

The Religious Aspect of the Concept of “Virtuous Man” in the Legacy of Al-Farabi

Samet Baizhuma¹, Bekzhan Meirbayev², Ainura Kurmanaliyeva³, Marzhan Alikbayeva⁴, Nurgul Tutinova⁵

Abstract

Today, the idea of a virtuous man in the legacy of Al-Farabi is one of the most topical challenges due to the constant changes in values. Above all, the intensive social development of our society places high demands on the formation of an active, creative personality. Thus, the analysis of theoretical research and the general concept of personality is considered in various scientific fields. A virtuous man is the result of moral education in socio-historical development. The formation of personality occupies an important place in the personal characterization; that is, it provides highly conscious forms of behavior and actions, forming the unity of all their relations with reality. This point of view has formed the basis of most study fields. The authors consider values oriented towards a virtuous man (motives and needs, aspirations and demands, virtue and mercy) based on the heritage of Al-Farabi. Thus, a virtuous man in the heritage of Al-Farabi is, firstly, an individual as a subject of social interaction and conscious action. Secondly, it is a systematic state of the individual, determined by their inclusion in social relations, and is the basis for the syncretism of religious education.

Keywords: Religion, Perfect Person, the Heritage of Al-Farabi, Spiritual Continuity, Humaneness.

Introduction

The definition of virtue, however, poses a challenge. If the human good is solely intellectual, why might moral virtues, which are intermediary dispositions in various domains of life, serve as an ethical goal? The foundation of virtue was laid in the heritage of world-famous second teacher Abu Nasr Al-Farabi. In his treatise on the origin of the soul and body, he refutes the opinion of his predecessor, Plato, that "the Soul appears before the body" and argues that the soul and body develop together; there is no soul without a body; the soul is the living property of the body; both the human body and the soul are transient. He also said that a person's cognition of his surrounded world is realized through the five senses, which itself are divided into external and internal energy of the soul, and it is the work of the brain (thought) and language to synthesize the information provided by the external energy. He considers the key difference between humans and animals to be the ability to think and speak. In the heritage of Al-Farabi, the definition of the concept of personality formation is: "Good manners and intelligence are human qualities. We find excellence and perfection in ourselves and in our actions when these two are the same, and we will become virtuous people due to these two noble qualities" (Nysanbayev & Kurmangalieva, 2005, 20).

The great thinker Al-Farabi gives a brief description of various manifestations of the phenomena of the soul in his treatise *On the Attitude of Virtuous City Residents*. He divides the process of cognition into two stages, calling the first one the sensory stage that encourages the thought process in the basic intuition of cognition. This is the main factor in the formation of the spiritual quality, strength, and willpower of the residents of the virtuous city. Bravery and heroic deeds are considered the good qualities of the willpower, while ruthlessness, cowardice, and lust are considered to be immoral personal qualities. Therefore, by

¹ Faculty of Philosophy and Political Sciences of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7748-5438>, Email: sametbaizhuma@gmail.com

² Faculty of Philosophy and Political Sciences of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3543-6096>, Email: Bekzhan.m@gmail.com.

³ Faculty of Philosophy and Political Sciences of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5299-2695>, Email: Ainura.Kurmanaliyeva@kaznu.kz.

⁴ Faculty of Philosophy and Political Sciences of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7228-663X>, Email: marzhan.alikbaeva@kaznu.kz.

⁵ Karaganda Buketov University, Karaganda, Kazakhstan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3476-7328>, Email: nurtut86@mail.ru, (Corresponding Author)

enumerating the special qualities of the human soul, he suggests that the conscious actions of a person indicate the difference between a person and an animal. A man cannot live without society, so he acts by communicating with others. This communication creates a man's professional characteristics and unites into different groups and communities. According to the profound words of Al-Farabi: "Active intelligence provides a person the knowledge and values that can be understood by the mind only after the intuitive part of the soul is formed in a person first, and then the striving part of the soul, which is connected with the intuition, is developed and the intention and aversion are formed. These knowledges are the essences that are judged by the first knowledge and the first mind" (Nysanbayev et al., 2009, 405).

Therefore, the relationships should be built on virtue and mercy. In order to live happy life, people should create a virtuous society where they help each other so that everyone can reach happiness, as happiness is the goal that every human being desires and strives to achieve. This is because happiness is a kind of perfection (Zamzami et al., 2021, 236). Every citizen should build a friendly relationship with one another. Al-Farabi addresses the question of virtue, contending that instilling virtue in a person is accomplished through morality. Regarding humility and extending a hand: humaneness is the link between people. As part of the human race, it is crucial for individuals to maintain peace and harmony within the society (Kobesov, 2006).

Justification for the Choice of Articles and Goals and Objectives

The study of "virtue and morality" in the legacy of historical figures and thinkers of the Kazakh people is considered one of the most significant among the great goals and heritages passed down from generation to generation. Today's goal of the national education, which continues through the generations, is to instill the national spirit, virtue, duty to the Motherland, and the principles of nationhood and unity. Consequently, many of the educational morals are tied to the national ideals found in the heritage of great thinkers, focusing on educating young people for humanity, virtue, decency, and patriotism.

Such moral ideas are also rooted in the national spiritual values of our nation. Studying the history of the country through its famous figures is a long-established trend in Kazakh consciousness. In Kazakh proverbs and genealogies, history is always recognized through the life stories of prominent individuals. The political, social, cultural-spiritual conditions of society are reflected through the lives of these personalities. For this reason, traditional Kazakh philosophy places more emphasis on strengthening the human mind than on trying to change life. Similarly, in the genealogical tradition, the primary focus is on providing information about the individual rather than the general state of society. Consequently, the topic and problem will focus on the importance of virtuous relations among people in society today. Morality and virtue can be the foundation in the conscious formation of an individual.

In terms of national unity and respect for the homeland, the educational heritage of the Kazakh people serves as a lasting example for future generation. The foundation of Kazakh morals and educational principles – rooted in noble linguistic, historical, lifestyle, and traditional heritage passed down through generations – is the enlightenment of the nation. Thus, spiritual and virtuous education occupies a distinct and objective place, separate from state policy and ideology. It becomes a source of strength, promoting the unity of both the state and its people, and is reflected in the democratic literacy of its citizens.

Thus, the concept of a virtuous man in the legacy of Al-Farabi is grounded in truth, virtuous relations, and the wellbeing of the people. It is evident that the principle of brotherhood of the Kazakh people is integral to their virtues and folk teachings.

Scientific Research Methodology

The scientific literature and the heritage of Al-Farabi, and the works where the concept of the perfect man is discussed in various points of view, were reviewed and compiled for the preparation of this paper. The following research methods were employed to address the main task and analyze the treatises on the virtuous person in the works of Al-Farabi: scientific-theoretical, methodological analysis, and system-structural method. Additionally, a comparative analysis of global experience was conducted in line with the

paper's objectives. During the survey, the works of both domestic and international scholars were analyzed, with a focus on recent studies and articles. The ideas regarding the virtuous man in the heritage of the great thinker Al-Farabi were examined, systematized, and articulated based on these sources.

Results and Discussion

According to Al-Farabi's division of labor, the inhabitants of the city are categorized into three groups: the poor, apprentices, and governors. He assigns physical labor to the poor and intellectual labor to the apprentices and governors, emphasizing that education, governance, and serving people with integrity should take precedence. As a prominent educator, Al-Farabi argues that a person can only be improved and perfected through virtue. He believes that virtue should be a universal quality, making his ideas significant in the social and ethical legacies of thinkers. He posits that the primary moral quality is virtue (Tanabayeba & Massalimova, 2017, 66).

In his teachings, Al-Farabi highlights twelve essential qualities for the governor of a virtuous city, including open-mindedness, the ability to cope with difficulties, self-discipline, high-spiritedness, ambition, and heroism. These qualities, intended to instill bravery and a heroic spirit in the younger generation, remain relevant today. Additionally, while religion promoted creativity in art, literature, and science, it also conferred divine-like authority on rulers, who were regarded as gods or their representatives (Levinson, 1992).

Several requirements for the qualities of a virtuous city leader are also outlined. The leader of a virtuous city, who is both the head of the virtuous people and the head of the country, must possess twelve innate virtues. First and foremost, this person's physical attributes must be perfect, and their strength must be well-adapted to the tasks they must perform. They should be able to accomplish tasks effortlessly with any part of their body. Additionally, they should naturally understand everything communicated to them, grasp the speaker's intent, and interpret the situation accurately. They must retain and remember all that they have understood, seen, heard, and noticed. The leader should be perceptive and insightful, recognizing even subtle signs, and must have a strong desire for art and education, enduring the demands of study and work without fatigue.

In personal matters, such as eating and private conversations, the leader should be content and avoid seeking temporary pleasure and joy. They should love truth and honest individuals, despise lies and hypocrisy, be high-spirited, and respect honor. Their soul should naturally incline toward good deeds and be far from evil. Material wealth, such as dirhams and dinars, should be shunned. The leader must be fair to all, treat strangers justly, guide people toward justice, and compensate those who have suffered from injustice, and show kindness and goodness to everyone to the best of their ability. They should be fair but not stubborn, unafraid of confronting injustice, and entirely merciless toward it. Additionally, the leader should be brave and courageous, unacquainted with fear or intimidation, and steadfast in pursuing necessary tasks (Kaliyev & Ayubai, 2007, 151).

Abu Nasr Al-Farabi once again emphasized the importance of refining the senses, thinking, upbringing, and actions. Humanity cannot be improved without knowledge, as an ignorant person cannot fully appreciate the virtues of others. True humanity is achieved through the education of the soul. Only when science and education are integrated can one attain spiritual health. A person who has not corrected their behavior cannot reach true knowledge. In summary, Al-Farabi asserts that it is the responsibility of individuals to achieve their goals. He highlights that personal growth is achieved through the pursuit of truth and understanding of the world. Al-Farabi's main conclusion is the unity of three essential elements: education, kindness, and beauty. His humanistic ideas have had a widespread influence globally. He extolled the high value of intelligence and knowledge, asserting that national unity and prosperity depend on preserving national education and spiritual values.

Al-Farabi's concept of virtue can be expressed in several ways. The thinker discusses virtue, faith, education, and generosity with regard to behavior, stating: "We argue that both good and bad qualities of behavior develop over time. If a person lacks their own stable behavior, they may easily adopt a different one. What

causes a person to develop their own behavior or to change from one behavior to another, often through close interaction, is habit. By 'habituation,' I mean the frequent and prolonged engagement in a particular action. The process of behavior formation is similar to the process of learning an art" (Kobesov, 2006, 12).

Al-Farabi discusses courage, bravery, and heroism, stating: "Willpower is primarily a desire that originates from intuition and belongs to the striving part of the soul, while perception pertains to the senses. This initial willpower gives rise to the imaginative part of the soul, through which desire emerges. Following the initial willpower comes a second willpower, which is a desire generated by imagination. This form of willpower enables a person to receive the first knowledge produced by active intelligence in the rational part of the soul. At this point, a third force of will, or free will, emerges. This free will, which is unique to humans and not found in other animals, allows individuals to perform actions that are either praised or condemned, and for which they are rewarded or reprimanded. While the first two types of willpower can be observed in non-intelligent animals, the presence of all types of willpower in a person enables them to distinguish between charity and evil, good and bad, and to strive for happiness" (Al-Farabi, 2009, 405).

The thinker provides his view on work, art education, and the results of one's labor: "People who achieve positive results in a particular field become leaders of those who do not have the same capability. These leaders are distinguished by their ability to be virtuous or serve as counselors, which they have attained through their efforts. Those with strong leadership skills and good intelligence will guide those who lack these qualities. Similarly, individuals with naturally imperfect qualities can become more worthy through good education compared to those with inherently good qualities. More mature and educated individuals in any field will lead those who are less educated. Even those who do not possess excellent qualities by nature can become leaders in their field if they receive proper education tailored to their natural inclinations. They can lead those who have natural excellence but lack adequate education" (Al-Farabi, 2009, 408). The development of such traits is determined by a person's inner drive and willpower. According to Al-Farabi, moral habits are under human control and can be changed, even though it may be challenging (Neria, 2013, 72).

However, the previous part of the quote highlights a shortcoming in this type of society: the mutual cooperation described here primarily focuses on the well-being of the body. It overlooks the true goal of society, which is to advance humanity's natural telos. While a healthy body is essential, it is not the sole determinant of this goal (Germann, 2021).

The remarkable scenes of nature are described as follows: "These bodies consist of the physical elements that make up the world, encompassing everything from cosmic bodies to the elements of earth, water, air, fire, and steam. They include stones and minerals on the earth's surface and in the subsoil, plants, irrational animals, and the worlds of rational beings. The researcher studies the types of each of these categories and the origins of their existence" (Al-Farabi, 2009, 439).

Regarding the role of beauty in art, song, and music, it is noted that: "Music is very beneficial in that it calms the lofty, perfects the imperfect, and maintains the status of the self-sufficient. It is also good for health because the soul is affected when the body suffers. Therefore, pleasant music uplifts the soul, provides a suitable force for the substance, and alleviates harm to the body" (Kobesov, 2006, 30).

When the thinker discusses protecting nature, he notes that the word "nature" is derived from the Arabic word "tabigh", which means a print, stamp, mark, or mold on wax or paper. This term signifies that all of nature receives its structure and existence from the mighty power of Allah and retains the imprint or expression of the Creator's act of creation. The initial act of creation is mirrored in nature itself. This imprint serves as a sign and reflection of Allah's order (Kobesov, 2006, 48).

On the teaching of intelligence: "A person who leaves behind a scientific legacy after death will be more valuable and insightful than one who sought only personal gain, as wealth can be detrimental to science. Thus, leaving a legacy is preferable and more valuable than worldly concerns, as it does not interfere with science. There is no barrier to attaining a degree in the afterlife. If other scholars or colleagues utilize this legacy, it will benefit him both in life and after death" (Kobesov, 2006, 38-39).

As for eloquent oratory, it is considered a valuable quality for rulers as well (Akhmetova, 2017, 463). Humor, when used appropriately, can contribute to this quality. A person should take time to rest, and moderate humor, rather than excess or lack thereof, can be beneficial. Humor has the power to uplift the soul. Wit enables a person to maintain relevance in humor, while excessive humor can lead to mockery, and a lack of humor can result in its absence (Kaliyev & Ayubai, 2007, 131).

Al-Farabi's philosophy of society, together with anthropology and cosmology, seeks to uncover humanity's ultimate purpose and the means to achieve it. This branch of practical philosophy addresses concepts such as happiness, the afterlife, the analogy between society and natural organisms, moral duties, and guiding citizens towards their natural telos, particularly through religion (Germann, 2021).

Conclusion

In summary, Al-Farabi asserts that it is up to individuals to achieve their goals. He argues that a person should continually improve himself or herself spiritually, and that self-improvement comes through understanding the truth and the surrounding world. The core of Al-Farabi's philosophy is the unity of knowledge, kindness, and beauty. His humanistic ideas have had a broad impact globally, highlighting the value of intelligence and knowledge. For a country to be strong and prosperous, it must preserve its national education and spiritual values. Today, this foundation is rooted in religious education and virtue: "The principal point is that those wishing to study in religious educational institutions should be guaranteed prospects for obtaining a specialized education, including both religious and secular knowledge and proficiency in multiple languages" (Duisenbayev et al. 2018, 252-258). Therefore, according to the goal of the paper, studying the concept of virtue in a religious context, the influence and the role in the formation and development of personality traits was determined. Al-Farabi's concept of virtue is connected to natural philosophy, the philosophy of society, long-standing cultural archetypes, and the internal experiences shaped by the mind. This concept holds significant importance for formative, regulatory, educational, and moral functions. It is necessary to recognize that this concept is a primary and influential means of education and the sustainable development of society, especially at a time of frequent changes in values in today's society in the context of globalization.

Due to the current global situation in the 21st century, there is a revival of Al-Farabi's legacy, the influence of his ideas on modern spiritual life, and his invaluable role in global spiritual search and development. Al-Farabi's heritage continues to be an important symbol of spiritual unity, his concept of virtuous man can be the basis for further rapprochement of peoples, can serve as the basis for the search for common values and dialogue between different religious or cultural identities, which is vital in modern times of uncertainty, contradiction, and upheaval.

Acknowledgement

This scientific article was funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the basis of the Project (AP19675827, "Philosophy of Language and Language of Philosophy of Abu Nasr Al-Farabi").

References

- Abu Nasr Al-Farabi (2009). *SELECTED TREATISES*. Almaty Arys Press, 2009.
- Akhmetova, E. (2017). Al-Farabi and Said Nursi on the Civilising Mission of the Prophets. *Kuala-Lumpur: Intellectual Discourse*, 25 (Special Issue). 453–475.
- Duisenbayev et al., (2018). Actual problems of Muslim pedagogy. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods* (Vol. 8, Issue 10), 703.
- Germann, N., Edward N. Zalta (Ed.). (2021). *AL-FARABI'S PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIETY AND RELIGION*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Stanford University Metaphysics Research Lab.
- Kaliyev, S. & Ayubai, K. (Ed.). (2007). *ANTHOLOGY OF KAZAKH TEACHING THOUGHTS*, Ten Volumes. Section 3: Teaching of ancient written heritage (1st millennium BC - end of the 15th century). Almaty: Sozdik Press. 480.
- Kobesov, A. (2006). *READING AL-FARABI AND ABAI SIDE BY SIDE: RESEARCH WORK*. Kazakh University Press, 258.
- Levinson, S. (1992). Review of Religious Language and the Public Square, *Harvard Law Review*, 105 (8). 2061–2079.

- Neria, Ch. M. (2013). Al-Farabi's lost commentary on the ethics: new textual evidence. *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 23 (1). 69-99.
- Nysanbayev, A. & Kurmangalieva, G. (Ed.). (2005). AL-FARABI'S PHILOSOPHY. Twenty volumes, Volume 2. Astana Translation Press, 480.
- Nysanbayev, A., Kurmangalieva G. & Sandybaev Zh. (Ed.). (2009). ABU NASR AL-FARABI, SELECTED TREATISES. Almaty Arys Press, 656.
- Tanabayeva, A. & Massalimova, A. (2017). Study of the Turkic code the analysis of Al-Farabi's life and legacy. *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 13 (5). 59-69.
http://www.ejst.tuiasi.ro/Files/66/6_Tanabayeva%20&%20Massalimova.pdf
- Zamzami, M. et al. (2021). Physical and Spiritual Dimensions of Happiness in the Thought of Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism*, 10 (2). 229-248. DOI:10.21580/tos.v10i2.8629