

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ABU NASR FARABI'S VIEWS ON RELIGION

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Abstract

This article examines the philosophical foundations of Abu Nasr Farabi's views on religion within the context of his broader metaphysical, ethical, and socio-political thought. Farabi approaches religion not merely as a system of beliefs or rituals, but as a symbolic and practical expression of philosophical truth adapted to the cognitive and moral capacities of society. The study analyzes the relationship between religion and reason, revelation and intellect, as well as religion's role in moral education and the construction of a virtuous society. Special attention is given to Farabi's concept of the "virtuous city" and his understanding of religious leadership, happiness, and moral perfection. The article argues that Farabi's religious philosophy represents a rational-humanistic synthesis that remains relevant in contemporary discussions on religion, ethics, and social harmony.

Keywords: Abu Nasr Farabi, philosophy of religion, reason and revelation, virtuous city, ethics, happiness, Islamic philosophy.

Introduction

The relationship between philosophy and religion has been one of the central and enduring questions in the history of human thought. In the intellectual tradition of the Islamic world, this problem gained particular importance during the classical period, when scholars sought to harmonize rational inquiry with revealed knowledge. Among the thinkers who made a decisive contribution to this synthesis, Abu Nasr Farabi occupies a distinguished place. His philosophical system represents an original and comprehensive attempt to explain religion through the categories of metaphysics, logic, ethics, and political philosophy.

Farabi did not regard religion as a phenomenon opposed to philosophy or reason. On the contrary, he interpreted religion as a socially necessary and intellectually grounded form of philosophical truth, adapted to the cognitive and imaginative capacities of the broader population. While philosophy addresses those capable of

abstract rational understanding, religion conveys the same truths through symbols, images, and narratives that are accessible to society as a whole. In this sense, Farabi viewed religion and philosophy as sharing a common origin and ultimate goal, differing primarily in method and form of expression.

The relevance of Farabi's views on religion is especially evident in the context of contemporary discussions on moral education, social harmony, and the role of religion in public life. His concept of the virtuous city highlights religion as a unifying moral force that shapes ethical behavior, promotes justice, and guides individuals toward true happiness. Farabi places human perfection (*sa'āda*) at the center of both philosophical and religious life, emphasizing that genuine happiness is achieved not through material satisfaction, but through intellectual and moral development.

This article aims to analyze the philosophical foundations of Abu Nasr Farabi's views on religion by examining their metaphysical, ethical, and socio-political dimensions. Through this analysis, the study seeks to demonstrate that Farabi's interpretation of religion represents a rational, humanistic, and integrative model that remains significant for understanding the relationship between faith, reason, and society in both historical and modern contexts.

Literature Review

The philosophical and religious views of **Abu Nasr Farabi** have long attracted the attention of scholars in both the Islamic world and Western academia. Classical Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd recognized Farabi as a foundational figure in Islamic philosophy and acknowledged his role in systematizing Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ideas within an Islamic intellectual framework. Their works often reference Farabi's interpretations of logic, metaphysics, and the relationship between reason and revelation, highlighting his influence on subsequent philosophical discourse.

Medieval Islamic scholars analyzed Farabi's views on religion primarily through his major works, including *The Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City*, *Attainment of Happiness*, and *Enumeration of the Sciences*. These texts were interpreted as efforts to reconcile religious belief with rational inquiry. Scholars emphasized Farabi's understanding of religion as a symbolic and pedagogical system designed to guide society toward moral perfection and happiness. His

theory of prophecy and leadership was particularly influential in shaping later Islamic political philosophy.

In modern scholarship, Farabi's philosophy of religion has been examined from various perspectives. Researchers such as M. Mahdi and C. Butterworth have explored Farabi's political philosophy, emphasizing the ethical and religious dimensions of the virtuous city. Their studies highlight the role of religion in maintaining social cohesion and moral order, as well as its function in translating philosophical truths into accessible forms for the general population. Other scholars have focused on Farabi's metaphysical views, analyzing his conception of the First Cause and divine intellect as the foundation of both philosophical and religious knowledge.

Western orientalists and historians of philosophy have also contributed to the study of Farabi's religious thought. They often situate his ideas within the broader context of medieval philosophy, drawing comparisons between Farabi and later Christian scholastic thinkers, particularly Thomas Aquinas. Such studies emphasize Farabi's influence on the development of rational theology and his contribution to the medieval discourse on faith and reason.

Despite the extensive body of research, certain aspects of Farabi's views on religion remain open to further investigation. In particular, there is a need for integrated analyses that connect his philosophy of religion with his ethical and socio-political thought. Existing studies often address these dimensions separately, without fully exploring their interdependence. This article seeks to fill this gap by offering a comprehensive philosophical analysis of Farabi's views on religion, emphasizing their coherence, rational foundations, and contemporary relevance.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, philosophical research methodology aimed at revealing the conceptual and theoretical foundations of **Abu Nasr Farabi's** views on religion. The methodological framework is interdisciplinary, integrating approaches from philosophy, theology, intellectual history, and political theory in order to provide a comprehensive and coherent analysis.

The primary method used is **philosophical-textual analysis**, which involves close reading and interpretation of Farabi's major works, including The Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City, Attainment of Happiness, and Enumeration of the

Sciences. These texts are examined to identify Farabi's key concepts concerning religion, reason, happiness, prophecy, and moral education. Particular attention is paid to the internal logic of his arguments and the conceptual relationships between philosophical and religious knowledge.

A **comparative method** is applied to situate Farabi's views within the broader philosophical tradition. His ideas are compared with those of classical Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle and Plato, as well as with later Islamic and medieval thinkers. This approach allows for the identification of both the originality of Farabi's thought and its continuity with earlier intellectual traditions, particularly regarding the reconciliation of reason and revelation.

The study also employs a conceptual-analytical approach to clarify fundamental categories such as religion, philosophy, virtue, happiness (sa'āda), and the virtuous city. By analyzing these concepts in their philosophical and socio-political contexts, the research highlights the systematic nature of Farabi's worldview. In addition, a historical-contextual method is used to account for the cultural, intellectual, and religious environment in which Farabi's ideas emerged.

Finally, an axiological approach is utilized to evaluate the ethical and normative dimensions of Farabi's philosophy of religion. This approach focuses on the values underlying his thought, including human perfection, moral responsibility, social harmony, and enlightenment. The combination of these methodological approaches ensures a holistic analysis of Farabi's views on religion and underscores their philosophical coherence and contemporary relevance.

Analysis and Results

The analysis of **Abu Nasr Farabi's** works demonstrates that his views on religion are firmly embedded within a comprehensive philosophical system that integrates metaphysics, ethics, and political philosophy. Religion, in Farabi's conception, is neither opposed to reason nor independent of philosophy; rather, it represents a practical and symbolic expression of philosophical truth adapted to the cognitive capacities of society.

One of the central results of the study is the clarification of Farabi's distinction between philosophical and religious knowledge. Philosophy operates through rational demonstration and conceptual understanding, addressing individuals capable of intellectual abstraction. Religion, by contrast, conveys the same truths

through images, symbols, and imaginative representations that are accessible to the broader population. Despite this methodological difference, both philosophy and religion share a common aim: guiding human beings toward true happiness (*sa‘āda*). Thus, Farabi establishes a hierarchical yet complementary relationship between reason and revelation.

The analysis also reveals that Farabi assigns religion a crucial ethical function. Religious teachings serve as an effective means of moral education, shaping virtues such as justice, moderation, responsibility, and compassion. Through ethical norms and collective rituals, religion contributes to the formation of morally disciplined individuals and socially cohesive communities. In this sense, religion plays a regulatory role in social life, reinforcing moral behavior where purely philosophical instruction may not reach.

Another significant finding concerns Farabi's political philosophy, particularly his concept of the virtuous city. In this ideal social order, religion functions as a unifying force that aligns individual conduct with the common good. The religious leader—ideally a philosopher-prophet—possesses both intellectual insight and moral excellence, enabling him to guide society toward justice and harmony. The absence of religious intolerance and coercion in this model underscores Farabi's humanistic and rational approach to faith.

Furthermore, the results indicate that Farabi's interpretation of divine attributes reflects a synthesis of Islamic theology and philosophical reasoning. He affirms the unity, perfection, and absolute knowledge of the First Cause while interpreting these attributes through rational metaphysical principles. This approach allows Farabi to remain faithful to Islamic belief while avoiding dogmatism and superstition.

Overall, the analysis confirms that Farabi's philosophy of religion is characterized by rationality, ethical orientation, and social purpose. His views emphasize the role of religion in achieving human perfection, social harmony, and intellectual enlightenment. These findings highlight the enduring relevance of Farabi's thought for contemporary discussions on the relationship between religion, reason, and society.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that Abu Nasr Farabi's views on religion are grounded in a coherent and comprehensive philosophical system that harmonizes metaphysics, ethics, and political philosophy. Farabi does not regard religion as an irrational or purely dogmatic phenomenon; rather, he interprets it as a rationally justified and socially necessary form of philosophical truth expressed through symbolic and imaginative means. Philosophy and religion, in his view, pursue the same ultimate goal—the attainment of human happiness (sa‘āda)—while differing in method and audience.

The analysis confirms that Farabi establishes a complementary relationship between reason and revelation. Philosophy addresses the intellect through rational demonstration, whereas religion communicates identical truths to society at large through accessible images, narratives, and moral prescriptions. In this framework, religion plays a crucial ethical and social role by cultivating virtues, reinforcing moral discipline, and promoting social cohesion. Farabi's concept of the virtuous city further underscores religion's function as a unifying moral force guided by enlightened leadership that combines intellectual excellence with moral integrity. Overall, Farabi's philosophy of religion reflects a rational-humanistic synthesis that remains highly relevant for contemporary societies facing challenges related to religious pluralism, moral education, and social harmony. His thought provides a model in which faith and reason are not antagonistic but mutually reinforcing dimensions of human culture and civilization.

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