

The Metaethical Dimensions of Fārābī's Ethical Philosophy

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Abstract

This paper explores the often-overlooked metaethical and religious foundations of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī's ethical philosophy by examining the ontological status of moral values, their epistemic accessibility, and the sources of moral normativity. While Fārābī is frequently studied for his normative and political ethics, this study shifts focus toward the deeper philosophical and theological principles that undergird his conception of the virtuous life (*sa'āda*) and the just society. Drawing from Aristotelian logic, Neoplatonic metaphysics, and Islamic theological doctrines, Fārābī presents a unique model in which moral values are both objective and intelligible through reason, yet remain grounded in divine order. The central role of the active intellect (*al-ʿaql al-faʿāl*) in moral cognition is highlighted as a metaethical cornerstone, linking rational understanding to spiritual fulfillment. Fārābī's commitment to moral realism and cognitivism is shown to be consistent with his teleological vision of human perfection, where virtue (*faḍīla*) is both an intellectual and ethical achievement. Moreover, this paper argues that Fārābī harmonizes revelation and reason by incorporating prophetic knowledge within a rationally intelligible framework, without reducing religion to philosophy. This synthesis affirms the distinct epistemic value of revealed knowledge while preserving the autonomy of philosophical inquiry. By situating Fārābī's ethical philosophy within contemporary debates on moral realism, religious epistemology, and the rational basis of normativity, this study offers a fresh perspective that repositions him as a significant figure in both Islamic and global metaethical thought.

Keywords: Fārābī, metaethics, virtue ethics, happiness (*sa'āda*), moral epistemology, religion.

INTRODUCTION

Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (872–950) was an eminent philosopher of the Islamic Golden Age, who blended Platonic, Aristotelian, and Islamic philosophical traditions into a broad philosophical system. al-Fārābī's writings cover a wide range of disciplines, including metaphysics, epistemology, logic, ethics, and political philosophy, presenting a systematic approach to explaining human nature, society, and the path to happiness (*sa'āda*).

According to Fārābī, the key role of ethics is to provide the foundation for individual and collective life. He contends that virtue and justice are the two essential pillars of civilization, and a just society can only be established through knowledge, rational governance, and moral discipline. His concept of the virtuous city (*al-madīna al-fāḍila*), inspired by Plato's *Republic*, is based on a hierarchical social structure in which philosophers and virtuous rulers lead society toward the ultimate good (Koca 2025).

This paper explores Fārābī's ethical and political thought, focusing on his views on virtue, happiness, and justice. It examines the relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge, the classification of virtues, and the philosopher's role in guiding society. Additionally, it investigates how Fārābī's concept of happiness transcends mere worldly success and aligns with eternal fulfillment, bridging the gap between rational ethics and religious eschatology.

Moral philosophy is the examination of moral concepts such as good and evil, virtue, happiness, responsibility, conscience, decision, intention, and duty through philosophical methods and perspectives. It represents a philosophical approach to ethics. Within this framework, contemporary moral philosophy addresses these issues from various angles, offering diverse interpretations and normative evaluations of ethical life.

In Islamic philosophy, the sciences are subject to systematic classification, and ethics finds its rightful place within this intellectual framework. Al-Kindī distinguishes between theoretical and practical philosophical sciences and situates ethics under practical philosophy alongside politics. Al-Fārābī categorizes the sciences based on their structures, subjects, and aims, listing ethics (*al-ṣinā'a al-khuluqiyya*) among the practical sciences and under *'ilm al-madani*, together with politics and economics (Al-Fārābī 1985, 15). Similarly, in *Aqsām al-*

‘Ulūm al-‘Aqliyya, Ibn Sīnā explicitly includes ethics within the domain of practical philosophy (Ibn Sīnā 2005, 5).

Islamic ethics is a rich and multifaceted tradition that operates at the intersection of revelation, theology, mysticism, and philosophy. At its religious core, it derives normative guidance from the Qur’ān and the Sunnah, offering a divine framework for moral behavior grounded in obedience to God and the pursuit of *taqwā* (God-consciousness). Theologically, disciplines such as *kalām* explore the foundations of moral responsibility, divine justice (*‘adl*), and human free will, often engaging in deep metaphysical debates about the nature of good and evil. In its mystical aspect, Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) emphasizes the inner purification of the soul and the transformative journey toward ethical perfection through love, self-discipline, and spiritual insight. Philosophically, thinkers like al-Fārābī sought to systematize ethics within a rational and metaphysical framework that aligns human virtue with the ultimate end of the soul.

This rational and universalist ethical understanding is systematically grounded in the works of prominent Muslim philosophers such as al-Kindī (d. 873), al-Fārābī (d. 950), Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), Miskawayh (d. 1030), Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925), Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 1502), and Kınalızāde ‘Ali Çelebi (d. 1572), each of whom integrated religious, philosophical, and humanistic perspectives into coherent visions of the moral life. Their works reflect a cumulative intellectual tradition where ethics is not merely a set of rules but a comprehensive inquiry into human perfection, social harmony, and metaphysical purpose (Ghuzan 2024; Hmdad 2024).

Philosophers have not limited themselves to investigating knowledge, being, or metaphysics; they have also engaged deeply with the philosophy of human action. When philosophers inquire into whether an action is good or bad, right or wrong, they are essentially engaging in moral philosophy. Drawing attention to this endeavor, G. E. Moore (1960, 16) defined the subject of moral philosophy as the investigation of the nature of good and evil, emphasizing that philosophers have often struggled to define what “good” actually means.

In agreement with Moore and Field, moral philosophers such as Sahakian (1975, 32) and Frankena (1963, 23) argue that moral philosophy is not merely a science of definitions or formal classification, but rather a philosophical reflection on moral judgments and moral

experience. Randall and Buchler (1966, 8) further clarify this position, stating that moral philosophy should be seen as the philosophy of human behavior. However, they insist on detaching the concept of “behavior” from its psychological, sociological, or anthropological connotations. The aim of moral philosophy, according to this view, is not merely to describe human behavior but to evaluate it normatively (Uğuz 2024; Aware 2024).

Metaethics is a branch of moral philosophy that examines the nature, meaning, and epistemological foundations of ethical concepts. Unlike normative ethics, which prescribes what is morally right or wrong, metaethics focuses on fundamental questions such as whether moral values are objective or subjective, how moral knowledge is acquired, and whether moral statements express truth-apt propositions or mere expressions of emotions or social constructs (Shafer-Landau, 2012). The key debates in metaethics revolve around moral realism vs. anti-realism, moral cognitivism vs. non-cognitivism, and the sources of moral normativity. Some philosophers argue that moral truths exist independently of human perception (*moral realism*), while others claim that morality is a social or psychological construct (*moral anti-realism*) (Brink 1989; Ceran 2025,14).

Another critical issue in metaethics concerns moral epistemology, which explores the ways in which humans can acquire moral knowledge. Rationalists assert that moral truths can be known through reason and logical deduction, while empiricists argue that moral understanding is derived from sensory experience and observation (Audi 1997). In contrast, moral intuitionists propose that moral truths are self-evident and grasped through intuitive faculties (Huemer 2005). These discussions are highly relevant to Fārābī's ethical system, as he integrates elements of rationalism, moral realism, and epistemological objectivism within his broader philosophical framework. His classification of knowledge and the role of the active intellect (*al-‘aql al-fa‘āl*) suggest a metaethical stance where moral values are grounded in both rational inquiry and an objective metaphysical order.

By analyzing Fārābī's ethical system, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how philosophy and morality shape human civilization, offering insights into both classical Islamic thought and contemporary ethical discussions. One might assume that the position of ethics within Fārābī's prominent views on logic, metaphysics, and politics is relatively narrow. Fārābī is often recognized as a logician,

metaphysician, and political philosopher, but to what extent can he be considered a moral philosopher? (Saruhan 2020, 3).

Despite certain objections, the information we have suggests that Fārābī wrote a now-lost commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Additionally, his discussions on the sources and value of ethics, virtues, and happiness in his other works—using a metaethical approach—provide sufficient grounds to classify him as a moral philosopher.

Fārābī's works, including *Tahṣīl al-Sa'āda*, *al-Tanbīh 'alā Sabīl al-Sa'āda*, *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, *al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya*, and *Fuṣūl al-Madanī*, offer ethical discussions that, in some aspects, surpass Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and even pave the way for Kantian moral philosophy. In this sense, ethics stands as one of the key concepts in his system, which extends from physics to metaphysics and from the individual to society (Rescher 1962; Kaplan 2021).

When classifying sciences based on their structure, characteristics, and subject matter, Fārābī divides them into theoretical (*naẓarī*) and practical (*'amalī*) sciences. He places ethics (*al-ṣinā'a al-khuluqīyya*, as he calls it) among the practical sciences. Furthermore, when classifying sciences based on their subject and method of acquisition, he includes ethics under the heading of *'ilm al-madanī* (civil science), alongside politics and economics.

Fārābī's ethical system, which is rooted in physics, psychology, and metaphysics, is fundamentally based on a strong theological conception of God. *Al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, although a work of political philosophy, dedicates a significant portion of its content to theology, cosmogony, and anatomy as a foundation for political thought. While Fārābī engages deeply with philosophy through theoretical interpretations and rational inquiry, he presents ethics within political philosophy as a civilizational project that begins with the individual and extends to society (Farabi 1949; Alper 2000).

In Fārābī's language, God is absolute goodness, and His providence encompasses all things. God establishes order in the universe through His attributes of generosity and justice. There is harmony and hierarchy among beings: "The beauty and magnificence in each being are realized when that being reaches the highest degree of existence and ultimate perfection. Since the First Being (*al-Awwal*) is the highest of all existents, His beauty surpasses all others who possess beauty. His beauty and magnificence derive from His very essence and substance.

This comes from Himself and is realized through His self-intellection. Delight, joy, and happiness emerge through the perception of the highest and most beautiful” (Farabi 1986).

The concept of virtue ethics has a long tradition in both Western and Islamic philosophy. Plato and Aristotle laid the foundations of virtue-based moral philosophy, with Aristotle defining happiness (*eudaimonia*) as the highest goal of human life. His *Nicomachean Ethics* emphasized the cultivation of virtues such as wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice as the means to achieve happiness (Aristotle 2009).

In the Islamic intellectual tradition, Fārābī, Mikawayh, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd expanded on Aristotelian ethics while incorporating Islamic theological principles. Fārābī, in particular, synthesized Greek philosophy with Islamic concepts, arguing that ultimate happiness is attained through intellectual perfection and moral refinement. His idea of the virtuous city draws parallels with Plato's philosopher-king but is uniquely framed within the Islamic worldview, where divine guidance and prophetic wisdom play a crucial role.

Scholars have extensively studied Fārābī's political philosophy, but his ethical system remains an area of growing interest. Modern research highlights his metaethical approach, which connects knowledge, virtue, and happiness to the human pursuit of perfection and divine proximity. This paper builds upon previous scholarship by examining how Fārābī's ethical philosophy bridges reason and revelation, providing a unique model of virtue ethics that remains relevant today.

Within his general philosophical system, Fārābī seeks to evaluate philosophy from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Ontology, epistemology, ethics, and politics are the fundamental pillars of his thought. Like every human being, the philosopher belongs to the sublunary world (*'ālam al-taḥt al-qamar*). In presenting his theory of emanation, Fārābī also introduces a hierarchy of existence. The First Being, God, is the source of all goodness, beauty, and perfection. This hierarchy consists of the supralunar world (*'ālam al-fawq al-qamar*), where intellects and souls exist, and the sublunary world, where material entities are found (Farabi 1986; Özturhan 2014).

Between these two realms lies the *active intellect* (*al-'aql al-fa''āl*), which is the tenth intellect in the hierarchy of intellects. Fārābī conceives of this intellect as an intermediary between God and the

material universe. Humans, as beings of the sublunary world, are rational creatures who reflect upon themselves and their origins. Fārābī grounds ethical knowledge in divine knowledge. In his view, the purpose of learning philosophy is clearly justified by both theological and ethical reasoning. The ultimate goal of philosophy is to know the Supreme Creator. The Supreme Creator is one and is the first cause of all things and all causes. He orders the universe with generosity, wisdom, and justice. Consequently, the philosopher's aim should be to resemble the Creator as much as possible. For Fārābī, philosophy is the knowledge of being as being. He asserts that the goal of the philosopher is to emulate the Creator to the best of their ability. Thus, the philosopher becomes a person who, in addition to moral and spiritual purification, seeks enlightenment through reason and strives to attain universal knowledge of existence, akin to divine knowledge (Farabi 1993;1961; 1983;1949; Aydın 2003; Aydınlı 2000; Bozyiğit 2018).

This study employs a philosophical and textual analysis of Fārābī's ethical system, using a comparative approach to examine his ideas within the broader context of Islamic and Aristotelian traditions. The research method involves: Primary Text Analysis:

Close examination of Fārābī's major works, including:

- i. *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila (The Virtuous City)*.
- ii. *Taḥṣīl al-Sa'āda (The Attainment of Happiness)*.
- iii. *al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya (The Principles of Political Science)*.
- iv. Identification of key ethical principles, such as justice, knowledge, and happiness.
- v. Comparative Analysis: Comparison of Fārābī's ethics with Aristotle's virtue ethics.
- vi. Examination of the Qur'anic ethical framework, particularly in relation to concepts like "the straight path" (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) and the classification of human behaviors (e.g., *dall* (misguided), *muḍill* (one who misguides), *fāsiq* (transgressor)).
- vii. Thematic Analysis: Investigation of how knowledge transforms into virtue and how virtue leads to happiness.
- viii. Analysis of Fārābī's concept of the philosopher-ruler and its ethical implications. This method allows for a systematic exploration of Fārābī's ethical philosophy, highlighting its relevance for both historical and contemporary discussions on morality and governance.

The Religious Infrastructure in Fārābī's Thought and Its Philosophical Transfiguration

In the shared formulation of many Islamic philosophers, philosophy is the human attempt—within the limits of one's capacity—to imitate the actions of God and, as much as possible, to resemble Him. The question "What is the purpose of learning philosophy?" finds an explicit and central place in al-Fārābī's thought. For Fārābī, the goal of philosophy is to know the Exalted Creator. The Creator is One, the First Cause of all causes, the arranger of the world through His generosity, wisdom, and justice. Therefore, the aim of the philosopher must also be to resemble the Creator to the extent of human ability.

Taking as his starting point the natural differences among individuals in terms of talents and dispositions, Fārābī concludes that not every human being can reach knowledge of true happiness purely through personal effort. He defines happiness as a rational and spiritual perfection and argues that achieving such lofty perfection requires extraordinary guides with special capacities. The First Leader, the Lawgiver, the Imam—these are figures who possess these special talents and show the principles that guide people toward happiness. These principles and teachings constitute what Fārābī calls *millah* (religion).

Fārābī, who regards true philosophy as *burhānī* (demonstrative philosophy), similarly views true religion as one that aligns with and derives its principles from demonstrative reason. This approach reflects Fārābī's distinctive stance: while providing profound and comprehensive interpretations of religion's essence and content, he also offers a sociological and philosophical presentation of religion.

When Fārābī discusses religion from the perspective of the philosophical mind, he does not explain religious content using the classical triad of faith (*īmān*), worship (*ibāda*), and ethics (*akhlāq*); instead, he reduces it to two key terms: *ara'* (opinions) and *af'āl* (actions). This shift reflects the philosopher's use of a more abstract and comprehensive language—one that transcends conventional theological categories and expresses religion within a broader ontological and epistemological framework. The philosopher does not merely classify religion by its surface elements, but seeks to uncover the structural relationship between belief, knowledge, and action.

In this regard, Fārābī defines religion as a system composed of *opinions* and *acts* (*ara' wa-l af'āl*). His distinction implicitly reflects the dual structure of religion: theory and practice. According to Fārābī, the theoretical aspects—termed *opinions*—include:

- i. The fundamental attributes of God, and accordingly, the order and function of spiritual beings in the divine realm;
- ii. The creation of the universe and the system of order and relationships within it;
- iii. The formation of the human being and their ontological status with respect to the Creator;
- iv. The content and function of prophecy;
- v. Reward and punishment in the afterlife;
- vi. And the exemplary attributes of past prophets, virtuous rulers, and spiritual leaders.
- vii. It becomes evident that Fārābī's notion of *opinions* in religion refers to principles whose primary source is the Qur'an (Author, Year).
- viii. Following this, Fārābī turns to the practical dimension of religion—what he terms *acts* (*af'āl*), which include:
 - ix. Words and actions that express reverence and praise for God;
 - x. Practices showing respect for spiritual beings, such as angels;
 - xi. Words and deeds that honor prophets, virtuous leaders, and spiritual guides;
 - xii. Speech and behavior that criticize immoral or corrupt leaders who misguide societies;
 - xiii. All actions related to personal and social conduct.

As will be recalled, philosophers like al-Kindī, in their approach to the sacred text, operated within the limits of language and lexical meaning, rather than seeking deeper symbolic interpretations. In contrast, the philosophical mind that Fārābī represents considers religious principles to be both direct expressions of reality and allegorical representations of truth. He goes further: religion is, for him, the symbolic presentation of the theoretical and practical truths attained through philosophy, adapted for the general population's understanding (Saruhan 2023).

Religion, in this sense, becomes a reflection of the images of truth and the representations of intelligible concepts in the human soul for Fārābī, there is no essential difference between the true philosopher and the prophet; both aim to guide humanity toward happiness in this world and the next. Although the philosopher might appear to have an advantage due to the acquired nature of his intellectual perfection, Fārābī does not

see this as categorical superiority. In his system, the ideal ruler is the individual who combines both prophetic and philosophical qualities. Hence, he regards the Prophet Muhammad as the "First Ruler," who unites in his person both revelation and reasoned insight. Religion, then, is a system that teaches philosophical truths to the public through persuasion and imaginative representations. It serves to disseminate among the masses what is reserved for the elite in philosophy. In Fārābī's thought, philosophical knowledge and the corresponding philosophical life are intellectual activities grounded in volition and the processes of knowing. Revelation, in turn, completes the philosopher's endeavor by unveiling the inner dimensions of transcendent reality. Therefore, Fārābī holds that revelation is, in essence, "natural" and does not imply a divine privilege. In principle, it is accessible to any individual endowed with a sound nature. Moreover, this form of revelation need not necessarily have a socio-political function—it may also be individual and experiential. Such a mystical experience places the philosopher in an epistemic integration with the transcendent realm, rendering him a "divine" being in a metaphorical sense (Farabi 1968, 24, 1966, 34, 1970, 23; Alper 2000, 87; Yıldız 2016, 62-103).

Philosophical Foundations of Farabi's Understanding of Ethics

Although al-Fārābī's direct engagement with ethics is limited in his extant works, evidence of a now-lost commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*—referenced by Andalusian thinkers such as Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl, and Ibn Rushd—suggests that he once tackled core ethical questions in depth (Neria 2013). In this alleged commentary, al-Fārābī is said to have rejected both the immortality of the soul and the possibility of conjunction with the active intellect, contradicting claims found in works like *The Political Regime* and *The Treatise on the Intellect*, where he clearly affirms such conjunction as the essence of ultimate happiness (Mattila 2017). This discrepancy has led some Straussian scholars to interpret his corpus as bifurcated between exoteric texts written for the public and esoteric writings intended for a philosophical elite—especially given the presence of Neo-Platonic emanation theories in his more widely read works. The tension between these layers makes the reconstruction of al-Fārābī's metaethical stance both interpretively rich and methodologically challenging.

While no complete ethical system based directly on Aristotle's *Ethics* survives from al-Fārābī, his shorter treatise *Tanbīh 'alā Sabīl al-Sa'āda* (Admonition on the Way to Happiness) provides a Hellenistic-flavored propaedeutic to ethical cultivation through the discipline of reason and

the moderation of passions (McGinnis & Reisman 2007). This text, along with fragments from *The Attainment of Happiness*, hints at a pedagogical approach where ethical readiness precedes logical and philosophical instruction. Although fragmentary, these materials support the thesis that al-Fārābī developed a metaethical view grounded in intellectual self-mastery and the pursuit of rational happiness. Thus, even in the absence of a systematic ethical corpus, his broader philosophical project embeds a coherent moral vision tied to metaphysical realism, epistemic discipline, and the political articulation of the good.

According to Fārābī, a philosopher must suppress their desires and be devoted to truth. Historical sources describe Fārābī as someone indifferent to material wealth, fame, and ostentation. When Sayf al-Dawla wished to offer him financial support, he accepted nothing more than four dirhams of silver—just enough to meet his daily needs (Saruhan 2017).

Fārābī also insists that a philosopher must be moderate in their behavior. Extreme harshness breeds resentment, while excessive humility leads to being undervalued and distrusted. The principle of moderation, which Fārābī emphasizes in the process of teaching philosophy, is significant in educational philosophy. His emphasis on this principle highlights the importance of respect between students and teachers, influencing later philosophical and pedagogical discussions on the teacher-student relationship. Fārābī argues that actions require intention and direction. The path to practice can only be attained through knowledge. To achieve an objective in knowledge, one must first master physics, followed by geometry. The ultimate goal in practice is the refinement of the human soul, followed by the improvement of households and cities. For Fārābī, philosophy is a process of purification and moral cultivation that begins with the individual and extends to society.

He also holds that human actions are rooted in a natural capacity (*istiṭā'a*), meaning that whether a person chooses to act or not, the potential for action exists within them. In Fārābī's ethics, nothing is absolutely immutable or impervious to change. Moral development, he asserts, occurs through intellect and intellectual growth. Knowledge has both theoretical and practical value: it enhances human reason, stimulates critical thinking, and fosters productivity. Politics, economics, ethics, and education are all acquired through knowledge. The order of

societies, too, varies according to their level of knowledge (Mahdi 1969; Bircan 2008).

Every human being is born equally inclined toward both good and evil. This highlights the fundamental role of education and habit formation in moral development. Since ethics is a practical science, it is learned through experience and action. Just as mastering a craft requires constant practice and repetition, becoming virtuous necessitates adopting good habits until they become second nature. Since morality is acquired through habits, it is also subject to change (Saruhan 2005, 2010).

Fārābī states: "If fear and hope did not exist, no one would strive for tomorrow (*ghadan*), no one would do good to others, no one would obey God, and no one would even attempt to display virtue." (Farabi, 1983, 14). For Fārābī, fear and hope arise from seemingly random events—things whose causes are not yet known. If a person were to know with absolute certainty everything that will happen tomorrow, they would have no reason to strive for it. Bearing the burden of something they know they will not benefit from would be irrational. In Fārābī's view, such behavior is not characteristic of intelligent individuals. Fārābī's approach to the issue of virtue can be derived from his definition of ethics. According to him, ethics is a discipline that enables the development of virtues, which he defines as moral faculties and dispositions that allow a person to perform good and beautiful actions. Fārābī categorizes virtues into four main types: theoretical (*nazarī*), intellectual (*fikrī*), moral (*akhlāqī*), and practical (*'amalī*) virtues:

- i. Theoretical virtues are the fundamental condition for happiness. Through knowledge and its power, one attains cognitive richness and maturity in understanding existence and events. As seen here, theoretical virtue is based on knowledge. Just as it gains value through knowledge, it also transforms into action, with happiness being its ultimate aim. Thus, knowledge itself becomes a virtue, forming the basis of theoretical virtues.
- ii. Intellectual virtues are those acquired through the faculty of contemplation, enabling individuals, societies, and humanity to exert all efforts in seeking and attaining what is good. These virtues play a central role in establishing strong states and shaping scientific and ethical philosophies that elevate societies.
- iii. Practical virtues, which represent the middle path, are faculties that avoid both excess and deficiency. Virtue is the reflection of the power of knowledge upon the will, leading to more

meaningful and comprehensive goodness. While extravagance and miserliness represent extremes, generosity—being a virtue—marks the balance between them.

Fārābī sometimes assigns an instrumental value to knowledge and at other times an absolute value. A thing may be chosen as a good for its own sake, or it may be sought as a means to achieve wealth, fame, or authority. Fārābī evaluates the virtue of societies based on their relationship with knowledge. Accordingly, societies and states are divided into two types: virtuous (*faḍīla*) and non-virtuous (*ghayr faḍīla*). Societies where knowledge dominates and where theoretical knowledge is translated into practical application are virtuous societies. In such societies, happiness prevails, as knowledge guides them toward internal and external peace and moral maturity. On the other hand, in non-virtuous societies, where ignorance prevails, people deviate from the right path, are subject to constant change, and lack noble values. The more accurately individuals think, the more they acquire the virtue of reason.

As a cognitive power, reason gains value when it aligns with human actions and deeds. The purpose of knowledge is its application. It is one thing to theoretically understand virtues like "goodness" and "justice" and vices like "evil" and "oppression," but it is another to apply this knowledge, embody goodness in life, and establish justice. As Fārābī states, when a person acquires the virtue of knowledge and ethics in both internal and external circumstances, they establish a connection with the transcendent world through the active intellect (*‘aql fa‘āl*). Upon reaching this state of perfection, they also attain true happiness, which is their ultimate goal. At the highest level of philosophy, Fārābī unites the roles of the ruler, philosopher, and prophet. Without philosophy, a ruler cannot grasp the essence of happiness. Without imagination, they cannot formulate laws, which are essential for understanding happiness and establishing a political framework.

It becomes clear that happiness is achieved through a deep understanding of existence, its principles, and its divine order. The one who contemplates the nature of being, its causal relationships, and the divine providence (*‘ināya*) governing the world is the one who attains happiness.

Happiness is closely related to knowledge. From one perspective, based on the theory of divine providence (*‘ināya*), happiness is linked to the flow of divine knowledge into the realm of existence and the perfection

of divine knowledge. This is also evident in the active intellect (*al-ʿaql al-faʿāl*), which enables human beings to acquire knowledge, recognize perfection, and live a life of intellectual and moral refinement. On the other hand, happiness is also connected to human knowledge. Fārābī outlines the methods of attaining happiness and provides guidance on the paths to it. In his work *al-Tanbīh (The Book of Admonition on Happiness)*, he classifies the states that lead a person to happiness into three categories:

- i. Actions performed by bodily organs, such as sitting, standing, listening, and speaking.
- ii. Emotional states related to the soul, such as desire, joy, anger, longing, and compassion.
- iii. Mental discernment (*tamayyuz*), which involves knowledge-based judgments about what must be known and done.

Fārābī emphasizes that a world built on cooperation among all human beings is a happy world. In Fārābī's philosophy, justice and love are the fundamental sources of civilization. His classification of love into three categories—love born out of necessity, love based on self-interest, and love arising from pleasure—seems to reflect the structural elements that shape societal organization (Farabi 1986).

Fārābī relates the formation of the "city" (*madīna*) to human need: "Every human being, in order to live and attain superior perfections, is by nature in need of many things, none of which they can provide alone. Therefore, each person requires the gathering of many individuals. Each individual contributes by fulfilling their own particular role. The conditions of all people in relation to one another can only be achieved through the coming together of different individuals for the purpose of mutual assistance" (Farabi 1986, 130).

According to Fārābī, when virtue and self-interest align, pleasure is produced. In this sense, the sustainability of a society founded on love is ensured by the virtue of justice. Just as bonds in the universe bring beings closer and connect them, love also binds human beings together. The various parts of a city and their hierarchical structure are interconnected through bonds of love and safeguarded by justice. Therefore, justice is the foundation and principle of the virtuous city (*al-madīna al-fāḍila*).

Happiness (*saʿāda*) is treated as an absolute value. What is meant by absolute value is something that is chosen solely for its own sake and

not as a means to another goal. In contrast, an instrumental good (*khayr wāsiṭa*) is something chosen for the sake of another purpose. Happiness is the only goal that is not a means to anything else; it is the highest and most perfect of all aims and virtues.

But what is the "good" that is identified with happiness? According to Aristotle, the good is "the final goal and ultimate purpose of all human beings." The final goal mentioned here is not only good in itself but also renders good whatever is used to attain it. For Fārābī, happiness is a goal that every human being desires to reach. Anyone who strives toward it does so because happiness is a state of perfection (Farabi 1983,129).

From another perspective, Fārābī argues that every being is created to attain its unique state of ultimate perfection. Every entity, including human beings, is endowed with the means to reach its distinct perfection. The specific perfection for human beings is called "the highest happiness." Since every person who seeks happiness does so out of a desire for perfection, the path to happiness requires continuous and serious effort to acquire and preserve virtuous behavior.

Thus, Fārābī appears to unite the goal of happiness in this world with the eternal happiness of the hereafter. His philosophical outlook integrates the pursuit of worldly happiness with the aspiration for eternal felicity, forming a harmonious connection between ethical life and eschatological destiny.

In conclusion, whether in epistemology, ontology, physics, or politics, the key concept in Fārābī's system is ethics. In a way, his entire philosophy serves as a pathway to ethics. Philosophy is not only the pursuit of true knowledge but also the fulfillment of righteous action. In his classification of virtuous and non-virtuous societies, the common flaw of non-virtuous societies is knowledge that is not put into practice. Is this not precisely what the Qur'an emphasizes most—the unity of faith and action (*īmān wa a'māl*)?

Fārābī defines religion as a holistic system composed of both beliefs and actions (*ā'rā' wa af'āl*). His attempt to establish the principles of religion suggests that his primary reference point is the Qur'an. After outlining the fundamental themes of the Qur'an, he proceeds to explain the practical dimension of religion, which he explicitly calls "af'āl" (actions). In this context, Fārābī's classification of the virtuous and non-virtuous cities and the concepts he employs, such as "dall" (misguided),

"muḍill" (one who leads others astray), "fāsiq" (transgressor), and "jāhil" (ignorant), appear to be, in a sense, a philosophical interpretation and expansion of Sūrat al-Fātiḥa.

The path to the straight way (al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm) can only be attained through sound reasoning and consistency. Sūrat al-Fātiḥa, with its profound emphasis on metaphysics, physics, and the pursuit of meaning and values, aligns with Fārābī's philosophical vision. The Qur'anic reference to "those upon whom blessings have been bestowed" (*an 'amta 'alayhim*) closely resembles Fārābī's conception of the highest happiness (*al-sa'āda al-quṣwā*).

This study indicates that Fārābī's ethical system is deeply intertwined with his metaphysics and epistemology. Several key insights emerge from the analysis:

Virtue is a Product of Knowledge: In Fārābī's ethical framework, theoretical knowledge (*'ilm naẓarī*) is the foundation of practical virtue. Without knowledge, individuals cannot distinguish between good and evil. The philosopher, as the highest form of human intellect, is the model of moral and intellectual perfection. Justice and Love as the Foundations of Civilization: Fārābī argues that justice holds society together, while love (*maḥabba*) strengthens social bonds. The virtuous city thrives on ethical leadership, where rulers embody wisdom, justice, and moderation.

Happiness as the Ultimate Goal: Happiness is not merely a worldly pleasure but an intellectual and spiritual fulfillment. It is achieved through the alignment of human reason with divine wisdom, facilitated by the active intellect (*'aql fa'āl*). Fārābī bridges ethics with eschatology, suggesting that the happiness sought in this world aligns with eternal bliss in the afterlife. The Unity of Faith and Action The Qur'anic emphasis on faith and action (*īmān wa a'māl*) aligns with Fārābī's ethical system. Non-virtuous societies are those where knowledge is not practiced, leading to moral and political decay. Fārābī's classification of misguided and virtuous individuals resembles Qur'anic discussions on guidance and misguidance, particularly in *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Fārābī's ethical philosophy embodies a profound metaethical framework in which knowledge, virtue, and

happiness are tightly interwoven within a metaphysical and rational system. For Fārābī, knowledge (*ilm*) is not only the foundation of epistemic certainty but also the key to moral action and spiritual fulfillment. It is through knowledge that human beings distinguish right from wrong, acquire the virtues necessary for personal and societal excellence, and ultimately align their souls with the divine order of the cosmos.

Virtues (*fadā'il*), in Fārābī's system, are not mere social conventions but ontological realities that reflect the perfection of the human soul. They emerge from reasoned understanding, disciplined practice, and a conscious striving toward balance and moderation. The theoretical, intellectual, moral, and practical virtues constitute a hierarchy of excellence that enables the human being to rise above base desires and participate in the higher order of existence.

Happiness (*sa'āda*) is the supreme end and the ultimate value in Fārābī's ethical thought. Unlike transient pleasures, true happiness is attained through the actualization of reason, the purification of the soul, and the embodiment of virtue. It is both the goal of philosophy and the telos of human life. In metaethical terms, happiness in Fārābī's philosophy functions as a moral final cause—that is, it gives direction and meaning to all ethical judgments and actions. The good is not defined independently of happiness, but rather, that which leads to happiness is truly good.

Moreover, Fārābī's ethical framework affirms that moral values are not relative or emotive, but instead grounded in a metaphysical realism where the structure of the universe and the aims of human nature converge. His reliance on the active intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*) as the source of both knowledge and moral illumination highlights a rationalist and objectivist metaethics, wherein moral truths are discoverable, universal, and necessary for human flourishing.

In conclusion, Fārābī's metaethical vision elevates ethics from a domain of opinion and utility to one of intellectual rigor, spiritual discipline, and ontological significance. His synthesis of Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, and Islamic principles constructs a moral universe in which to know the truth is to become virtuous, and to be virtuous is to achieve eternal happiness. In this way, Fārābī establishes ethics not merely as a branch of philosophy, but as the very aim of philosophical inquiry and the essence of civilized life.

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