

## The Psychology of Belief and Doubt in Al-Farabi Philosophy of Religion

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### Abstract

Psychology of belief and doubt appears in the state of individuals, philosophers, or researchers where they reiterate that something is correct and can be trusted while the other is not true which automatically emerges doubt. The research article tried to understand this psychology of belief and doubt regarding the philosophy of religion given by Al-farabi. Al-farabi was a scholar and philosopher popularly known for his mathematics, medicine, and metaphysics work. Al-farabi was an intellectual and pragmatic thinker, so this also drove his philosophies. He was among the Islamic scholars who gave less importance to religion and more preference to the sciences and math and emphasised the development of humankind. Sufism very much influenced his early life; hence, in his religious beliefs, Sufism has been able to find space. His belief in finding common ground in religion and politics in Islamic society is doubtful because Islamic countries had yet to be secular in politics. This concept of belief and doubt has been covered here with the help of secondary data from peer journals and analysed through thematic analysis. The data analysis has been discussing this in five different themes based on the concept of belief and doubt, importance of region and religious belief, religious philosophy of Al-farabi and the beliefs and doubts of philosophy of Al-farabi.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, Islam, Religion, Society

### 1. Introduction

Religion is the belief in a god and several gods & the activities that are connected with the faith, such as praying and building temples, churches, synagogues, and mosques. Over 4000 religions are practised worldwide; the most practised religions in the world are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Riddell, 2022). The philosophy of doubt and belief are integral parts of religion where doubt implicates the religion while the hypothesis formulates the faith. Philosophy of religion is the philosophical study of the nature of religion and the meaning of the religion, which includes analysis of concepts, ideas, terms, arguments, and practices of the religion. Every religion in this world has its philosophy, and here, Al-farabi's philosophy of religion is going to be explored. Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi, also known as Alfarabius in the Latin West, was an early Islamic philosopher and music theorist. He is also known as the "Father of Neo-Platonism" and "Father of Islamic Political philosophy" (Gommans & Huseini, 2022). Al-farabi has various core interests; his main interests were political philosophies, philosophies of religion, Physics, metaphysics, Logic psychology, and Music theory. During different periods, different Islamic scholars have come up with their own philosophies; for instance, Illuminationist philosophy, Mystical philosophy, Transcendent theosophy, and Isfahan philosophy are the different types of philosophies in Islam.

Al-farabi's philosophy of religion is among one of the religious philosophies given by Islamic scholar Al-farabi (Gommans & Huseini, 2022). It can be defined as descriptive, as per the perception of the current religious status of Islam. This philosophy basically denies the quality of any autonomous knowledge and wisdom blatantly, completely rejects the exclusive truth, and reduces it to mere tools. Each of these philosophies of Islam, which different Islamic philosophers gave, belongs to the Ottoman, Persia, Mughal empires, and Arabs (Faroqhi, 2019).

As mentioned above, there are some sorts of psychological doubts and beliefs in every philosophy of regions, and so is the Al-farabi philosophy of religion. This research article aims to understand those doubts and thoughts about the philosophy of Al-farabi for faith. This has been covered in four part in the later part; methods, findings discussion and the conclusion.

## 2. Methods

The method is how data is collected and analysed to reach the answers of a particular research study. For this research article, the data has been compiled with the help of secondary data collection methods. It is the process of collecting data from sources like books, authentic websites, news reports, reports published by the government, and journal articles published by researchers from Google Scholar (Rahmatullah & Gunawan, 2020). Peered journal review data sources have been exclusively emphasised here, while data from authentic websites and books has also been taken. The collected data has been analysed with the help of the thematic data analysis method, where all the research problems have been discussed and answered with the help of themes. There are many advantages of carrying out data analysis with the use of thematic analysis: it is an unsupervised approach, it doesn't require any expertise, it doesn't require any type of algorithms, and others (Braun & Clarke, 2019). When the data is being collected with the help of a secondary method, the best way for its analysis is thematic data analysis. Hence, the data has been collected from secondary sources that are peer-reviewed journal review articles after the year 2019 and analysed in the findings part.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1 The psychology of doubt and belief in religious philosophies

Doubt and belief are concepts applied to almost every philosophical theory and study. The idea of doubt can be explained as indecision and hesitancy regarding accepting or rejecting a proposition (Pomerleau *et al.*, 2020). The famous examples of doubt are whether god exists in the real world, whether it is possible to reach out near the sun, or any other things that are related to mythology. On the other hand, belief is the opposite of doubt, and it is a concept in which something an individual believes is accepted as accurate even if it is not. Both images have their significance, where one questions everything while the other agrees with the results.

Humans have developed some beliefs in every area of society, and I doubt that religious philosophies have dominated these differences. Today, there are large sections of people who believe and have faith in religion. At the same time, specific areas of the same society challenge the very existence of god and doubt the existence of religion and its philosophies (Pomerleau *et al.*, 2020). As mentioned earlier, there are over 4,000 different types of faith in which Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and Buddhism have the largest population in the world. Each of these religions has its philosophies, and each of those philosophies has its doubts and beliefs. As per the Islamic religious philosophy, certain obligations in Islam are summed up to form five pillars of Islam, which can be considered religious belief.

Those beliefs are belief in god and his prophet, obligations to prayer (Five times a day), charity, pilgrimage or the Hajj, and fasting during Ramadan. These are the common beliefs in Islam and its philosophies, while several doubts exist in the Islamic religious perspectives (Ganiyev & Umaraliev, 2020). Islam is one of the three Abraham religions, which are Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and it is the most significant doubt about the very existence of ALLAH in the real world as there is no face of the idol of ALLAH. In Islam, it is believed never to question the existence of ALLAH and its religious practices, but if its methods were not doubted, it would be difficult to remove the ill rules in Islam.

The holy book of Islam is the Quran, and it comprises all the religious teachings of Islam; however, there is doubt whether Hadiths in Islam are liable to the Islamic religion and its philosophies. Hadith is the report attributed to the prophet Mohammad in Islam and describes words and actions from SUNNA (Thalib *et al.* 2020). As Prophet Mohammad had never mentioned the existence of Hadith, it remained a doubt among the Islamic philosophers whether to accept it or not. These doubts and beliefs of Islam have been raised in Islam and Islamic religious philosophies. Islam has been divided into two sections, Shias & Sunnis, and both have their religious perspectives.

As per the Shias religious philosophy, they believe in the existence of prophet Mohammad while they are the followers of Ali and their descendants, while Sunnis are the followers of Sunna and the followers of the family of Prophet Muhammad. However, both of these philosophies are the believers of the Holy Quran, the Hadith, and the five pillars of Islam (Thalib *et al.* 2020). But at the same time, they have specific religious and philosophical differences, which is why West Asia has been in turmoil ever since Islam was founded in the Middle East. From the above analysis, the psychology of doubts and belief in religious philosophies has been explained by considering the example of Islamic religious perspectives. The significance of these religious philosophies will be discussed in the later part regarding spiritual practices.

### **3.2 Significance of Islamic religion and religious beliefs**

Ever since human civilisation started, the concept of religion has evolved, acting as a source of comfort and guidance for humans. Today, religion has become an integral part of human life. It defines the purpose of life, reinforces social unity and stability in life, promotes psychological & physical well-being, and motivates people (Barton *et al.*, 2021). In other words, religion is the most potent way of expressing meaning, encouraging, helping, and believing while dealing with any traumatic situation. Religion also teaches a person about the moral values and principles that make a better person in society. Many religions, like Hinduism, come with a rich cultural heritage, while certain narratives and religious teachings strictly drive some religions. Practising a religion involves a lot of things like "Sermons, the commemoration of the activities of a god or gods, sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trance, initiations, funerary services, matrimonial services, meditation, music, art, dance, public service, or other aspects of human culture" (Al-Billeh, 2022).

Consider the example of the Islamic religion; it is the second most practiced religion in the world and most of its population is in Asia and North Africa. The Islamic religious philosophies have strived to prove that there is no interaction between the intellect, revelation of knowledge, and faith. Islam as a religion has given a lot of things to this modern world, like Surgery, Toothbrushes, Music, Optics, Algebra, and Hospitals (Morrison, 2021). Islam as a religion has played a more significant role in changing the politics and geography of a region, and the spread of Islam as a religion in 57 nations around the world is the most prominent example (Nguyen, 2021). Islam has contributed in almost all the domains of studies, like literature, art, philosophy, science, medicine, and mathematics.

Regarding religious beliefs in Islam, the most common belief is that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of god. The other religious beliefs of Islamic philosophies include belief in oneness, belief in angels of god, belief in revelations, belief in Prophets of God, belief in the day of Judgement, belief in pre-measurement, and belief in resurrection after death (Nguyen, 2021). These are the seven most common beliefs that exist in Islam, and each of these beliefs has been able to bind all Muslims worldwide. Confidence in the Oneness of God comes with the concept that there is one god, and that is supreme, eternal, and crater of this world.

As per the Islamic religious philosophies, a god has no father or mother. In addition, they do not have any sons & daughters as well. God is almighty and supreme, and praying to one god is the only way to reach heaven. Belief in the Angels of God: Islamic religious philosophy also believes in the existence of angels of god, which god creates to fulfil his commands and worship (Prochowicz-Studnicka, 2020). Belief in the Revelations (Books) of God: Muslims worldwide believe in various Islamic and Abraham texts like the Holy Quran, The Scrolls of Abraham, and the Psalms of David. Belief in the Prophets of God: The Abraham religion has five prophets and messengers, like Noah, Moses, Solomon, Jesus, and Muhammad (Ali, 2023). Each prophet has come to the earth to teach humankind and divine revelations. Belief in the Day of Judgment; all Muslims around the world believe in the Day of Judgment that is in heaven and hell.

Belief in Pre Measurement (Qadar): all Muslims worldwide believe that the almighty god possesses all the knowledge and power to control everything, whether it is space or time. Belief in Resurrection after Death: Muslims worldwide also believe in the concept of resurrection after the death of a person, where every individual has to face the judgment of the Almighty God, Allah (Al-Issa *et al.* 2021). From the above discussion, the significance of Islam as a religion and its religious beliefs have been understood.

### 3.3 Philosophies in Islam and Al-farabi's philosophy of religion

Islamic philosophers have given various types of philosophies in different periods and from other parts of the world. Al-farabi's philosophy of religion is among the many religious perspectives Islamic scholars have given. As per Al-farabi's account, religion is just an instrument intended for application and cannot be considered the sphere of knowledge, truth, and wisdom on its own (Kurmanaliyeva, 2021). He asserted that religion is actions & opinions that are determined and restricted by the stipulated communion by practising it for a specific purpose with all due respect.

Al-farabi is considered one of the greatest scholars, just behind Aristotle, and most of his world was dedicated to science; it had been said that he had played a bigger role in the synthesis of Sufism. Sufism in Islam is a mystic religious practice that focuses mainly on purification, spirituality, ritualism, asceticism, and esotericism (Jasvi, 2021). Sufi order has been established to promote peace and spirituality in Islam and reduce the extent of radicalisation in the Islamic culture (Mukhammadievich *et al.* 2022); there were various ways by which Sufism could be practised like Qwalli, Sama, Ziyarat, Hadra, Anasheed, and others.

The classical form of Sufism has been taken from certain teachings and practices of the Quran and Sunna. Over the years, Sufism has reduced its popularity globally and is now limited to certain Islamic countries. Islamic scholar and philosopher Al Farabi has played a more significant role in popularising Sufism and its practices (Mukhammadievich *et al.* 2022). There are several reasons why Al Farabi is aligned with Sufism, as his parents raised him in the mystical tradition of the Sufism tradition of Islam. Al-farabi's philosophy of religion makes it clear that neither the Sunni nor the Shia is superior religious philosophy but the mysticism and spiritual form of religion is best to practice.

The religious philosophies of Al-farabi were very much influenced by the studies and writing of Plato, metaphysics, and various types of Mysticism. While interpreting his Islamic perspectives his reading of the religious philosophies of Plato and Aristotle has helped him provide a more liberal religious view where particular emphasis has been given to spirituality and mysticism (Mukhammadievich *et al.*, 2022). In his writing, he tried to provide a very rational explanation of concepts like prophecy, heaven, predestination, and god. His religious, and philosophical view has given him the gift of adhering to morality and a diving inspiration to live on. Today, most Sufism is centered in Turkey and parts of Iran, but during the time when he was a scholar, it was practised exclusively in Turkey.

As per Al-farabi, Sufism and mysticism in religious practices are very important, especially in Islam, as they provide spiritual education, increase faith in god, and reduce the fear of god rather than promote the love of god. Sufism is further classified into two orders: Basara, followed by Islamic laws, and Be-shara, where there is no foundation for Islamic laws (Mukhammadievich & Mamarasulovich, 2022). Due to these features and characteristics of Sufism, its practices were promoted exclusively by Al-farabi through his philosophy of religion. From this, it has been found that there are various philosophies in Islam. Al-farabi's philosophy has expressed that religion is not the only way to increase wisdom and knowledge. In the later section, the significance of Al-farabi's philosophy of religion will be exemplified by discussing both pros and cons.

### 3.4 Importance of Al-farabi's Philosophy of Religion

After the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, the prominent philosopher was Al-farabi, who devised his philosophy of religion. The religious philosophies the Al-farabi gave were based on the division of Aristotle's ratios, specifically on theoretical and practical ratios. Al-farabi, while offering his spiritual perspective, added the term practical ratio application and divided them into two theoretical ratios: demonstrative science and discursive science (Khalidi, 2022). By giving this philosophy, Al-farabi has faced severe backlash from the Islamic culturists but also from a series of other religions and prophets. The philosophy presented by the Al-farabi for faith has changed the societal norms and perspective of ordinary people regarding religion and Islam.

Al-Farabi has rejected religion as the autonomous status to gather knowledge and wisdom. Although his philosophy had seen backlash from several Islamic scholars, at the same time, it had made the people rethink that

religion is the only source by which knowledge and wisdom could be gathered. Modern sciences, Physics, Mathematics, Medicine, and others can be taught through religion or religious texts (Mape *et al.*, 2023). According to him, religion and religious faith are two different sections, and religion teaches us moral values and principles. Still, it is not the only source to expand one's knowledge and wisdom. His philosophy, however, helped to enhance the understanding of religion and its role in knowledge & wisdom in society.

The subsequent claim made by Al-farabi was that he had ultimately rejected the claim of exclusive truth. Exclusive truth claims are framed as per the polarities where it is said whether a claim is valid or it is false. In terms of a belief system based on truth, a statement can be considered authentic if it is correct (Hakim, 2019). As per the philosophy of Al-farabi regarding religion, he said that everything that is said and stated by faith is not always true. Various beliefs are claimed as true in Islam or any other religion, but they are indifferent to its practical implications. Hence, by rejecting the claim of religion of exclusive truth, Al-farabi has helped people think differently, especially when religion claims something.

Al-farabi has reduced religion to a mere tool used to influence a group of people. Talking about Islam, there are two main sects in it, and they are Shias and Sunnis; both are similar, but there are specific differences between them. Even though both sects of Islam follow the prophet Mohammed as their messenger, Hadiths and Five Pillars, they have fought against each other on many occasions. Europe and West Asia have witnessed several conflicts where the wars were fought just for the religion, popularly known as the Crusades. From 1096 to 1291 AD, the world saw eight major crusades, and each of these wars killed many people (Strømme, 2023). Hence, by understanding the crusade wars, it can be said that religion has become a tool that can invoke the sentiments by which people will become motivated to fight a war. These are some of the importance of Al-farabi's religious philosophies, while in the later section, the beliefs and doubts in his philosophies will be understood.

### **3.5 Beliefs and Doubts in Al-farabi's philosophy of religion**

As per Al-farabi's philosophies of religion, religion is an imitation of perspective and a perfect example of practical, intentional virtue and conditions of action. Religious doctrine thus becomes a science of rhetorical and poetic methods by which anyone can be convinced, instil integrity, and instil the ways towards happiness (Manshur, 2020)—the truths the various religions claim are evaluated or measured by the Al-farabi through joy. The best way to judge this action is the way of happiness; as a religion can provide satisfaction to a person, it can be said that the religion is adequate, while if it is not, it sometimes creates chaos and turmoil.

Coming to the religious beliefs of Al-farabi, he was a believer in Sufism and the Sufi sect of Islam due to his early upbringing in the Sufi society. Sufism is considered the spiritual movement in Islam to eradicate the orthodox practices of Islam. Orthodox Islam believes in the complete domination of Islam, while Sufism believes in the existence of religion and unity among all the different sects (Mujahid, 2021). From this, it can be said that Al-farabi's beliefs were against any orthodox religious philosophy as they used religion to fulfil their motives. The other thought of Al-farabi was about religion and spiritual philosophies. As per him, religion is a symbolic representation, while teaching and knowing about religion often studies the perspectives. Thus, the belief those philosophies are superior to religious views.

When it comes to doubts in the philosophy of Al-farabi, it arise mainly in religion and politics. During the spread of Islam in the Middle East and Europe, most states had direct influence of religion in politics. This means that religion directly or indirectly influenced every action the state took. People from other sects and religions had to face problems; hence, Al-farabi devised a plan to find common ground between religion and politics (Yuslih, 2022). Al-farabi had created communal grounds to tether the political authorities and make them work on theoretical and practical wisdom. He had played a critical role in fusing morality and the characteristics concerns of religion. He understood that the category of religion has been evolving historically, and it will further develop in the future as well.

Through his philosophy, he had prepared a fertile and intellectual ground for both the religious and secular citizens for the future. The doubt here is that Islam is orthodox, especially among the Sunnis. They believe in the existence of only one god, Allah, and eradicating any other faith. Hence, there is considerable doubt is whether secular and

religious politics will ever find common ground (Yuslih, 2022). The concept of Secular or Secularism was started in Christian countries, and as of the 21st century, all Islamic nations are secular. Hence, the religious philosophy of the Al-farabi is doubtful when it comes to politics as from its very existence none of the spiritual philosophies has supported the cause for practicing secular politics (Yuslih, 2022). The belief in promoting Sufism by the Al-farabi's religious doctrine was also doubtful as it had been limited to certain countries in West Asia and had yet to be able to spread further. From the above study, the beliefs and doubts of the religious philosophies of Al-farabi, considered the most significant religious philosopher of Islamic history after Plato and Aristotle, had been understood.

#### **4. Discussion**

Al-Farabi, or Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi, was an Islamic scholar, philosopher, and musician who also had expertise in science, mathematics, and Metaphysics. He has given various theories and philosophies in a wide range of domains like politics, science, medicine, and religion. He is often considered an intellectual and most practical philosopher in Islamic history, so his religious philosophy becomes important to study. This research article has been dedicated to understanding the psychology of beliefs and doubts in Al-farabi's philosophy of religion. The first step is to understand the psychology of thoughts and doubts in religious philosophies to understand this. In religious perspectives, their set of rules and principles, which a large segment of society treats as accurate, is generally considered as beliefs even if they don't have any conclusive evidence. For example, most of the religious philosophies talk about the existence of god and it is believed all around the world even though none of them have seen them. Next is the philosophy of doubt, in which some group challenges or questions a particular belief for its credibility. When it comes to religion and religious beliefs, both of them are being considered as crucial as doubt sometimes increases the beliefs and clears the complexities.

Since the start of human civilisation, religion has been a significant part of it. Islam was started in the Middle East and ever since then, it has been spread all over the world. Islam as a religion has given a lot of things to this world, like intellect, revelation to knowledge and wisdom, surgery, kinds of literature, and spirituality through mysticism (Sufi). It also teaches about the concept of the oneness of god, belief in angels, judgment day, and belief in the resurrection. Islam has given the theory of god's supremacy, and nobody in this world is supreme to god. When it comes to understanding philosophies in religion, each religion has its own perspectives, and every philosophy is designed to propagate its theory. For instance, Al-farabi was an Islamic scholar and had come up with his own view of religion. Most of the religious philosophies in this world are liberal in nature and some intellectual, where he is trying to change the spiritual values and practices into a modern look. He is against any orthodoxy and supported a collective and secular society where subjects like Science, Mathematics, and Medicine could flourish, and religion should be tolerant and spiritual.

The religious philosophy of Al-farabi has wholly changed the spiritual perspective of various historians, not only the Islamic but the historians of other parts of the world. Al-Farabi's philosophy has made the world realise the importance of Modern science, Medicine, and Metaphysics. He also revealed to the world that religion is merely a practice and that increasing the knowledge and wisdom of religion and religious study is not enough. His philosophies and theories had faced severe backlash from Islamic scholars and spiritual bodies, but he was still adamant about his perspectives. His attitudes do possess certain doubts, and one of them was his philosophy on religion and politics. Islam is a religion that does not have any concept of secularism or the existence of any religion in the world; hence, it is a very big question of whether this philosophy is going to work for Islam.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Religion and religious beliefs are essential parts of human life. Over the period, various academic and religious scholars have come up with their own philosophies regarding religion, religious beliefs, and religious practices. The research article aimed to provide the psychology of belief and doubt in Al-farabi's philosophy of religion. Globally, there are over 4000 religions in this world, and among them, the most followed are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism. The influence of religion can be seen all over the world, especially in Islam. Religious and non-religious scholars had come up with their own religious beliefs, and they had mentioned this through

their philosophies. The data collected for this research article is secondary data where special emphasis has been given to the peer-reviewed journal articles while it has been analysed with the help of thematic analysis. The psychology of belief and doubt is essential to understand as by this, it can be categorised as whether the philosophy of a person is correct or not. Islam as a religion has a huge significance over the world due to its religious beliefs, five pillars, and the overall contribution that has been given by it to society. Al-Farabi, a known Islamic scholar, theorist and music expert, had come up with his own philosophy of religions. In his philosophy, he promoted the need for practical and intellectual knowledge rather than becoming a mere tool of religion, which various scholars criticised.

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