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## The Phenomenon of Volunteerism in al-Farabi's Philosophy: The Spiritual Path to Happiness and Virtue

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the spiritual essence of volunteerism and its role in achieving happiness within the framework of al-Farabi's ethical philosophy. Al-Farabi interprets the concept of *sa'āda* (happiness) as the highest good attainable through reason, willpower, and the pursuit of virtue. Volunteering is viewed as a conscious moral choice and an expression of one's inner world and ethical responsibility, carried out through actions that benefit society. The study examines the philosophical parallels between al-Farabi's views on human spiritual perfection and the ethical foundations of modern volunteer work. Using textual and comparative-philosophical analysis, the article explores how virtuous voluntary acts serve as a pathway to happiness. In Farabi's thought, happiness is not merely a subjective state but an ontological condition attained through the pursuit of truth, absolute good, and ultimate purpose. This perspective allows for a meaningful re-evaluation of volunteerism as a form of spiritual self-realization and civic contribution. The paper aims to demonstrate the relevance of al-Farabi's philosophical legacy in addressing contemporary issues of morality, social responsibility, and active citizenship.

*Keywords:* al-Farabi, ethics, good, evil, happiness, virtue, volunteerism, intelligence, spirituality, spiritual perfection.

### Introduction

One of the outstanding medieval Islamic philosophers, Al-Farabi, examined happiness and virtue as primary requirements for attaining moral perfection, both at the individual and social levels. He associated these ideas closely with human nature, reason, and conscious will. According to Al-Farabi, the end of human life is happiness, and the means to it is virtue. One can reach virtue through knowledge and education and bring balance to social life, according to him. It is in this light that these texts are of interest, most especially in the understanding of social-ethical phenomena like volunteering in this day and age. Al-Farabi frames virtue, goodness, and humanity not as theoretical concepts but as spiritual acts that should be performed with the life-blood of their practitioners. According to his philosophy, an individual must discover the purpose of life through reason and morality. Through this, a person not only improves oneself but also contributes to the spiritual perfection of society. These ideas strongly resonate with modern civic engagement, including volunteer activity. In his works, Al-Farabi does not limit himself to theoretical reasoning but highlights the ethical responsibility of every member of society, the value of voluntarily performed good deeds, and the ways to achieve spiritual development.

From this perspective, the article analyzes Al-Farabi's concepts of goodness, happiness, human will, and virtue, and examines their connection with the ethical foundations of contemporary volunteerism. Al-Farabi deeply studied ancient Greek philosophy, especially the teachings of Aristotle, and harmonized them with the Islamic worldview. This synthesis elevated his moral philosophy to a special level. He viewed the human being as a perfected entity who naturally strives for virtue, truth, and justice. In this regard, knowledge, education, experience, and conscious choice hold a special place in the path toward virtue.

Al-Farabi's philosophy is closely connected to modern humanities, especially to social philosophy and ethics. Linking his intellectual legacy with social phenomena such as volunteerism allows for a deeper understanding of human character and the pursuit of public good. Volunteerism can be seen as an ethical sphere where the principles of virtue are transformed into concrete action. For this reason, Al-Farabi's ideas about building a virtuous society and his views based on human moral responsibility remain highly relevant in today's world.

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### *Research methods*

This study employs comparative-philosophical and textual analysis methods. Al-Farabi's ethical and philosophical system is examined based on his original works, and the moral concepts within his philosophy are compared with Aristotle's classical views. Additionally, the values and ethical significance of contemporary volunteerism are interpreted through the prism of these philosophical doctrines. During the textual analysis, the key concepts found in Al-Farabi's main works — "Tahsil al-Sa'ada", "Fusul al-Madani", and "Siyasat al-Madaniyya" — as well as Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics" were analyzed in terms of their structure and content. No empirical methods were used, as the research is theoretical in nature.

### *Results*

The research revealed a close interrelation between the concepts of goodness, happiness, and voluntary action in Al-Farabi's ethical philosophy. In his philosophy, happiness is the highest good of human life, and the means to attain it are rational, virtuous conduct. Such thoughts were juxtaposed against Aristotle's eudaimonia, pointing out the shared premise between the two philosophers: moral perfection is brought about by intellectual progress, both in intellectual exercise and in virtuous practice.

In addition, Al-Farabi systematized the concept of "malaka", which meant an established character in the human soul, and demonstrated that it was coincident in meaning with the term "hexis" used by Aristotle. Moreover, the philosopher, as Al-Farabi holds, who alone without any compulsion chooses goodness, is the ethical unit of civilization.

With reference to this study, we concluded that the soul and purpose of contemporary volunteer work are consistent with the moral obligations introduced by Al-Farabi. Volunteer work is also assessed as an environment for developing habitual virtues and is empirically supported as a method for strengthening moral and spiritual goals.

According to Al-Farabi, true happiness for individuals and citizens — both in this world and the hereafter — is achieved through the cultivation of four essential components: theoretical virtues, intellectual virtues, moral virtues, and practical arts. Among these, theoretical virtues are of primary importance, as they encompass the knowledge that allows for precise and accurate understanding of existing realities [1].

Theoretical knowledge, in Al-Farabi's system, is divided into two main categories. The first consists of innate or self-evident principles, which are not derived from prior reasoning but are assumed to be known intuitively. The second category includes knowledge obtained through methodical processes such as reflection, investigation, logical deduction, learning, and teaching. This acquired knowledge serves as the foundation for developing further insights and reasoning.

In his philosophical classification of the sciences, Al-Farabi outlines several subdivisions, such as:

- The degrees of knowledge;
- The science of mutual learning;
- The natural sciences;
- Metaphysical or supernatural science;
- Civil science, which addresses societal organization and governance.

Al-Farabi also distinguishes between two kinds of principles: principles of teaching (mabâdi' ta'lîmiyya) and principles of existence (mabâdi' wujûdiyya). The former are premises that provide definitive and generalizable truths about a given category or genus. The latter are concerned with explaining the ontological basis for why certain types exist, involving causes that exist independently of the mind — such as causes in themselves (bi-hâ), from themselves ('anhâ), or for themselves (lahâ) [2].

Among the highest forms of demonstration is the "demonstration of the reason why" (burhân al-limmi), which synthesizes both teaching and ontological principles. It not only affirms that something exists but also reveals why it exists. On the other hand, a demonstration based only on existence or only on knowledge — without uniting both dimensions — is termed the "demonstration of existence" (burhân al-innî).

In summary, Al-Farabi emphasizes that the pursuit of happiness is inseparable from the disciplined acquisition of knowledge and virtues. By mastering both the speculative and practical sciences, human beings fulfill their natural purpose and contribute to the realization of a virtuous and harmonious society.

### *Discussion*

Al-Farabi is one of the leading eastern thinkers who, like Plato, tried to discover the way to man's individual happiness and dreamt to establish a just and morally healthy society. His "Virtuous City" is based on

the “Virtuous man” and is closely related to moral character and virtue. In this sense, his ethical theory may be described not only as a theoretical system but also as a practical program for making us into perfect persons. One such philosophical perspective provides useful guidance to comprehending the deeper sense of volunteering in our contemporary world.

The concept of happiness is crucial for the whole ethical system of Al-Farabi. All human actions aim at happiness, but the latter is not a means to other ends but a self-sufficient and most desirable end. “A good is not desirable for the sake of anything else, but for its own sake; and happiness is a good of this kind” [3].

This idea resonates with the essence of volunteer work: becoming a volunteer is not about external rewards or compensation, but about consciously performing acts that benefit others. Thus, the volunteer’s highest motivation is spiritual fulfillment and inner happiness.

In Al-Farabi’s view, happiness is not material success or fleeting pleasure, but rather a state of inner perfection reached through intellect and virtue. All human aspirations in this life are, in fact, diverse paths toward this ultimate aim. At this juncture, a meaningful parallel can be drawn between Al-Farabi’s concept of *as-sa’āda al-quswā* (“the supreme happiness”) and Aristotle’s *eudaimonia*, as outlined in the *Nicomachean Ethics* [4]. Both philosophers believe that self-realization and inner harmony are the key to genuine happiness, although Al-Farabi embeds this concept within the Islamic worldview.

For Al-Farabi, deliberation in one’s actions, and the conscious choice to be virtuous, are necessary conditions of happiness. The whole process is achieved by voluntary moral choices, made under the influence of intellectual knowledge.

The natural human disposition is oriented toward virtue, but in order for this disposition to be able to actualize this potential, the individual needs to be guided, be in the right environment, and receive a moral education.

Al-Farabi emphasizes the role of reason and free will in ethical development. Goodness is not innate but is acquired through conscious effort and correct choices. To choose goodness is to exercise one’s free will. This perspective also underpins the ethics of volunteering: to volunteer is, above all, a choice.

According to Al-Farabi, happiness is achieved through repeated good actions, sincere intentions, and habitual virtue.

“Virtue is a disposition formed through repeated actions and becomes part of one’s character” [5].

He maintains that every human competence and aim is valued only insofar as it leads to goodness. However, absolute goodness — the highest good — is happiness itself. Happiness is that which is desired always for its own sake, not for the sake of something else. Anything that supports the attainment of happiness is good, while anything that obstructs it is bad [5; 121].

In Al-Farabi’s view, happiness is not a reward for knowledge or virtue but the ultimate aim realized through virtuous action. Just as knowledge is the result of study and learning, happiness is the result of a life of ethical discipline. Misery, conversely, is not a punishment but the outcome of neglecting virtue and choosing injustice [5; 152].

True happiness is not accidental; it cannot be achieved by chance. Al-Farabi argues that virtuous actions are not innate or randomly assigned but consciously pursued. Therefore, happiness is attainable only when the good is chosen for its own sake and not for external gains such as wealth or power. This is why conscious preference rooted in reason must consistently guide one’s moral choices [3; 3].

Moreover, the ability to distinguish good from evil must be continuous — not occasional. One cannot achieve happiness without maintaining a lifetime of good choices. If a person repeatedly chooses evil, it becomes part of their character [3; 30-31].

Al-Farabi teaches that the human capacity for good and evil is inherent, but that mere potential is not enough. To actualize virtue, one must not only understand it intellectually but also perform it through action and habit. Competence is not simply knowledge — it is the ability to act with skill and intent. Just as being a doctor requires both knowledge and practice, so too does moral excellence require repeated ethical action [5; 120-121].

He identifies three key conditions for attaining happiness: virtuous actions, stable dispositions within the soul, and conscious choice. Through these, a person can avoid evil and strive toward moral and spiritual fulfillment [3; 5–7].

Al-Farabi also underscores the importance of education and mentorship. Since not everyone knows what constitutes true happiness, a teacher or moral guide (*murshid*) is essential. This aligns with modern volunteer organizations, where mentors and coordinators instill values such as compassion, kindness, and moral awareness through practical experience [6].

He does not view evil as a substance or force in itself but as the absence of goodness. All evil stems from human choice and the misuse of free will. For Al-Farabi, there is no natural evil in the world — everything in the universe is good except what opposes goodness [5; 150].

He distinguishes between two types of evil:

Misfortune — the direct opposite of happiness.

Voluntary wrongdoing — actions that oppose virtue and lead to moral failure. Both, he insists, are matters of free will.

This perspective also applies to volunteerism: choosing to do good freely is not only a contribution to society but also a stand against moral indifference. Volunteering, when practiced consistently, shapes character and reinforces ethical values.

Therefore, volunteerism should not be seen merely as social work, but as a philosophical practice of self-development and spiritual growth. It reflects the core of Al-Farabi's concept of happiness as the harmony of reason and moral action. Through helping others, the volunteer approaches this state of fulfillment.

In this sense, volunteer work becomes a path to inner contentment, unbound by external reward. It is grounded in ethical responsibility, self-awareness, and a commitment to the public good. Volunteering is, ultimately, a lived expression of the pursuit of virtue — a practice of happiness as Al-Farabi envisioned it.

### Conclusions

Al-Farabi's ethical philosophy represents a profound inquiry into the spiritual foundations of human existence, the potential for inner perfection, and the ability to live harmoniously within society. For Al-Farabi, the ultimate purpose of human life is the attainment of happiness, which can only be realized through the unity of reason and virtue. The choice of goodness, the pursuit of right action, and the purity of intention are all central themes in his moral doctrine [7]. According to Al-Farabi, achieving happiness requires that an individual consciously direct their free will toward virtue and engage in moral self-cultivation.

In his view, although human nature is inclined toward goodness, this potential does not actualize itself on its own. It must be nurtured through education, guidance, mentorship, and the influence of a morally sound social environment. Especially significant in Al-Farabi's philosophy is the concept of “malaka” or how virtuous behavior is appropriated as a stable form of character. Thus, its development is like a road where virtue is transformed into a settled habit through repeated virtuous acts.

Al-Farabi's ethical lessons are as pertinent as ever in the modern age. In an age of moral muddle, his ethical view of happiness as an end to be attained by moral effort, his idea of good and evil as the products of free choice, and his view of a perfected society resulting from justice and reason remain a cornerstone of great philosophic thought. For Al-Farabi, the only actions that lead to “happiness” in the true sense of the word, and this not only for oneself but for an entire community, are those grounded in virtue.

We think his principles of right action are entirely consistent with the principles of volunteerism. Free activity is the appearance of internal nobility; it presents itself in acts of service or other activities. In engaging in such activities, individuals enrich their own spiritual lives while also contributing to the moral advancement of society. Al-Farabi's concept of the “Virtuous City” [8] encapsulates this ideal, where every individual acts according to ethical principles for the common good. Therefore, his legacy can be seen as a comprehensive value system that offers ethical orientation not only to the individual but to society as a whole.

In conclusion, the ethical philosophies of Al-Farabi and Aristotle are united by shared conceptions of goodness, virtue, happiness, and moral responsibility. These classical ideas closely align with the ethos of modern volunteer work. Altruism, ethical commitment, compassion, and the pursuit of the common good are not only timeless philosophical ideals — they are also visibly enacted in contemporary civil society.

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### **Әл-Фараби философиясындағы еріктілік феномені: бақытқа жетудің рухани жолы**

Мақалада әл-Фарабидің этикалық философиясы аясында еріктілік әрекетінің рухани мәні мен оның бақытқа жетудегі рөлі жан-жақты қарастырылған. Фараби «са'ада» ұғымын адамның ақыл-парасаты, ерік-жігері мен ізгілікке ұмтылысы арқылы қол жеткізілетін ең жоғары игілік ретінде сипаттайды. Еріктілік — тұлғаның ішкі дүниесі мен моральдық жауапкершілігінің көрінісі ретінде, қоғамға пайдалы әрекеттер арқылы жүзеге асатын саналы таңдау формасы деп бағаланады. Сонымен қатар әл-Фарабидің адамның рухани кемелденуі туралы тұжырымдары қазіргі волонтерлік қызметтің этикалық негіздерімен салыстырыла сарапталып, философиялық үндестігі көрсетілді. Зерттеу мәгіндік және салыстырмалы-философиялық әдістерге сүйене отырып, ерікті ізгі әрекеттердің адамды бақытқа жеткізудегі орнын пайымдайды. Фараби философиясында бақыт — бұл тек субъективті күй емес, ол — адамның ақиқатқа, абсолюттік ізгілікке және түпкі мақсатқа ұмтылуы нәтижесінде қол жеткізетін онтологиялық жағдай. Мұндай көзқарас волонтерлік әрекетті де мәндік тұрғыда қайта пайымдауға мүмкіндік береді: ерікті қызмет арқылы адам өзін қоғам игілігіне арнап, жоғары моральдық санамен үйлесім табады. Бұл еңбек әл-Фарабидің философиялық мұрасының бүгінгі замандағы адамгершілік, әлеуметтік жауапкершілік және азаматтық ұстанымдарға ықпалын ашып көрсетуге арналған.

*Кілт сөздер:* әл-Фараби, этика, жақсылық, жамандық, бақыт, ізгілік, еріктілік, ақыл, руханилық, рухани кемелдену.

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### **Феномен добровольчества в философии аль-Фараби: духовный путь к счастью**

В данной статье проводится всесторонний анализ духовной сущности добровольческой деятельности и её роли в достижении счастья в контексте этической философии аль-Фараби. Мыслитель трактует понятие са'ада (счастье) как высшее благо, к которому человек может прийти посредством разума, воли и стремления к добродетели. Добровольчество рассматривается как осознанный моральный выбор и проявление внутреннего мира личности и её нравственной ответственности через действия во благо общества. В статье сопоставляются воззрения аль-Фараби на духовное совершенствование человека с этическими основами современной добровольческой практики. Исследование базируется на текстовом и сравнительно-философском анализе, выявляя, как добровольные добродетельные поступки способствуют достижению счастья. В философии аль-Фараби счастье — это не просто субъективное состояние, а онтологическое состояние, достигаемое в стремлении к истине, абсолютному добру и высшей цели. Такой подход позволяет по-новому осмыслить добровольческую деятельность как форму духовной самореализации и гражданского служения. Статья направлена на раскрытие актуальности философского наследия аль-Фараби в контексте современных нравственных, социальных и гражданских вызовов.

*Ключевые слова:* аль-Фараби, этика, добро, зло, счастье, добродетель, добровольчество, разум, духовность, духовное совершенствование.

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