**Arab Economics**

**Introduction**

Al-Tusi (1201-1274), who revived the philosophic tradition in Persia in the thirteenth century[[1]](#endnote-1), stated that Bryson`s work on this subject is the only one that was handed down from the Greek to the Arabs[[2]](#endnote-2). Not many Falasifah have used this neo-Pythagorean philosopher, whose name is a pseudonym and who wrote this work about original economics probably in the second century BC. The exception is Avicenna. He wrote a large letter on the government of the house and he did use ´Bryson´, as the reader will see soon. Neither were all users of ´Bryson´ Falasifah. The famous scholar Miskawayh (932- 1030), for instance, almost copied the paragraphs about the education of boys from the *Oikonomikos* of ´Bryson´ in his *The Refinement of Character*[[3]](#endnote-3)*.*

In medieval Europe Avicenna (980-1037AD), who lived in Persia, at several courts, was considered the most important scientist and philosopher after Aristotle and Alfarabi. The Scholastics were simply impressed by his works. Only some of them were translated from Arabic in Latin but these books have had a tremendous influence in the West. The enormous *Kitab el Shifa* (Eng.: *Book of healing {*of the soul DN}, Lat.: *Sufficentia*), a complete overview of science and philosophy, was in the thirteenth and fourteenth century intensively read by the medieval scholars in the West. Here are also to be found the three practical sciences, of which economics is the second one, their definitions, and their reach,.Avicenna stayed however best known in the West because of his Qanun fi-`t- Tibb (Eng.: *The canon of* *medicine*, Lat.: *Liber canonis de medicina*) For many centuries this medical encyclopedia became the textbook for the study of medicine in Europe and after its translation into Latin it has circulated in the university circles for about 500 years.

Avicenna´s booklet on the government of the house, which never has been translated in Latin has been given the title *Risala fi-s-siyasa* (Eng*. Book on politics)*.In this title ´house´ is not mentioned, because in this letter the author dedicates a paragraph to kingship and the booklet originally must have beena letter to a king.

**2. Summary of Avicenna`s *Book on politics*** [[4]](#endnote-4)

**[Introduction[[5]](#endnote-5)]**

[Praise of Allah][[6]](#endnote-6)

Allah created his servants for which he should be praised. *He made clear to them a way to thank him, by showing them His praise. He prescribed them religious laws, by which He passed to them still more possibilities to thank him. He equipped them with intellect, which He gave them to protect their belief and as a help and support in the world. He gave them speech, by which He created a distinction between man and wild and domestic animals.* (p. 51)

*Allah should be praised manifold for what falls under his good government and under the friendliness of his disposition, by which every individual species of his Creation possesses a part of His goodness. Every species has received in full its part of what is as well good for him as in his interests.* (p. 51) He bestowed upon them the perfections of his blessing and the completeness of his talents

Then he equipped the humans with specific characteristics of his blessings, so that he positioned them on top of much of his creation. *Their character is the most perfect, their make-up the most balanced; their way of life the most inspired.* (p. 51)

*Their striving during life is directed at the desirable intellect which He gave them; at the superior understanding with which power He supported them; at the good values in which beauty He wrapped them and the noble character traits with which high rank He embellished them. Moreover they can use the power of discrimination, by which He shows them the difference between the good and the bad, the opposition between sinful and honest behaviour and the superiority of maker over product, possessor over possession and ruler over subject* (p. 52). *The consequence of this is that man gets knowledge about the difference between the Creator and the created and finds a way to proof the existence of the eternal Creator without stubborn denial or visible arrogance* (p. 52),

Allah blessed them with a second gift. *He made them different as to reason and opinions, like he distinguished them as to possession, residences and ranks*. (p. 52) These differences are necessary, because they make people go through nasty experiences, which makes them aware of their depravity before they die.

[In which way people are different]

*Those who have reason know that if all people would be king, they would fight each other till the last person and if all people would be subject, all would die as under-dependents.* *When they were of equal wealth, in the same way it would become clear that the one would not assist the other and good friends would not support each other and if they were equal in poverty they would die in misery and perish suffering. But if mutual jealousy is [one of the characteristics]of their individuality and fighting each other [one of the characteristics] of their nature and is situated in the origin of their essence, then the difference in their destinies and the differences in their situations are a cause of their survival and a reason for satisfaction.*(p. 53)

*The one who becomes subjected to doubt is the person that has wealth but is not equipped with reason, is devoid of good morals and acquires his part of the world in the most easy way, once he starts to become aware of his missing reason and the inability to act according to his considerations. But he will be certain* *that the wealth he possesses is something else than the reason that he does not possess.* (p. 53).

*The one who has good morals is poor, if he desires the situation of the ignorant rich and does not doubt that he is estimated higher by this and that one will prefer him without these good morals*. *Who has a skill, which produces that by which he can stay alive, is not jealous on the possessor of large sovereignty or on the possessor of far reaching power*. (p. 53)

*All these are signs of wisdom, indications of merciful government and references to charity and mercy*. (p. 54)

[About government]

Allah gave kings the authority to govern their subjects. *They have to consider how the world has to be governed by wisdom, good order, perfect politics and solid government.* (p. 54) They are positioned at the top of the organisation of each kingdom to protect the creation. *After him the one model of governors follows the other: they who have obtained the guidance over states; who got the job of the control of cities and villages; after them those who He distinguished as owners of the herds and as leaders of the families and the servants, and after them the ones who He distinguished as possessors of dwellings and as educators of the wife and the sons*. *Each of them is a guard of them who he brought under his protection, brought together in his control and to whom his commands and prohibitions are directed and who as a subject fall under his authority*. (p. 54)

[In which way people are alike]

*Those who with regard to property, house, family, wealth and possessions belong to the lowest positions need everything what the most powerful king needs, like* *good government and control, much attention and appreciation, culture and education, justice and approval, and as less as possible disregard, neglect, disapproval and condemnation* (p. 54). The person who says: <To achieve this, much is required.> is right. For the individual that has no support and help, needs more good care and is more entitled to a high degree of circumspection, like the *protection by sufficient moneyrty and the support of assistants and helpers. This is because the poor without any possession needs more means to acquire his subsistence and to organize his situation properly than the rich*. (p. 55).

One may not like this comparison between the poor man and the king but for everyone who has thought about the matter it is a proof that we only mean to discuss how between people just *exist similarities in character and physical constitution. And that we talked about the requirements of the soul and about what is necessary for bodies and residences, without discussing other problems, dangers and destinies*. (p. 55)

[These similarities become manifest in the need for food, the protection of a residence, the marriage with a wife, the education of children and the dealing with assistants and experts.]

*Everybody should know that both the king as his subject does need food in order to live and make their personality survive*. *They need food stocks as well, upon which they may drawl when necessary, because the way people acquire food is different from the way which is well known of animals.* (p. 55) They only look for food whenever they are hungry and *do not reserve anything of what has put them into motion because they are not aware of the recurrence of their need of it.* (p. 55)

*Man, however, needs a place where he can store and preserve whatever he acquires, till the time that he needs it. That is why it is necessary to put into use dwellings and residences. Whenever he has taken into possession a house and whatever he has acquired keeps there, he will have the need to protect it against the one who wants it (too) and to keep it away from the one who wishes it (too)* (p. 56) Of course the governor of the house cannot protect the food in person, because then he would not be able to go and work outside to provide for the new food.

*(That is why)* *it is also necessary to designate a deputy to protect his possessions. For deputy only somebody is suited, whom his soul trusts. His soul only trusts the partner that Allah (His name is praised) gave as confidant to the husband. This is the cause of the taking of the wife*[[7]](#endnote-7)*.* (p. 56)

Once they are married children will be born. With the amount of children the need for food rises and *then helpers, supporters, experts and servants are necessary. This way the man becomes a protector and gets subjects under his authority.* (p. 57*)* These are matters that both king and subjects need.

*For in (his life on) this world every human needs[[8]](#endnote-8)*:

*food, which keeps his mind steady and his body erect,*

*a house, where he preserves his possessions and in which he looks for protection whenever he quits working,*

*a partner, who protects his dwelling for him and preserves for him his acquisition,*

*children, who work for him when he will not be able to do that himself anymore, realize his lineage and keep his memory vivid,*

*assistants and experts, who help him and carry his burdens.*

*If these (people) have come together for him, he is their protector and caretaker and they are for him like subjects or as a flock.* (p. 57)

[How a flock is protected]

*For a flock it is necessary that her protector during the day, by grass and water, and at night by fences and circumclosures pursues the welfare of its free grazing cattle.* *And that he sends his surveyors into the meadows and disperses his dogs over his estates to protect them against lions and calamities, like theft, attack and plunder. And that he chooses warm winter locations and fresh summer locations for her, looks for green grass and clear water, is attentive during gestation and is prepared for the moment of giving birth*. *It is necessary too that he herds the flock in view of her wellbeing and trains it on the basis of unanimity, by way of shouting, whistling, rebuking and threatening. This is sufficient when the flock obeys well and is sincerely affectionate, so that he does not need to hit them with his stick*.

*In the same way the wife, the child and the servant and the subaltern need the owner, because of which he is obliged to guard and protect them, to carry their burdens, to provide for their necessities, to govern them well, to form them by making merry and arousing fear, by promise and threat, by approaching and taking his distance, by contribution and withdrawal, till their behaviour towards him is good.* (p. 57/58)

*These are summarized the words [which still need clarification] about the necessity of and the need for government. We will now continue with commented examples in chapters which elaborate it more in detail*. (p. 58)Inshallah, it will be preceded by a chapter about the government by the male of his soul, *because that is the most beautiful in the order and brings the most gain.* (p. 58)

**About the way the male governs his soul**

[Self-government]

*Of the existing kinds of government the government of the soul is the first with which man should begin, because the soul stands closest to him.* *It is the most valuable for him and the most important to pay attention to*. (p. 59) It can be governed without awareness of the government of others.

*One of the most important things that somebody needs in order to be able to govern his soul is to know that this is equipped with an intellect that has the directing function and that the soul, which spurs to evil and has a large amount of shortcomings and possesses many ill sides in its nature and in the root of its character, must be directed*. (p. 59) And he has to know that who wants improvement of his immorality, needs to know every wickedness of it with a knowledge that perpetrates deeply in it. *After this* *he may start with its improvement, because otherwise is what he improves, not protected or solid* (p. 59)

One has to completely know all one’s defects completely. *When he neglects some of these defects, in the same time knowing that he has to enclose them if he wants to improve them, then he is like somebody who cures the outside of a wound, while the inside of it contains an illness.* (p. 59) An illness of the body cannot be neglected either. One needs a clear picture of the vices one may possess.

As long as the knowledge of a man of his sole is unreliable and he is not sufficiently aware of his shortcomings and he tolerates his weaknesses to a large extent, he has to compensate this by a person who will correct him: a friend. This is not just a friend but *a loving, understanding friend, who is involved in him with a certain degree of distance and who shows him the goodness of his situations as good and the badness of them as bad.* (p. 60).

[Kings and subjects and their exposure to opposition]

*The people who have the greatest right to this and need this the most are leaders and kings.* (p. 60) If they stop with carefully deliberating and encouraging proper behaviour to dominate, they do not pay attention anymore to their mistakes and errors succeed each other, *with only some exceptions of whom the reason shines, the intellect dominates and the insight in self-control is excellent.[[9]](#endnote-9)* (p. 60)

If kings and leaders hide their shortcomings for each other, then, when they are threatened by confronting statements about their defects, the degree of disaster increases. *They are afraid of messages with slander and venom, hate and seductions, gossip and secret accusations.* (p. 60/1) If knowledge of their imperfections is blocked they think that they do not possess them.

*In this respect the situation of the people under them (in rank) is incomparable with it* (p. 61), because they cannot hide their vices from each other, living as closely together as they do. Once confronted with them they will necessarily improve the ugliest of their vices,

*Living together* *causes* *on account* *of* *opposed arguments, (that people) raise objections against each other and defend their own points of view.* (p. 61) They accuse each other of vices and make each other reproaches. Both parties even come with false accusations. But they decline the use of arguments of supporters and do not use spies to get informed [as kings do DN].

*The one, however, who wants to maintain peace under his subjects does not attack them but treats them obligingly and not in an unjust way.* *He will not experience any difficulties in finding amongst his friends, relatives, companions and table- and dinner fellows somebody, who shows him his mistakes and advises him about his soul*. (p. 61)

[Bad friends and kings]

The perverse situation of kings en leaders increases because of what persons who are connected to the bad share with them; what nefarious table fellows make available to them and what those who do not honestly tell them their own mistakes and therefore should be ashamed to give advice about that kind of situations, suggest them.

Maybe one of them, who goes on to defend his behaviour, will nevertheless say that he will not give any advices anymore about such a situation*, because for a good advice goes that it burns like fire and is sharp as a spearhead.* (p. 62) It is, however, more probable that this person is going attack me[[10]](#endnote-10), because I assail him by pointing out his mistakes. Only a considerate partner, who thinks matters over, will be on my side.

*But an ignorant, who is irresponsible, will say <We do not feel ourselves safe against the collapse of our rank and the split with our partners, because of the violence of his power and his angry attack.>.* (p. 62/3) This person one has to tell that only friendship based on virtue and belief matters. If he is guided by these two he will not get lost on the road of friendship,

*Maybe you have decided for yourself that your companion is a brave person, who carefully considers all aspects or that is an irresponsible ignorant. (*p. 63)

*The carefully considering (companion), when leading, produces an excellence, that is even more complete, when he is afraid and concerned, guards his friendship and bows himself about the first matter which you mention. If he does consider, reflect and decide carefully, than he knows the good, to which you aspire en the right that you show, so that you get the best response.*

*As far as the ignorant irresponsible (companion) is concerned, you must not have any trust in his knowledge, and you have to be flexible towards him and you have to differ from him in meaning. Do not think that you have to be a friend of somebody with these characteristics or that you need his guiding. You have to know that he is not at your side.* (p. 63)

*The road which the prudent (companion) advises you to follow is not the easiest one, if you are confused and do not have a goal but your circumstances require to take that advised road*. (p. 64) He will advise you with the softest and friendliest words. *Talking in* *indirect and ambiguous words about the most remote places and most hidden situations is more effective than in direct and clear ones and giving examples is better than providing precise specifications.* (p. 64)

When your companion-friend is listening, take the time to explain what your worries are in a way that he may acknowledge what you want to say.

When you see that he does not listen, stop talking and wait for a more suitable moment..

[Studying one´s virtues and vices implies studying one´s fellow creatures]

*A person who is engaged in investigating his virtues and vices should study the characters, the temperaments and the natural dispositions of the people and consider their virtues and imperfections and compare them with those that he possesses himself.* *And he has to know that he shows similarity with them and that they show similarity with him, because people resemble each other. They are similar as the teeth of a comb. This way he knows, that if he sees a good virtue it is present in him too, be it visible or hidden. If the virtue is visible than he should he make it prosper and devote himself to it so that the virtue does not disappear nor decreases.* (p. 64/65)

*If the virtue is hidden then he should bring it to the surface and reveal it.* *Moreover he must pay attention to the requirements of the virtue and then it will react in the most simple and fastest way.* (p. 65)

If he sees an imperfection, bad habit of low character in another person he knows that such an inclination is present in him as well, open or hidden. If it is open he should get it under his control. If the inclination is hidden than he should put it under his surveillance in such a way that it does not become visible.

[Conclusion]

*Man must govern his soul by preparing it for reward and punishment.* *If the soul obeys well and follows what is imposed on it, like accepting virtues which produce a worthy character and a noble nature and renouncing vices, it will receive abounding amounts of praise, happiness will be brought to it and it will be made ready for certain blessings.* *If the soul obeys badly, wanders around without purpose and does not follow its rein, prefers vice above virtues, by which a mean or shameless character is produced, than the soul will be punished by an affluence of reprobation and shame, it is brought to vehement remorse and blessings are restrained from it, till it becomes more flexible. (*p. 65)

**About the way man manages his revenues and expenditures**

[Acquiring revenues]

*The human need for food urges every human to be active in the acquisition of his food - with the help of divine inspiration at his pursuit - and in the care for his sustenance - with the help of natural resources and possibilities that are available to make a surplus*. (p. 66)

When it comes to the means of existence, two kinds of people exist

*One kind that has enough and can enjoy livelihood, which is occasioned by heritage especially of herds* DN] *or the possession of real estate*

*A kind of people who need earnings, what inspires them to enter into commerce or to practice a craft for (the acquisition of) food.* (p. 66)

*A craft is more reliable and more permanent than commerce, because commerce takes place by means of property , and property is doomed to get lost, is an imminent evil and brings a lot of disasters* [[11]](#endnote-11) (p. 66)

*There are three kinds of occupations for solid men. First the kind that lies within the scope of reason, like sound meanings, correct advices and capable government. This concerns professions like those of minister, governor, politician or king; one within the sphere of good custom, like the art of writing, rhetoric, astrology and medicine. These are the occupations of literate and cultivated men. A kind in the sphere of courage and strength concerns professions like horse-men and javelin-throwers.* (p. 66)

Who wants to have one of these professions should get control over it and make progress in it, so that he becomes perfect in it. *He* *should know that nothing exists that adorns man more and is considered more valuable than availing of enough ways to provide for one’s own existence.* (p. 67)

*Next he must try to find a lifestyle of a craftsmanship in the most virtuous, friendly and discrete manner; stay away from greediness and desire and have nothing to do with immodest avarice and excessive consumption.* (p. 67)He must be awarethat all abundance and every profit acquired in a dishonest way means little, even for powerful people; is unimportant, even if his material property is huge; is disastrous, even if his welfare is plain and is disastrous, even if to outsiders it looks like progress.

*For if the pureness is not contaminated; effacing himself does not cause any trouble; his rank is unimportant and his weight is light, than the flavour is better, the possibilities are more lenient, the blessings are the most extensive and the profit is the largest.* (p. 67)

[On spending]

*Once man has acquired enough property[[12]](#endnote-12), it is most just, when a part of it is spent on taxes (Ar.: sādaquat), charity (Ar.: zakawāt) and acts of kindness and that a part is stored as a provision against the changeability of fortune and unforeseen circumstances.* (p. 67/8)

Taxes and charity should be given in a sincere way and as a preparation for the day that one will be poor oneself. The largest part should go to the poor, who hide their poverty. That is the way God meant donating to be done. Taxes and charity should be given sincerely and not be donated with the intention to profit from the return gift.

*Acts of kindness are subject to certain conditions. The first one is speed because speed makes matters more agreeable. The second is discretion because discretion makes things more clear. The third is disdain, because by disdain things become larger, he fourth is intensity and continuity because interruptions make that something becomes forgotten the first and erase the tracks of it. The fifth is the right choice of the object because if one does not choose the person who becomes better by it; is capable of expressing his thanks for it; can see the good intention of it en can accept it with love and friendship, than it is like seed that falls in a salty swamp*. (p 68/9)

*The right way to make expenditures and to accomplish an improvement in it lies between overdoing and stinginess and the continuous alternation of neglect and overrating.* (p. 69) A problem stays that even if somebody most carefully evaluates his expenditures and knows to distinguish all requirements of moderation, he still will be confronted with the accusations of the slanderer¸ the hate connected to every virtue and the jealousy, which comes with all sublime zeal and high rank.

That is why the prudent man has to develop some of his businesses in conformity with the intellect of the common people and often tolerate situations which might be seen as impropriety or spoilage. *For there are more people who praise the improprieties of the common people than those who praise and value moderation* ( p. 70) That is why somebody who praises purity is more special and more complete as to reason and possesses a better judgement.

If possible the prudent man should not neglect to store (money), in order to avoid as much as possible that changing circumstances exhaust his possibilities and that he will have to look for help over and over again and this way will stay poor.

*Allah is master of sufficient food and good protection.* (p. 70)

**About the way a man governs his wife**

*A good wife is a partner of the husband in his property. She is his conservator as to his property and his deputy when is he is on a journey* [[13]](#endnote-13).*That woman is best, who is sensible, pious, discrete, smart en dedicated, gives birth to many children, curbs her tongue, goes along with the reins, is sincere of heart, guards what has to be hidden, is serious in her presentation, respectable in her appearance, behaves with all the proper dignity within the family, renders her husband services easily and without reserve, is a competent manager, makes the insignificance of her husband look great by her esteem, drives away his sadness by the beauty of her character and let him forget his sorrows by her friendly attitude*. (p. 71)

*The man´s government of the wife prescribes three central matters, from which no deviation is permitted: respect, esteem and occupation of her thoughts with vital subjects.* (p. 71)

As to respect, if she does not respect her husband, he is despised by her with the consequence that she does not listen to his commands and does not care about his prohibitions. *She might even want to subjugate him, so that he obeys her. This way she changes in the commanding and he in the commanded, she becomes the one who prescribes and he the prescribed, she changes into a leading person and he in someone who is leaded and that is a distortion and a reversal. Woe the male on that day.* (p. 71/2)

*What dishonour and shame, decay and destruction accrue to him by her fights and* *tyranny and what harm is caused to him by her short-sightedness and bad government, and what is brought to him by her sin and subjugation to pleasure. For (forcing) respect is the essence and basis of the government of the husband of the wife and it is the thing by which every shortage is complemented; every loss is compensated; all what is missing is replaced and all what is perishable is pickled[[14]](#endnote-14). Respect cannot be replaced by anything and without respect nothing will become perfect between a man and his wife*. *The respect of a wife for her husband consists of nothing else than that the male makes himself honourable and that he guards his belief, virtuousness and reliability as to his promises and threats* (p. 72)

*The importance of esteem of the male for his wife lies in the fact that a dignified and free woman will be stimulated to many beautiful acts, when she thinks well of the esteem of her husband,* (p. 72),because she wants to maintain this esteem. *Without esteem the man cannot bring her to this inclination.* She will not to perform beautiful acts, whatever he attempts. Actually, the higher the rank and position of the woman is, the more this a proof of excellence and generosity of the husband.

*The esteem of the male for his wife consists of three things: permitting her to embellish her appearance, taking care that she is completely veiled and declining the opportunities to arouse her jalousie.[[15]](#endnote-15)* (p. 72/3)

*That she occupies her thoughts with vital subjects means that educating the children, leading her servants and controlling whatever is part of the domestic tasks belong to the occupations of the wife. For if the woman has no daily activities she is carefree and she only will be led by the desire to show her beautiful appearance and her exterior forms to men.* (p. 73) The result of this is that she considers the esteem of her husband to be insufficient, the time of his visits too short and that she is dissatisfied with all the good he does for her.

**About the way a man governs his son**

A son is entitled to a proper name and to a wet nurse who has no mental and physical defects, *for as one says: ´milk carries illnesses´.* (p. 74)

[Character formation]

*As* *soon as the son is taken away from his wet-nurse[[16]](#endnote-16) one has to make a start with his education and with the training of his character.* (p. 74) This should be begun before bad character-traits and shameless habits can get a grasp upon him. If they jump on him when still very young then he is not yet capable of repelling them because he is not yet able to make distinctions and has not yet a goal

*Nasty character features should be turned to the better and wrong habits should be diverted by interchangeably having fun with him and arising his fear, being close with him and segregating him, ignoring him and paying him attention, praising him and rebuking him. If that is not enough and it necessary to beat him, do not refrain from it.* *The first blow, which works intimidating and incites defence with the boy, should be short and painful.* (p. 74)

[About instruction on basic level]

A boy is ready for instruction as soon as he remembers what he hears. One should begin the boy’s education with teaching him the Koran, the letters of the alphabet and the particulars of the religion. After that he can move on to poetry. *The child should start with the poetry in which is expressed the excellence of the custom, the benedictions of science, the rejection of ignorance and the disapproval of weakness of mind and are stressed the piety of the ancestors, the approved courses of action, hospitality and the other honourable qualities.* (p. 75).

*The instructor of the boy should be sensible and pious, have insight in character-building, be adroit in the education of boys, austere and serious, and stay away from frivolity and folly. He should not neglect his reputation en be friendly in the presence of the boys.* (p. 76) He should be flexible, virtuous and orderly as well as straight. *He must serve the leaders of humankind and be aware that it is peculiar to the character of kings to fight each other and that the badly behaved jeer at each other.* (p. 76) He must know manners and behave himself properly in conversation.

*At school the boy should be accompanied by boys from higher circles, who possess good customs and agreeable habits*. *When the one boy is inspired by the other one, learns from him and likes to be in his company, separating them would be the best way to irritate him*. (p. 76)

He should pay attention to each of his pupils alternately and stimulate this way that the one disciple learns from the other by arousing competition and jealousy and showing approval and disapproval in a systematic way. *At another moment he should denounce their inability to reach their goal.* (p. 76)

After this both boys discuss events because *these discussions will open their reason and break through the restrictions of their understanding, for each them mostly talks about the most pleasurable he has seen and the most strange he has heard*. (p.76*)* This way the imagination of both will be stimulated and they will start to discuss the truth of the matter. *They agree or fight each other; they avoid the truth or try to recover it. This is caused by rivalry, pride, mutual competition and imitation, by which their character is trained, their ambition stimulated and their habits are formed.* (p. 77)

[Education after basic instruction: the Koran, reading and writing]

*Once the boy is ready with learning the Koran and knows the roots of the language by heart, with the help of them one has to direct his attention to the profession that he would like to exercise and on the road to it.* (p. 77) If he for example wants to become a scribe he should take lessons in language, writing, reciting, discussion and argumentation techniques, etc.

If he likes to *become something else, the instructor has* *to teach the boy not to take an arbitrary profession but only the profession that confirms his nature and fits him*. (p. 77) This is necessary in order to prevent that everybody would choose the most noble habits and the most sublime skills. My point is proven by the fact that some people easily and others difficultly acquire certain habits. That is why we see that some choose for literature and others for poetry, etc.

This goes for every category, for instance science. Within that area some choose for algebra, others for geometry and still others for medicine.

It is actually a great mystery how and why all people make choices and what are the reasons that they develop their skills in different directions. *Only* *Allah (His name be praised) knows them.* (p.78)

Sometimes human characters run counter to all customs and skills. A proof of this is that some parents have spent much energy and money on the education of a son but have not succeeded in reaching what they hoped for.

This shows that before he determines a profession for the boy, *the instructor first should weigh the character of the boy, try his abilities and test his intelligence* (p. 78). The instructor then knows his motivation and the degree to which his desire matches the requirements of the job and his shortcomings. *He then has to take a decision, which is the most definite in government and the most far-going of all what has to be executed during boyhood, because nothing should be offered to him which might lead to failure. (*p. 78)

[Setting him up]

*When the boy is a bit skilful in his profession, it belongs to good government that one sees to it that he has an income from it and can live on it.* (p.78/9) *Because if he can exist from it, he has two advantages; one of it is that once he has tasted the sweetness of earning by his profession and knows that the wealth and advantages that may come with it are enormous, he will not know any rest before he will have reached the perfection and the end of it. The second is that he gets accustomed to looking for sustenance, before he reaches a situation in which he possesses sufficient stock[[17]](#endnote-17). Because we think, that when the stock lessens, that the sons of well-off people with certainty may count on the property of their father and on that part of his stock, which is attributed to them. But if he is dependent on that, he is cut off from the opportunity to look for sustenance by a profession as well as from the protection by good customs.* (p. 78/9)

*Once the son is able to acquire by his profession, then it belongs to government to make him marry and let him continue his journey on his own.* (p. 79)

**About the way man governs his servants[[18]](#endnote-18)**

[Thank Allah for servants]

Servants*[[19]](#endnote-19)* should be governed in the same way as one`s hands and feet.

Just like one might say that the face of a man is his door-man, so you might call the assistants of a man his hands, because they are capable of doing what his hands can do. Who can save you walking can be your substitute in this regard, just the like the one who can observe what your eye can see can save you that activity.

*Servantoffer you many possibilities and their contribution gives many benefits. If they would not exist, the access to leisure would be firmly closed and the way to mercy would not be paved but blocked. You would be forced to a continuous getting up and sitting and to repeated intervening and retreating again and again, which would lead to weariness of the body. These are all indications of frivolity, carelessness en despicable and low manners. The consequence of it is loss of dignity; decrease of decorum and calmness; withdrawal of honour and* *disappearance of the right way to strive for religious and worldly matters and for earnestness. The degree of stability of these features make that one can distinguish between master and servant or leader and subject. (*p. 80/1)

*You have to thank Allah (to Him belong glory and majesty) for the benefits that are brought to your service by the servants and what you remain spared of because of them. You have to involve them and should not dismiss them, go and see them and not neglect them, treat them friendly and not repress them, because they may, just like other people be affected by laziness and tiredness, by boredom and slackness Just like other people are driven by what the wishes and needs that lie in their nature, (are driven) by their needs and bodily wishes*. (p.81)

[The acquisition of servants]

*If somebody wants to acquire a servant, he only should buy him, if he has met him and carefully has investigated, examined and tested him. If this is not possible than you have to use estimations, intuitions, guesses and suppositions.* (p. 81) Do avoid people with irregular forms and a disrupted figure, because character follows physical constitution. [[20]](#endnote-20) *In the proverbs of the Persians is said: <The most beautiful what an ugly man possesses, is his face.>* (p. 81/2) Also evade invalids and those who carry a disease. He should not be too intelligent, because a servant that is too smart will deceive you.

*Once this has happened one should consider for which work the servant, whom is acquired, is fit, which skill he might practice, and in what he shows superiority, so that he can support and satisfy his owner.* (p. 82/3)

[Specialization]

*A servant should not be moved, nor from one job to another and neither from one craft to another, because that strengthens the causes of hardship and is one more reason for decay.* *Who does this may be compared with the person who makes his horses plough and his oxen race*. (p. 83)

*For every human possesses certain competences and skills, to which his personality has enabled him and which are of use to him because of his talent. They are for him like an innate nature which should not be abandoned and like a natural disposition which should not be given up.* (p. 83)

*When someone who is servant is good at a certain job; masters this work; and is experienced in it; knows its situation; is familiar with it en used to doing this work then he should not be transferred to work with the owner chooses and selects for him but which is opposed to his nature and violates his essence.* (p. 83) This humiliates the servant because it brings him down to the status of a beginner. The slave is only useful for the owner there, if the owner forgets how useful he was in his earlier position, and the owner, once returned, will establish that the original situation has become worse.

*If one wants to decline a servant, this never should be done by moving him, because this shows small mindedness, impatience and want of civilization. (*p. 84) For he will have to replace him and his substitute will be more or less identical with the whom is moved. If he goes on with these replacements, at a certain moment he will remain without servants. *On the contrary, he must inculcate his servants that nobody of them will find a way to depart from his dwelling or to leave his house and residence.*(p. 84) For not only is this a perfect opportunity for the master to practice virtue and the best proof of fidelity and generosity. But *it is also the case that the servant will not follow orders; be sincere; have pity; be attentive and act with care or take supportive or defensive actions, before he is convinced and has ascertained, that he is a partner of the owner as to welfare and a companion as to his possessions and land, so that he feels himself protected against the removal and does not need any longer to be on his guard that he will be sent away.* (p. 84)

*If a servant however thinks that his owner´s fundament of respect is low en that his owner does not feel himself solidly committed to protecting him and that his position is not that sure because of mistakes he makes or his work ability decreases, than his attitude towards his owner is as somebody who is on journey without settling down somewhere*. (p. 84). He will not occupy himself with his orders and not worry about what happens. *His endeavour will only be directed at obtaining the provisions which he thinks necessary for the day that he will leave the owner and the support on which he can fall back when the owner treats him badly*. (p. 84/5)

*The owner of a servant should therefore avail of manners to improve and reform him/her without sending them away or removing them and without rejecting or ignoring them. The person who because of disciplinary measures puts his wrong behaviour on the right track and who is sincere by reliability earns his support. This is the way to enhance his authority and when mistakes are made he must be able to offer forgiveness.* (p. 85) When sins are repeated after punishment the servant may be beaten a little. One should not give up before his obstinacy is proven.

*But for the one, who stubbornly perseveres in his disobedience without changing it or for the one, who commits a terrible crime, compassion does not exist and is forgiveness within the boundaries of government impossible. The only proper decision for the owner is that he sends him away as soon as possible, before he will have demoralized the rest of the servants.* (p. 85)

[Avicenna adds a small epilogue]

We have finished with the duty of the male concerning his acting with respect to the government over himself and over the house. We only have *discussed few out of much and the essence without commenting on it.* (p. 86) The book would have become much larger, if we would added the proper examples from the stories that people tell and from poetry but we wanted to give the reader an easy time. *With few often much more is won than with much and something small may be more perfect than something big.* (p. 86)

*Allah is the helper to result and success. The treatise about politics is completed. Much praised be Allah, who is always adequate in his benedictions.* (p. 86*)*

1. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, philosopher and mathematician, brings in the thirteenth century the tradition of the Falasifah to the fore again in the East. John Cooper, *al-Tusi, Kwajah Nasir* (1201-74) retrieved from: <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H036.htm>*.* on 02-01-2018*.(--) He defended Ibn Sina (Avicenna) from the criticisms levelled against him from the direction of theology, (--), made a significant contribution to the acceptance of metaphysical argumentation and theology in Twelver (, the largest branch of Shia theology) DN) Shi`i theology, brought the ethical tradition of Ibn Miskawayh and the philosophers into the centre of Islamic discourse, and had a lasting effect on the study of exact sciences in Islam through both his original contributions to mathematics and astronomy and the observatory at Maraghah which the Mongol Kan Hülegü established for him.* He also revives the Greek practical philosophy by writing the *Nasirean ethics*, which despite its title contains a discourse on economics and one on politics as well. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Martin Plessner,as cited in ‘Bryson’ *Oikonomikos*, p.4. Plessner also cites al-Tusi when he writes that only a compendium (Ar.: muhtasar) of the treatise of ‘Bryson’ and no other Greek treatises on the subject has been translated in Arab. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Miskawayh, who worked as a librarian for different viziers, has written many books, amongst them quite some works on ethics. In this domain his most influential work has been *Tahdbib al-akhlaq (The refinement of character*). It contains six chapters: The principles of ethics; character and its refinement; the good and its divisions; justice; love and friendships and the health of the soul. To read: Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character (Tahdbib al-akhlaq*).Translated by Constantine K. Zurayk, Beirut (Great Books of the Islamic world), 2002. The paragraphs about the education of boys, which are inspired by ´Bryson´ are to be found in the second chapter of *Character and its refinement.* [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This book I have translated from a translation in Dutch of the manuscript in Leyden University! Avicenna*. Over het beheer van huis en haard. Ingeleid, vertaald en van commentaar voorzien door Tineke Hoff*. (*Avicenna. About the government of house and heart. Introduced, translated and commentated upon by Tineke Hof*.) Kapelle, Kampen (Kok, Agora) 1993. My translation has been checked and incidentally a bit changed by Sina Mirzai. He used [Arab version] Ali Mūhammed Esber. (ed.) *Al-Šayh Al-Ra’ys Ali ben Sinā, Ketāb Al-Syāsah* (*A book on Politics*).Bedāyāt (Syria, Jahble), 2007 and also (Farsi version) *Abū Áli ben Sinā, Resāleh Al-Syāsah* (*Political treatise*), translated by The Centre of Political and Social Studies of Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majles). Tehran , 2000. A substantial change is the title from *About the government of house and heart* into *About politics*. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Avicenna wrote many works in the form of letters, because he corresponded with other scholars and had to answer questions of several high functionaries. Some of these letters, like this epistle about economics served a general purpose, because they became copied, were dispersed and have exerted influence. Tineke Hoff, o.c. p. 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. I have divided the chapters into paragraphs and given each paragraph a title. These titles stand between square brackets [..]. They are not to be found in the original texts. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. This text is a nice example how the Falasifah mix Muslim and Greek knowledge. From the Xenophon-Ps. Aristotle-Bryson tradition is the argument that the man works outside and the woman inside the house and that the wife is busy with the conservation the food. In Greek economics this is followed by an explanation why the cooperation of husband and wife is natural. Here Avicenna however (according to Hoff, o.c. p. p 56) falls back on Sura 16:72: *Allah has given you from your midst wives (---)*. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. The bullet points are added by me. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Avicenna probably wants to suggest here that the person to whom he has sent this letter (and whom we do not know!) is an exemplary governor or king. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. This is not Avicenna. The text is not clear as to who might be meant here. Hoff, o.c. p 62, n. 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Note that Avicenna does not define trade as an art. He adopts, maybe under the influence of Plato and Aristotle, who both had declined trade, a very critical position here. He suggests that commerce is a more dangerous profession than practising crafts, because merchants work with money, which is very risky for one´s soul. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Until now the economists have not made a distinction between ´property´ and ´income from property´. Here must be read ´income from property´, because otherwise this sentence offers the risky advice to give away a part of one´s source of income. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. ´Bryson´ had written in Ch. 2 Par 3 of his *Oikonomikos* that the governor of the house needs someone who protects and governs what is in the house during his absence. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Hoff renders: *all what is transient is made superfluous.* . [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Avicenna leaves the matter of esteem for the wife at this. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. This paragraph is a specification of ´Bryson´, who only writes about early age in general terms. ´Bryson ´ had set young age against puberty. Avicenna moreover summarizes Bryson`s extensive alineas in Chapter 2.4 of his *Oikonomikos* about character in early youth in a few lines. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. I assume that Avicenna again has herds has in mind, when he is talking about *stoc*k here. They are capital and a source of income at the same time. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Avicenna uses *al-khaidam* and *al-makhdūm* and both words mean *servants,* Although the context sometimes suggests slaves and in the Dutch version the word *slaves* is used, I have rendered both term into *servants.* ‘Bryson’ did use *al-o’bayd: slaves* and *al-mamalyk:* *mamluk*. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Avicenna uses the same kind of analogies as ´Bryson´ when he compares the activities of servants with the activities of the limbs, although in a different wording. ´Bryson´ discusses the government of slaves after the government of income and expenditures. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. In the Arab world physiognomy was a science with a long tradition: the Qiyafa It existed of many sub-sciences, like the study of hand forms and hand lines, of footprints and for instance beauty spots. ´Bryson´ does not mention these bodily requirements. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)