

# The Divine Simplicity in al-Fārābī

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**Abstract:** Drawing back the medieval era, the idea of divine simplicity as regards to divine nature has traditionally been regarded as one of the instigating fundamental modalities appealing to apprehending God's nature in terms of both philosophers and theologians. More particularly in the philosophical theology, the question of whether God has a nature distinct from his own existence or has attributes distinct from his own divine self or essence has been a subject of serious discussion. At the very foundation of the claim that God does not have a nature other than his own existence or that he has no attributes distinct from his own essence is the idea that God is simple. The paramount concern of this article is to provide a descriptive account of the doctrine of divine simplicity from Islamic intellectual history by investigating how this doctrine was articulated by al-Fārābī in Medieval Islamic philosophy, without, however, having an aim in refuting any of the opponent views in relation to the doctrine. This article mainly emphasizes on the direct correlation of divine simplicity with the doctrine of God's "oneness" in al-Fārābī's perception and draws the attention to the fact that his thesis as regards to God's simplicity is grounded on the idea that God's own essence is free from any kind of ontological and semantic distinction or multiplicity.

**Keywords:** Al-Fārābī, One, God, Oneness, Simplicity, Divine attributes, the First Cause.

## Farabi'de İlahi Basitlik

**Özet:** Ortaçağ dönemine kadar gittiğimizde, Tanrı'nın doğasına ilişkin İlahi basitlik fikri geleneksel olarak hem filozoflar hem de teologlar tarafından Tanrı'nın tabiatını kavramada başvurulan en önemli temel yaklaşımlardan biri olarak önümüze çıkmaktadır. Özellikle felsefi teolojide, Tanrı'nın kendi öz varlığından ayrı bir doğaya veya kendi zatından ayrı sıfatlara sahip olup olmadığı sorusu ciddi tartışma konusu olmuştur. Tanrı'nın varlığından ayrı bir doğasının olmadığı veya onun kendi zatından ayrı olan sıfatlara sahip olmadığı iddiasının temelinde Tanrı'nın basit olduğu öğretisi bulunur. Bu makalenin başlıca amacı, Tanrı'nın basitliği düşüncesi bağlamında herhangi bir karşıt görüşü çürütme amacı taşımadan, Ortaçağ İslam felsefesinde bu fikrin el-Fārābī tarafından nasıl ifade edildiğini inceleyerek İslam entelektüel tarihi içerisinde bu düşüncenin betimleyici bir tarzda bir ifadesini sunmaktır. Bu makalede, el-Fārābī'nin tasavvurunda Tanrı'nın "birliği" doktrini ile İlahi basitliğin doğrudan korelasyonu üzerinde durulmuş ve Tanrı'nın basitliğine ilişkin tezinin O'nun salt zatının her tür ontolojik ve semantik ayırım ve bileşiklikten uzak olduğu düşüncesi üzerine kurulduğuna dikkat çekilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** El-Fārābī, Bir, Tanrı, Birlik, Basitlik, İlahi Sıfatlar, İlk Neden.

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A response to the query of what God is and what kind of existence He is can be sought in the theistic traditions: The Omniscient, the Omnipotent, the Omnipresent, the Most Perfect, the Necessarily Existent, the Most Great and etc. To predicate these qualities of God is to set forth what kind of God is believed in. In addition, this practice plays an indispensable role in distinguishing different perceptions of God from one another. Moreover, the aforementioned necessary qualities for God could exhibit an indispensable role in unclouding precarious ambiguity regarding the perception of God's nature. Still, there are some pressing prerequisite questions: How to comprehend the properties attributed to God in relation to His bare self? What could be the nature of the relationship between these essential qualities attributed to God and the perception acquired by these qualities and God Himself? Can these qualities be identical to God Himself or not? If so, in what sense exactly are they identical?<sup>1</sup>

It is commonly known that in the history of philosophy in general and the Medieval in particular that there is an assuming number of thinkers who have recognized these qualities in a framework of ontological simplicity and considered them to be identical with God's essence and that is to be one of the essential consideration regarding our perception of God. The most highly structured articulation and authoritative defense of the doctrine of divine simplicity is found in the works of philosophers and theologians during the Middle Ages. In the history of western philosophy, for instance, the doctrine of divine simplicity is central to the classical theism of Augustine<sup>2</sup> (354-430), Anselm<sup>3</sup> (1033-1109), and Aquinas<sup>4</sup> (1225-1274). Although their treatment of simplicity proves influential on later medieval accounts of divine simplicity in western philosophical

- 1 Mehmet Sait Reçber, "Fârâbî ve Tanrı'nın Basitliği Meselesi," *Uluslararası Farabi Sempozyumu Bildirileri* içinde. Bu bildiri Ankara'da 7-8 Ekim 2014 tarihleri arasında Uluslararası Farabi Sempozyumu'nda sunulmuştur. (Ankara: Elis Yayınları, 2005), 213.
- 2 His account of the doctrine played an influential role on later medieval accounts of the simplicity: Augustine, *On the Trinity*, translated by Stephen McKenna, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963).
- 3 His following work represents an early medieval account of the doctrine of divine simplicity: Anselm of Canterbury, *Monologion*, in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000), 1-87.
- 4 The following work of Aquinas is a broad medieval defense and articulation of the simplicity and is a standard in discussions about the doctrine today: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (also *Summa theologiae*), Translated by the English Dominican Fathers, (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947). See also for an evaluation of the role and effect of simplicity in Aquinas' perception of divine nature: Peter Burns, "The Status and Function of Divine Simplesness in *Summa theologiae* Ia, qq. 2-13," *Thomist* 57/1 (1993): 1-26.

theology, it is not originated with them and represented not only in classical Christian theology, but also in Islamic thought. In this article, my focus of this doctrine will be on one account of the idea of divine simplicity represented by one of the formal representative thinkers of Islamic philosophy, al-Fārābī (870-950).

According to the doctrine of divine simplicity being a subject of considerable discussions today, be it physical or metaphysical, God is fundamentally devoid of any ontological composition or complexity: God is the divine essence itself and neither possesses any material or temporal components as the evident forms of multiplicity nor does He possess any distinct properties or attributes as the least forms of multiplicity. There are no real divisions or distinctions neither between God as subject of His attributes and His attributes themselves nor His existence and essence. For instance, it is believed not to be appropriate to attribute the quality omniscient to God in virtue of demonstrating omniscience -which would create a real difference between God and the attribute of omniscience- but rather to accept Him as being omniscience as well for the other divine Omni-attribute as Augustine claims in his *The City of God*, XI, 10: "God is what he *has*."<sup>5</sup> If each attribute is believed to be identical with God, then each attribute would be identical with each other (for instance, if God = omniscience, and God = omnipotence, then omniscience = omnipotence), which is considered to be one of the difficulty in grasping such an idea of divine nature as Alvin Plantinga states in his analytic critique of divine simplicity: "In the first place if God is identical with each of his properties, then each of his properties is identical with each of his properties, so that God has but one property," But it is absurd, he thinks, to assert that God has only one property, because "it is an obvious fact that God has several properties."<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, His essence and attributes are exclusive to Him and they define what divine existent He is, according to the basic statement of the doctrine. To provide an example for the case, while it is agreed upon that there are different manifestations of being a human being, God manifests in a unique non-sharable divine nature. This is what is conceived to be the doctrine of divine simplicity.

5 William E. Mann, "Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies*, 18/4 (Dec. 1982), 1.

6 Alvin Plantinga, *Does God have a Nature?*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 47. See the book for an extensive analytic critique of divine simplicity and the classic concept of God. The work is regarded as a standard for contemporary philosophical discussions over simplicity.

There are various metaphysical and theological motives behind the doctrine of divine simplicity. The first and foremost among them is to preserve God's unique ontological status of His being the ultimate transcendence and the genuine first cause of the whole existent. In other words, the divine simplicity aims at parading a fundamental ontological difference between God as the necessary being and all other created as contingent beings. Thus, the simple God needs to be reflected different and distinct in His existence from all other created beings. That is to say, God differing from created beings, which necessitate a cause to exist, is the truly uncaused first cause that transcends everything. There is no explanation or reason for His existence. His nature is self-explanatory and ontologically independent from all other beings. Thus, any existent that is unable to justify its self-existence in due course draws back necessarily to an uncaused primer cause. In fact, the simplicity arises from unambiguous pivotal idea homogenized with a firm credence in the self-existing nature of the erstwhile uncreated cause. The doctrine of divine simplicity, therefore, is considered to be ensuring God's otherworldliness and transcendence.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the idea of simplicity states an "ultimacy assumption" pertaining to God.<sup>8</sup>

After the above introductory words, it would be appropriate now to unveil the approach adopted by al-Fārābī towards the idea of divine simplicity, i.e., how he articulated and defended it. The account of the doctrine presented by al-Fārābī tends to be rather the oneness of essence, although the concept of simplicity, in its philosophical sense, does entail the meaning of oneness either as it denotes a simple thing that is indivisible and one entity. For as to be seen in the succeeding parts of this work, while talking about the issue it is to be discerned that al-Fārābī's emphasis and concern is centered around God's being One in terms of every possible meaning of the word one embodies: God is one in "His rank of existence", "in His substance and essence", and is "indivisible" regarding both quantity and quality and action.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it seems that what labels al-Fārābī's

7 Peter Weigel, "Divine Simplicity," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. For an assessment of the ontological motives behind the idea of simplicity through Aquinas' account of the doctrine and philosophical theology see also: Peter Weigel, *Aquinas on Simplicity: An Investigation into the Foundations of His Philosophical Theology*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008).

8 Brain Leftow, "Is God an Abstract Object?" *Noûs* 24/4 (1990): 584-85. See the work for an assessment of the role of theories of attributes in accounts of the divine nature.

9 Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* [The Virtuous City], *Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State: Abū Naṣr Al-Fārābī's Mabādi' Ārā' Ahl Al-Madīna Al-Fāḍila*, A Revised Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary by Richard Walzer, (USA: Great Books of the Islamic World, 1998), 66-69 (Citations are to both the edition and the English translation).

account of the doctrine in relation to its driving motive is much more centered around strongly and purposefully ensuring God's ontological status of oneness rather than ensuring His being the genuine uncaused first cause of the whole existence. The apparently meticulous choice of naming the first chapter of his book *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* as "The First Cause is One and Mind", where he discusses God's nature, provides a relatively sound indication that could be used to defend the oneness of the first cause. In other words, by stating "the First Cause is One and Mind" he has intended to discern the purpose behind his idea of God being a simple entity, that is to say, to be oneness; otherwise, he might have named it as "The One is the first Cause and Mind" if he had primarily intended to demonstrate the God's being the first cause. In fact, such a willed simplicity is the denial standpoint of al-Fārābī to refute the existence of more than one god and any plausible associated equal or similar partner to God.

In his work, *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, concerning the First Being (*al-Awwal*), al-Fārābī argues that the First Being is the first cause of all the other beings. He then goes on to portray the First as one "whose existence is the most excellent and precedes every other existence, no existence can be more excellent than or more prior to, Its existence." That is to say, there is no possible being that could be perfect than He is or former to His being. He is the utmost perfection in being. In this respect, it is not possible for Him to be a subject of the ontological limitations that other beings have as He has no existence of "potentiality" (*bi'l-quwwa*) or contingency and is not prone to any "non-existence" or privation (*adam*). For these deficiencies can only be thought for the existence of the other contingent beings. Therefore, He is eternal and He is self-sufficiently everlasting and not dependent on anything else other than His own substance and essence to be eternal and everlasting. That is to say, one cannot look for any causal explanation for His existence: "It is the existence for whose existence there can be no cause through which (*bihi*), or out of which (*anhu*), or for the sake of which (*lahu*), it has come to exist." For the First is absolutely uncaused and neither matter nor withstood by matter in any way whatsoever, and since He is free of matter, He does not have any form either "because form can exist only in matter." According to al-Fārābī, if a form would be attributed to Him, then His essence unavoidably must be composed of *matter* and *form*, and if it was like that, each of these compositions would be a cause for His existence. Correspondingly, no purpose or aim can be ascribed to His existent to fulfill. Otherwise, that purpose might be considered as the cause of His existence which would be incompatible with the basic thesis anent Him not to have any cause to be the First Cause.<sup>10</sup>

10 al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, 56-59.

Consequently, any kind of composition that might be attached to His being would lead to a causal explanation for His existence and that is what prevents such an existence from being the First Being, i.e. God. Thus, an existence which consists of any kind of composition, by definition, would be ontologically dependent on these components which are composed of and each of these components would be pondered as a cause for His existence. However, since the fundamental idea about the Necessary Being is to be one in any possible sense of the word and not to be in need of any kind of cause to exist, He should be believed in as a firm simple entity. For whatever is composed of components is not completely and utterly one, but somehow is numerous and diverse, it seems that such an idea of simplicity is the approach, adopted by al-Fārābī, through which he conveys his perception and comprehension of the concept of one (*wāhid*) for God as an indivisible simple being. To elucidate his perception of the One, al-Fārābī proceeds to discuss that the First has no any sharer in His perfect state of being, since in the contrary case this sharer would consist of that which is particular to it and that which is common to the both, and thus would be composite and accordingly significantly different from the First, whose essence is simple and indivisible:

The First Existent is different in Its substance from everything else, and it is impossible for anything else to have the existence It has. For between the First and whatever were to have the same existence as the First, there could be no difference and no distinction at all. Thus, there would not be two things but one essence only, because, if there were a difference between the two, that in which they differed would not be the same as that which they shared, and thus that point of difference between the two would be a part of that which sustains the existence of both, and that which they have in common the other part. Thus each of them would be divisible in thought, and each of the two parts of the First would be cause for the subsistence of its existence; and it would not be the First but there would be another existent prior to It and a cause for Its existence – and that is impossible.<sup>11</sup>

Here, al-Fārābī is demonstrating that if two different divine entities would be considered in the First, the commonality and dissimilarity between the two would not be the same and what they have in common and what they don't would signify two different consisting parts of the same essence which maintain the existence of both. Therefore, each of them would be a cause in constituting

11 al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, 58-61.

His essence, in addition to maintaining His existence, which might require one of them to be prior to the other's existence. Consequently, that might allocate existence for more than one divine existent while such a possibility cannot be accepted; God must be contemplated as one utterly simple indivisible entity according to al-Fārābī.

Furthermore, in the above quoted passage, al-Fārābī is signifying that the components of definition, namely, the genus and the differentiae of a thing, the elements that both allow one to treat of things and to identify their ontological reality, cannot be used in approaching the First Cause.<sup>12</sup> This is another claim contained within al-Fārābī's idea of simplicity that any ascription of definition (*ḥadd*) or description to God is not possible, which, in turn, implies the impossibility of talking about God's essence:

The First is not divisible in thought into the things which would constitute Its substance. For it is impossible that each part of the explanation of the meaning of the First should denote one of the parts by which the First's substance is constituted. If this were the case, the parts which constitute Its substance would be causes of Its existence, in the same as the meanings denoted by the parts of the definition of a thing are causes of the existence of the thing defined and in the same way as matter and form are causes of the thing composed of them. But this is impossible in the case of the First, since It is the First and since Its existence has no cause whatsoever.<sup>13</sup>

This passage indicates that what the First is like cannot be discussed, since the definition that explains what He is would signify multiple constituents constituting His substance, and these, in turn, would occur at the same time as the causes of His existence as such in matter and form that constitute material composites. In other words, by virtue of His indivisibility, the First cannot be known by way of logical division and predication. For the elements used in such a logical resolution to define a thing are the things that fundamentally constitute its substance and hence represent its ontological character. On that account, to claim that God is definable, according to al-Fārābī, would indicate some parts in constituting His substance since whatever concept would be used to define Him might refer to a different conception of God, in the same way, each word as a different

12 David C. Reisman, "Al-Fārābī and the Philosophical Curriculum," *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 59.

13 Reisman, "Al-Fārābī and the Philosophical Curriculum," 66-67.

component in a definition partakes in the formation of the meaning. Thus, since each part of the definition attributed to God would unavoidably involve one of the components by which the First's substance is composed, then each part constituting God's substance would be a cause for His existence. In that case, it would result in contradiction with the fundamental statement of the doctrine represented by al-Fārābī that God is the unique genuine first cause and the indivisible simple one. For oneness of God, in al-Fārābī's mind and perception, is impossibility of divisibility in any sense whatsoever, which amounts to the absolutely indivisible firmness or tightness identity "by which He is distinguished from all others" in His substance, and also in His "action," and in His "quality" and "quantity."<sup>14</sup> So then, the First's distinction from all other existing entities is by virtue of a oneness which is His essence itself and it is exactly this essence by virtue of which He is one. For one of the meanings of oneness, according to al-Fārābī, is "particular existence (*al-wujūd al-khāṣṣ*) by which each existent is distinguished from all others." In this respect, the First is also one, and deserves more than anything else the quality of oneness.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding to the abovementioned meaning of oneness, a similar statement can be found in al-Fārābī's work *Kitāb al-wāḥid wa al-waḥda* (On the One and Oneness), dedicated to a linguistic and ontological exposition of oneness and multiplicity:

"The one" (*al-wāḥid*) is also said of that which is set apart by its quiddity (*al-munḥāz bi-māhiyyatihi*) – whichever quiddity that may be, divisible or indivisible, conceived [by the human soul] or [existing] outside the soul. This is the [the thing] set apart in its having a share of existence (*al-munḥāz bi-mā lahu qist al-wujūd*) and [the thing] set apart in its share of existence (*wa-l munḥāz bi- qistihi min al-wujūd*). It is in the nature of "the one" said in this sense to accompany the existent (*an yusāwiqa l-mawjūd*), like the thing (*al-shay'*), and there is no difference between saying "all things" (*kull shay' min al-ashya'*) and saying "each one" (*kull wāḥid*). (*Al-Fārābī, Kitāb al-wāḥid wa al-waḥda*, p. 51, trans. in Janos 2016).

Here, al-Fārābī is arguing that every each thing, be conceived in the mind or outside the mind, owns a kind of oneness that is exclusively attached to the

14 Reisman, "Al-Fārābī and the Philosophical Curriculum," 68-69.

15 Reisman, "Al-Fārābī and the Philosophical Curriculum," 68-69. For a similar formulation see al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya, al-Mulaqqab bi-Mabādi' al-Mawjūdāt*, ed. F. M. Najjar, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq, 1993), 44.



existing quiddity (essence) of every each thing as a necessary accompanying attribute. Al-Fārābī, as Damien Janos points out, who also cites and discusses the above passage, suggests an identity between the existence and oneness of existing entities and quiddities, by this way every existing thing besides being multiple is also one in the sense that its particular existence is its own exclusive oneness.<sup>16</sup> This meaning of oneness goes for both material and immaterial existing things such as the cosmic intellects equally. The same sense of the oneness, therefore, applies to God as well in a distinguishing way as it is explicitly stated in the passage that “whichever quiddity that may be, divisible or indivisible” it is applicable to all quiddities. Since every each existing thing possesses a oneness that is exclusive to its own quiddity by virtue of its existence and specific quiddity, God is also expected to be one in this sense of oneness for the reason that He possesses a particular and distinguished existence and quiddity. Thus, this meaning of oneness provides al-Fārābī with the opportunity to suggest a sort of divine unity that pertains to God alone for the reason that this kind of oneness advocates an essential identicalness between the oneness of an existing thing and its quiddity. Consequently, this oneness is essentially identical with God’s exclusive quiddity and existence and therefore non-sharable with other existents but specific to Him alone. In this sense of oneness, God is distinguished from all other existing things by virtue of His particular existence and the oneness that is exclusive to His quiddity.

According to above quoted passage, all the existing entities, be divisible or indivisible, that are one in a certain sense are also multiple most of them. However, in *Kitāb al-wāḥid wa al-waḥda*, we find two other key features connected to “oneness in quiddity” as formulated by Janos in the following way: “oneness in quiddity (a) need not be predicated of something multiple, and (b) need not have a multiplicity that is opposed to it.” As for the illustration of these two points Janos cites the following three passages from *Kitāb al-wāḥid wa al-waḥda*:<sup>17</sup>

As for what is set apart by its quiddity, it may be multiple or it may not be multiple. (*Al-Fārābī, Kitāb al-wāḥid wa al-waḥda*, p. 74, trans. in Janos 2016).

However, some things cannot have any multiplicity whatsoever, such as what has an absolutely indivisible quiddity. (*Al-Fārābī, Kitāb al-wāḥid wa al-waḥda*, p. 90, trans. in Janos 2016).

16 Damien Janos, “Al-Fārābī’s On the One and Oneness: Some Preliminary Remarks on its Structure, Contents, and Theological Implications,” *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Khalid El-Rouayheb and Sabine Schmidtke, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 117.

17 Janos, “Al-Fārābī’s On the One and Oneness,” 119-120.

What is not one is opposed to what is one. The ways of negating the one are as numerous as the ways of affirming the one. Nevertheless, among the things that negate the one is what possesses a potentiality of multiplicity opposed to the one. But not everything that is called one is opposed by a certain multiplicity. Among these things [not opposed by multiplicity] is the one said of a thing that is set apart by its quiddity. (*Al-Fārābī, Kitāb al-wāḥid wa al-waḥda*, p. 57, trans. in Janos 2016).

Al-Fārābī, in these passages, determines the ontological grounds for the oneness related to his doctrine of God's simplicity: Although both oneness and multiplicity are predicated to particular existing things, there are also some existents that cannot be subject to any kind of multiplicity as it is the case with "an absolutely indivisible quiddity" by which the owner of such a quiddity is set apart from others manifesting himself in a non-sharable rank of existence. Additionally, even though multiplicity is always found in things as a quality opposite to the oneness that is gained by virtue of their specific quiddities, not every kind of oneness possesses an opposite multiplicity as it is the case with "the one said of a thing is set apart by its quiddity." So then, since God, according to al-Fārābī, possesses an absolutely indivisible essence by virtue of which He is distinguished from all other existents, He is neither subject to any kind of multiplicity in His essence nor is the oneness that is due to His exclusive essence opposed by any kind of multiplicity.

Another fundamental motive behind al-Fārābī's idea of simplicity is that since the First is free of any matter in His existence and nothing about Him depends on matter to be what He is, He must be, an "actual intellect" (*'aql bi'l-fi'l*) intellect in His essence and not be the subject of any potentiality (*bi'l-quwwa*) in His existence. For what avoids the form to be an actual intellect and actually intelligible is the matter in which an entity exists. Thus, whatever being which is not in need of matter to exist is an actual intellect in its essence. Accordingly, the First Being, who is completely and perfectly independent from matter, is actual intellect and actually intelligible in His essence. Al-Fārābī then goes on to add that since the First does not require the assistance of any exterior agency to cause Him to become the object of His own intellection, He is intelligible through His substance by virtue of His being an intellect. To put it another way, the First, on the basis of His being self-sufficient, is actual intellect as the act (*'aql*), actually intelligible as the object (*ma'qūl*) and actually intelligizing as the subject (*'āqil*) of His own intellection. Thus, He is self-intellect, self-intelligible and self-intelligizing. Nevertheless, all these are not supposed to hinder God's being a simple one

entity. God's being actual intellect, and actually intelligible and intelligized does not constitute any diversity, composition or distinction in the divine intellect. Put it differently, the multiplicity of terms or concepts which are expressed in speech does not mean any existing multiplicity in the act of divine intellection itself. On the contrary, all refer to one and the same indivisible Divine essence. By the same token, He is not in need of any external essence to know, to be knowable and knowing, which does not imply any composition or distinction in His essence as well. All He needs to know, to be knowable is His essence itself self-sufficiently, therefore His knowledge of His essence refers to nothing but to His own essence.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, the Intellect, Intelligible and Intelligizing seem distinct only in appearance (or in grammar), but in reality all of them denote only one meaning and the same simple "one" perfect existent. That's is why although the cosmic intelligences of al-Fārābīan cosmology, which are called "the separate intelligences" that ultimately and necessarily emanate from the First Cause, are one and simple by virtue of their being immaterial and intellectual, they are at the same time multiple in their being intelligible. For they intelligize both the First Cause and their own essence; and this, in turn, keeps them away from being entirely simple and one mainly when their essence is compared to that of the First. Moreover, they are caused and therefore possess a composite and imperfect nature.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, what sets the First apart from other immaterial and intelligible existents is the logical characteristic of the oneness of His essence, by virtue of which he is completely self-sufficient, as well as His being their Uncaused First Cause.

Similarly, according to al-Fārābī, the qualities that are attributed to God do not refer to any plurality or composition in His essence, but to God's divine simple essence which is completely independent of any ontological deficiencies and limitations. Besides being self-sufficient, eternal, necessary, uncaused and immaterial, God has some other attributes such as knowledge, wisdom, living and life, greatness and beauty which are identical to His very essence. Al-Fārābī, on the ground of the oneness of God, reduces these attributes to the Divine essence. These attributes are identical to God's essence just in the same way other attributes (like being self-sufficient, eternal, uncaused and immaterial) are identical to

18 Janos, "Al-Fārābī's On the One and Oneness," 70-73. See also Majid Fakhry, *Al-Fārābī Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism: His Life, Works and Influence*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2002), 79-82.

19 See Janos, "Al-Fārābī's On the One and Oneness;" 118. As for the emanation of the cosmic intelligences from the First see al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, 100-105.

His essence. In addition to considering these attributes not signifying any ontological composition or diversity in the Divine essence, it seems that, on the basis of the thesis of indefinable God, al-Farabi tries to demonstrate God's attributes to be comprehended in a semantic identicalness.<sup>20</sup> To understand this semantic identicalness it would be sufficient now to see how al-Fārābī exposes this semantic identicalness in his approaching God's different attributes within the frame of the attribute "knowledge." According to al-Fārābī, all divine attributes refer to nothing but God's knowledge, and His knowledge, as previously mentioned, refers to nothing but His essence, that is to be understood within a semantic identicalness.

Reducing the attributes to the Divine essence could be illustrated through the examples of unveiling the attributes of *wisdom* and *living* and *life*, *greatness* and *beauty*. Firstly, for *wisdom* al-Fārābī states: "wisdom consists in thinking the most excellent thing through the most excellent knowledge" which comes to be understood that wisdom is what is being extracted out of the activity of the First's self-intelligizing His essence and via the knowledge He knows by intelligizing His essence. Thus, wisdom consists in the becoming of the most excellent knowledge to be known by the Intellect. And what makes this knowledge excellent is its being permanent which does never come to an end. Thus, the Divine wisdom in such an illustration involves in nothing but God's knowledge. Secondly, for the attributes *life* and *living*, al-Fārābī reaffirms that it is the act of intelligizing "the most excellent intelligible through the most excellent intellect." It is crucial to know that the attributes *life* and *living* refer to the same and one essence which is considered to be the highest and a most perfect stage of existing. This degree of living is the utmost perfection of existence. In His existence or life there is no motion since motion can only be attributed to matter. For that reason this existence is not deficient since deficiency belongs only to matter which moves from one degree of a stage to another. So since the First is not associated with matter, the essence is at the highest degree and in a perfect level of living which is the act of self-intelligizing. Thirdly, the attributes *greatness*, *majesty* and *glory* overshadowing all others' greatness, just like the previously mentioned attributes, are within nothing rather than His essence because it is only His essence which possesses the utmost greatness. And His exaltedness and glory do not depend on anyone's glorifying and praising to be exalted and glorified, rather He is being exalted and glorified by Himself in His eternal act of intelligizing "the most excellent intelligible through the most excellent intellect."

20 Reçber, "Fārābī ve Tanrı'nın Basitliği Meselesi," 219-220.

Therefore, all His greatness, majesty and glory are within His one simple essence. Lastly, the same applies to His attribute beauty. Since God's essence is in the utmost state of perfection of existence then His beauty is also the most perfect beauty which surpasses all other beauties. Hence, the beauty about the First Being is the beauty of His self-intelligizing, and that is one and same essence. So since the knowledge of His own essence is the most excellent and His contemplation of His own essence is the most accurate one, then the pleasure, delight and enjoyment He has are the enjoyment of self-intelligizing, and that is in the greatest and the ultimate level of self-enjoyment.<sup>21</sup>

Basing on the aforesaid concerning the relationship between the divine essence and its intrinsic attributes, the view held by al-Fārābī is that the First is identical with His attributes. For the claim that the First is "one", in al-Fārābī, is shorthand for the claim that He manifests no metaphysical distinctions whatsoever, including that between subject and essential attributes. The claim that God is "one," thus, is at the heart of al-Fārābī's concept of God.

## Conclusion

To conclude, for al-Fārābī, the Divine attributes all refer to the same and one thing, i.e., the simple one essence. It would not be consistent, according to al-Fārābī, to affirm these attributes supplementary to the Divine essence, otherwise, that would necessitate diversity in the First Being and allocate for more than one divine entity. Thus, God's bare self cannot be the subject of any distinction or plurality neither semantically nor ontologically: Firstly, any differentiation might be applied between the Divine attributes would eventually imply a metaphysical and semantic composition or multiplicity between God's bare self and His attributes, and that is what wrecks the basic statement of the idea that God is to be conceived as "one" and "simple" unique entity. Secondly, to attribute any kind of form to God unavoidably results in God's dependence on matter which would cause failing in ensuring and preserving God's unique ontological status of being the One and genuine uncaused first cause of whole existent, for the reason that a necessary being is the one which subsists by itself self-sufficiently, as independent of all beings. For al-Fārābī, this approach towards the Divine is the only way to guarantee God's being the One in terms of every possible meaning the word "one" denotes.

21 al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*, 72- 75 and 82-87.

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