

The Idea of An Ideal Society in Al-Farabi's Concept of the "Virtuous City"

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Abstract: This article examines the idea of an ideal society in Abu Nasr Al-Farabi's concept of the "Virtuous City." Al-Farabi's political and philosophical thought occupies an important place in the history of Eastern and world philosophy because it connects metaphysics, ethics, politics, education, and human perfection into a unified system. In his doctrine, society is not understood merely as a mechanical association of individuals, but as an organized moral and intellectual community directed toward the highest human good, namely happiness. The purpose of this article is to analyze the theoretical foundations of Al-Farabi's ideal society, to explain the relationship between the virtuous ruler, virtuous citizens, knowledge, justice, and moral education, and to determine the contemporary significance of this concept for social and philosophical thought. The study is based on historical-philosophical analysis, comparative interpretation, and conceptual examination of Al-Farabi's political ideas. The results show that the "Virtuous City" is built on the harmony of reason and morality, the priority of knowledge, the ethical responsibility of leadership, and the purposeful cooperation of citizens. Al-Farabi's model of an ideal society remains relevant because it emphasizes that political order cannot be stable without moral values, intellectual development, justice, and social responsibility.

Keywords: Al-Farabi, Virtuous City, ideal society, political philosophy, justice, happiness, moral education, virtuous ruler, social harmony, Eastern philosophy.

Introduction: Abu Nasr Al-Farabi is one of the greatest thinkers of medieval Islamic philosophy and world intellectual history. His works contributed to the development of logic, metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy, music theory, and pedagogy. In the history of philosophical thought, he is often called the "Second Teacher" after Aristotle, because he systematized Greek philosophical heritage and developed it within the intellectual environment of the Muslim East. Among his most significant contributions is the concept of the "Virtuous City," in which he presents a philosophical model of an ideal society governed by reason, justice, knowledge, and moral perfection.

The problem of an ideal society has always occupied an important place in philosophy. From Plato's "Republic" to modern theories of civil society, thinkers have tried to answer the question of how human beings can live together in a just, harmonious, and meaningful social order. Al-Farabi's answer to this question is distinctive

because he connects the structure of society with the ultimate purpose of human life. For him, society is not only a place where people satisfy material needs, exchange services, or maintain political order. Society is a necessary environment for achieving happiness, which he understands as the highest perfection of human existence.

The "Virtuous City" is not simply a political project. It is a moral, intellectual, and educational system. In Al-Farabi's view, a person cannot reach perfection in isolation because human beings need cooperation, communication, education, and social organization. The city becomes virtuous when its members cooperate for the sake of true happiness, not only for wealth, power, pleasure, or fame. Therefore, the quality of society depends on the quality of its goals. If society is directed toward noble aims, it becomes virtuous. If it is directed toward false values, it becomes ignorant, immoral, or misguided.

The relevance of Al-Farabi's concept is not limited to medieval philosophy. In the modern world, societies face problems such as moral crisis, social inequality, political instability, weakening of responsibility, conflict between material progress and spiritual values, and the decline of trust in leadership. Al-Farabi's doctrine reminds us that the development of society requires not only institutions and laws, but also ethical consciousness, intellectual culture, responsible governance, and education aimed at human perfection. His idea of the "Virtuous City" can therefore be interpreted as a philosophical foundation for thinking about social harmony, civic responsibility, and the moral purpose of politics.

The aim of this article is to analyze the idea of an ideal society in Al-Farabi's concept of the "Virtuous City." The article explores the philosophical meaning of virtue, happiness, leadership, justice, knowledge, and cooperation in Al-Farabi's political doctrine. It also explains why the "Virtuous City" may be regarded as a model of purposeful social organization and why its principles remain significant for contemporary social thought.

The study uses historical-philosophical analysis as its main methodological approach. This method makes it possible to interpret Al-Farabi's concept in the context of medieval Eastern philosophy, Islamic intellectual culture, and the reception of Greek philosophical traditions. Al-Farabi's political ideas cannot be understood separately from his metaphysical and ethical worldview. Therefore, the analysis considers the relationship between his theory of knowledge, his understanding of human perfection, and his model of social organization.

The article also applies conceptual analysis. Key concepts such as "virtue," "happiness," "city," "ruler," "justice," "knowledge," and "cooperation" are examined as interconnected elements of Al-Farabi's philosophical system. This approach allows us to show that the "Virtuous City" is not a collection of separate political recommendations, but a systematic doctrine in which every social function is related to the final aim of human life.

Comparative interpretation is used to identify the broader philosophical meaning of Al-Farabi's ideas. His concept is compared indirectly with classical traditions of ideal society, especially with the Platonic understanding of the just state and the philosopher-ruler. However, the article does not reduce Al-Farabi's doctrine to imitation of Greek philosophy. It emphasizes the originality of his synthesis, in which philosophical rationalism, ethical perfection, and social responsibility are integrated into one model.

The study is qualitative in nature. It does not rely on statistical data, but on interpretation of philosophical texts and theoretical sources. The main research task is to reveal the internal logic of Al-Farabi's concept and to explain its significance for understanding the moral foundations of society.

The analysis shows that Al-Farabi's idea of an ideal society is based on the principle that human beings are social by nature. A person cannot achieve complete perfection alone because individual life is limited by natural needs, intellectual limitations, and dependence on others. Cooperation is therefore not accidental, but necessary. However, Al-Farabi distinguishes between ordinary cooperation and virtuous cooperation. People may cooperate for trade, protection, comfort, power, or pleasure, but such cooperation does not yet create an ideal society. The virtuous city emerges only when citizens cooperate in order to achieve true happiness.

For Al-Farabi, happiness is the highest aim of human existence. It is not identical with wealth, physical pleasure, social status, or political domination. True happiness is connected with the perfection of the soul, the development of reason, moral virtue, and knowledge of truth. This understanding gives his social philosophy a teleological character: society has a purpose, and this purpose determines its moral value. A city becomes virtuous when its political, educational, moral, and economic activities are directed toward the realization of human perfection.

One of the central results of the analysis is that Al-Farabi's ideal society is hierarchically organized, but this hierarchy is not based merely on force, inheritance, wealth, or social privilege. It is based on knowledge, moral excellence, and functional necessity. In the "Virtuous City," each person performs a role according to ability, education, and social function. This does not mean that Al-Farabi denies the value of individuals. On the contrary, he believes that every member of society contributes to the common good when social roles are harmonized with the general purpose of the city.

The figure of the virtuous ruler occupies a decisive place in Al-Farabi's doctrine. The ideal ruler is not simply an administrator or military leader. He must possess intellectual perfection, moral purity, practical wisdom, persuasive ability, courage, justice, and care for the people. Al-Farabi's ruler resembles the philosopher-ruler in Plato's philosophy, but he also has features of a moral educator and spiritual guide. The ruler's task is not only to maintain order, but to guide citizens toward happiness. This means that political leadership is inseparable from ethical responsibility.

The "Virtuous City" also depends on justice. In Al-Farabi's concept, justice is not limited to legal

punishment or distribution of material goods. It is a principle of harmony between the parts of society. Justice means that each social element performs its proper function and contributes to the common aim. When rulers, scholars, educators, artisans, soldiers, and other groups act according to virtue and reason, society becomes balanced. Injustice appears when private interest, ignorance, greed, or false values dominate over the common good.

Knowledge plays a foundational role in Al-Farabi's ideal society. The virtuous city cannot be governed by ignorance because ignorance leads people toward false happiness. If citizens do not understand the difference between true and false goods, they may mistake wealth, pleasure, or power for happiness. Therefore, education is essential. Al-Farabi's political philosophy is deeply pedagogical because it views the formation of citizens' minds and morals as a condition of social perfection. The ideal society must cultivate reason, ethical behavior, and awareness of the common good.

The analysis also reveals the importance of moral education. Al-Farabi does not believe that laws alone can create a virtuous society. Laws are necessary, but they are insufficient if citizens lack moral consciousness. A stable and ideal society requires people who are able to control desires, act fairly, respect others, seek knowledge, and participate in common life responsibly. Moral education forms the inner basis of social order. Without it, political institutions become external mechanisms that cannot produce genuine harmony.

Another important result is Al-Farabi's classification of non-virtuous cities. He describes ignorant, immoral, changing, and misguided cities in order to show what happens when society pursues false aims. In an ignorant city, people may seek wealth, pleasure, honor, domination, or bodily satisfaction instead of true happiness. In an immoral city, people may know the truth but fail to live according to it. In a misguided city, false beliefs are presented as truth. This classification demonstrates that Al-Farabi's ideal society is defined not only by what it includes, but also by what it rejects. The "Virtuous City" is opposed to social structures that separate politics from morality and knowledge.

The findings show that Al-Farabi's ideal society is not utopian in the simple sense of an unreal fantasy. It is a normative philosophical model. It establishes criteria by which real societies can be evaluated. A society may be judged according to the goals it pursues, the quality of its leadership, the role of knowledge, the level of justice, and the moral condition of its citizens. In this sense, the "Virtuous City" functions as a philosophical standard for social criticism and improvement.

Al-Farabi's concept of the "Virtuous City" has deep philosophical significance because it unites anthropology, ethics, politics, and education. His idea of society begins with the nature of the human being. Since human beings are incomplete without cooperation, social life is necessary. However, Al-Farabi does not reduce society to a contract of mutual benefit. He views society as a moral community directed toward the highest good. This distinguishes his approach from purely pragmatic or materialistic interpretations of politics.

The most important feature of the "Virtuous City" is its orientation toward happiness. In modern language, happiness is often associated with subjective satisfaction or emotional comfort. In Al-Farabi's philosophy, happiness is objective and connected with perfection. It requires knowledge, virtue, and the proper development of human capacities. This view gives politics a moral purpose. The state and society should not merely provide security or economic welfare; they should create conditions in which people can become intellectually and morally better.

The role of the ruler in Al-Farabi's concept may be interpreted from different perspectives. On the one hand, his ideal ruler represents wisdom, justice, and moral perfection. Such leadership is attractive because it suggests that power must be guided by reason and virtue. On the other hand, modern political thought may question whether such concentration of moral and intellectual authority in one ruler is realistic or compatible with democratic pluralism. Nevertheless, the essence of Al-Farabi's idea remains relevant: political leadership must be based on competence, responsibility, justice, and service to the common good.

Al-Farabi's doctrine also highlights the relationship between knowledge and governance. A society that is governed without knowledge becomes vulnerable to ignorance, manipulation, and false aims. The virtuous ruler must understand both theoretical truths and practical affairs. This means that political wisdom requires not only technical administration, but also philosophical vision. In the contemporary context, this idea can be connected with the need for evidence-based policy, ethical governance, intellectual responsibility, and long-term strategic thinking.

The educational dimension of the "Virtuous City" is especially important. Al-Farabi understands that social order cannot be created only from above. Citizens must be educated to understand virtue, justice, and common responsibility. Education is therefore not a narrow institutional process, but a civilizational function. It shapes the moral and intellectual character of society.

In this sense, Al-Farabi's concept is valuable for modern pedagogy and civic education because it emphasizes the unity of knowledge and morality.

The idea of justice in Al-Farabi's philosophy differs from a purely legalistic understanding. Justice is harmony, proportionality, and proper order. It requires that each part of society contribute to the whole according to its capacity and function. This view reflects the organic model of society, where social groups are interconnected. In modern terms, this can be interpreted as the need for social solidarity, professional responsibility, institutional balance, and ethical cooperation.

Al-Farabi's distinction between virtuous and non-virtuous cities is also highly relevant. Many modern societies may achieve technological progress and economic growth but still suffer from moral confusion, social alienation, corruption, or loss of common purpose. Al-Farabi would argue that such societies cannot be considered truly successful if they do not lead people toward moral and intellectual perfection. His classification of ignorant cities shows that a society can be materially developed but spiritually mistaken if it treats wealth, pleasure, or power as the highest aim.

The concept of the "Virtuous City" also has contemporary significance for discussions about civil society. A strong society requires more than formal institutions; it needs citizens who understand their responsibility toward others. Al-Farabi's emphasis on cooperation for the common good can be connected with modern ideas of civic participation, social trust, and public responsibility. His doctrine suggests that a healthy society must cultivate not only rights, but also duties, virtues, and moral awareness.

At the same time, Al-Farabi's model should be interpreted critically and historically. His hierarchical structure reflects the intellectual and political context of his time. Modern society is more complex, pluralistic, and institutionally diverse. Therefore, the "Virtuous City" should not be applied mechanically as a political program. Its value lies in its philosophical principles: the unity of knowledge and morality, the ethical purpose of politics, the importance of education, the responsibility of leadership, and the orientation of society toward the common good.

Another important aspect is the universal humanistic meaning of Al-Farabi's concept. Although it was created in a medieval context, it addresses questions that remain central today. What is the purpose of society? What qualities should leaders possess? How can citizens be educated for responsible life? What is the relationship between justice and happiness? Can political order exist without moral foundations? These

questions show that Al-Farabi's thought belongs not only to the history of philosophy, but also to contemporary debates about social development.

The "Virtuous City" may also be interpreted as a model of spiritual and intellectual civilization. For Al-Farabi, the highest society is not the richest or the most powerful, but the one that helps people become wise, moral, and happy. This idea challenges modern societies to reconsider the criteria of progress. Economic indicators and technological achievements are important, but they are not sufficient if they do not serve human dignity, justice, education, and moral improvement.

Al-Farabi's concept of the "Virtuous City" presents one of the most profound models of an ideal society in the history of political philosophy. It is based on the idea that society must be directed toward true happiness, which is achieved through knowledge, virtue, justice, and cooperation. The ideal society is not merely a system of political institutions, but a moral and intellectual community in which rulers and citizens work together for the common good.

The analysis shows that the central elements of Al-Farabi's ideal society are the virtuous ruler, moral education, social harmony, justice, knowledge, and purposeful cooperation. The ruler must possess wisdom and ethical responsibility, while citizens must be educated to understand and pursue virtuous goals. Society becomes ideal when all its parts function in harmony and are oriented toward human perfection.

Al-Farabi's concept remains relevant for modern social and philosophical thought. It reminds us that politics cannot be separated from morality, leadership cannot be separated from responsibility, and social progress cannot be reduced to material development. The "Virtuous City" encourages contemporary society to think about the ethical foundations of governance, the importance of education, the role of civic responsibility, and the need for a common moral purpose. Although Al-Farabi's model belongs to the medieval philosophical tradition, its core ideas continue to offer valuable guidance for understanding the relationship between human perfection and social order.

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