of al-Fârâbî as well as those of cuneiform literature, point out to us that the main conceptions of Greek philosophy and philosophers are included in the Mesopotamian, especially Sumerian literature of wisdom. To appreciate this point it is also sufficient to consider as a future study altogether the following parallelism between Zeus and Zas,⁶³ Aphrodite and Inanna, Man and Nannar,⁶⁴ Dike-Themis and Anû, Poseidon and Enki, Sophos and Enki, Khtonia and Ki, Uranos and Lil, *Fusis* and *Nam*, Logos and *Mu*, *To ti en einai* and *Me, Dator Formarum* and Nanna, *Materia Prima-Khaos-Kur*, and Ninkhursag, Demiourgos and "Good Fashioners", man as a plant of Heaven, and creation of man by Gods, human intellect as a divine light, and to make man living from the "eternal breath of Gods", the universe of ideas and the "Table of Heaven" of Enki, the Thought as a

motion, and the "Boat of Heaven" of Enki, man as a social animal and Enkidu as a wild beast, without society, *Styx* and *Kur* and concordance of society and man with the universe, ruler as a shepherd, Seven Sages, the immigration to the virtuous city, "rompre le cercle" and Inanna's leaving her seven "bijoux", *Imitatio Dei*, as a response to *Creatio Dei*, wisdom as a religion (Eutyphron), wisdom as a science, wisdom as a philosophy, wisdom as an ultimate happiness for man, from which comes *Philosophia Perennis*, *Câvidân Hired*, *al-Hikma al-Hâhida* and *Bilgelik*.

