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Conviviality and Happiness

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(Received 16th December MMXXII; | First published online 24th April MMXXIII)

Abstract

In this paper, I try to show that happiness is an effect of conviviality, the highest form of living together, is the aesthetic form of a rational relational ethic. For Miskawayh, like Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, reflective wisdom is a way of moving with a friend towards perfection and happiness. Most of the wisdoms insist on reason in order to reach happiness, which for Aristotle, as for Fârâbî and Miskawayh, is legitimately the end pursued by man. Spinoza, on the other hand, insists rather on desire which is a positive vital force. The knowledge of the causes that make us act frees us from sad passions and leads us to bliss. Spinoza's ethics is also a treatise on freedom and happiness. Living together happily requires fundamentally the reason that founds freedom and autonomy, the desire for the beautiful and the good and the reciprocity that founds hospitality and respect for others. We present here a political approach to conviviality understood in this way, always starting from Fârâbî, but also calling into question the Khaldunian anthropological solution.

Keywords: Happiness; Conviviality; Living together; Freedom; Hospitality; Reasonability

1. Introduction

In my latest research on the philosophy of living together, I have put a lot of emphasis on the ethical approach to conviviality. Indeed, as you know, ethics¹ is, roughly speaking, the theoretical study of the principles that guide human action in any context where there can be deliberation, to use Aristotelian language. In the end, it is human thought that recaptures the human, so it is philosophy itself that escapes the systems of knowledge. Is it not this deliberation respectful of the rules of reason that we find worked out in the texts of Fârâbî through a form of phronesis? I have therefore spoken of a Farabian moment in which reflection on human affairs, while certainly

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1. This definition of ethics is indicative. The definitional work of ethics requires both a conceptual and historical analysis of the cognitive constituents and practical effects of moral theories.

taking root in the Greek philosophical tradition, drew from Aristotle in particular the key ideas of an ethic of living together, and endeavoured, thanks to the interference of the two spaces of thought, the mythical and religious space and the epistemic and philosophical space, to implement an ethico-political conception capable of thinking about human happiness. For Fârâbî, this happiness consists in the fulfilment of man, in that the soul "reaches a perfection in being that it can subsist without matter, becomes a separate substance and is fixed forever in this state"². Fârâbî translates this intellectual virtue, this disposition "accompanied by right reason, turned towards action and concerning what is good and evil for man"³, in the words of Aristotle, as ta'aql. The term ta'aql allows Fârâbî to insist both on the possible concretisation (mutabaqa) of reason (al'aql) in the daily life of men and on the human dimension of ethics.

For him, reasonability is also what gives reason its social dimension since it can be at the origin of the fabric of relations with others as a fundamental criterion of all humanism... It is therefore that set of theoretical criteria and practical dispositions, the realisation of which in man's daily activity would make the individual reasonable, living according to the demands of reason and able to persevere in his being, i.e. ultimately a happy being. Al-ta'aql, which we have translated as reasonable, thus gives reason a social and human dimension. Family reasonableness, the principle of all good management of family affairs, civil reasonableness, which is the basis of the management of the city, and human reasonableness (al-ta'aql al insyi), which seeks to bring happiness to humankind, form, for Fârâbî, the three degrees of ethical awareness and existence as a community. There is indeed a humanist concern here. This concern for humanism is found even more clearly in another Arab philosopher of the same period, Miskawayh, who, while remaining dependent on Plato in general and Aristotle "for certain definitions and particular descriptions", "seems to have been an Arab philosopher who was able to emphasize, in the Platonic tradition, the primacy of the notion of justice"⁴. This justice in the city is achieved through al ouns wa'l mahabba, sociality and love. Mahabba expresses, etymologically, an affectionate disposition which, according to Miskawayh, can be specified as "love-passion (ishq), love-friendship (sadâqa), love-madness (walah), filial affection (mawadda)"⁵. But this "mahabba" is necessarily done by al-ouns, because there is, writes Miskawayh, "a pressing need to achieve a situation in which the dispersed individuals constitute a community harmoniously linked to the point of being, thanks to this agreed harmony, only one individual whose members all contribute together to the production of the same act useful to him"⁶.

This is what I call conviviality or Al'ta'anus, which is defined as living together in harmony and translates not only a justice accompanied by reason and love, but also a possible understanding between men, a humanism⁷ of love and sharing. Conviviality is the aesthetic form of the ethics of happy living together. Thus, mahabba is not only a condition of al ouns, it is also a condition of possibility of thought itself.

For Miskawayh, like Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics, the aim of reflective wisdom is to journey with the friend towards perfection and happiness. Only the wise man, the philosopher, in his quest for "rigorous knowledge and just behaviour"⁸ can claim God's friendship, in the manner of Abraham who became khalil Allah. Most of the wisdoms therefore insist on reason in order to achieve happiness, which for Aristotle, as for Fârâbî, is legitimately the end pursued by man. Spinoza insists rather on desire, which is a positive vital force. The knowledge of the causes that make us act frees us from sad passions and leads us to bliss. Spinoza's ethics is also a treatise on freedom and

2. Youssef Karam, in Fârâbî, *Idées des habitants de la cité vertueuse*, Beyrouth et le Caire 1980, p.7

3. Aristote, *Ethique à Nicomaque*, VI, &4.

4. Mohammed Arkoun, *Contribution à l'étude de l'humanisme arabe au IV^e/X^e siècle*, Miskawayh, philosophe et historien, Vrin, Paris 1970, p.294.

5. Ibid., p.303.

6. in Liv. V de *Tahdhib al Akhlâq*, cf. Arkoun, op. Cit. p.303.

7. It goes without saying that this humanism is thought of within the limits of Muslim belief. Man performs his own task in life. He will not replace God.

8. Miskawayh, op. Cit. , Trad. De Arkoun, op. Cit., p.307

happiness. Living together 'happily' fundamentally requires the reason that founds freedom and autonomy, the desire for the beautiful and the good, and the reciprocity that founds hospitality and respect for others. In this paper, I will risk a political approach to conviviality understood in this way, still starting from Fârâbî but also questioning the Khaldunian anthropological solution.

2. The Farabian solution

Fârâbî defines happiness by saying that "each being is made to reach the ultimate perfection that he is likely to attain in accordance with his place in the order of being. The specific perfection of man is called the supreme happiness"⁹. In the very first sentence of his book, *On the Achievement of Happiness*, Fârâbî enumerates four "human things" "by which nations and citizens achieve supreme happiness in life: the theoretical virtues, the deliberative virtues, the moral virtues, and the practical virtues,"¹⁰ which are ultimately the conditions of this happiness. In fact, throughout this book, our philosopher has avoided approaching the question of happiness from a purely religious point of view. Rather, it is a philosophical approach in a political order that highlights the possibility of living together happily.

The main function of the prince or the imam or the philosopher is to make the citizens of their nation happy by means of the stated virtues and their concretisation in the daily activity of power. For Fârâbî, the ruler must acquire these virtues while seeking "the perfection that man must achieve" and the possible means of this perfection which are necessarily useful but noble and virtuous. These means must be perfectly examined and made intelligible. Fârâbî adds:

He must distinguish them from the things that prevent him from attaining this perfection, which are evils, vices and vile things. He must make known what each of them is, how it is, from where it is and for what it is, until all of them come to be known, intelligible and distinct from each other. This is political science.

In other words, political science is that which makes citizens happy, it is the setting up of the functions "by which the citizens of the cities achieve happiness in and through political association according to the innate disposition of each one". We do not intend to analyse this very important book of Fârâbî. This would require an effort that the time devoted to this communication does not allow. I only insist that happiness, in this political order, which must be distinguished from ephemeral happiness such as pleasure or any feeling of punctual satisfaction, takes place on an individual scale "For each being is made to reach the ultimate perfection that he is capable of attaining in accordance with his place in the order of being". It is collective and common to all citizens of a nation because the main function of politics is to seek, through these virtues and their realisation, the happiness of both each citizen and the community as a whole. Finally, it is cosmopolitan, since the supreme power is obliged to seek the happiness of every man, wherever he may be, and for this Fârâbî thinks of a sort of international body to manage this function, made up of experts, to use current language, "who know both the specificity of each nation and the need for all to attain perfection and happiness. Better still, the philosopher-prince must declare war on the "evil nations" to achieve this "cosmopolitical" goal. He must "excel in the organisation and direction of armies and in the use of machines and people of war to conquer those nations and cities that are unwilling to do what would give them the happiness that man is destined to acquire"... "The warrior who seeks this is the one who is the most important and most important of all. The warrior who seeks this is the just warrior, and the art of war that seeks this is the art of just and virtuous war".

In fact, in order to govern in the order of happiness, power must have at its disposal two bodies (or "two groups of people" in the words of Fârâbî), a violent body whose function is to bring all men to happiness and a peaceful body that uses persuasion, The other group, says Fârâbî, employed

9. Fârâbî, *De l'obtention du bonheur*.

10. Fârâbî, op., p. 17

to form the character of nations and the citizens of cities with their consent, consists of those who possess the rational virtues and the arts.

3. The Khaldunian solution

Ibn Khaldun writes¹¹ : "Political power is natural to man, because of his social character." Indeed, man is more inclined towards good than towards evil because of his nature (*fitra*) and his faculty of logical reasoning (*quwwa nâtiqâ âqila*): the evil in him is due to his animal faculties; insofar as he is a human being, he is rather inclined towards goodness and virtues, and political power comes to man as such, since it is proper to him and distinguishes him from animals. Thus man's virtues are accommodated by political power because goodness corresponds to political authority.

Man is therefore sociable by nature. Political power itself is a natural and biological necessity. For Ibn Khaldun, philosophising is above all an operation of clarification and rationalisation to come to know things in their truth. It is thought, with its different degrees, that constitutes man's being (*wujûd*) and his "reality" (*haqîqa*). His first contact with the outside world is animal, i.e. it is through direct perception (*al idrâk*) defined as "intimate awareness (*shu'ûr*) by the perceptive being (*mudrik*) of what is external to it"¹² . But man, in addition to the possibility of perceiving these external things, has an "extra-sensory" faculty by which he grasps "the forms of sensible things". "Thought is the free disposal of these ultra-sensory forms and the nomadism of the mind, which goes from one to another exercising analysis and synthesis"¹³.

Ibn Khaldun distinguishes three fundamental degrees of thought and reason: the first degree concerns *al ta'aqul wa-l tamyîz*, understanding and discernment. The second degree of reason is already more perfected since it allows, after having discerned things and distinguished the useful from the harmful, to acquire ideas, opinions. It is with this level of reason that man becomes political, establishes relations with others and behaves socially (*âdâb*). The third level of reason is speculative reason (*al'aql al nadhari*), i.e. that which truly knows, that which provides knowledge (*'Hm*) "of objects beyond the senses and beyond its reach"; Its object is therefore being and existence with their causes.

To understand Ibn Khaldun's political philosophy, one must organically link the sociality of man (*ijtima'*) to the necessity of *wâzi'*, justice and solidarity, *al asabiyya*. The human being is only fulfilled in an association, in a society naturally organised around a *wâzi'*; that renders justice and controls this association and represses all disorder and injustice that threaten man's very existence. The politician is thus not defined according to the Greek scheme as primarily a man of the city, as a citizen, but as a natural being, the *ij tima'* being, for man, a necessary and natural operation; without it, the species would disappear. It is therefore within the polis that Ibn Khaldun defines man as a "political" being. But this sociality of man is linked, for him, to the *'asabiyya*, to the grouping of solidarity; as soon as man enters into contact with others, there will be, according to him, a conflict of desires: "But each one stretches out his hand to seize what he desires, for injustice and aggressiveness are in the nature of the animal". From this conflict of desires necessarily arises anarchy (*fawdhâ*), "they need a moderator -*frein*, *wâzi'*, i.e. a leader". Power here is synonymous with *ghalaba*, domination achieved by force and by solidarity. "In this context, *al 'asabiyya* is indispensable for success"¹⁴.

Certainly based on the agnatic infrastructure, this notion is the basis of the association's balance, its cohesive strength, its awareness of its specificity and the great mobility that leads it to power. The state, in the way it is constituted and in the way it functions, is above all a result of this *'asabiyya*, which is not at all a phenomenon specific to nomadic Bedouins, it has urban forms that make it a real

11. Ibn Khaldûn, *al Muqaddima*, traduit en français sous le titre de *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, par Y. Monteil, Sindbad, Paris 1978, p 283

12. Ibn Khaldûn, *op. cit*, p 873.

13. Ibn Khaldûn, *op. cit*, p 874.

14. Ibn Khaldûn, *op. cit*, p 363

force for social cohesion. The problem is that, in the city, it can become an instrument of oppression, whereas the state must be just and moderate: "Good government is synonymous with gentleness (rifq)";. The city can soften this grouping of people whose members, through the easy life of the city and the enjoyment it provides, lose the warlike aggressiveness of nomads. This is the decline of the 'asabiyya and the loss of the state, which will be taken over by another, stronger and more warlike 'asabiyya. We can therefore say that it is, in Ibn Khaldun's system, both the emotional counterpart of social mobility and the rational cause of the building of power and its loss. All political systems, insofar as they are organically linked to this notion, generally experience a period of flourishing and greatness, a period of stagnation and finally a period of decline at the end of which another political system (dynasty) seizes power through a stronger 'asabiyya. The first period is characterised by the power of the young power, which was born of rural or Bedouin life, and therefore retains "the Bedouin virtues, the harshness and savagery of the desert. It is accustomed to hardship and shared glory, so it retains its clan spirit (its solidarity grouping). Its members are sharp and feared and people obey it. Installed in the urban setting, this (political) power group enjoys luxury and prosperity. In this period, the chief, who in principle was a moderator and practised a soft policy of rifq, tends to slide towards personal power and autocracy. This second generation, which is well aware of this shift, still lives in the memory of the first period in the hope of returning to its glory and brilliance. In the third period, corruption and luxury inevitably lead the ruling group to decadence¹⁵.

Even if Ibn Khaldun criticises Fârâbî for his political theory, he is nonetheless Farabian in his approach to happiness. It should be noted that what Ibn Khaldun rejects in Farabian political philosophy is its political ethics oriented towards the ideality of socio-political organisation. In fact, Ibn Khaldun does not distinguish himself from the "idealist" philosophers only on this level of the conception of the ideal city. He also rejects the starting point of the Hellenistic philosophy when it comes to the genesis and principle of power. Philosophy is city-like in its principle; it is an effect of the polis, of the madaniyya (politēia). In this sense, following the example of Plato, Aristotle, Fârâbî, Ibn Roschd (Averroes), it gives prestige to the city to the detriment of the tribes, the nomads, the Bedouins, and nomadism in general. For Ibn Khaldun, however, city life is the result of a social change, of the development of solidarity (al asabiyya), which is not primitively urban and which is the principle and the nerve of all social life. The two solutions thus favour happy living together, what I have called conviviality. The first, that of Fârâbî, is of an aesthetic and political nature, but from an ideal perspective, whereas the second is anthropological and from an empirical perspective. The first opens up to the human and questions what is constant in human relationships, while the second highlights the changing and evolving character of all living together.

15. Ibn Khaldûn, op. cit, p 334