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## THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF AL-FARABI: A LINGUISTIC-PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF “VIRTUE”, “HAPPINESS”, AND “CIVIC ETHICS”

Al-Farabi, one of the foundational thinkers in Islamic philosophy, developed an educational vision deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and influenced by Aristotelian thought. He views the human being as a creation of God, destined to return to Him, and believes that virtue is not innate but acquired through education and conscious effort. Since perfection is not present at birth, it must be cultivated; therefore, education is a central tool for achieving both personal fulfillment and moral excellence. According to Al-Farabi, the path to human happiness involves a clear understanding of what happiness is, a desire to pursue it, and the will to act upon that desire. He distinguishes between two essential methods for developing virtue: *ta'dib* – تادیب (discipline), which focuses on nurturing intellectual or theoretical virtues, and *ta'lim* – تعلیم (instruction), which supports the growth of ethical and practical virtues. These processes, he argues, must be carried out within a socially guided, morally sound community. Although some aspects of his philosophy may seem idealistic or aspirational, Al-Farabi's framework emphasizes the transformative power of education and the essential role of society in shaping the virtuous individual. This study examines his classification of virtues, the significance he attaches to civic life, and his belief in the human capacity for moral development. Using textual analysis of primary Arabic sources and comparative insights from Greek and Islamic traditions, the research affirms Al-Farabi's enduring relevance in contemporary debates on ethics, education, and human potential.

**Keywords:** Al-Farabi, happiness, virtue, education and training, islamic philosophy, civic ethics.

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### Әл-Фарабидің білім беру философиясы: «ізгілік», «бақыт» және «азаматтық этика» ұғымына тілдік-философиялық талдау

Ислам философиясының негізін қалаушы ойшылдардың бірі – Әбу Насыр әл-Фараби өзінің білім беру жүйесін исламдық ілімдерге сүйене отырып, Аристотельдің ой-пікірлерінің ықпалымен қалыптастырған. Ол адамды «Жаратушының жаратқаны» деп танып, оның түпкі мұраты өзін жаратқан «Жаратушыға қайта оралу» деп түсіндіреді. Әл-Фарабидің пікірінше, ізгілік – адамның бойында туа біткен, болмысынан берілген қасиет емес, адам баласы оны тәрбие мен саналы әрекет арқылы меңгереді. Адам баласының «кемелділік» қабілеті оған туа біте тән болмайтындықтан, оған арнайы тәрбиелену арқылы жетуі тиіс. Осы тұрғыдан алғанда, білім беру – жеке тұлғаның кемелденуі мен моральдық тұрғыдан жетілуінің басты құралы болып табылады.

Әбу Насыр әл-Фараби адам бақытына жетудің жолы – алдымен бақыттың мәнін айқындау, оған ұмтылу ниеті мен сол ниетті жүзеге асыруға деген ерік күші екенін атап көрсетеді. Ол ізгілікті қалыптастырудың екі негізгі әдісін айқындайды: біріншісі адамның зияткерлік әрі теориялық ізгі қасиеттерін дамытуға бағытталған «*тә'дīb* – تادیب (тәрбие; тәрбие беру, тәрбиелеу), ал екіншісі адамның этикалық және тәжірибелік ізгі қасиеттерін жетілдіретін «*та'лīm* – تعلیم (оқыту; білім беру, үйрету).

Әл-Фарабидің пайымдауынша, бұл үдерістер қоғамдық бақылауға негізделген және моральдық тұрғыдан сауатты қоғамда жүзеге асырылуы қажет. Оның кейбір философиялық ұстанымдары идеалистік немесе ұмтылыстық сипатта болып көрінгенімен, әл-Фарабидің

тұжырымдамасында білім берудің түрлендіруші күші мен ізгі жеке (кемел) тұлғаны қалыптастырудағы қоғамның маңызды рөліне баса назар аудартады.

Бұл мақалада әл-Фарабидің ізгі қасиеттерді жіктеу қағидаларын, оның азаматтық өмірге беретін маңыздылығын және адамның адамгершілік (моральдық) тұрғыда даму, кемелдену қабілетіне деген сенімі ғылыми негізде қарастырылады. Зерттеу барысында араб тіліндегі түпнұсқа дереккөздер мәтіндік талдау арқылы сараланып, грек және ислам философиялық дәстүрлерімен салыстырмалы талдау жасауға талпыныс жасалады. Осының нәтижесінде, қазіргі заманғы этика, білім беру және адам баласының әлеуеті (мүмкіндіктері) туралы пікірталастарда Әбу Насыр әл-Фарабидің айтқан тұжырымды ой-пікірлері күні бүгінге дейін өзінің өзектілігін сақтап отырғандығы айғақталады.

**Түйін сөздер:** әл-Фараби, бақыт, ізгілік, білім және тәрбие, ислам философиясы, азаматтық этика.

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**Философия образования аль-Фараби:  
лингвофилософский анализ «добродетели»,  
«счастья» и «гражданской этики»**

Аль-Фараби – один из основоположников исламской философии – разработал свою образовательную концепцию, глубоко укоренённую в исламских учениях и находящуюся под влиянием аристотелевской мысли. Человека он рассматривает как создание Бога, предназначенное к возвращению к своему Творцу. По мнению аль-Фараби добродетель не является врождённым качеством, а приобретается посредством воспитания и сознательных усилий. Поскольку совершенство не дано от рождения, его необходимо взращивать, что делает образование основным инструментом для достижения как личностного самосовершенствования, так и нравственного совершенства.

Согласно аль-Фараби, путь к человеческому счастью заключается в чёткости понимания его сути, в стремлении к нему и в наличии воли для реализации этого стремления. Философ различает два основных способа развития добродетели: *та'диб* – تَدْبیب (воспитание), направленный на формирование интеллектуальных и теоретических добродетелей, и *та'лим* – تَعْلِم (обучение), содействующий развитию этических и практических добродетелей. По его мнению, оба эти процесса должны осуществляться в условиях нравственно здорового и социально организованного общества.

Несмотря на то, что некоторые аспекты философии аль-Фараби могут восприниматься как идеалистические или утопические, его концепция подчёркивает преобразующую силу образования и ключевую роль общества в формировании добродетельной личности.

Настоящее исследование рассматривает его классификацию добродетелей, значение, которое он придаёт общественной жизни, а также его веру в способность человека к нравственному развитию. Посредством текстуального анализа первоисточников на арабском языке и сравнительного изучения греческих и исламских традиций доказывается неизменная актуальность идей аль-Фараби в современных дискуссиях об этике, образовании и раскрытии человеческого потенциала.

**Ключевые слова:** аль-Фараби, счастье, добродетель, обучение и воспитание, исламская философия, гражданская этика.

## Introduction

Since ancient times, beginning with Greek philosophers, the role of ethics and education, as well as their interrelation, has been a subject of philosophical inquiry. However, only a few thinkers – among them Abu Nasr Al-Farabi – have succeeded in harmoniously integrating divine principles with rational investigation. By

synthesizing Islamic theology with Aristotelian and Platonic thought, Al-Farabi reconceptualizes education as a purposeful journey aimed at the attainment of genuine and lasting happiness – a path achievable only through the deliberate cultivation of virtue within a just and morally upright society.

Contrary to deterministic or essentialist views on human nature, Al-Farabi maintained that moral

perfection is not innate but must be nurtured through conscious effort, rational guidance, and sustained practice. In his view, every individual possesses free will in choosing whether or not to act. If a person intends to act, but that action is strongly condemned by society or contradicts societal norms of intellectual and ethical development, the person may refrain from it. This underscores the crucial role of moral education and upbringing in shaping human behavior.

This research article explores Al-Farabi's dual approach to education, encapsulated in the concepts of *ta'dib* – تأديب (moral and intellectual discipline) and *ta'lim* – تعليم (structured instruction). It further examines the philosophical foundations of these concepts and their relevance within contemporary discussions on ethical education.

Al-Farabi's perspective diverges from classical models such as Platonic idealism, which considers virtue an inherent form. Instead, he emphasizes the concept of *fitrah* – a natural disposition that is flexible and requires active cultivation within social and moral contexts. His classification of virtues – intellectual, deliberative, ethical, and practical – reflects Aristotelian structures, yet it is deeply intertwined with Islamic values, particularly monotheism and the ultimate goal of drawing closer to God.

Although some scholars have critiqued Al-Farabi's idealism, especially regarding his concept of the "Virtuous city", they recognize that his emphasis on moral habit formation aligns with modern understandings of behavioral psychology. Recent academic works (e.g., Rabbani, 2021) have highlighted the tension in Al-Farabi's thought between the universality of *fitrah* and the acknowledgment of individual variability, offering a nuanced contribution to the ongoing nature versus nurture debate.

The ideas presented in Al-Farabi's extant treatises remain highly relevant to contemporary society. Issues such as the nature and value of the human being, life's purpose, modes of existence, education, ethics, happiness, virtue, and the necessity of peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding in society are central to both his works and current discourse.

Key societal matters – including human behavior, moral education, the understanding of virtue, the principles of justice, and related concepts – are thoroughly addressed in Al-Farabi's works, such as *Attainment of Happiness*, *The*

*Virtuous City*, and his socio-ethical treatises. Furthermore, the development and formation of the "Perfect man" are elaborated within *The Virtuous City*.

Al-Farabi consistently affirms that humans cannot live isolated from society; rather, the surrounding environment directly influences a person's attainment of happiness and self-perfection. His pathway to happiness contrasts with that proposed by later medieval philosophers like Ibn Arabi and Rumi, who emphasized mystical isolation as a route to perfection. In contrast, Al-Farabi believed that personal perfection is achievable only through active social engagement and collective development.

Nonetheless, the fact that Al-Farabi neither criticized the Sufi tradition nor refrained from incorporating Sufi elements into his writings suggests an area worthy of separate scholarly investigation.

## Literature review

Numerous scholarly works have been written in various languages on the pedagogical views of Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, particularly concerning teaching, education, learning, and upbringing.

To briefly summarize, these include a range of studies and publications dedicated to the analysis of his ideas, among which are key monographs, journal articles, and scientific reviews in Kazakh, Russian, Arabic, English, Turkish, and Persian.

**In Kazakh**, Absattar Derbisali. Al-Farabi and Spiritual Heritage – Almaty: Dauir, 1998., Mukhammedzhan Tynyshbaev. Al-Farabi's Pedagogical Views // Ulakat (Pedagogy Journal), 2006, No. 5, Kudaibergen Zhubanov. Al-Farabi and Kazakh Pedagogy // Pedagogy and Psychology, 2011, No. 4. A.T. Myrzabekova. The Role of Education in Al-Farabi's Philosophy of Knowledge // Bilim (Education), 2019, No. 2. Sh. T. Taubaeva. Pedagogical Concept of Al-Farabi // Bulletin of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. Series "Pedagogical Sciences", 2020, No. 1 (62), pp. 4-20.

**In Russian** – Baimurzyn, M. Problems of Pedagogy in the Scientific Heritage of Al-Farabi / M. Baimurzyn // Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR. Series of Social Sciences. – 1978. – No. 3. – P. 70-75., Kobesov, N.N. Problems of Education in the Doctrine of Al-Farabi // In: Problems of Spiritual Culture of

Kazakhstan. – Almaty, 1987., Kobesov, N.N. The Pedagogical Heritage of Al-Farabi. – Alma-Ata: Mektep, 1989., Kobesov, N.N. Al-Farabi on the Role of Knowledge in the Education of Man // In: Cultural Heritage of Kazakhstan. – Almaty, 1990., K.N. Sagadiyev. Pedagogical Ideas of Al-Farabi – Almaty: Rauan, 1992., K. Beysenbaev. The Pedagogical Heritage of Al-Farabi // Problems of Education, 2005, No. 4, Islam Zhanasova. Al-Farabi's Pedagogy in the Context of Modernity // Bulletin of Abai KazNPU, 2018, No. 1, T. Sabirov. Education and Upbringing in the Works of Al-Farabi // Pedagogy and Psychology, 2012, No. 3.

**In Arabic** – Yusuf Zidan. Al-Farabi: His Philosophy and Teachings – Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, 2003., Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri. The Educational Thought of Al-Farabi // Journal of Islamic Thought, 1999, Issue 12, Taha Abdul Rahman. The Theory of Education and Learning in Al-Farabi // Journal of Al-Manhaj, 2015, Issue 29, Abdullah Al-Qarni. Al-Farabi and the Concepts of Happiness and Education // Journal of Contemporary Arab Thought, 2018, Issue 40. In English – Dimitri Gutas. Al-Farabi and the Foundation of Islamic Pedagogy // Journal of Islamic Studies, Oxford University Press, 2000., Majid Fakhry. Al-Farabi's Philosophy of Education // Islamic Quarterly, 1997, Vol. 41, A. Mahmoudi. Virtue and Learning: Al-Farabi's Educational Philosophy // Journal of Islamic Thought, 2010., Richard Walzer. Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: A Revised Translation with Commentary – Oxford University Press, 1985., Tercan, N., & Nurysheva, G. (2021). Al-Farabi's creative heritage and his scientific-pedagogical ideas. *Perspektivy nauki i obrazovania* – Perspectives of Science and Education, 54 (6), 434-442.

**In Turkish** – Mahmut Kaya. Al-Farabi's Understanding of Education // Journal of the Faculty of Theology, 2004, Vol. 17, Ahmet Arslan. Morality and Education in Al-Farabi – Istanbul: Klasik Publishing, 2012. Ali Durusoy. Knowledge Acquisition and Education According to Al-Farabi // *Felsefe Dünyası* (World of Philosophy), 2015, Issue 62, Hüseyin Atay. Education and Virtue in Al-Farabi – Ankara: Ankara University Press, 1999.

**In Persian** – Mohammadreza Hakimi. Al-Farabi and Education in Islamic Civilization – Tehran: Daftar Nashr Maaref, 2005., Jafar Sajadi. Educational Thoughts of Al-Farabi // Journal of Education, 2008, Issue 2, Mehdi Farmanian. Al-

Farabi's Educational Philosophy and Its Application in Contemporary Times – Qom: Institute for Humanities Research, 2012., Alireza Ghaemi Nia. Al-Farabi and the Foundations of Teaching and Education – Tehran: Iranian Institute of Wisdom and Philosophy, 2017.

In addition to these, other relevant studies are addressing various aspects of Al-Farabi's educational philosophy.

### Research methodology

This study employs hermeneutic and comparative analysis methods. It focuses on the examination of Al-Farabi's original Arabic treatises – specifically *Tahsil al-Sa'ada* – تحصيل السعادة (Attainment of Happiness), *Al-Siyasa al-Madaniyya* – السياسة المدنية (The Civil Policy), and *Al-Tanbih 'ala Sabil al-Sa'ada* – التنبيه على سبيل السعادة (The Exhortation on the Way to Happiness) – along with their relevant commentaries.

These sources are analyzed within the intellectual context of the Islamic Golden Age and compared with Aristotelian virtue ethics.

Subsequently, the philosophical themes identified are critically examined through the lens of contemporary educational theory to assess their practical implications.

This research aims to explore, critique, and analyze Al-Farabi's philosophy of enlightenment, its objectives, and methodologies.

### Main part

Among the most basic concerns that have long fascinated Muslim thinkers, ethical scholars, and philosophers is the issue of the education and upbringing of humanity. The final goal and purpose of education, how it is conducted, and, eventually, the kind of human being it produces have remained significant and challenging issues to debate. The educational philosophy and system of any school of thought are shaped by its worldview – its perspective on existence, life, and the nature of the human being. This outlook determines the direction and orientation of the educational process within that framework. Consequently, investigating the truth and nature of the human being is one of the most essential inquiries in the philosophy of education. It is upon this understanding that the characteristics of the educational system are defined, the factors influencing human



development are identified, and the human being's capacities and potential for positive transformation are assessed – in short, determining the extent to which a person is capable of being educated and refined.

In this regard, philosophers have played the most significant role in shaping educational schools of thought. By presenting distinct systems derived from their perspectives on the nature of existence and the human being, they have sought to articulate and explain their educational views. In fact, by formulating their educational theories, defining their aims and ultimate goals, and critically engaging with other educational ideas, philosophers have consistently been among the most influential forces in the development of educational systems. Even today, the selection and determination of educational objectives still require acceptance of certain fundamental philosophical principles. Among these thinkers, Al-Farabi, the first major Islamic philosopher, built his work upon the ideas of two towering Greek figures – Plato (an ancient Greek philosopher (c. 427-347 BC), student of Socrates and teacher of Aristotle, known for his works on philosophy, ethics, and politics) and Aristotle (a classical Greek philosopher (384-322 BC), student of Plato and tutor to Alexander the Great, renowned for his contributions to logic, metaphysics, ethics, and natural sciences).

By carefully synthesizing their educational theories and harmonizing them with Islamic teachings, he crafted a cohesive educational framework rooted in religious thought. His innovations profoundly influenced later moral philosophers, leaving an indelible mark on their theories. This study aims to elucidate Al-Farabi's educational philosophy, its objectives and methodologies, and to critique and analyze them.

Before exploring Al-Farabi's educational theories, it is crucial first to examine the core principles and philosophical foundations that underpin his system. These elements formed the bedrock of his ethical and educational philosophy, shaping his unique approach to learning and moral development.

One of the fundamental elements that must be considered in any philosophical educational theory is its stance on the nature and essence of human beings. According to Al-Farabi, a human is a composite being made up of an immaterial soul and a physical body, with the soul and spirit being superior to the body. (Najjar, 1986:24).

He identifies five faculties of the human soul: the rational cognitive faculty (*natiq nazari* – ناطق نظري), the rational practical faculty (*natiq amali* – ناطق عملي), the appetitive faculty (*muntazi'a*), the imaginative faculty (*mutakhayila* – متخيلة), and the sensory faculty (*hasasa* – حساسة). Among these faculties, only the rational cognitive faculty can perceive happiness, provided that it is attended to, developed, and not neglected. (Sajjadi, 1972:238)

This means that when a person applies the primary principles and knowledge granted by the active intellect correctly, understands them thoroughly, and through the appetitive faculty develops a desire for them, then reflects carefully on what actions to take, and finally puts the results of this reflection into practice through the practical rational faculty, while the imaginative and sensory faculties cooperate in supporting the rational practical faculty – at that point, all that comes from the person is good. Therefore, true voluntary good originates only from this aspect. (Enayat, 1985:111)

Al-Farabi's philosophical system presents a nuanced understanding of human nature that balances universal foundations with individual differences. At its core lies the concept of *fitrah* (فطرة), a sound, innate nature shared by all mentally healthy humans that enables comprehension of primary truths and serves as the basis for universal happiness. This common human disposition, while fundamental, manifests differently across individuals, resulting in varying capacities for reasoning, perception, and understanding. Crucially, Al-Farabi distinguishes between necessary and sufficient conditions for action: our shared *fitrah* (فطرة) constitutes the necessary "Natural disposition" for moral agency, yet it doesn't determine actions absolutely, thereby preserving free will while avoiding determinism. This sophisticated framework accommodates both the universal human potential for virtue and the particular ways this potential develops in different individuals, reflecting Al-Farabi's characteristically balanced synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy with Islamic thought. The system ultimately maintains moral responsibility while acknowledging natural variations in human capabilities, offering a comprehensive basis for ethical education that recognizes our common humanity without neglecting individual uniqueness.

According to Al-Farabi, the natural disposition (*fitrah* – فطرة) in human beings exists only in

potential form. To bring this innate potential into actuality and guide it toward ultimate perfection, or at the very least, bring it closer to such fulfillment, it must be cultivated through deliberate discipline, continuous practice, and the strengthening of the will. The realization of this potential is not automatic; rather, it requires conscious effort aligned with the demands inherent in human nature. (Hekmat, 2007:83)

He further explains that if such discipline and training are not applied to one's natural dispositions, the innate potential will remain unactualized, gradually deteriorate, and eventually be lost over time. Moreover, if this discipline is directed toward base or ignoble pursuits, the same potential will become habituated to lower forms of action, thereby diverting away from higher and nobler acts. In this way, the soul inclines toward what is inferior, rather than being oriented toward its true perfection (Khadami, 2012:97).

Therefore, according to Al-Farabi, the existential perfection of a human being is not present in any individual from the outset in an actualized form. No human is inherently predisposed to perfection from the beginning of their existence. This is because the natural disposition (*fitrah* – فطرة) is a composite of opposing elements; while it inclines toward perfection, it simultaneously tends toward its opposite. Consequently, a person's attainment of perfection – and ultimately, happiness – through their natural disposition is not possible from birth. It requires deliberate, voluntary actions and choices. If perfection were innate and fully actualized from the start, no differences in perfection would be observed among humans. The reason for this is that *fitrah* consists of contradictory elements (Davari, 1983:52).

One of the fundamental assumptions of ethics as a discipline – and a key presupposition in education – is the notion that human character is capable of change; in other words, that humans are educable. It is only under the belief in the mutability of human character that ethics, concerned with how virtues can be acquired and vices avoided, finds its meaning. Ethics not only aims to identify and understand various virtues and vices, but also informs the processes of moral cultivation. Education, which is understood as creating the conditions necessary for the development of a being's innate capacities and the actualization of its latent potentials, is considered

one of the most important outcomes of ethical thought. Like Aristotle (Pour Hosseini, 1990:91), Al-Farabi maintains that character is malleable and subject to transformation.

Morality – whether virtuous or vicious – is essentially acquired. As long as a person has not yet developed a particular trait, it remains within their capacity to acquire it. And even once a trait has been formed, it can still be altered through one's own will and choice (Al-Yasin, 1980:53).

In contrast, some philosophers maintain that morality is natural – that is, it arises from human nature itself and is therefore immutable. Others, however, hold a more nuanced view, arguing that certain aspects of morality are rooted in nature and thus unchangeable, while other aspects are shaped by habit and are therefore subject to change and decay (Al-Yasin, 1992:161).

Al-Farabi, like Aristotle, holds that human beings are naturally predisposed to social life; in other words, they are, by nature, political or civic creatures (*madani al-tabi'*). He argues that humans, to fulfill their needs, have no choice but to engage in social interaction, cooperation, and mutual assistance. However, in Al-Farabi's view, this cooperation is not merely a means for meeting necessities or ensuring physical survival. Rather, it empowers individuals to master the conditions of life and facilitates their journey toward perfection and ultimate happiness. From his perspective, human beings depend on social life not only for their existential stability but also for their attainment of perfection. Al-Farabi appears to prioritize the pursuit of virtue and perfection over material existence, viewing moral and intellectual development as the true foundation of human flourishing (Nasri, 1991:123).

He says: Each human being is created with a nature that, both for the stability of their existence and for the attainment of their highest possible perfections, depends on numerous needs – needs that no individual can fulfill alone. Rather, the fulfillment of these needs requires a collective, wherein each person takes responsibility for meeting a specific aspect of what is required. Every individual, therefore, stands in such a relation to others that mutual dependency becomes a necessity. For this reason, no person can reach the perfection destined for them by their natural disposition except through social life, through communities and associations composed of many

individuals who assist and support one another (Nasri, 1991:131).

Al-Farabi also states in *al-Siyasa al-Madaniyya* – السياسة المدنية (*The Political Regime*): "Among all living beings, the human is one of those species that, in an absolute sense, cannot attain even the most basic and essential needs of life – let alone the higher and more excellent states – except through social life, through the gathering of many individuals in a single location, and through their mutual connectedness and cooperation" (Sajjadi, 1972:230).

Al-Farabi views the human being as a composite of body and soul, possessing, at least potentially, both virtuous and noble qualities, as well as base and blameworthy ones. It is the function of society to actualize these potential traits, bringing them from mere possibility into reality. Neither human virtues nor vices can fully manifest in isolation or individual life; rather, they require the context of social interaction to emerge. This view is emphasized not only by Aristotle but also by the Muslim philosophers who followed in his intellectual tradition (Lotfi, 1972:391).

According to Al-Farabi, human beings attain perfection and happiness within the context of the city (*madinah* – مدينة), but not just any city. True perfection is achieved only in a city whose inhabitants are guided by a virtuous and fully cultivated leader. On this basis, the virtuous city (*al-madinah al-fadilah* – المدينة الفاضلة) functions, in Al-Farabi's view, as an educational environment, where the laws and institutions serve a formative and moral purpose.

The philosophical foundation of this idea lies in Al-Farabi's analogy between the city and the human body: just as each organ in the body has a specific function, so too does each member of the city. And just as the dysfunction of an organ requires the intervention of a physician, any disorder in the city requires the guidance of a wise and capable ruler to restore its health and harmony (Sajjadi, 1972:208-209).

### Moral Virtues

In his ethical and educational writings, Al-Farabi discusses the concept of virtue, its various types, and its essential role in shaping human character and ultimately leading the individual to perfection. He defines virtue as a natural disposition within the human being for performing good actions. When these actions are repeated and

become habitual, they give rise to stable traits in the soul dispositions through which a person performs deeds that are subject to praise or blame. Such a stable quality of the soul, formed through repetition and habituation of good acts, is what Al-Farabi refers to as *virtue* (*fadilah* – فاضلة) (Najjar, 1986:31).

Al-Farabi holds that not all virtues are innate. While individuals may have a natural inclination toward certain types of virtues, the actual acquisition of virtue occurs through habit and repetition. A single act – whether good or bad – does not suffice to classify a person as virtuous or wicked. It is only through the consistent performance of virtuous actions that one becomes a virtuous person, just as vice emerges from the habitual repetition of immoral acts (Lotfi, 1984:55-56).

Like Aristotle, Al-Farabi defines virtue as *moderation* (*i'tidāl* – اعتدال) and maintains that when actions deviate from the balanced state, whether through excess or deficiency, they become morally blameworthy. For Al-Farabi, what truly matters is the maintenance of equilibrium and moderation in one's conduct, as it is this balanced state that renders actions virtuous and serves as a means of attaining perfection and happiness. Even excess in performing seemingly good actions is not considered a virtue; rather, it constitutes vice and becomes an obstacle to the realization of human perfection (Lotfi, 1984:65-66).

Al-Farabi classifies virtues into four categories and explains that the human achievements found among nations and citizens, through which both worldly happiness in this life and ultimate felicity in the hereafter are attained, fall into four types: theoretical virtues, intellectual (or deliberative) virtues, ethical (moral) virtues, and practical arts or productive skills (*ṣanā'āt 'amaliyya* – صناعات عملية) (Boumelhem, 1981:25).

He defines theoretical virtues (*al-fadā'il al-naẓariyya* – الفضائل النظرية) as forms of knowledge whose ultimate aim is to render the intelligibles comprehensible and to establish certainty in the human mind regarding their existence. Some of these forms of knowledge are innate, arising in the human being without their knowing how or from where they were acquired – these are called *primary or intuitive sciences*. Others are obtained through reflection, investigation, inference, teaching, and learning.

Al-Farabi explains that in addition to the theoretical faculty, the human being requires another faculty known as the deliberative or rational faculty (*al-quwwa al-fikriyya* – القوة الفكرية) in order to perceive aspects of change in time and space and to determine what is most beneficial for attaining higher ends. Intellectual virtues (*al-faḍā'il al-fikriyya* – الفضائل الفكرية) thus arise from this faculty, as it enables the individual to infer what is most effective and appropriate for noble and virtuous goals. However, if the deliberative faculty is used to identify what best serves base or immoral ends, such reasoning should not be called an intellectual virtue but deserves another, less honorable name. (Boumelhem, 1981:56-57)

However, the theoretical intellect is dependent on what Al-Farabi refers to as the practical intellect, or *will*. Since the human will is inherently influenced by both natural and social factors, it does not follow fixed and immutable laws. As a result, moral virtues (*al-faḍā'il al-khuluqiyya* – الفضائل الخلقية) vary according to differences in time, place, and individual circumstances. Virtues related to appetite, pleasure, joy, anger, and similar emotions are all subject to such variability. Practical virtues (*al-faḍā'il al-'amaliyya* – الفضائل العملية) are defined as the realization of moral virtues and the performance of good deeds. Al-Farabi holds that practical virtue is subordinate to intellectual virtue, which in turn is subordinate to theoretical virtue. This hierarchical relationship reflects the structured interdependence of the faculties: theoretical understanding guides deliberation, and deliberation informs ethical action.

### Happiness (Sa'adah – سعادة)

After reviewing various views on happiness, Al-Farabi states that it is something every human being desires and toward which they strive with effort and determination. Indeed, the very movement and inclination of a person is directed toward happiness, for happiness is perfection itself, and thus requires no further explanation. He considers the ultimate goal of ethics and education to be the attainment of happiness (*sa'adah* – سعادة). Happiness, in Al-Farabi's point of view, is the process of transformation and progression of the soul toward its existential perfection, reaching a state so complete that it no longer depends on material substance. At this highest level, the human

being becomes one of the immaterial and transcendent beings. (Sajjadi, 1972:186)

According to Al-Farabi, happiness (*sa'adah* – سعادة) is the absolute good – the greatest and most complete good – and is the most deserving thing to be self-sufficient in itself, such that its attainment eliminates the need for anything else. He defines happiness in terms of good, and good in terms of happiness. Conversely, anything that prevents a person from attaining happiness is considered absolute evil (*sharr 'alā al-ittlāq* – شر على الإطلاق). (Boumelhem, 1972-1980:49)

**a. Happiness as a Questionable Concept:** Al-Farabi divides happiness into two categories: true happiness and apparent (or presumed) happiness. True happiness is attainable through performing good deeds, virtuous actions, and embodying virtues, whereas the acquisition of knowledge, wealth, worldly pleasures, and similar pursuits constitutes *apparent happiness*. Al-Farabi does not discuss individual happiness apart from civic life or life among nations. For him, the criterion to distinguish true happiness from apparent happiness is whether an individual belongs to the *virtuous city* (*al-madīnah al-fāḍilah* – المدينة الفاضلة) or is ignorant (*jāhil* – جاهل). Achieving true happiness depends on living under the rule of a wise and just society (Khadami, 2012:88).

Al-Farabi regards happiness (*sa'adah* – سعادة) as the absolute good. He explains that everything beneficial on the path to attaining happiness is considered good, not inherently or by itself, but good because of the utility it provides in reaching happiness. He further states that happiness is the greatest good among all goods, and the most complete end toward which human beings naturally strive. It becomes clear, therefore, that happiness stands as the highest good and the most perfect ultimate goal among all effective and influential factors for which every person endeavors. (Boumelhem, 1972:47)

Elsewhere, Al-Farabi defines true good as the perfection of existence, and true evil as the absence of existential perfection. Accordingly, from his perspective, happiness is equivalent to good, and good is equivalent to existence and perfection. Therefore, it can be concluded that happiness is equivalent to existence and perfection. However, happiness does not correspond to all meanings of good, such as relative good or extrinsic good, but



rather corresponds solely to absolute good. (Najjar, 1980:86)

Al-Farabi also considers pleasure to be a complex (questionable) concept and identifies its highest degree as the manifestation of God within the human heart and the direct, intuitive perception of God. He views happiness as a form of pleasure, but not a sensory or fleeting pleasure; rather, it is an intellectual, long-lasting, and multi-leveled pleasure, complex and enduring over time. (Khadami, 1986:91)

Accordingly, pleasure, good, and happiness are equivalent concepts, and their doubts and other attributes can be applied interchangeably. Just as the direct and intuitive perception of God constitutes the highest pleasure (the ultimate pleasure), it is also considered the highest form of happiness. A similar perspective can be found in the writings of Mulla Sadra, who also equates happiness with existence and good, asserting that the attributes they share – including the doubt about existence – apply interchangeably to one another. He states: "Existence is good and happiness, and the perception and awareness of existence constitute another form of good and happiness" (Shirazi, 1986:121).

On the other hand, he (Mulla Sadra صدر الدين الشيرازي, a prominent 17th-century Persian philosopher (1571–1640), founder of the Transcendent Philosophy (al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah – الحكمة المتعالية) in Islamic philosophy) also considers existence to be equivalent to pleasure and concludes that the stronger the existence of something, the more intense and enduring its pleasure will be. Since the existence of the Almighty God is the most intense, complete, and perfect of all existents, perceiving Him constitutes the highest and most perfect happiness, and the pleasure derived from this perception is the strongest and most intense pleasure (Shirazi, 1986:122).

**b. Happiness is not accidental:** In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states that happiness and well-being are common possessions shared by all humans. For this reason, many people can achieve it, and those who are not hindered by a lack of virtue can attain it through education and effort. If becoming happy through this method is more valuable than happiness attained by chance, then reason dictates that this is indeed the case. To consider the greatest and most noble good

(happiness) as the result of mere chance is a sign of negligence (Lotfi, 1984:38).

Diligence is essential for a happy life accompanied by virtue. Such a life belongs to a happy and blessed person, who will persist in happiness throughout their life. This is because they will consistently, or at least more often than others, think and act following virtue (Lotfi, 1984:41).

Like his teacher Aristotle, Al-Farabi believes that happiness is not accidental; rather, it is realized when an individual, throughout their entire life, not just for a limited period, consistently performs virtuous actions based on their own will and choice. In other words, a person cannot be called happy if they achieve virtue or experience noble spiritual states such as mercy and pleasure unintentionally, accidentally, or for a limited time. True happiness requires deliberate and continuous virtuous action across the three dimensions of existence: actions, mental states, and intellectual discernment.

It is important to understand that, firstly, sometimes noble and virtuous actions may occur to a person accidentally or be considered actions performed without will and choice. However, regarding happiness, it is not the case that one can attain it when such virtuous actions are performed without intention or volition. Rather, these actions must be done deliberately and by choice. Moreover, if a person performs such actions only occasionally or in certain matters, they will not achieve happiness. Instead, virtuous actions must be chosen consistently in all that one does, throughout their entire life and lifetime (Al-Yasin, 1980:53).

**c. Happiness Is Beyond Praise:** Philosophers differ in their views on whether happiness is something worthy of praise and commendation, or if it transcends mere praise altogether. Aristotle considers happiness to be beyond mere praise and states: "Happiness is not an ordinary gift, and it seems that the reason anything is praiseworthy is because it possesses a particular quality and bears a certain relation to something else. Just as it is meaningless to attribute any relation to God and consequently deem Him praiseworthy, since simple praise is insufficient to express our true feelings about Him, so too is happiness and blessedness. No one praises happiness as they do justice; rather, all people regard happiness as something superior and

more divine than justice. Praise is appropriate for virtue, not for happiness. Happiness and blessedness are among the noblest and most complete things, especially because they are the primary source (of all actions), and we consider the origin and cause of goods and gifts to be something noble and divine" (Pour Hosseini, 1990:103).

However, Al-Farabi regards happiness as something related to human states and conditions that are not inherently subject to praise or blame, and thus happiness itself is praiseworthy, and what leads a person to happiness consists entirely of states that are neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy (Al-Yasin, 1980:81).

### **The Goal of Education and Training**

Al-Farabi believes that a perfect human is adorned with moral virtues and possesses sufficient knowledge of virtues and happiness. He emphasizes that theoretical knowledge of these matters through the rational faculty, though necessary, is not sufficient. Rather, a person must have a strong desire for them, make them the ultimate aim and goal of life, and in practice also be endowed with these virtues. In other words, reaching the highest degree of ultimate happiness requires not only knowledge and reason but also action. He expresses this as follows: "When a person has correctly recognized happiness but does not make it the goal and purpose of their life, nor acquires a genuine desire toward it, or if their enthusiasm for it is weak, and consequently sets as the aim and goal of their life something that is not true happiness, and employs their other powers toward achieving that aim, then what results is nothing but evil" (Sajjadi, 1972:243).

He also says: "When a person applies the initial principles and fundamental knowledge granted to them by the Active Intellect, correctly understands them, and through their appetitive faculty becomes passionate about them... and then puts the result of their reasoning into practice employing appropriate tools and instruments... at that time, whatever comes from that person will be entirely good" (Sajjadi, 1972:259).

A person needs to examine their soul, recognize its flaws, and actively strive to develop virtues and good qualities. In Al-Farabi's philosophy, achieving these virtues, which are essential for building the ideal society and ultimately ensuring the happiness of its members, is only possible through proper education and

upbringing. This is why education holds such a vital place in his system of thought. Al-Farabi sees the goal of education and upbringing as creating a balance in the faculties of desire, anger, obedience, and virtue – that is, moderation. He defines good actions as those that fall within the middle ground, since excessive actions harm both the soul and the body. Regarding how to recognize this balance in a person's actions, he says:

"It is necessary to measure the quantity of actions in terms of their number and amount, as well as their quality in terms of intensity and weakness. This should be done while considering the relation of these actions to the doer, the person for whom the actions are done, and the time and place of the act, thus taking moderation into account" (Najjar, 1986:38).

Al-Farabi believes that recognizing moderation in actions depends on careful consideration of the time and place of the act, the person performing it, their purpose, the means they use, and the act itself. In other words, a person must maintain balance across all these aspects. According to Al-Farabi, the proper measure for the middle ground of any action or character trait is based on a fixed and objective standard – namely, happiness (*sa'adah* – سعادة). At the same time, individual differences and varying circumstances must be taken into account when determining the right balance for each person (Imani, 2017:93).

**Education and Discipline:** According to Al-Farabi, since human beings differ by nature and no one is inherently born with knowledge of happiness and its causes, people need teachers and guides. However, the need for guidance and instruction varies among individuals. Al-Farabi expresses this idea as follows: Since the purpose of human creation is to achieve ultimate happiness, one must first understand the true meaning of happiness and make it the ultimate goal in life. Then, a person needs to recognize the actions required to attain that happiness and strive to perform them. People are naturally different in their dispositions, so no one is born with an innate knowledge of happiness or the ability to act accordingly without guidance. In both understanding what happiness is and knowing how to act to achieve it, individuals need a guide or mentor. Some require less guidance, others more.

Moreover, even when people are guided in these matters, it does not automatically mean they will act accordingly without encouragement or

motivation. Most people need ongoing guidance and support to truly walk this path (Sajjadi, 1972:244).

Al-Farabi believes that virtue can be developed through two main ways: Teaching (*ta'lim* – تعليم) and Discipline (*ta'dib* – تأديب).

### **Teaching (*Ta'lim* – تعليم) and Discipline (*Ta'dib* – تأديب)**

He defines teaching as the process of developing theoretical virtues within nations and cities, while discipline is the method of cultivating moral virtues and practical skills among the people. Teaching is done solely through words and speech. Discipline, on the other hand, involves encouraging people and citizens to develop habits through repeated practical actions and to strengthen their will and determination to continue performing these actions. (Boumelhem, 1981:71)

Al-Farabi highlights two fundamental differences between teaching (*ta'lim* – تعليم) and discipline (*ta'dib* – تأديب). First, teaching refers to the development of theoretical virtues, while discipline focuses on cultivating moral and practical virtues. Second, teaching is carried out through words and speech alone, whereas discipline involves both words and actions. The goal of discipline is to habituate the people of a society to virtuous actions and practical habits, and to awaken their will toward performing these actions. This way, these actions and habits become a responsibility for their souls, and they come to embrace these deeds with passion and dedication, much like lovers devoted to their beloved. The motivation to act can sometimes be inspired by words and other times by actions (Boumelhem, 1981:78).

Al-Farabi also points out that in teaching and discipline, a guide or mentor must consider certain factors carefully in order to truly understand the individual they are educating and effectively lead them toward happiness and fulfillment.

**a) Paying Attention to Individual Differences in Talent:** Al-Farabi divides learners into three groups:

- The first group includes those who might try to use their knowledge for harmful purposes. For these individuals, efforts should focus on refining their morals and making them aware of the consequences of their harmful tendencies.

- The second group consists of less capable individuals who need guidance to find the knowledge that will be truly beneficial to them, and they should be directed accordingly.

- The third group is composed of intelligent and capable people, for whom no shortcomings in education and training should be allowed. Nothing should be withheld from them to ensure they reach their full potential.

**b) Paying Attention to the Differences Among Nations and Peoples:** Al-Farabi, in the matter of education and training – and consequently in guiding individuals toward happiness – believes that although all humans share a common nature, it is essential to consider the different types of nations, peoples, and their unique characteristics. This consideration is necessary to make education and training more effective.

He emphasizes studying the various groups within nations and closely examining the traits and behaviors that are naturally rooted in each group. This detailed understanding allows for general principles to be drawn about most or all nations. Therefore, education must be organized in a way that takes into account the happiness of each nation, people, or individual. It should preserve what is appropriate for the training of that specific group and identify the methods best suited to instill those virtues within them (Boumelhem, 1981:78).

**c) The Importance of Practice, Repetition, and Habit:** According to Al-Farabi, educating and training a person is a gradual process that requires various theoretical and practical foundations. In other words, achieving desirable results in moral education is not something that can happen quickly or easily without the necessary groundwork and enduring challenges and difficulties. Virtue is formed fundamentally through habit, practice, and repetition. He believes that true moral character develops only when the states of the soul become established as stable dispositions through habit. This cannot be achieved without consistent repetition and exercise. According to him, no human being is inherently born virtuous or vicious, although some may have a natural tendency or readiness to perform virtuous or vicious acts more easily than others. However, this natural potential is not virtue itself. Virtue emerges only when this potential for virtuous actions is firmly rooted and

strengthened through habit, formed by repeated practice, and the resulting disposition is what we call virtue.

A person can't be inherently born virtuous or vicious from the very beginning of life. However, naturally, one may have a tendency or readiness to perform virtuous or hateful actions. This natural potential, though, is not called virtue. Virtue arises when this tendency is shaped into a firm disposition in the soul through habit, and this habit is formed by consistent and deliberate repetition. When these actions become established and firmly rooted, and the person naturally performs them, this strengthened disposition is what we call virtue (Najjar, 1986:31).

Al-Farabi emphasizes that a person truly becomes human when they possess full readiness and potential for virtues, and these virtues become deeply rooted in them through habit. Such a person, having cultivated these virtues, rises beyond ordinary humanity toward a higher, divine level of existence (Najjar, 1986:33).

**d) Paying Attention to Using Diverse and Suitable Methods for Each Learner:** It is quite clear that when Al-Farabi emphasizes individual differences in aptitude in the process of education and training, he also undoubtedly suggests different methods and approaches tailored to fit each person accordingly. He agrees with Plato on the idea that education and instruction should begin from childhood. Al-Farabi says: "Just as Plato has stated, we must begin educating individuals from an early age" (Boumelhem, 1986:72).

Regarding theoretical sciences, he believes they should be taught using persuasive (imaginative) methods. Many of these sciences can be grasped through imagination because understanding them intellectually depends on prior knowledge of numerous abstract, non-physical principles – principles that are part of the highest levels of understanding. Ordinary people, however, comprehend these concepts better through examples and imagery provided by persuasive techniques. The teacher should also determine what aspects of knowledge are specific to each group (or nation), and identify teaching methods suited to what is common across all peoples or the citizens of a city. Observing all these considerations, which are distinguished through intellectual virtue, leads the learner toward acquiring true theoretical virtues (Boumelhem, 1986:73).

However, when it comes to practical virtues and practical skills (crafts), people must be trained to perform them through two main approaches:

1. Persuasive and emotive speech, or other forms of communication that can deeply embed these actions and dispositions into the soul, so that a person's will and determination are stirred, leading them to perform these acts willingly and with genuine desire.

2. The method of coercion and compulsion. This approach is used specifically for those rebellious or disobedient members of a city or community who refuse to follow the right path willingly and voluntarily (Boumelhem, 1986:77).

## Conclusion

It is well established that as a result of the emergence and subsequent widespread spread of Islam in the Middle Ages, social principles began to be viewed from a religious perspective. Positive qualities, such as being polite, just, kind, compassionate, and generous, or negative qualities, such as stealing, scolding, beating, and torturing, are actions that occur in any society, whether it is a religious or secular society. However, the problems we are facing are even more difficult and complex, and the solution to them depends on the religion we follow. Islam also influenced Al-Farabi's philosophy.

Al-Farabi's doctrine of the "Perfect man" or "Rational man", which is composed of many factors, not only touches on religion, but also directly addresses ethics and philosophy, including civic philosophy. While human behavior and actions are the subject of ethics, society or a city and its inhabitants are the subject of civic or political philosophy. Since a person is an integral part of that society, a member or a resident of a city, they are closely interconnected; society must develop according to the person and the person according to the society. Al-Farabi's complete society is divided into three: the great, the medium, and the small. The great society is a group of several people, which comprises multiple nations, the medium society is a single people, and the small society pertains to the urban area. Within Al-Farabi's philosophical system, a person can achieve happiness through actions that lead to goodness; that is, if a thing or action leads to happiness, it is good, and if it does not lead, or even hurts leading, it is evil. A person's pursuit of happiness continues throughout life until death.



According to Al-Farabi, the human being is a social creature whose needs can only truly be fulfilled through living in a community and interacting with others. He believes the ultimate purpose of human life is to attain *true happiness*, both in this world and the hereafter. Earthly happiness, in his view, serves as a stepping stone toward eternal happiness in the afterlife. This noble goal, however, is only achievable through the acquisition and practice of the four key virtues (intellectual, moral, practical, and political). Since no human is born inherently virtuous, people need guidance – not only to recognize these virtues but also to learn how to cultivate and live by them. This is why, in Al-Farabi's philosophy, the roles of education (*ta'lim* – تعليم) and character formation (*ta'dib* – تأديب) are so central and indispensable.

However, Al-Farabi sees educated and well-raised individuals as the foundation for building an ideal society – a *virtuous city* (*madinah fāḍilah* – مدينة فاضلة) where its citizens live in complete happiness and well-being. In his view, only through proper education and upbringing can people develop the capacity to create such a city. And it is only within this city that true human happiness and ultimate fulfillment can be realized. Al-Farabi's vision of education, virtue, and happiness is deeply rooted in his philosophical outlook. Yet, due to its highly idealistic and abstract nature, his conception of the virtuous city may appear somewhat out of reach in practical terms – more of a philosophical aspiration than an immediate reality. (Rabani, 2021:98)

Although Al-Farabi is deeply influenced by Plato, especially in his philosophical approach to education and its social aims, his language and conceptual framework in discussing moral and educational principles are rooted in the Qur'an and Islamic teachings. In essence, while the structure of his educational philosophy reflects classical Greek influence, particularly Platonic ideals, the soul of his message is unmistakably Islamic. He harmonizes reason and revelation, presenting a model of education that seeks not only intellectual growth but also spiritual and moral elevation following divine guidance.

The findings of this study highlight three core elements of Al-Farabi's educational philosophy:

1. The Nature of Virtue Acquisition – Moral and intellectual transformation is achieved through repetition, habituation, and practice, not through knowledge alone.

2. The Social Dimension of Human Perfection – Individual ethical development is deeply intertwined with social and communal structures.

3. Philosophical Limitations – While Al-Farabi's model is visionary, his idea of the virtuous city presupposes universal rationality and downplays the complexities of real-world socio-political diversity.

### Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (AP19679483).

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Келіп түсті 11 мамыр 2025 жыл  
Қабылданды 13 тамыз 2025 жыл