"JUST WAR" IN THE ARAB PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

Mohammad al Sheikh ●

Where the question of just war is concerned, classical Arab philosophy has suffered from what can only be described as "double marginalization". Firstly, Western philosophical writings on the subject have tended to overlook the Arab contribution, while giving ample scope to other sources from St. Augustine to Michael Waltzer, and secondly, when they do actually happen to speak about "just war in Islam", they focus on the theology and ethics of war (jihad), while ignoring its other aspects.

The aim of this article, therefore, is to highlight the value of the Arabs' philosophical contribution to the issue of "just wars" – an issue which is quite distinct from the tradition of jihad and combat. In doing so, I shall endeavour to approach the subject analytically and critically from two angles:

One: To show the degree to which "just war" became a specifically Islamic philosophical matter (al Farabi and

● Professor of Political and Religious Philosophy at Al Hassan II University, Casablanca.

Ibn Rushd are particularly relevant here), and examine its status in classical Arab political philosophy.

Two: To define the limitations of the Arab contribution to this question - limitations which are a result of excessive idealism leading to an approach that obscures political realities and sees a "just war" as the type of war engaged in by a "Virtuous City" (i.e. the kind of city envisaged by al Farabi) against "corrupt cities" in the name of humanitarian values. (Similar to the wars that are being fought today between the "Good Camp" and the "Evil camp".)

Several people with an interest in philosophical ideas have commented that the issue of "just war" has become a popular topic for discussion among contemporary political thinkers. This is true. If you look at recent books on philosophy, thought and political theory published over the past decade under the title "Just War" (not to mention those others which also deal with the same topic without mentioning it in their titles), you will find they approach their subject from a wide range of angles – historical, ideological… in the context of present-day realities etc. – with the result that it spills over into numerous different categories including, among others, political philosophy, political thought, law, the philosophy of law, legal theory, international relations and strategic studies.

War is a basic fact of human life that most of mankind has experienced at one time or another over the ages, and philosophers have always given it a place in their discourse. However, the discourse of the present day differs from that of the past in at least one fundamental respect. While the "philosophical contemplation" of it remains much the same, attitudes towards it have changed. We can see this, for example, if we compare the French philosopher Emile Chartier, commonly known as Alain (1868-1951), with the contemporary American philosopher Michael Waltzer (1935-).

In his book "Mars; or the Truth about War" Alain objects in principle to the concept of war on the basis of his radical pacifism and deeply ingrained anti-authoritarianism. And in another of his books – "The Citizen against Powers" – he sees a person at war as a "monkey with weapons". Waltzer, on the other hand, maintains that, when dealing with the subject of war

– any war – the following questions need to be answered: Who are the war leaders? What war? What are the means being adopted? Are those means compatible with the ends? Or are they legitimate regardless of the ends?

The question of a "just war" became a particularly hot topic following a series of terrorist incidents attributed to some modern-day extremist Islamist groups, the most vicious of which were the 11th September attacks. This prompted some scholars to reassess the Islamic position on war; previously most of them had judged it in the light of the traditional view of the Crusades and their predecessor – jihad – or what they termed "Holy War". However, the new approach contained various anomalies which were sometimes hard to reconcile:

One: Their focus was on the Islamic extremist view of war and their approach – unfortunately – was based to some extent on the belief that the extremists saw the creation of international "incidents" as being tantamount to acts of worship. In reality, though, when some Western thinkers try to present the picture in darker colours than it really is, they are in fact reviving – or conjuring up – certain old *fiqhi* (doctrinal / jurisprudential) concepts that used to be applied to what might be described as "war theology" – that is, they considered the question of the legitimacy of war in a purely religious context and from an angle that we might term the "etiquette", or ethics, of war. A good example of this is a book by the American academic John Kelsay[1] entitled *"Arguing the Just War in Islam"*, which evokes the spirit of the old Arab Islamic tradition of jihad and ignores the philosophical tradition on the question of war.

One notable thing in this connection is the fact that when this author does indeed examine a classical Arab philosopher's position on war – here I am referring specifically to Ibn Rushd – he fails to consider the view of Ibn Rushd the philosopher, the man known in the West as Averroes who produced a summary of Plato's *Republic* with a commentary; instead, he focuses on Ibn Rushd the *faqih* (scholar of doctrine/jurisprudence), referring in particular to the chapter on jihad in *Bidayat al Mujtahid wa*

---

1 John Kelsay: *Arguing the Just War in Islam*, Harvard University Press, 2007.

Nihayat al Muqtasid (Ibn Rushd's work on *fiqh*, or jurisprudence, which usually has the English title of "*The Distingushed Jurist's Primer*"). The Dutch Orientalist Rudolph Peters (1943-) translated the chapter on jihad from Ibn Rushd's book into English and included it in his book *Jihad in Medieval and Modern Islam* (1977)[1], later updated under the title *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (*Texts*) (2005 and 2008).[2]

Whenever Kelsay himself happens to cite philosophers in a book about "just war" (not jihad), the only names he mentions are those of *fuqaha* (jurists/scholars of doctrine). And when he mentions a classical philosopher – i.e. Ibn Rushd – he does not refer to him as a philosopher, but as a *faqih* and the author of *Bidayat al Mujtahid wa Nihayat al Muqtasid*. Moreover, he devotes a total of less than two pages to Ibn Rushd's views on Shariah rulings dealing with matters other than war.

In both the instances I have mentioned here, what is really missing is the classical Arab philosophical perspective on the question of war - a perspective which comes mainly under the heading of "classical political philosophy". In fact, traditional Arab "political philosophy" has always been a somewhat controversial subject among academics. On the one side there is the well-known Orientalist view which sees classical Arab political philosophy as a carbon copy of its Greek predecessor. Then from the other side there is the position that seeks to stress its uniqueness and highly distinctive features. There is also a third approach that takes a critical look at its contribution from both a positive and negative point of view, and that is the one that we shall adopt here.

One leading critic claims that Muslim philosophers are always to be found hanging around on the fringes of politics: "The philosopher either remains silent, demonstrates a couldn't-care-less attitude or sees himself as being above politics and all those involved in political activity. In doing so he compensates for his attitude with strange terms like 'civil politics' and 'the Virtuous City'… This really has more to do with the philosopher's own political opinions, emotions, ideas and conduct than it does with the politics

---

1   Rudolph Peters: *Jihad in Medieval and Modern Islam*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1977.

2   Rudolph Peters: *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, Markus Wiener Publisher, 2005 and 2008.

of a society or a city. The philosopher in an Islamic society ultimately gets to a point where he creates his 'city' within himself and has no interest in putting forward proposals for building a society..."[1] On Al Farabi's *Virtuous City* this critic says: "Al Farabi's *Virtuous City* is a purely cerebral construct inspired by a reading of Plato's *Republic* and information gleaned from Aristotle's political writings and the views of the Platonists. There is of course no connection between this 'composite cerebral city' and an Islamic city, but this is not important. What matters is that it is not designed to promote political reform or change; it is in fact a city derived from alien philosophical emotions..."[2]

Could he not have also said the same thing about Ibn Rushd's commentary on Plato's *Republic*?

The critic also takes a hard look at "Ibn Rushd's commentary on those of Aristotle's political texts that were familiar to him."[3] Elsewhere he writes: "It is our opinion that – contrary to what is generally said – Ibn Rushd's political ideas are nowhere to be found in his commentaries on Aristotle's political works. We have to look for them in his other books, not his commentaries."[4]

We do not know which texts the writer is referring to - particularly since Ibn Rushd himself states at the beginning of his commentary on Plato's *Republic* that he had been forced to summarise the *Republic* "because we failed to obtain Aristotle's book [i.e. *Politics*]"[5]. Could he perhaps mean Ibn Rushd's summary of Aristotle's *Ethics*, the Arabic version of which has been lost? Alternatively, he may possibly be referring to 'Ammar al Talibi's claim that he personally had seen the Latin version of Ibn Rushd's commentaries on Aristotle's *Politics* with his own eyes.[6]

---

1   'Ali Oumlil: *Al Sultah al Thaqafiyyah wa'l Sultah al Siyasiyyah*, Markaz Dirasat al Wahdah al 'Arabiyyah, 1st impression, Beirut, 1996, p. 23.

2   Ibid. p. 187.

3   Ibid. p. 198.

4   Ibid. p. 221.

5   Ibn Rushd: *Al Dhururi fi'l Siyasah*, p. 73.

6   'Ammar al Talibi: *Al Nadhariyyah al Siyasiyyah lada Ibn Rushd*, in the records of the Ibn Rushd Conference marking the 800th anniversary of his death, Al Mu'assasah al Wataniyyah li'l Funun al Matba'iyyah, Algiers, 1985, p. 219.

Whatever the case may be, and regardless of the political references to be found in his critique of *Ethica Nicomachia* (*Nicomachian Ethics*), Ibn Rushd stipulated that ethics must always come first. That is why we are amazed that the critic should say: "Does this critique [of those of Aristotle's political texts that were familiar to Ibn Rushd] truly represent his actual political ideas? Many of those who have written about Ibn Rushd believe so. However, in our opinion his real political ideas and positions should be sought outside his commentaries on Aristotle's political texts. And this is something we shall endeavour to establish."[1]

That is why we find him searching for evidence of Ibn Rushd's political thinking in the latter's summary of the *Book of Dialectics*. This is a right and proper thing to do, but in our view it is a "complementary requirement" and should be seen as subsidiary to the summary of the *Republic*, not of the same order as the summary of the *Republic*.

What the critic calls "his [i.e. Ibn Rushd's] commentaries on Aristotelian political philosophy" represent (in the critic's view) "his concept of politics in the barest of terms; however, as far as a realistic understanding of it – i.e. his political position – is concerned this is something that is completely different from [Aristotle's position]."[2] The odd thing about all this is that he (the critic) makes no reference of any kind to Ibn Rushd's book *Al Dhururi fi'l Siyasah* (*Essential Politics*). It would also have been even more appropriate to enquire why that manuscript was lost and what traces of its influence can be seen in Ibn Rushd's philosophy. In our view that is the most important question.

If we now turn our attention to the scholars who have an interest in Ibn Rushd's political philosophy – or, to put it more accurately, his political views, particularly his view of war – we find that, contrary to the previous situation, there are those who see Ibn Rushd's main interest as being what he called "*Islah al Madinah*" ("Setting the City to Rights"). Furthermore, there is at least one scholar who maintains that Ibn Rushd regarded war as the way to do this, claiming that "there is an Ibn Rushdian tendency

---

1　'Ali Oumlil: *Al Sulta al Thaqafiyyah wa'l Sulta al Siyasiyyah*, p. 198.

2　Ibid. p. 221.

towards political/educational reform which sees war as a basic means for achieving it."[1] The scholar who propounded this view sees Ibn Rushd as a "war thinker" and tries to cite evidence of what he calls "the Rushdian militaristic tendency"[2] or "the Ibn Rushd militaristic tendency"[3]… or "This militaristic tendency which we aim to prove…"[4]

Elsewhere in his book this author writes about what he calls "the Ibn Rushd war tendency" or "his militaristic tendency", or indeed "his tendency towards violence/militarism". Ibn Rushd is not seen merely as a "person with warlike tendencies" or "someone with militaristic tendencies" who "promotes war"[5] and indeed "glorifies war"[6]. More than that, he is "a man with warlike tendencies that have no hesitation about expressing themselves openly"[7], a person with "violent/militaristic tendencies"[8] whose "intellectual origins" – according to the author – can be traced back to Aristotle and al Farabi,[9] though their main cause in Ibn Rushd's case was that he "grew up in a climate of war."[10]

Generally speaking, this was how Ibn Rushd's views on politics and "just war" were represented. However, we feel that they could possibly have been more clearly and coherently presented if it had not been for a combination of extraordinary circumstances:

One: If Ibn Rushd had been able to lay his hands on Aristotle's *Politics*, he might not have needed to produce a commentary on Plato's political philosophy.

---

1   Farid al 'Ulaibi: *Ru'yat Ibn Rushd al Siyasiyyah*, Doctoral Theses Series No. 24, Markaz Dirasat al Wahdah al 'Arabiyyah, Beirut, 2008, p. 244.

2   Ibid. p. 242.

3   Ibid. p. 242.

4   Ibid. p. 241.

5   Ibid. p. 233.

6   Ibid. pp. 236-237.

7   Ibid. p. 216. Al 'Ulaibi supports his view by quoting an extract from 'Ali Zai'our's book *Al Hikmah al 'Amaliyyah aw al Akhlaq wa'l Siyasah al Ta'amuliyyah: al Falsafa fi Maidan al Fi'l wal Mi'yar wal 'Ala'iq al Ijtima'iyyah,* Dar al Tali 'ah, Beirut, 1988, p. 429. He describes the book *Talkhis al Siyasah* as "glorifying war and teaching how to promote it and demonstrate its virtues." (See p. 236)

8   Ibid. p. 239.

9   Ibid. p. 241.

10 Ibid. p. 243.

Two: If the text of his summary of Plato's *Republic* had not been translated into Hebrew, and from Hebrew into Latin and English, we would not have known where Ibn Rushd stood on the political issues of his time, particularly the question of "just wars". Hence we can draw at least two amazing conclusions from that book:

Firstly, as we indicated above, if there had been a translation of Aristotle's *Politics* available in Andalusia, Ibn Rushd would not have written his commentary on Plato's *Republic*. After all, he was indisputably an Aristotelian.

Secondly, in writing his commentaries or summaries (which were numerous), Ibn Rushd usually kept strictly to the text. However, in the case of his commentary on *The Republic* he departed from the norm and "liberated himself" from the text in several instances. In some places – and indeed whole chapters – he refrained from comment on the grounds that the passages were dialectical in nature, or criticized them as irrelevant or unconvincing. It was noted by Muhsin Mahdi that this was the case with nearly two thirds of Ibn Rushd's commentary.[1]

Was Ibn Rushd's theory of "just wars" something completely separate from his expressed position on politics as revealed by his writings?

Commenting on the various aspects of military training described in Plato's *Republic* Ibn Rushd wrote: "Hence what is meant by just wars is clear from what is said here…"[2]

We are convinced on the basis of this sentence that Ibn Rushd actually saw the issue of "just wars" as a separate, independent category. Indeed, we may go so far as to say that he might have been the only Arab philosopher to treat "just wars" as a totally separate, independent subject (even if we consider him along with al Farabi who preceded him).

---

[1] Muhsin Mahdi: *Alfarabi et Averroes: Remarques sur le Commentaire d'Averroes sur la Republique de Platon*, dans *Multiple Averroes*, Actes du Colloque International Organise a l'Occasion du 850e Anniversaire de la Naissance d'Averroes, Paris, 20-23 Septembre 1976, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1978, p. 93.

[2] Ibn Rushd: *Al Dhururi fi'l Siyasah* (summary of Plato's *Politics*), translated from the Hebrew by Ahmad Shahlan, Silsilat al Turath al Falsafi al 'Arabi, Mu'allafat Ibn Rushd (4), Markaz Dirasat al Wahdah al 'Arabiyyah, Beirut, 2nd impression, 2002, p. 83.

His "theory of war" is to be found in his summary of the first dialogue of *The Republic*, or – to be more specific – in his review of ways of training in the virtues, including the virtue of courage (particularly paragraphs 22 to 29). After referring to the two accepted methods of training – persuasion and coercion – and explaining the former, he then turns to the latter and says (reflecting his view of the justification for a "just war"!): "As far as the latter is concerned, that is the approach to be adopted with rebels, enemies and those who are not endowed with the necessary virtues – which is to say, the way of coercion and punishment with chastisement. It is clear that this approach is not the one to be used with the 'people of the Virtuous City', except – that is – for educational purposes, since it is the most effective way of training [the young] in those things which are distasteful, such as war and the degradation it entails."[1] He then continues promptly with a sharp assertion that puts his view of just wars into a nutshell: "With regard to those other nations that are not [so] blessed and which do not behave as proper human beings should, there is no way to discipline them other than this one – I mean, to coerce them through war so that they embrace virtues."[2]

Muhsin Mahdi concludes his excellent article - : *Alfarabi et Averroes: Remarques sur le Commentaire d'Averroes sur la Republique de Platon* (*Al Farabi and Ibn Rushd: Observations on Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Plato's Republic*) – by indicating the points on which Ibn Rushd disagreed with Plato.[3] According to him one of the main points of difference was over the question of war. In his *Republic* (Book 2, paragraphs 372a and 374c) Plato states that the origin of war should be attributed to the fact that cities wished to enjoy greater affluence, prosperity and endless wealth; this led to greed and ambition which gave those cities the motivation to expand and annexe the assets of their neighbouring cities. Hence an "affluent city" needed to make war so that it could gain more assets, just as it needed to defend its own assets and resources against other cities with similar hostile ambitions. Therefore it needed a specially trained army for that purpose.

---

1 Ibid. p. 80.

2 Ibid. pp. 80-81.

3 Muhsin Mahdi: *Alfarabi et Averroes: Remarques sur le Commentaire d'Averroes sur la Republique de Platon*. See above, p. 100.

So what one can conclude from Plato's view of wars is that wars are a compulsive necessity, not a matter of choice. Accordingly, there was no question of virtue here; rather, it was need – a natural necessity – that was the root cause of war.

Summarising Plato's position, Ibn Rushd says: "What Plato's book contains on this matter (i.e. wars in the 'Virtuous City') is that this aspect [of the psyche – i.e. the power of anger] is (naturally) unsuited for this purpose (i.e. war); rather, it is there because it is driven by necessity: either on the basis of the first intention (that it is their purpose) to take property from other cities by force because they are driven to do that by necessity, or in a quest for that which is better, or on the basis of the second intention, which is that (their predisposition for war) is a kind of precaution to protect the city from whatever external cause might occasion it alarm."[1]

As one would expect, Ibn Rushd's position (one which he shares with al Farabi) is the same as Aristotle's – i.e. that the virtue of courage "cannot be exercised unless it is coupled with the art of war."[2]

While understanding the need to resort to coercion (whether at home or abroad), Ibn Rushd almost raised the question of legitimacy – an issue not raised by Plato, whose reasoning was unable to escape from the logic of "natural disposition", "nature" and "natural necessity"; to him (i.e. Plato), war was a natural necessity and as far as he was concerned the question of legitimacy was initially related to the legitimacy of resorting to coercion; that is to say, to what extent is it legitimate to resort to coercion – either against someone within the city's borders or against someone outside? His reply to this question was that it depends upon the nature of the city. A Virtuous City has no business resorting to coercion, except – possibly – for training purposes and to promote a disciplined spirit among its troops. This was because (in Plato's view) courage is not to be seen as a tool for preparing for war, since war is something that stems from necessity – an activity that is necessary for achieving the Virtuous City's external goals and defending its territorial integrity.

---

1   Ibn Rushd: *Al Dhururi fi'l Siyasah*, p. 81.

2   Ibid. p. 81.

However, in Ibn Rushd's view, the aim of coercion is to spread wisdom and promote virtue among the different nations and cities, particularly those cities that are corrupt and refractory and do not behave in the way that human beings should. Such entities should be compelled by force until they embrace the required virtues. Thus, according to him, war is a moral requirement, not a natural necessity.

Despite this, Muhsin Mahdi does not examine the question of "just wars" in any substantial detail, possibly because it was not an issue that was considered to be of much interest at the time when he wrote his article.

In his *Republic* and *Laws*, Plato says that wars should be fought against those whom he sometimes describes as "barbarians" and at other times as "the alien outsider". That is to say, the term "war" – in its specific sense – excludes the category of "civil war", unless it is understood in the more general meaning of "strife"; nor has war ever been "national". In the first of these two books he says (in an observation spoken by the character of Socrates): "It seems to me that the fact that two words are used to express war and local strife means that they are two inherently different things; I am referring here to conflict between people of the same country and conflict between people who are alien to each other. Hostility between kin is called local strife, while between strangers it is called war."[1] Elsewhere he adds: "[If] Greeks fight barbarians or barbarians fight Greeks, then we should say that there is war between the two sides. After all, they are enemies by nature and the enmity between them merits the term war. However, if Greeks fight each other, we should say that the ties of kinship between the two sides have not ceased to exist, but that Greece appears to be suffering from the malady of disunion within itself – so that the term local strife would be the proper term to be used to describe this kind of enmity."[2]

However, in the second book – the *Book of Laws* – he describes this same "internal strife" as war. He writes: "There are two types of war. There

---

[1]   Plato: *Republic*, Tr. Fu'ad Zakariya, Al Hay'ah al Misriyyah al 'Aamah li'l Kitab, Cairo, 1974, p. 374.

[2]   Ibid. p. 375.

is what everybody calls sedition and disorder – which of course is the most damaging kind of war … The other kind – which I think we are all agreed is much less serious – is the kind which breaks out when we have a dispute with an alien outsider."[1]

To be frank, I am not the first person to have found Ibn Rushd's position somewhat confusing when considering the difficulties and contradictions created by his view of just wars. Muhsin Mahdi concludes his famous article with the following observation:

Although it might be fairly easy to persuade the protectors of Plato's Virtuous City to submit to the military training needed for their city's defence and for achieving its domestic goals, it would be difficult to find any incentives for the protectors of Ibn Rushd's Virtuous City to submit to that very same training, but with the aim of becoming involved in wars against every "political entity" and every nation that does not speak their language or share their customs. Indeed, it is very likely that the protectors would not be as enthusiastic about virtue as Ibn Rushd would wish them to be; that is to say, it is doubtful that they would be prepared to die in order to bring happiness to far-away nations about which they knew nothing – nations that were non-virtuous, vicious and refractory without a trace of humanity in their behaviour.[2]

Revisiting this subject in the wake of the events of 11th September 2001 gives a somewhat different perspective on the above comment, which at the time it was written may not have seemed particularly significant, either to the reader or to the writer himself. One of the expressions which now seems more significant than it did at the time is the term "just wars".

Biermann's comments on Muhsin Mahdi's observations (which I have cited above) also indicate that Ibn Rushd's approach to war was "dubious": "As regards treating the Shariah and Aristotle's ideas as being equal, [I am] wondering whether the meaning we have given to 'war' in the two

---

1 Plato: *Laws,* Tr. Mohammad Hasan Dhadha, Al Hay'ah al Misriyyah al 'Aamah li'l Kitab, Cairo, 1986, pp. 90-91.

2 Muhsin Mahdi: *Alfarabi et Averroes: Remarques sur le Commentaire d'Averroes sur la Republique de Platon*. See above, pp. 100-101.

situations of war and jihad might not actually refer to two different things? Yet did Ibn Rushd not give jihad a definition that would make it identical to Aristotle's definition [of war]?" I do not know if Muhsin Mahdi replied to this question. If he did, his reply was not published in the record of the symposium at which the issue was discussed.

Some scholars and academics maintain that there is no difference. After beginning with an explanation of Ibn Rushd's view of jihad, Al 'Ulaibi says: "When we look at his writings on *fiqh*, we find that in his book *Bidayat al Mujtahid wa Nihayat al Muqtasid* he deals with the question of war in two main chapters – *Kitab al Jihad* (*Book of Jihad*) and *Kitab al Harabah* (*Book of Warfare*) – In *Kitab al Jihad* he focuses specifically upon what he classes as a just war (i.e. jihad), which it is obligatory for Muslims to fight…"

We do not know how this academic came to see "jihad" as being the same as "just war". If Ibn Rushd indeed drew no distinction between them from a *fiqh* point of view, this would mean that *Kitab al Jihad* deals with war from a wide range of different aspects, including the ethics of war within a *fiqh* framework (i.e. what is permissible and impermissible in war). However, there is actually no reference here to the concept of "just war" – that is to say, war launched by the Virtuous City against non-virtuous cities in the name of propagating virtue. In fact, Ibn Rushd had another view, which was that war in this category was launched by the Muslims against "all polytheists"[1], and that they fought so that the polytheists would "either embrace Islam or pay the *jizyah* (tax on non-Muslim subjects)".

However, this distinction is of no interest to our academic, who writes: "In this respect he looks at just war from a *fiqh* point of view and sees it as meaning that Holy Jihad which Allah commands the Believers to wage against anyone who fails to respond to the *da'wah* (call) to Islam – that is to say, all Unbelievers and polytheists. On the other hand, an unjust war is the opposite of Holy Jihad in that it aims to serve purposes other than those stipulated in the Qur'an and the Hadith."[2]

---

[1] Ibn Rushd: *Bidayat al Mujtahid wa Nihayat al Muqtasid*, Part 1, Dar al Ma'rifah, Beirut, 6th impression, 1982, pp. 381 and 389.

[2] Al 'Ulaibi: *Ru'yat Ibn Rushd al Siyasiyyah*. See above, p. 212.

What is more important it that it raises this question: Did Ibn Rushd see "jihad" and "just wars" as being one and the same thing? I believe the answer to that could be both "Yes" and "No". If we regard the Shariah and virtue as being the same thing, or indeed restrict the term "virtue" to having the same meaning as "the Shariah" (and I do not think that Ibn Rushd did this), then indeed there will be no problem, since "war" in this context would be understood as meaning the same as "jihad". However, if we take "the Shariah" as an *example* of virtue rather than as virtue itself (and I doubt if I would be wrong in thinking that this was Ibn Rushd's position), this would mean that war is a broader concept than jihad, while jihad is in the category of obligatory virtue – i.e. Islamic religious virtue – against those who have no religious virtues. Ibn Rushd intimated this when he said: "And it would seem likely that this is the case with those legal rulings that are guided by the 'Shariah of mankind', such as this Divine Shariah of ours. Thus, calling people to Allah the Most High is made in one of two ways: the way of advice and guidance and the way of jihad."[1]

Whatever the case may be, the problem here is how to make the transition from a "religious view of the world" - which divides the globe into two camps, the Faith Camp and the Infidel Camp (in which the Believer is allowed to resort to coercion, after exhausting all the options along the persuasion route, and declare war upon the Unbeliever; such a war would thus be a just one, since its aim would be to impose religious virtue by force upon those who have no religious virtues) – to a "moral view of the world, which in turn divides it into two camps – the Virtuous City and the different types of corrupt cities; in such a situation war becomes a necessary means of propagating virtue and wisdom.

In other words, the same Manichaean logic applies in both cases; a just war is waged either in the name of religion (i.e. the Faith) or in the name of morality (i.e. virtue). Consequently, such an approach could end up by providing justification for all those wars which are being waged today between the "Good Camp" and the "Evil Camp".

---

1   Ibn Rushd: *Al Dhururi fi'l Siyasah*, p. 81.

Nevertheless, Ibn Rushd's comments about "wars between cities" should not prevent us from recognizing the universal human dimension of his thought. At the same time, however, we should concede that, while human beings are able to understand shared moral values, and even "relative values", it is much harder for them to come to a mutual understanding on issues related to Belief and Unbelief.

If we return to the Arab philosophical tradition and seek to compare Ibn Rushd's concept of just wars with the ideas of another philosopher, we will find no better example than al Farabi.

Al Farabi may rightly be regarded as the greatest political philosopher in the history of Arab Islamic culture during the Middle Ages. Such a view is amply justified by the number of books he wrote which were devoted to the subject of politics. (He also wrote numerous other books on non-political topics.) However, the scope of his philosophy was limited to abstract principles and in most cases it lacked any analysis of the real world; this is despite the fact that his work has attracted the interest of numerous distinguished scholars. They include the great political thinker Leo Strauss (1899-1973), who published his famous article in 1945 entitled *Farabi's Plato*, and his pupil and friend Muhsin Mahdi (1926-2009) - author of *Al Farabi wa Ta'sis al Falsafah al Siyasiyyah al Islamiyyah* (*Al Farabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*), which was published in 2001.

Where the question of "just wars" is concerned, there are essential differences between al Farabi and Ibn Rushd. For example, the term "just wars" does not exist in al Farabi's political writings (though this does not mean that they contain no indirect reference to the concept). Another significant difference between them concerns the "disciplining of nations and cities". Al Farabi mentions two approaches to discipline – voluntary and compulsory; in his book *Tahsil al Sa'adah* (*The Attainment of Happiness*) he refers to: "the use of engines of war and fighting men to attack nations and cities that are not accustomed to doing that through which they [may] attain that happiness for which humans exist in order to achieve it."[1]

---

1   Al Farabi: *Kitab Tahsil al Sa'adah*, Dar wa Maktabat al Hilal, 1st impression, 1995, p. 75.

If Ibn Rushd regards as "just wars" those wars that are waged by the Virtuous City against "those other nations that are not [so] blessed and which do not behave as proper human beings should" – i.e. nations that should be "compelled by war to embrace the virtues" – al Farabi, by contrast, proclaims the principle of "every nation's right to happiness" as an acceptable reason for the Virtuous City waging war on other cities. Wars of this kind in his view would thus be just wars.