

## The Revival of al-Farabi's Ethical Idea: Virtue and the Spiritual Foundations of Turkic-Islamic Civilization

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### Abstract

This article examines Abu Nasr al-Farabi's ethical and political philosophy as a foundational framework for the formation of virtuous personality and leadership within Turkic-Islamic intellectual history. Rather than treating virtue as an abstract moral ideal, al-Farabi conceptualizes *faḍīla* as a structured synthesis of rational knowledge, moral habituation, and spiritual discipline oriented toward *sa'āda* (human happiness). The study focuses on al-Farabi's doctrine of the virtuous person and the virtuous ruler as articulated primarily in *The Virtuous City* and traces its reception and transformation in the works of later Turkic thinkers, including Yusuf Balasaguni, Khoja Ahmad Yasawi, Mahmud Kashgari, and Ahmad Yugnaki. It shows that al-Farabi's doctrine of the virtuous person and ruler can be understood as a civilizational model in which personal moral growth and the welfare of society are indivisibly united. Employing analytical-historical and comparative philosophical methods, the article examines how al-Farabi's model of ethical leadership was reinterpreted within different intellectual and socio-spiritual contexts, particularly through juridical, pedagogical, and Sufi frameworks. This approach enables the identification of the ethical, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of al-Farabi's system and their transformation within later Turkic-Islamic thought. The analysis demonstrates that, despite variations in form and emphasis, these thinkers preserve a shared conception of leadership grounded in moral self-perfection, justice, and responsibility toward the community. The findings indicate that Turkic-Islamic ethical thought not only inherited al-Farabi's ideas but also adapted them into a durable civilizational paradigm linking personal moral development with social order. By situating al-Farabi within this intellectual continuum, the article clarifies his enduring significance for Islamic moral philosophy and provides a historically grounded perspective on virtue-based leadership and ethical education.

**Keywords:** benevolence, personal development, spirituality, al-Farabi's spiritual legacy, humaneness

### Introduction

Finding a precise definition of virtue is a challenging philosophical undertaking. If the human good is solely intellectual, one might ask why moral virtues, those intermediary dispositions in various domains of life are regarded as the ultimate ethical goal.<sup>1</sup> The foundation of virtue, both as an ethical ideal and as the basis of social harmony, was profoundly articulated in the heritage of the great thinker, Abu Nasr al-Farabi. In his treatises on the soul and the virtuous city, he examines the unity of body and soul, the process of cognition, and the role of rational and moral faculties in perfecting human nature.<sup>2</sup> He argues that human beings are distinguished from animals not merely by perception, but by the capacity for rational thought and articulate speech. True virtue, therefore, is achieved when reason and good manners act in harmony, forming the complete and perfect human personality.

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<sup>1</sup> Juwaini, Juwaini, Syamsul Rijal, Aminudin Basir @ Ahmad, Harjoni Desky, Moh Tamtowi, Mawardi Mawardi, and Cut Siska Safira. 2025. "Ibn Miskawaih's Ethical Philosophy and Its Relevance to Moral Education in Indonesian Secondary Schools". *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13 (1): 695-720. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v13i1.1648>.

<sup>2</sup> Germann, Nadja. "Al-Fārābī's philosophy of society and religion." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2021).

According to Nysanbayev, Kurmangalieva and Sandybayev,<sup>3</sup> for al-Farabi, the ultimate end of human striving, happiness can only be attained through a virtuous society governed by mutual aid, justice, and compassion, where everyone contributes to the collective perfection of humanity.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Farabi's ethical theory is the moral cornerstone of civilization and transcends individual virtue to the social and political spheres.<sup>5</sup> His spiritual legacy is a special importance for understanding the man-society, power-spirituality relationship. According to his theory, a wise, just, and virtuous leader whose power is based on moral and intellectual brilliance must govern the state and society. Such a ruler embodies truth and kindness and serves as his people's spiritual guide and leader in addition to holding political authority.<sup>6</sup> This conception situates leadership within the ethical and spiritual order of civilization, making it both a moral and cultural responsibility rather than a purely administrative function<sup>7</sup>

By integrating ethics, education, and politics into a coherent philosophical system, al-Farabi laid the groundwork for later developments in Islamic and Turkic intellectual traditions. His model of the “virtuous ruler,” combining reason and morality, knowledge and justice, became the archetype of leadership in classical Islamic thought and found continuity in the works of Turkic thinkers such as *Kutadgu Bilig*,<sup>8</sup> *Diwani Hikmet*,<sup>9</sup> *Diwani Lugat at-Turk*,<sup>10</sup> *Hakim Ata kitaby*,<sup>11</sup> and *Aqīqat Syiy*.<sup>12</sup> These works expanded on the idea that when authority is based on virtue and spirituality, it supports the community's peace and perfection rather than power.

Thus, the revival of al-Farabi's ethical thought is not merely an intellectual return to the past; it represents a reawakening of the spiritual and moral foundations upon which Turkic-Islamic civilization was built. His synthesis of reason, virtue, and spirituality continues to offer profound insights into the moral architecture of society and the enduring relationship between personal perfection and civilizational flourishing.

### **Justification for the Choice of Articles and Goals and Objectives**

The ethical and political philosophy of Abu Nasr al-Farabi occupies a central position in the intellectual history of Islamic civilization, particularly in discussions concerning virtue (*faḍīla*), happiness (*sa'āda*), and the moral foundations of social order. Modern Farabi studies have demonstrated that his ethical system cannot be reduced to abstract moral theory but must be understood within its broader philosophical, political, and civilizational context.<sup>13</sup> This civilizational reading of al-Farabi's thought is further supported by studies which emphasize the integration of metaphysical, ethical, and epistemological dimensions in his philosophical corpus, particularly within an Islamic intellectual framework.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, al-Farabi's works, especially *The Virtuous City*, constitute an essential source for examining the relationship between individual moral perfection and collective well-being.

The selection of later Turkic-Islamic thinkers such as Yusuf Balasaguni, Khoja Ahmad Yasawi, Mahmud Kashgari, and Ahmad Yugnaki is justified by their sustained engagement with ethical, political, and pedagogical questions that parallel and extend al-Farabi's philosophical project. Scholarly studies indicate that these figures played a decisive role in transmitting and transforming Islamic ethical concepts within Turkic linguistic and cultural contexts, thereby contributing to the formation of a

<sup>3</sup> Abu Nasr al-Farabi. Selected Treatises, ed. A. Nysanbaev, G. Kurmangalieva, Zh. Sandybaev (Arys Press, 2009), pp. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Zamzami, M. et al. “Physical and Spiritual Dimensions of Happiness in the Thought of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina.” *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism* 10, no. 2 (2021): 229-248. <https://0.21580/tos.v10i2.8629>

<sup>5</sup> Boros, Gabor. “Molière, descartes, générosité.” *Filozofia* 64, no.2 (2009), pp. 133-143.

<sup>6</sup> Myrzaly N. Rukhani zhangyru jane ulttyq ideologiya [Spiritual revival and national ideology] (Foliant, 2019). (in kazakh)

<sup>7</sup> Zhumadilov T. *Al-Farabi jane qazirgi liderlik teoriyasy* [Al-Farabi and modern leadership theories] (Kazakh University, 2021). (in kazakh)

<sup>8</sup> Zhusip Balasugun, *Kutty bilik*, (Zhazushy Press, 1986). (in kazakh)

<sup>9</sup> Khoja Ahmet Yasawi. *Diwani Hikmet* (M. Auezov Institute of Literature and Art Press, 1993). (in kazakh)

<sup>10</sup> Mahmut Kashkari. *Diwani Lugat at-Turk*. (Khantengri Press, 2005). (in kazakh)

<sup>11</sup> Suleimen Bakyrqani, *Hakim Ata kitaby* [The Book of Hakim Ata] (Nauka Press, 1991). (in kazakh)

<sup>12</sup> Akhmet Yugnaki. *Aqīqat siy* [The Gift of the Truth] (Bilim, 1998). (in kazakh)

<sup>13</sup> Neria, Ch. M. Al-Farabi's lost commentary on the ethics: new textual evidence. *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 23, no 1 (2013): 69-99. Also refer to Germann, Nadja. “Al-Fārābī's philosophy of society and religion.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2021).

<sup>14</sup> Ishak, Shaik Nizam, and Shaik Abdullah Hassan Mydin. “Elemen Tawhidik dalam Perbincangan Ilmu Geometri Karya Tokoh Islam: Analisis terhadap Kitab al-Hiyal oleh al-Farabi.” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 20, no. 1 (2025): 171–188. <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol20no1.13>.

*The Revival of al-Farabi's Ethical Idea: Virtue and the Spiritual Foundations of Turkic-Islamic Civilization* distinct moral-intellectual tradition.<sup>15</sup> Their major works, such as *Kutadgu Bilig*, *Diwani Hikmet*, *Diwani Lugat al-Turk*, and *Aqiqat siy* (The Gift of Truth), provide historically grounded material for tracing the continuity and reinterpretation of al-Farabi's ethical ideals. This intellectual lineage demonstrates that the foundations of Kazakh and broader Turkic spirituality are inseparable from Islamic ethical thought.

The aim of this study is to analyse the philosophical foundations of virtue (*faḍīla*), happiness, and moral perfection in al-Farabi's ethical and political works, with particular emphasis on *The Virtuous City*. On this basis, the study examines the continuity between al-Farabi's concept of the virtuous person and the moral-educational ideals developed by later Turkic-Islamic thinkers such as Yusuf Balasaguni, Khoja Ahmad Yasawi, and Ahmad Yugnaki, understood as a synthesis of knowledge, justice, and spiritual responsibility within al-Farabi's system of thought. Through a comparative analysis of al-Farabi's concept of virtuous leadership and the Turkic tradition of ethical governance, the study highlights their shared civilizational and humanistic values. It also seeks to clarify the philosophical and ethical continuity between al-Farabi's teachings and contemporary discussions of ethical leadership, civic virtue, and moral education in the Islamic world.

Through this approach, the study seeks to demonstrate that al-Farabi's ethical philosophy provided a durable conceptual framework in which personal moral development, ethical governance, and social harmony are understood as mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single civilizational vision. Situating al-Farabi within this broader intellectual continuum allows for a more precise assessment of his enduring influence on Turkic-Islamic moral philosophy and highlights the relevance of virtue-centered ethics for contemporary discussions of moral education, civic responsibility, and leadership within Islamic societies.

### **Methodological Framework**

This study employs an analytical–historical approach grounded in the methods of intellectual history and philosophical analysis. The research is based on a close reading of primary texts by Abu Nasr al-Farabi, with particular attention to *The Virtuous City*, alongside selected works of later Turkic-Islamic thinkers, including Yusuf Balasaguni, Khoja Ahmad Yasawi, Mahmud Kashgari, and Ahmad Yugnaki. These sources are examined in their historical, linguistic, and conceptual contexts to clarify the meanings of key ethical and political concepts such as virtue (*faḍīla*), happiness (*sa'āda*), moral perfection, and leadership.

The analytical component of the study consists of a systematic examination of al-Farabi's ethical and political concepts, focusing on their internal coherence and philosophical structure. This includes an analysis of how al-Farabi integrates rational knowledge, moral habituation, and spiritual discipline within his conception of the virtuous person and the virtuous ruler. Attention is paid to the normative and teleological dimensions of his ethical theory, especially the relationship between individual moral perfection and the collective happiness of society.

The historical-comparative component of the methodology is used to trace the reception and transformation of al-Farabi's ethical ideas within the Turkic-Islamic intellectual tradition. By comparing al-Farabi's writings with later texts such as *Kutadgu Bilig*, *Diwani Hikmet*, *Diwani Lugat al-Turk*, and *The Gift of the Truth*, the study identifies both continuities and reinterpretations of the concept of virtue-based leadership. This comparative analysis does not assume direct textual borrowing in every case but rather examines shared conceptual frameworks and ethical orientations shaped by common intellectual and religious traditions.

In addition, a contextual approach is applied to situate these philosophical ideas within their broader socio-cultural and civilizational settings. This allows the study to assess how ethical leadership and moral education functioned as practical ideals within Turkic-Islamic societies, rather than as purely

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<sup>15</sup> Kobesov, A. *When studying al-Farabi and Abai in parallel: Research work* (Kazakh University Press, 2006), 258. Also refer to Tanabayeva, A. & Massalimova, A., Study of the Turkic code the analysis of al-Farabi's life and legacy. *European Journal of Science and Theology* 13, no 5 (2017): 59-69. [http://www.ejst.tuiasi.ro/Files/66/6\\_Tanabayeva%20&%20Massalimova.pdf](http://www.ejst.tuiasi.ro/Files/66/6_Tanabayeva%20&%20Massalimova.pdf)

theoretical constructs. The methodological framework thus combines philosophical analysis with historical contextualization, ensuring that conclusions drawn in the discussion are grounded in textual evidence and intellectual history.

Through this integrated approach, the study establishes a clear methodological basis for analyzing the continuity between al-Farabi's ethical philosophy and later Turkic-Islamic conceptions of virtue, leadership, and social harmony. This framework provides the foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion of results.

## Results and Discussion

The table outlines a comparative framework of leadership concepts in Turkic-Islamic thought as developed by al-Farabi, Zhusip Balasagun, Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, Mahmud Kashgari, Ahmet Yugnaki, Suleiman Bakyrangani, and Shakarim Kudaiberdy. It identifies philosophical foundations, moral and intellectual qualities, levels of leadership, and civilizational purpose as the key criteria. Across these thinkers, leadership is defined by the integration of ethical virtue, rational knowledge, and spiritual responsibility. From al-Farabi's philosopher-king to Yasawi's Sufi guide, the ideal ruler embodies justice, wisdom, and service to the community. This continuity demonstrates a unified intellectual tradition where the perfection of the individual constitutes the essential condition for the moral and political harmony of society.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 1: Comparative analysis of the models of the national leader and ideal leadership in the works of al-Farabi and Turkic scholars**

	<b>Al-Farabi</b>	<b>Zhusip Balasagun</b>	<b>Khoja Akhmet Yasawi</b>	<b>Mahmut Kashkari</b>	<b>Akhmed Yuginaki</b>	<b>Suleimen Bakyrangani</b>	<b>Shakarim Kudaiberdy</b>
<b>Works</b>	«On the views of the inhabitants of a virtuous city»	«Kutadgu Bilig»	«Diwani Hikmet»	«Diwan Lughat al-Turk»	«The Gift of Truth»	«The Book of Hakim Ata»	«The Three Truths»
<b>The main concept of leadership</b>	Philosopher-leader (philosopher-king), possessor of wisdom and reason	Just and wise king, the image of "Kuntudy" (Justice)	Spiritual leader, saint, Sufi leader	A leader who unites through language and cultural unity	A spiritual leader based on wisdom and justice	Spiritual teacher, model of human perfection	A wise leader, guided by conscience and conscience, a possessor of "the science of honour"
<b>Qualities of an ideal leader</b>	A person who is intelligent, fair, educated, spiritually mature, and serves the happiness of the people	Just, reasonable, knowledgeable about power and law, caring for the people, and well-educated	A person who has conquered his desires, is humble, a teacher in the path of God, and a servant of the people.	A keeper of the cultural code, respectful of the language, a guarantor of spiritual integrity	A teacher who is disciplined, knowledgeable, and upright, educating people in justice	A patient, restrained, spiritual leader, and role model for the people	An honest, fair, responsible, spiritually honest, morally upright person who serves the people faithfully.
<b>Level of leadership</b>	Ethical-spiritual perfection	Ethical-good character	Ethical-spiritual purity	Ethical-cultural awareness	Ethical-goodness and justice	Ethical-spiritual perfection	Ethical -purity of honour

<sup>16</sup> Kobesov, A. *When studying al-Farabi and Abai in parallel: Research work* (Kazakh University Press, 2006), 258.

<b>(ethical, intellectual, functional)</b>	Intellectual - philosophical knowledge Functionality- legislator, educator, governor, preacher	Intellectual- management science Functionality- state order enforcer	Intellectual -religious and educational wisdom Functionality- spiritual educator, spiritual teacher of the people	Intellectual -mastering language and civilization knowledge Functionality- unifier of the people	Intellectual- wisdom, education Functionality- social reformer	Intellectual -moral wisdom Functionality- spiritual teacher	and conscience Intellectual - philosophical, religious and ethical knowledge Functionality- spiritual national teacher of the people
<b>Main mission and goal</b>	Ensuring the happiness and harmony of society, creating a just society	The happiness of the state and society, establishing a world order through justice	Leading people to spiritual perfection and closeness to God	Preservation of the unity of the Turkic peoples, spiritual and cultural integrity	The development of man and society through virtue	Spiritual purification of society, leading to morality	To improve the people through honour, justice, and mercy, and to offer a path to spiritual renewal
<b>Qualities of an ideal leader</b>	Basic model, root model; ideological basis for later Turkic thinkers	Directly in line with al-Farabi's idea of "happiness and justice"; deepened in a practical direction	Consistent with al-Farabi's model of a spiritual-intellectual leader: wisdom and spiritual perfection are intertwined	Like al-Farabi's idea of "city unity": cultural and linguistic harmony is the pillar of society	Continuing al-Farabi's logic of "a perfect person is a perfect society"	Adapted to the Sufi space, in harmony with al-Farabi's idea of the "wise leader"	Elevates al-Farabi's idea of the "wise leader" to the level of a philosophy of morality and honour; connects spiritual leadership with conscience

The comparative synthesis presented in Table 1 systematizes these findings by identifying three interconnected dimensions of leadership: moral-spiritual perfection, intellectual competence, and social responsibility. This structure emerges inductively from textual comparison rather than from an imposed theoretical model. Across philosophical, pedagogical, and Sufi sources, leadership is consistently grounded in virtue, knowledge, and responsibility toward the community, demonstrating the long-term influence of al-Farabi's ethical paradigm within Turkic-Islamic thought.

This emphasis on ethical accountability and moral restraint in leadership resonates with broader Islamic civilizational analyses, including studies on Ibn Khaldun's critique of moral decline in political authority, which similarly locate the stability of governance in ethical self-discipline and justice.<sup>17</sup> The analysis of al-Farabi's ethical and political thought, in conjunction with the intellectual tradition of Turkic-Islamic civilization, reveals a profound continuity in the understanding of virtue (*faḍīla*), leadership, and the moral foundations of society.

Both Al-Farabi and subsequent Turkic thinkers such as Yusuf Balasaguni, Ahmad Yasawi, Mahmud Kashgari, and Ahmad Yugnaki, view leadership not as an instrument of domination, but as a moral-

<sup>17</sup> Majid, Mohamad Kamil Ab, and Mohd Fauzi Hamat. "Pemikiran Ibn Khaldun mengenai sifat dan amalan negatif yang boleh meruntuhkan kepemimpinan Islam." *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 1, no. 1 (2005): 137-166.

spiritual responsibility rooted in the perfection of the self and the pursuit of collective happiness.<sup>18</sup> A critical engagement with al-Farabi's ethical philosophy reveals that the concept of virtue (*faḍīla*) is inherently teleological, meaning every ethical action is directed toward a specific, overarching purpose. *Faḍīla* is thus established not as an end in itself, but as the necessary path and methodological tool for attaining the ultimate human end: *sa'āda*, or perfect happiness and self-realization.

Crucially, al-Farabi departs significantly from purely individualistic Hellenistic interpretations; he argues that this pursuit of happiness is not conceived as a subjective, internal, or isolated achievement possible only within an individual vacuum. Instead, *sa'āda* is fundamentally and fully realized only through participation in a virtuous society (*al-madīna al-fāḍila*) which is, in turn, structurally governed by the principles of mutual aid, comprehensive justice, and profound compassion (*rahma*). This socio-political dimension is what gives al-Farabi's ethics its unique communal and practical force. Our research demonstrates that this commitment to collective flourishing; where individual perfection is contingent upon the well-being of the *polis*; forms the profound intellectual scaffolding linking al-Farabi's classical philosophy to the subsequent ethical, legal, and political architecture that defined the core values and institutional structures of Turkic-Islamic civilization.

Al-Farabi establishes that the human being is differentiated from animals not merely by perception, but by the unique capacity for rational thought and articulate speech. True virtue is attained when reason and good manners achieve harmony, culminating in the complete and perfect human personality. This perfection of intellect and morality is dynamically integrated, directed toward collective happiness and social order. The political framework, articulated most comprehensively in *The Virtuous City*, dictates that the leader's primary mission and goal is ensuring the happiness and harmony of society and creating a just society. The moral cornerstone of civilization thus transcends individual virtue, entering the social and political spheres.

Subsequent Turkic thinkers did not merely borrow this concept; they contextualized and deepened the meaning of collective perfection within their socio-spiritual frameworks. Yusuf Balasaguni, in *Kutadgu Bilig*, directly aligns al-Farabi's ideal of "happiness and justice," deepening it in a practical direction. Balasaguni's core concept, embodied by "Kuntugdi" (Justice), is the just and wise king whose mission is "The happiness of the state and society, establishing world order through justice". Justice (*adalat*) is presented as the very foundation of political order, requiring the moral perfection of the ruler as a prerequisite for the state's happiness and order. This affirms al-Farabi's doctrine that the perfection of the ruler mirrors the perfection of the city, consolidating the principle: "a perfect man coequals a perfect city."<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, the spiritualization of this teleology is observed in Khoja Ahmad Yasawi's *Diwani Hikmet*. While al-Farabi roots his system in rational-intellectual virtue, Yasawi's model interprets the path to *sa'āda* as leading people to spiritual perfection and closeness to God. Yet, this spiritual perfection retains its social mandate, aligning perfectly with al-Farabi's model of the spiritual-intellectual leader where wisdom and spiritual perfection are interwoven. The Sufi guide, having conquered his own desires, becomes a servant of the people. The dictum that "He who restrains his desires will be a blessing to the people" parallels al-Farabi's fundamental teaching that self-mastery must precede the governance of others. Here, the pursuit of individual spiritual elevation becomes the highest form of social responsibility.

Mahmud Kashgari offers a distinct, yet complementary, civilizational interpretation of collective happiness. Through the preservation of the unity of the Turkic peoples, and spiritual and cultural integrity, Kashgari emphasizes cultural stewardship. This preservation of cultural and linguistic harmony as a pillar of society is analogous to al-Farabi's idea of "city unity," where a shared moral and linguistic framework constitutes the cohesion necessary for the virtuous polity.

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<sup>18</sup> Tanabayeva, A. & Massalimova, A., Study of the Turkic code the analysis of al-Farabi's life and legacy. *European Journal of Science and Theology* 13, no 5 (2017): pp. 66.

<sup>19</sup> Sarsengali, B., and A. Shagyrbai. "The Concept of a Noble and a Perfect Person in Religious Philosophy". *Eurasian Journal of Religious Studies* 32, no. 4 (2022) : 50-59. <https://doi.org/10.26577/EJRS.2022.v32.i4.r5>. (in Kazakh)

In contemporary terms, the revival of this unified teleology holds profound practical significance. The philosophical lineage connecting al-Farabi to Balasaguni and Yasawi consistently defines leadership as the guarantor of societal harmony, moral order, and the collective pursuit of happiness. This framework offers a timeless model for ethical governance, asserting that the welfare of society is inseparably united with the personal moral growth of its citizens and rulers. The goal of civilization, as understood by these thinkers, is the elevation of the human condition toward perfection, achieved dynamically through the integration of knowledge, justice, and spiritual discipline. This consistent emphasis demonstrates the enduring philosophical relevance of al-Farabi's legacy for modern efforts toward spiritual renewal and the moral reconstruction of society.

This concept of the spiritual-intellectual leader, where the ruler's self-perfection precedes and enables the governance of others, provides a direct philosophical foundation for al-Farabi's detailed ethical-pedagogical system. A comprehensive analysis of al-Farabi's ethical philosophy necessitates an examination of the mechanisms by which virtue (*faḍīla*) is attained, specifically emphasizing the roles of rational discipline and moral habituation. Far from being a mystical endowment or purely theoretical insight, al-Farabi posits the formation of virtue as a rigorous, universal process achievable through education, self-discipline, and consistent practice.<sup>20</sup> This pedagogical approach provides the intellectual and ethical framework that informed the moral-educational ideals developed by later Turkic-Islamic thinkers.

Al-Farabi's ethical anthropology views ethical character development analogously to vocational training. He insightfully states that "the formation of behaviour is like the learning of art". This signifies that moral dispositions are intermediary, learned, cultivated habits, or acquired skills rather than mere innate traits. The achievement of true virtue, where reason and good manners act in harmony, requires the rigorous application of rational faculties to regulate one's moral life. The virtuous person, and supremely the virtuous ruler (*al-ra'īs al-fāḍil*), must embody the unity of reason and moral will, perfecting themselves before attempting to govern others.

The sources detail specific qualities foundational to this perfection. The ideal ruler must possess twelve qualities, both innate and acquired, including intelligence, courage, moderation, truthfulness, justice, love of knowledge, and a crucial disdain for material wealth. These attributes define the three interdependent levels of ideal leadership identified in our comparative framework: the ethical (moral and spiritual perfection), the intellectual (philosophical knowledge), and the functional (practical governance). The intellectual requirement underscores that philosophical knowledge must guide moral action, rendering the leader a legislator, educator, governor, and preacher.

This disciplined pedagogy translates seamlessly into the Turkic tradition's emphasis on the moral teacher and the spiritual guide.<sup>21</sup> Ahmad Yugnaki continues al-Farabi's logic that "a perfect person is a perfect society". He interprets the leader as a disciplined, knowledgeable, and upright teacher whose functional role is a social reformer, educating people in justice. This aligns with the overall aim of virtuous development as the perfection of intellect and morality.

In the Sufi tradition, the pedagogy is intensified through self-purification and spiritual training. Khoja Ahmad Yasawi's model of spiritual leadership demands that the leader conquers his desires and practice humility, functioning primarily as a spiritual teacher and servant of the people. Suleiman Bakyrqani similarly portrays the leader as a spiritual teacher who emphasizes patience and restraint, serving as a moral role model. This demonstrates how the intellectual discipline advocated by al-Farabi was adapted to the Sufi space, transforming rational self-mastery into spiritual perfection.

Even in the modern context, Shakarim Kudaiberdy's approach elevates al-Farabi's wise leader ideal to a philosophy of morality and honour, connecting spiritual leadership with conscience. Shakarim defines the ideal leader as a possessor of "the science of honour," who is honest, fair, and morally upright, emphasizing the ethical-intellectual foundation required for effective functional leadership.

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<sup>20</sup> Faruqi, Yasmeeen Mahnaz. 2015. "Role of Muslim Intellectuals in the Development of Scientific Thought". *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 3 (3): 451-66. <https://journal.scadindependent.org/index.php/jipeuradeun/article/view/80>.

<sup>21</sup> Wan Hamat, Wan Hasmah Laili, and Mohd Isa Hamzah. 2020. "Sikap Siswa Guru Semasa Belajar Di Institut Pendidikan Guru Berasaskan Pemikiran Al-Zarnuji: Pre-Service Teacher's Attitude During Study at Institute of Teacher Education Based on Al-Zarnuji Thought". *Al-Muqaddimah: Online Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 7 (1):23-36. <https://ijie.um.edu.my/index.php/MUQADDIMAH/article/view/24260>.

The enduring nature of this pedagogical lineage lies in its assertion that ethical education is central to social stability. Al-Farabi's insistence on the unity of education, kindness, and beauty as conditions for human perfection remains relevant to contemporary moral education and humanistic management. The systematic commitment to the development of moral character through habituation and rational discipline provides a timeless model for modern leadership theories emphasizing justice, responsibility, and human dignity, making this philosophical scaffolding essential for modern national and spiritual revival. The continuity found across these thinkers confirms that leadership is not merely an administrative function but an expression of profound ethical responsibility and pedagogical wisdom.

In *The Virtuous City*, Al-Farabi outlines a comprehensive model of the ideal ruler (*al-ra'īs al-fāḍil*), whose essence is a synthesis of intellect, justice, and virtue. He asserts that the purpose of leadership is to guide citizens toward *sa'āda* (happiness) through moral education, knowledge, and the cultivation of good habits.<sup>22</sup> As for eloquent oratory, it is considered a valuable quality for rulers as well.<sup>23</sup> The leader's perfection mirrors the perfection of the city, as "a perfect man is a perfect city."<sup>24</sup> Al-Farabi's ethical anthropology thus situates the formation of virtue as a universal process, achievable through education, habituation, and self-discipline. His statement that "the formation of behaviour is like the learning of art" reflects a deep understanding of moral psychology, emphasizing that ethical character develops gradually through consistent practice.<sup>25</sup>

In his account of the ruler's attributes, Al-Farabi lists twelve innate and acquired qualities: intelligence, courage, moderation, truthfulness, justice, love of knowledge, and disdain for material wealth among them. These qualities, grounded in both rational and spiritual cultivation, remain relevant to contemporary discussions of ethical leadership and civic virtue. A ruler must embody the unity of reason and moral will: one who perfects himself before governing others. This harmony of intellect and virtue, which integrates personal ethics with social responsibility, becomes the cornerstone of his model for the virtuous polity.

Turkic-Islamic thinkers of the subsequent centuries inherited and reinterpreted Al-Farabi's ethical ideal in accordance with their sociocultural contexts. In *Kutadgu Bilig*, Yusuf Balasaguni transformed Al-Farabi's philosopher-king into a just and wise ruler who ensures harmony through justice and reason. Justice (*adalat*) in Balasaguni's conception functions as the foundation of both political order and moral integrity. The image of "Kuntugdi" (Justice) personifies the ruler's responsibility to maintain equilibrium between wisdom, law, and the welfare of his people. This convergence with Al-Farabi's ideal city demonstrates that the moral perfection of the ruler is the prerequisite for the happiness and order of the state.

Similarly, Khoja Ahmad Yasawi's *Diwani Hikmet* advances the concept of spiritual leadership (*irshād*), in which the true leader is a Sufi guide who has subdued his own desires and serves humanity in the path of God.<sup>26</sup> The model of leadership by Ahmad Yasawi represents the spiritualization of Al-Farabi's ethical theory: the perfection of the soul becomes the highest form of social responsibility. The dictum "He who restrains his desires will be a blessing to the people" parallels Al-Farabi's teaching that self-mastery precedes the governance of others.

Mahmud Kashgari, through *Diwani Lugat al-Turk*, extends this tradition by defining leadership as cultural stewardship. The preservation of language and the unification of the community through shared culture and knowledge reflect Al-Farabi's understanding of the city as a moral and linguistic unity.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Ahmad Yugnaki and Suleiman Bakyrangani continue to link leadership with spiritual education, interpreting the ruler as a moral teacher whose role is to guide society toward justice and virtue.

<sup>22</sup> Neria, Ch. M. Al-Farabi's lost commentary on the ethics: new textual evidence. *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 23, no 1 (2013): 69-99.

<sup>23</sup> Akhmetova, Elmira. "Al-Farabi and Said Nursi on the Civilising Mission of the Prophets". *Intellectual Discourse* 25 (Special Issue) (2017): pp. 463. <https://doi.org/10.31436/id.v25iSpecial.Is.1053>. Also refer to Kaliyev, S. & Ayubai, K. (ed.). *Anthology of Kazakh teaching thoughts*, Ten Volumes. Section 3: Teaching of ancient written heritage (1st millennium BC - end of the XV century) (Sozdik Press, 2007), pp. 131.

<sup>24</sup> Bagasharov, K., G. Tobashev, and N. Tutinova. "The Concept of 'Perfect Man' and Its Axiological Meaning." *Eurasian Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 1 (2022): 38-44. <https://doi.org/10.26577/EJRS.2022.v29.i1.r5>, (in Kazakh)

<sup>25</sup> Mashanov, A. *Al-Farabi and Abay*. (Kazakh University Press, 2020), pp. 85. <https://elibr.kaznu.kz/book/13167>

<sup>26</sup> Sanford V. Levinson, "Love and Power: The Role of Religion and Morality in American Politics", by Michael J. Perry, 105 *Harvard Law Review* 2061 (1992).

<sup>27</sup> Duisenbayev, et al. Actual problems of Muslim pedagogy. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods* 8, no. 10 (2018): 679-703. <https://doi.org/10.26655/mjltm.2018.10.1>.

Leadership embodies three interdependent levels: ethical (moral and spiritual perfection), intellectual (philosophical and educational wisdom), and functional (practical governance and social harmony) in all the models mentioned above revealed thorough comparative analysis. These levels correspond directly to Al-Farabi's integrated model of the philosopher-ruler, whose rule harmonizes theoretical knowledge, moral virtue, and civic responsibility.

From a contemporary perspective, this philosophical lineage provides a timeless framework for understanding ethical leadership and governance in the modern Islamic world. Al-Farabi's insistence on the unity of education, kindness, and beauty as conditions for human perfection finds modern resonance in moral education, humanistic management, and national revival movements. His call for the integration of reason, virtue, and spirituality prefigures the ethical imperatives of present-day leadership theories emphasizing justice, responsibility, and human dignity.

## **Conclusion**

This study has examined Abu Nasr al-Farabi's ethical and political philosophy within the broader horizon of Islamic thought and civilization, emphasizing its role in articulating a normative relationship between moral self-formation, leadership, and social order. Through an analytical–historical and comparative engagement with *The Virtuous City* and selected works of later Turkic-Islamic thinkers, the article has demonstrated that virtue (*faḍīla*) in al-Farabi's system is inseparable from the Islamic understanding of knowledge, responsibility, and human purpose. Ethical excellence is presented not as an abstract moral aspiration, but as a practical condition for realizing happiness (*sa'āda*) in both individual and communal life.

The comparative findings indicate that al-Farabi's ethical vision was neither confined to philosophical discourse nor limited to a single intellectual tradition. Rather, it was received, interpreted, and reformulated within juridical, pedagogical, and Sufi frameworks across the Turkic-Islamic world. Thinkers such as Yusuf Balasaguni, Khoja Ahmad Yasawi, Mahmud Kashgari, and Ahmad Yugnaki articulated complementary ethical models in which leadership and authority were consistently grounded in justice, moral discipline, and service to the community. Despite differences in language, genre, and spiritual orientation, these traditions shared a civilizational ethic that subordinated political power to moral accountability and viewed leadership as a form of ethical trust (*amāna*).

From the perspective of Islamic civilization, the enduring significance of al-Farabi's thought lies in his synthesis of reason, revelation, and ethical practice. His conception of the virtuous person and the virtuous ruler reflects an Islamic worldview in which intellectual excellence and spiritual refinement are oriented toward the common good. The continuity observed in later Turkic-Islamic ethical thought suggests that al-Farabi's philosophy contributed to a shared moral vocabulary through which Islamic societies articulated ideals of governance, education, and social harmony.

In this respect, al-Farabi's ethical philosophy offers a historically grounded framework for understanding virtue-based leadership within Islamic civilization. While the study does not seek to transpose medieval models directly onto contemporary contexts, it highlights the relevance of al-Farabi's ethical principles for ongoing discussions concerning moral education, civic responsibility, and leadership formation in Muslim societies. By situating al-Farabi within a living intellectual tradition, the article affirms the importance of ethical self-cultivation as a foundational element of civilizational continuity and renewal in Islamic thought.

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