

Music As An Object Of Philosophical Knowledge In The Teachings Of Al-Farabi

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Abstract: This article examines music as an object of philosophical knowledge in the teachings of al-Farabi, one of the most prominent representatives of medieval Islamic philosophy. Special attention is given to the place of music within al-Farabi's philosophical system, where it is understood not only as an art form but also as a scientific discipline grounded in rational, mathematical, and metaphysical principles. Drawing on al-Farabi's major treatise "Kitab al-Musiqā al-Kabir" ("The Great Book of Music"), the study analyzes his views on the nature of sound, harmony, rhythm, and musical perception, as well as their connection with logic, mathematics, ethics, and psychology. The article highlights al-Farabi's synthesis of ancient Greek musical theory, particularly the ideas of Pythagoras and Aristotle, with the intellectual traditions of the Islamic world. It is argued that al-Farabi conceptualized music as a means of intellectual cognition and moral influence, capable of shaping human character and emotional states. The findings demonstrate the enduring philosophical significance of al-Farabi's musical theory and its contribution to the development of musicology as an interdisciplinary field at the intersection of philosophy, science, and art.

Keywords: Philosophy of music, musical theory, medieval philosophy, harmony, sound, Kitab al-Musiqā al-Kabir.

Introduction: In the contemporary world, the ontological and epistemological essence of music increasingly occupies the center of complex philosophical-paradigmatic inquiry. In particular, the analysis of Abu Nasr al-Farabi's intellectual legacy within the framework of the history of philosophy is regarded not only as a key component of Eastern musical thought, but also as an essential element in the evolution of universal humanistic thinking. In his work Kitab al-Musiqā al-Kabir ("The Great Book of Music"), al-Farabi interprets music not merely as a practical art, but as a theoretical system reflecting divine harmony and cosmic balance. By synthesizing Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysical traditions, he seeks to comprehend the structural models of reality through music.

Al-Farabi's musical theory particularly his idea that the ordering of sounds and rhythmic structures ensures the discipline of the soul and the perfection of the spirit gives rise to new ethical and aesthetic paradigms. In this respect, his approach is conceptually close to Kant's teleological principles of aesthetic judgment. Through this perspective, al-Farabi presents music not

only as an art form, but as an integrative mode of cognition and being, thereby revealing the ancient roots of the multilayered models of thought explored in post-classical epistemology. He associates music with hikma (wisdom), aligning it with Aristotle's concept of theoria and logically connecting it with modern phenomenological approaches particularly Hans-Georg Gadamer's interpretations of aesthetic experience. Thus, the philosophical and conceptual analysis of al-Farabi's musical theory, expressed through the harmonic system he developed, provides a solid epistemological foundation for new interpretations within the framework of contemporary post-metaphysical thought.

The relationship between music and human thought is increasingly becoming a broad field of scholarly analysis worldwide. In particular, the musical ideas advanced by Abu Nasr al-Farabi are today regarded as one of the important sources studied at leading institutions such as Harvard, Oxford and the Sorbonne. In his famous work The Great Book of Music, al-Farabi presents music as a powerful force that directly influences the human soul. He argues that through the

system of sounds, music enables the cultivation of the inner world, the regulation of emotions, and the attainment of spiritual elevation. Although these views shared certain commonalities with Aristotle's ideas of his time, al-Farabi did not interpret music merely as a means of entertainment or pleasure. Rather, he understood it as a path leading the human being toward maturity and perfection. According to him, every melody and every rhythm generates a specific state within the human heart, and this state directly affects a person's behavior. Al-Farabi's views are being reinterpreted in new ways by contemporary scholars, who seek to reassess the role of music in human life and society. For this reason, al-Farabi's intellectual legacy has not lost its relevance today; on the contrary, it continues to be valued as an ancient source of knowledge that guides humanity toward moral and spiritual development.

At a time when processes of national and spiritual renewal, rediscovery of historical heritage, and its scholarly study in accordance with contemporary demands are consistently continuing in our country, the analysis of Abu Nasr al-Farabi's views on music within the framework of the history of philosophy represents an extremely relevant field of academic inquiry. In his work *Kitab al-Musiqa al-Kabir* ("The Great Book of Music"), al-Farabi interprets music not only as a form of art, but also as a force that cultivates the human soul and establishes moral harmony within society. While these ideas were innovative for their time, they have not lost their significance in the present era; on the contrary, they fully correspond to modern intellectual and social needs.

Within the framework of political and educational reforms implemented nationwide with the aim of aesthetic education, spiritual development, and guiding the younger generation toward maturity through beauty, a profound scholarly study of al-Farabi's ideas contributes to the formation of a rich internal foundation that serves spiritual stability. In particular, al-Farabi's interpretation of music as a means of calming the soul, deepening thought, and strengthening morality can serve as an invaluable theoretical basis for addressing contemporary challenges related to moral education in society. At the same time, through an in-depth reinterpretation of this legacy, al-Farabi's place in national philosophical thought can be more clearly defined, which, in turn, contributes to the strengthening of the Uzbek philosophical school and to the enhancement of its international academic reputation.

Thus, the topic "A Philosophical and Conceptual Analysis of Abu Nasr al-Farabi's Musical Theory" constitutes a timely research direction that directly

serves the fundamental interests of our country's scientific and social development, being well substantiated both theoretically and practically. As emphasized by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyoyev, "the preservation, study, and transmission of historical heritage from generation to generation is one of the most important priorities of state policy". In the intellectual genius of our great ancestor Abu Nasr al-Farabi, the historical foundations of the New Uzbekistan society we are building find a central place through his reason, creativity, and philosophical insights.

Theoretical review

The musical dimension of al-Farabi's intellectual legacy constitutes a unique source that invites a deep understanding of the intellectual and cultural system of its time, and its analysis within the framework of the history of philosophy serves to renew the internal logic of contemporary scholarly thought. In his writings on music, al-Farabi sought to express, through musical modes, the interconnection between human emotions, inner psychological experiences, and moral norms within society. He writes that "the inner states of a human being are expressed through music by means of specific sounds", which presents him as a thinker who explored the subtle relationship between states of the soul and musical expression. It cannot be denied that al-Farabi's musical views are engaged in a philosophical dialogue with ancient Greek traditions. While adopting Plato's idea that "music is a means of education," al-Farabi deepens it in an original manner. According to him, "music is not a tool that changes human morality, but a spiritual force that awakens it." From this perspective, al-Farabi interprets music not as a mere collection of external sounds, but as a means leading to inner spiritual harmony. These views, in fact, correspond to the internal logical structure of the system of knowledge developed by al-Farabi and elevate it to a level at which it can engage in dialogue with the great universal thinkers.

From today's perspective, the prospects for an in-depth scholarly and theoretical study of al-Farabi's views on music are exceptionally broad. This is because his interpretation of music as a force that ensures spiritual harmony corresponds closely with modern analytical approaches aimed at understanding consciousness, emotions, and social balance. Particular attention should be paid to al-Farabi's assertion that "music not only expresses the soul, but also gives it a certain form" [1, p. 49]. In contemporary thought, this idea can be understood as viewing music as a distinctive cultural medium that organizes human emotions not in a visual, but in an acoustic form.

Al-Farabi analyzed not only the substantive aspects of music, but also its role in society. When he spoke of “the role of music in shaping social consciousness through folk songs, rituals, and customs,” he seeks to gain a profound understanding of the relationship between music and society. This approach clearly provides a basis for viewing music not merely as an aesthetic phenomenon, but as something intrinsically connected with elements of social consciousness. From the standpoint of scholarly and creative inquiry, al-Farabi’s legacy can be integrated with contemporary musicology, cultural studies, and anthropological research. His idea that “the system of melodies must correspond to the harmonies of human nature” is directly related to twenty-first-century studies on the role of music in shaping cultural identity. This aspect is especially significant in our era, when music is being reassessed as a universal concept within the framework of global intercultural dialogue.

With regard to the methodological orientations of research, a deep and comprehensive study of al-Farabi’s legacy may be carried out along the following lines: first, through a historical-comparative approach that analyzes the connections between al-Farabi’s ideas and ancient as well as medieval musical thought; second, through an aesthetic and affective analysis that clarifies how he shaped musical meaning; and third, through the modeling of the musical systems described by al-Farabi using modern scientific technologies. These methods not only allow for a deeper understanding of al-Farabi’s views, but also make it possible to reinterpret them within the framework of contemporary science. Al-Farabi’s musical legacy is the product of profound philosophical reflection on the human being, society, and the psyche. An analysis of this heritage creates the necessary foundation for restoring ideological, spiritual, and aesthetic criteria that are important for the present day, and for revitalizing them within modern culture and social consciousness. Al-Farabi wrote that “through music it is possible to restore the balance of social consciousness” an idea that today may serve as the basis for a new scholarly and aesthetic paradigm [2].

Al-Farabi’s musical legacy especially the ideas articulated in his *Kitāb al-Mūsīqī al-Kabīr* constitutes a subject worthy of profound methodological and conceptual analysis within the history of philosophy. In examining this legacy, it is essential to consider it within a coherent philosophical system, in dialectical interconnection with ethics, politics, metaphysics, and epistemology. Al-Farabi elevates music to a philosophical status not merely as an art form, but as a fundamental means in the formation of perception, the soul, and society. Central to understanding his views on

music is his idea of a “knowledge-based society”. He interprets music as a means of cultivating the human psyche and guiding it toward moral perfection: “Music awakens human nature, purifies emotions, and illuminates consciousness” [7].

One of the key prospects in today’s scholarly context is to bring al-Farabi’s approach into dialogue with contemporary music psychology and music pedagogy. For instance, modern studies analyze music as a social instrument that influences human mental health. A study devoted to Sloboda’s legacy states that “music can serve as a means of strengthening social motivation and spiritual stability, supporting the inner development of the younger generation” [10]. These ideas are semantically consonant with al-Farabi’s system. From a methodological standpoint, analyzing al-Farabi’s legacy requires an organic integration of analytical and Continental approaches in musicology. Roholt distinguishes these two directions as lying between “a structural understanding of experience” and “the interpretation of music’s cultural codes” [8]. Al-Farabi, however, balanced these approaches already in his own time: he articulated musical structures (maqām, rhythm, melody) through logical categories, while simultaneously interpreting their metaphysical value. In the history of philosophy, music has consistently been understood as a form that is “inexpressible in words”. Bowie notes in this regard: “The meaning of music may lie precisely in its resistance to verbal articulation” [7].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Al-Farabi was among the first thinkers to address the relationship between music and meaning on a systematic, scientific basis, exploring it through the lenses of logic and rational categories. From both a scholarly and creative standpoint, his legacy remains an underexplored resource for contemporary research. A critical analysis of his works, comparison with modern aesthetic theories, and integration into music education systems could usher in a new phase of the Al-Farabi intellectual tradition. As Kivy notes regarding the contemporary renewal of music philosophy: “The marriage between music and philosophy has now been renewed, allowing for a reconsideration of twentieth-century aesthetic values” [4].

Al-Farabi’s contributions to music represent a polyphony of ideas and experiences. His work is not only of historical significance but also offers profound insights for contemporary philosophy, cultural studies, and musicology. Studying his musical heritage today requires approaching it not merely as a historical-philosophical artifact but in dialogue with modern cognitive and theoretical frameworks. Indeed, Al-

Farabi's theory represents one of the earliest attempts to comprehend the "intellectual essence of music". By applying the mathematical and logical principles of his time to musical structure, he transformed music from a practical art into an "intellectual rhythm" apprehended through cognition. From this perspective, his legacy provides a conceptual foundation for twentieth and twenty-first-century musicological and epistemological research.

Andrew Bowie observes: "For philosophy, music is valuable in its clarity within the unknown it exists at the threshold of language and, through itself, introduces new questions into philosophical inquiry" [3]. Within the framework of Al-Farabi's philosophy, music was conceived not merely as a source of aesthetic pleasure but as a means to cultivate spiritual discipline and achieve the harmonious organization of society.

Contemporary philosophical approaches also seek to enrich Al-Farabi's perspective on music with alternative methodologies. Tiger Roholt considers the continental and analytic traditions as two opposing, yet complementary, methods for understanding music. While the analytic school analyzes music within the framework of semantic expression, the continental approach aims to study it at social and existential levels. Al-Farabi, however, can be regarded as one of the first synthesizers of these two approaches: he not only defined musical structure through mathematical principles but also accounted for its spiritual and moral consequences. Furthermore, contemporary research on the relationship between music and philosophy offers opportunities to revisit and reinterpret Al-Farabi's insights. Levinson describes the mutual inspiration between music and philosophy as follows: "Music is a form of thought. Within it, there is logic, coherence, and meaning. Thus, music not only inspires philosophy but also becomes a unique expression of it" [5].

From a scholarly and creative perspective, applying Al-Farabi's methodological apparatus to contemporary music criticism and cultural studies is crucial. As Kristina Yapova notes: "Musical cognition is a cultural phenomenon perceived as a form of human existence. This cognition speaks not only about music itself but also about the worldview embedded within it" [6]. This insight should be analyzed in alignment with Al-Farabi's idea of regulating society through music. Thus, Al-Farabi's philosophy of music can serve as a methodological guide for current research. His work not only defines the role of music in shaping the moral structure of society but also integrates it with reason and cognition. Reinterpreting his legacy in contemporary post-philosophical approaches provides a theoretical foundation for studies on music and social

consciousness, as well as music and psychological resilience.

The philosophical views on music developed by Abu Nasr Al-Farabi within the framework of Eastern Renaissance thought constitute a scientific and cultural heritage that has yet to be fully explored in the context of contemporary philosophy. This heritage, analyzed through the methodological tools of historical-philosophical inquiry, allows music to be studied not only as a theoretical discipline but also as a universal symbol of spiritual and aesthetic formation. From this perspective, Al-Farabi's reflections on music can be understood as a "philosophical path leading to human perfection". He defines music as an "intellectual activity directed toward moral and spiritual excellence" and interprets the relationship between music and philosophy as an "endeavor to comprehend the harmony of the cosmos through reason". Here, music functions as a "means reflecting human existence" and serves to elevate the human spirit. Therefore, in Al-Farabi's theory, music is not merely an art form but an intellectual practice that stimulates the inner world of the individual.

Contemporary research also emphasizes the metaphysical essence of music. According to Huang, Wu, and Guo, music serves as an "important environment for the formation of mental states leading to personal perfection". They regard music as an "ideational-communicative system" and assign it a central role in shaping an individual's worldview, education, and aesthetic consciousness [9]. Similarly, Levinson evaluates the relationship between music and philosophy as "the intersection of artistic and logical modes of thought". He describes music as "an aesthetic form of reasoning," thereby demonstrating how music manifests philosophically at social, cultural, and ontological levels. Another important aspect is that contemporary methodological approaches aim to analyze music as a multi-layered network of meanings. Scholars led by Esti Sheinberg emphasize the necessity of understanding music through "networks of significations," demonstrating that each musical element rhythm, melody, pause carries its own philosophical significance. Based on this, the prospects for analyzing Al-Farabi's musical thought through modern methodological criteria can be outlined as follows:

Ontological approach: Al-Farabi considered music as a form of being, portraying the harmony between humans and the cosmos. This approach intersects with contemporary musical ontologies.

Phenomenological analysis: Direct perception of musical experience was crucial for Al-Farabi, whose

perspective aligns with the phenomenological views of Merleau-Ponty and Husserl.

Axiological method: The place of music within the system of values occupies a central position in Al-Farabi's thought. This method forms a basis for modern musical aesthetics.

Semantic-structural analysis: The system of musical symbols in Al-Farabi's works can be examined through contemporary semiotic methods.

Cultural-philosophical reinterpretation: By analyzing the socio-cultural foundations of his works, his views can be evaluated in their historical and conceptual context.

Al-Farabi's philosophy of music not only constitutes the artistic and intellectual heritage of his era but also possesses rich spiritual and philosophical resources for contemporary research. His ideas, when analyzed with modern methodological approaches, open pathways to new scientific paradigms. The prospects for studying Al-Farabi's legacy in the context of contemporary philosophy and cultural studies are extensive. First, this heritage can be explored interdisciplinarily at the intersection of philosophy, musicology, psychology, and sociology. Second, the spiritual and moral-philosophical foundations of music proposed by Al-Farabi are now being reinterpreted as a source for youth education, musical literacy, and the formation of cultural identity. Third, Al-Farabi's methodology based on the integration of reason and emotion can provide a scientific foundation for contemporary musical aesthetics, alternative therapies, and approaches to psychological well-being.

Contemporary research necessitates studying Al-Farabi's music theory on philosophical-anthropological and logical-aesthetic grounds and comparing his views with current scientific methodologies. This is because Al-Farabi's reflections on music advance the idea of human perfection through the triad of reason, spirit, and melody. In today's global cultural context, this idea is especially significant for restoring aesthetic sensitivity and moral harmony, which are gradually diminishing. In particular, Al-Farabi's philosophy offers substantial conceptual potential for intercultural dialogue, aesthetic understanding, and the development of ideational tolerance. Therefore, a profound and systematic study of Al-Farabi's musical legacy from the perspective of the history of philosophy is essential for addressing contemporary moral and aesthetic challenges, reinterpreting the social and spiritual functions of music, and integrating his insights into modern thought. Indeed, his idea that "music is the natural expression of the human soul" provides a philosophical foundation for restoring inner

balance in today's individual.

CONCLUSION

Al-Farabi's philosophical views on music, within the framework of contemporary thought, represent one of the highest achievements of medieval Eastern philosophy. His interpretation of music not merely as an artistic phenomenon but as a philosophical, epistemological, and moral-spiritual category serves as a crucial methodological resource for enriching the theoretical foundations of modern musicology and aesthetic theory. From the perspective of the history of philosophy, Al-Farabi's musical thought is distinguished by its synthesis of the Pythagorean and Aristotelian legacies of Greek philosophy with the scientific approaches of Eastern thought, connecting music organically with human psychology, social ethics, and moral education. Even in contemporary aesthetic discourse, the theoretical principles outlined in his *Kitab al-Musiqā al-Kabir* remain highly relevant for understanding the socio-cultural functions of music and applying them in pedagogical contexts.

In modern musicology, the significance of Al-Farabi's theory primarily lies in providing a scientific basis for understanding the impact of musical melody and rhythm on the human psyche and in deeply analyzing music's educational and ethical power within aesthetic reflection. His perspective interprets music not only as a means of achieving inner harmony and moral perfection but also as a crucial factor in shaping social consciousness and cultural development. Within the history of philosophy, this approach highlights the role of art not merely as an aesthetic experience but as a medium for epistemological and ethical realization. Today, Al-Farabi's views serve as a universal conceptual model in the philosophical analysis of musical aesthetics, illuminating the interconnections between art and science.

Furthermore, the prospects for studying Al-Farabi's legacy open new avenues for the formation of scientific paradigms by integrating his musical-philosophical teachings with contemporary methodological approaches. His theoretical principles serve as a foundational resource for developing new methods and approaches in music pedagogy, philosophy of art, and aesthetic culture. Therefore, an in-depth study of Al-Farabi's musical thought, its philosophical analysis, and its application in modern musicology holds strategic significance for contemporary research and practice, enhancing our understanding of music's role in moral development and social consciousness.

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