

The Philosophical Basis of Al-Farabi's Concept of 'Virtuous City'

Al-Farabi's full name is Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Fārābī Uzlağ ibn Tarkhan. His birthplace is the ancient Kazakh city Otrār, which Arabs called Bārāb-Fārāb, hence the name Abū Naṣr al-Farabi means "Abū Naṣr from the city of Fārāb". Sometimes he was simply called Tarkhani. Abū Naṣr started his education at an early age, studying in his hometown Otrār, and then moved to Khorāsān. Later, to improve his knowledge, he went to Baghdad, the cultural centre of the Arab world, where he studied under highly educated people. For example, he studied medicine and logic under the Christian scientist Yuhanna ibn-Haylan, and natural sciences and Greek language from the well-known translator Abū Bashār Matta. It is also known that al-Farabi had a good relationship with the famous scientist Abubakar bin Siraj—al-Farabi taught him logic and learnt astronomy from him. Al-Farabi was mainly self-taught and a self-determined and successful person. He focused on Greek science and philosophy, and Aristotle's rich legacy. He was fluent in Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Greek and other foreign languages (Khairullaev, 1975, p. 152). Iranian researcher Majdi Sanay (2001) argues that Iranian politicians subdivide the Islamic scientific culture into three main directions: (1) the philosophy of al-Farabi, (2) the concepts of Nizam-ul-Mulik, and (3) the concepts of Fazollah and Rozbehan Khodzha.

Al-Farabi commented on Aristotle's *Categories*, *Metaphysics*, *De Interpretatione*, *Rhetoric*, *Poetics*, *Prior and Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, etc. He also wrote a number of his own works, such as *What Must Precede the Study of Philosophy*, *The Intellect and the Intelligible*, *The Book of Music*, *The Book of the Enumeration of the Sciences*, *The Gems of Wisdom*, *Principles of the Opinions of the Citizens of the Virtuous City*, *The Political Regime*, *Attainment of Happiness*, etc. Al-Farabi became a well-known scholar, was called the teacher of the East and "the Second Teacher". His views on the social sciences, philosophy and natural sciences were inspired by the cultural, philosophical and scientific ideas of medieval Near East societies (Burabayev, 1985, p. 8). Al-Farabi's scientific and philosophical views and approaches developed in very social and economic conditions and his works are still of current interest. His ideas on the state, leadership, and social and ethical philosophers have great value for contemporary societies. His wide range of high-quality works have had significant influence on the progress of European Renaissance. Al-Farabi played a great role in bringing together the science and

culture of the ancient East and West (Burabayev, 1985, p. 8). The fact that his works have not lost its importance is evidence of their deep wisdom. Ancient philosophical views generally never go out of date, their wisdom and knowledge continue to influence our way of thinking and inspire new ideas. Also, al-Farabi's historical approach to philosophy has been continued.

Abū Naṣr al-Farabi's works broadly discuss medieval Arab ideas about state, leadership and law. While Arab philosophers did not distinguish between state and government and considered these concepts as synonymous, al-Farabi introduces variations of philosophers and philosophical education. Philosophical issues in Arab-Muslim tradition are based on ancient Greek philosophy, particularly the views of Plato and Aristotle. Most of them define politics as a science of the state affairs of the so-called 'virtuous city'. Such cities, ranging from small-sized cities to the Arab caliphate, were defined as societies who live together, share a common purpose, and are managed by a single administrative power. Relating Greek traditions with Muslim politics has influenced all parts of Arab-Muslim philosophy (Kubesov, 2004, p. 13).

In this article, methods of comparative theoretical research are applied as a scientific tool based on the disclosure of the theoretical foundations and theoretical significance of al-Farabi's philosophical idea of a virtuous city. In addition, the study relies on the scientific basis and a source of thought described in the works of foreign and domestic authors and researchers and employs the methods of hermeneutic, comparative and stylistic studies of the texts. The study of al-Farabi's philosophical concept of virtuous city is based on the use of methods of phenomenological analysis related to the philosophical features and aspects of personality development.

In most cases, al-Farabi's philosophical views have retained their value and significance for the development of the modern society. Some of al-Farabi's treatises are devoted to public life (*The Political Regime, Aphorisms of the Statesman, The Opinions of the Citizens of the Virtuous City, In the Attainment of Happiness, The Book of Principles*, and other minor treatises) (Burabayev, Kenesarin & Kurmangaliyeva, 1988, p. 231). According to al-Farabi, who became the father of Arab philosophy, philosophical theory teaches how to maintain and organize virtuous leadership, how citizens can achieve well-being and felicity, and the ways to achieve such results. He presents his views in *Principles of the Opinions of the Citizens of the Virtuous City, The Gems of Wisdom* and *The Political Regime*.

One of al-Farabi's most valuable and influential works is the treatise *Kitab Ara' Ahl al-Madinah al-Fadilah*, or *Principles of the Opinions of the Citizens of the Virtuous City*, which was written in Egypt in 948. In 942, its first draft, *Kitab Al-Siyasah Al-Madaniyah*, or *The Political Regime*, was known as a separate work. In the treatise, influenced by Plato's ideas about the right social structure, right legislation and right opinions of the citizens, al-Farabi reviews an ideal society, which he called virtuous city or *Madinah Fadilah*, from a philosophical point of view.

Al-Farabi's ideas on perfect and imperfect cities are based on Plato's and Aristotle's theories of the ideal society and types of societies. In his *Republic*, Plato presents his ideas on the structure of an ideal society. Plato's 'ideal city' was a utopia based on the criticism of the states at that time. However, there was a clear connection with certain states, as it described their properties and signs.

Plato considered justice as the basic principle of an ideal state. Al-Farabi believed that the goal of human activity is happiness which can only be achieved with the help of correct knowledge. The thinker equated society with the state. Society consists of human members. "A virtuous city is like a body, all the organs of which help each other to save the life of a living organism" (Davari Ardakani, 1992, p. 134). Al-Farabi presented a classification of Plato's and Aristotle's cities. He defined the ideal society as a "city where people are genuine, and help each other to live, manage their lives and get access to good things", and called it a virtuous city. Like all unique thoughts of his time, al-Farabi's philosophical concepts did not coincide with the theoretical principles of Arab culture, which aimed at presenting the true images of the Islamic caliphate (Al-Farabi, 1973, p. 125). In his *Principles of the Opinions of the Citizens of the Virtuous City*, al-Farabi provides the following definition of a virtuous city: "A city in which everyone cooperates to gain happiness is a virtuous city, and a society in which all people collaborate to achieve happiness is a virtuous society". Al-Farabi compares his virtuous city to a healthy body, "all the organs of which work together to ensure that the body lives and for the preservation of its life". Compared to Plato's and Aristotle's ideal states, al-Farabi's virtuous city is composed of a number of communities.

The population of a virtuous city consists of five categories: the virtuous, the speakers, the assessors, the warriors, and the rich. The virtuous are the wise, the prudent, and those who think about major matters and are the transmitters of religion; the linguists are rhetoricians, poets, musicians, scribes, and those who act in the same way they do. The assessors are accountants, engineers, doctors,

astronomers, and those who act in the same way they do. The warriors are the soldiers, guardians, bandits and those who act in the same way they do and are counted among them. The rich people are those who earn property in the city, such as farmers, cattle-breeders, traders, and those who act in the same ways. (Al-Farabi, 1972, p. 305) Al-Farabi says about this: “Man needs the help of his fellowmen to attain the perfection inherent to his nature” (Bulach, 2006, p. 213).

In his book *Abu Nasr Al-Farabi*, Kasymzhanov (1982, p. 146) discusses the abovementioned communities of the city as “the virtuous”, or the feudal elite. However, al-Farabi stated that “the virtuous include the wise, the prudent, and those who have opinion about major matters”. In ancient Greece and medieval East, it was mostly the philosophers who were called the wise.

Al-Farabi's *Principles of the Opinions of the Citizens of the Virtuous City* is one of the important works which channels the thinker's picture of the world. The treatise analyses and studies in detail the basic mechanisms and necessary conditions for the existence of humanism in society. For example, a human needs help from nature and tends to create various types of human society. Because in order for each person to exist and achieve perfection, they need a society. According to al-Farabi, the virtuous city is an ideal. It is a feudal city governed by a perfect ruler. The ruler is assisted by people who carry out the goals of the ruling officials and people who act in accordance to these goals, representing the lower strata of the society. Like Aristotle, al-Farabi connected politics with geography but added a territorial dimension which contains not just the natural-geographical component but also a spatial and territorial factor, which are not the same. For example, human society for al-Farabi is “the combination of many people in one place of residence”, which can occur only as a result of the cumulative effects of these factors (Al-Farabi, 1973, p. 131).

In al-Farabi's virtuous city, there is not only of spiritual inequality, but also inequality of richness, because a virtuous city, in which workers live, is limited by the impossible “need” for mutual assistance and achieving patience and perseverance. That is, al-Farabi believed that philosophers play an important role in the society. The philosopher divides the human society roughly into two types: complete and incomplete. The entire society is divided into three types of communities: large, medium-sized, and small. The large community encompasses all the people inhabiting the Earth. The medium-sized community is represented by a knowledgeable population, and the smallest unit is a specific city, family, etc. Al-Farabi also distinguished between four incomplete communities—a city

block, a street, a house and a village. Despite the fact that the latter was not seen as part of the city, it is an incomplete community serving the city. A person can access the highest level of development and well-being only in the city. One can achieve happiness in any city, and can make a choice in this regard. Residents are described as part of the city that help each other on the way to happiness. (Altaev, 1994, pp. 74–78) In the treatise, al-Farabi said:

in order for a person to improve completely, he depends on many factors. Because he says that he cannot do or have access to all the necessary things alone. Therefore, a person should live in a community of other people, and only then can he fully achieve and reach happiness. But he is also the cause of the community for other people. (Al-Farabi, 1970)

Thus, the actions of each member of the society allow other members to achieve all the necessary things. Only by helping each other, people of the communities can achieve perfection, keep calm and live harmoniously. However, the communities are not of equal importance. The very first city will reach prosperity and maturity. Al-Farabi's central category is not independent. In the noble city, happiness is realized through people, felicity, justice and beauty.

A city of people who have shared true happiness for the purposes of mutual assistance in work is a good city, and a society that helps people to achieve happiness is a virtuous society. The population where there are cities that help each other to achieve happiness, is considered, respectively, a virtuous population. Thus, if all nations help each other to achieve happiness, then the world will be kind. (Al-Farabi, 1970, p. 145)

According to al-Farabi, the first and most important advantage of a noble mayor is the “virtuous members” of the community that have the capacity to perform the appropriate actions. (Stepanyants, 1997, p. 123).

A city is like a human body and its organs. The organs of the body help each other for the purpose of preserving life and are divided according to their abilities and nature, much like the way in which population groups in cities are divided according to their capacities. A perfect thinker understands how to meet the needs of a virtuous society, its details, the methods of fair governance and the ways, signs, and basic traits of the ruler. The leaders of the city govern the city's population not only using their potential and personality traits, but also such qualities as the art or craft. He is the manager of the city who gives this city guidance and balances it with his heart. Each person of the excellent city “in the

first place” ought to “know the First Cause and all its qualities” and it is through this that they reach the highest level. Therefore, each member of the city should follow the goals of the head of the city according to his capacity.

There are four types of heads of the virtuous city:

- A true ruler, the supreme leader with all the necessary qualities;
- If there is no true leader, a good city is run by “the virtuous” of the city;
- A “ruler by law” who knows and abides by the early laws and regulations put in place by the first rulers if none of the previously mentioned could not be found;
- In the absence of a ruler by law, a group of individuals with expertise in former laws, i.e. the heads of the law. (Al-Farabi, 1973, p. 146)

For al-Farabi, it is not important who manages the city or how many times he manages it. The important thing for him is the manner how it operates, and the manner depends on the characteristics and potential that the ruler should have. In addition, al-Farabi argues that a supreme ruler alone cannot manage all parts of the city, so “between the communities there is no higher leader, so there is a head of each part of the city.” Al-Farabi says that a virtuous city is like a healthy and flawless human nature because each of its parts help each other to maintain health. However, as a rule, parts of the human body differ from each other in nature, position and function. (Bayrakdar, 1998, p. 19)

The head of the city, as the head of a human body, stands above all, and its heart is the most mature and unmanageable organ. Human heart enables the functioning of all other organs, i.e. the human body, because it is the core that manages all the necessary organs. This is how the mayor is the cause for the existence of the city, and the society of people around it operate in harmonious interaction according to an established order. Like everything that happens in the body, the head must solve all the problems that arise in the city to eliminate difficulties. In the treatise *Virtuous City*, based on the hierarchy of the population of the city, al-Farabi touches upon the idea of a perfect society which is capable of establishing social justice and freedom.

Al-Farabi can imagine “a society that has a degree of achievement in human nature only through joining of people who share an essential part of another person’s life and help each other”. More than a thousand years ago, the idea of public support for the poorest population groups was one of the main goals of a state’s internal policy. In such a “developed society”, al-Farabi says, “communication, assistance, support, and collective life become the vital necessities for the people.”

Al-Farabi believes that such a society must be governed by a person capable of combining intelligence, knowledge, tolerance, spiritual authority with twelve personality traits that can be combined with human potential. If there are two persons who have such traits, they should govern the city—one has to be ready to govern the city and the other needs to be able to manage it. His art should be superior to the art of others, he says that art is not for nothing, nor it is the kind of art that others use—that it should be the art that all others who possess it have to do, and that other arts should be art. The city's mayor needs to be familiar with this art and claim that he is the perfect person who knows the ways to attain happiness. The leader should guide the city's inhabitants onto the right path to happiness and encourage them to do the work (Seisenbayev, 2014, pp. 184–185).

Al-Farabi believes that a head of the city must have six different qualities: wisdom, superior wisdom, reliability, high reasoning skills, knowledge or war, and strong health. “The person who combines all this is a model who others should seek to imitate and listen to what he says and speaks. Such a person can govern the state at his own discretion.” However, it is very difficult to find such abilities and qualities in one person. A genius believes that if he has at least six of the virtues of his goodness, he can be the head of the city. Al-Farabi also does not exclude this type of head of the city. Regarding this type of government, he writes: “It is not possible for a person to combine all the good qualities with one another, but if these qualities are shared by a group of individuals, then members of this group will be replaced by the governors, who are well-educated leaders and are called the virtuous, and their rule is called the virtuous regime.” (Khairullaev, 1967, p. 38)

Al-Farabi does not distinguish between society and the state. The society itself, as well as the human body, the virtuous city, is seen as a healthy human, the organs of which complement each other to save the life of a happy owner, to make it more complete. All the above describes a fertile city of al-Farabi, reflecting the main characteristics and values of the civil society.

When discussing the social inequality of people, Al-Farabi says that in “immoral cities” the inhabitants are inclined toward what al-Farabi considers to be wrong or presumed goods, which “are from the beginning manifested in the desire of people to dominate each other” (Khairullaev, 1967, p. 11).

Next to identifying the peculiarities of a virtuous city, al-Farabi also distinguishes between vicious cities and the many types of well-being, and their forms and

methods of governance. If a city does not have any of the qualities of a good city, it is a vicious city. Plato and Aristotle call such cities bad cities. Even Plato's philosophical flawless city is considered a bad city. According to al-Farabi's philosophy, no one among the inhabitants of these cities can gain happiness. Vicious city, in contrast to a good city, is where "the citizens never knew what happiness was, and they did not even think about it". Al-Farabi pointed out the following types of miserable cities: a city of need, a city of exchange, an unfaithful and unhappy city, a city that loves the government, an inhumane city, and a floating city. The deficiencies that all the bad cities share and that distinguish them from good cities are that their citizens do not understand the true meaning of happiness, and that the densely populated city and its rulers do not try to achieve it (Yozhan, 2001, p. 187). It is said that the doctrine of the virtuous city reflects the ideals of a civil society. Al-Farabi revised the advanced social structure of the society in its classification and replaced it with different characteristics and classifications of "good" and "bad" cities. Al-Farabi says that human beings differ from the animal world in their advanced intellect and perfection of the body, but in order for human beings to grow, they need language and diversity (Khatami, 2001, p. 134). According to al-Farabi, the fragmented parts of the city are "connected with mutual love; they are upheld and retained in righteousness". Another feature that strengthens the well-being of the virtuous city is justice, which al-Farabi described primarily as "the division of common good will, then division among them, which the citizens possess". The philosopher deals with such notions as well-being, wealth, respect, authority, and "other goodness".

Al-Farabi noted that happiness is the result of knowledge and well-being, and that this opportunity is available to citizens. Al-Farabi divided happiness into two categories: well-being and felicity. Kindness, knowledge, and culture lead people to happiness, and direct their actions and will. Al-Farabi claims that "people can only achieve true happiness in a good city" and classifies the cities inhabited by citizens as a good-natured city. In a virtuous city, only the citizens can have a happy future, with the goal of helping them to move forward.

Al-Farabi says that the way of cooperating towards true happiness is unique (Yozhan, 2001, p. 187). To achieve that, the government must rely on lawful and good practices. In an oppressive, corrupt government, negative actions and bad things may take place, and lead to a brutal regime. Al-Farabi preaches a perfect state and points out that "happiness is the most dignified, the greatest and the most mature virtue", and that every person has the right to pursue that. But it

is only possible for the people of a virtuous city to have such a right, and that only the virtuous can access happiness. The main difference of such cities from other cities is the high order and culture of the people, the good will and the well-being and wisdom of their rulers. Therefore, al-Farabi argues, the existence of such cities is directly related to the ruler who can fully execute his fame and self-esteem.

Al-Farabi's perspective is that he "does not rule out the use of violence in a good city, but rather uses the same methods as the imperfect city". As Mehdi Sanay (2001) argues, if we consider al-Farabi's virtuous city as an unrealistic dream society, it should be described as a utopian doctrine. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the utopian and other specific aspects of his doctrine. In the works of different authors, there are various manifestations of the ideal society. Utopia, as a dream of public relations, represents a general part of spiritual life. It includes all religious beliefs, ethical and legal theories, the education system—in other words, any knowledge and creativity that is featured in human life. It is hard to imagine at any stage people, or a person who would not dream of paradise. But the emergence of utopia in spiritual life is not accidental and is based on socio-historical reasons (Nasimov, 211, p. 62). The scientific legacy of al-Farabi has greatly influenced the development of political thought of the humanity. Al-Farabi emphasized the importance of politics and morality, and realized that the many social, political and ethical requirements of a virtuous city were transferred to its supreme ruler. Finally, the idea can be used widely in the Second Teacher's work to introduce new ideas in modern political science (Sanay, 2001, p. 262).

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