

AL-FARABI (Abu Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Tarkḥān ibn Awzalug (Uzlug) al-Farabi)—a philosopher, b. 870 in Farab (Turkestan), d. 950 in Damascus.

Al-Farabi studied logic in Baghdad under the direction of the Christian scholars Yuhanna ibn Haylan (d. 910), and Abu Bishr Mattā (d. 940). The latter was one of the translators of Aristotle's work into Arabic. Al-Farabi also learned Arabic grammar, astronomy, music, medicine, and the natural sciences. His interest turned to Aristotle's philosophy and he studied Aristotle's works. He developed and systematized Aristotle's thought in the context of Arab culture. Because of his extensive work called *The Second Teaching*, al-Farabi came to be called the "Second Teacher", (Aristotle being the first), and the work became the foundation for Avicenna's *Book of Healing*. In 942, al-Farabi left Baghdad and went to Syria where he traveled to Aleppo and Damascus. He probably also visited Egypt between 942 and 948, and returned to Damascus.

According to mediaeval biographies, al-Farabi wrote more than 100 works, but only a small portion have been preserved. Many of al-Farabi's works only recently have become available in new editions, and so the interpretation of his thought is constantly being revised. Most of his works are treatises in logic and the philosophy of language, as well the philosophy of politics, religion, metaphysics, psychology, and natural philosophy. His best-known works are *al-Madīnah al-fādilah* (*The Virtuous City*, often compared with Plato's *Republic*), *Risālah fi'l 'aql* (*Treatise on the mind*), *Kitāb al-ḥurūf* (*Book of letters*), and *Kitāb ihṣā' al-'ulum* (*Book of the Enumeration of the Sciences*).

Al-Farabi's metaphysical thought is an attempt to combine Platonic and Aristotelian thought and is focussed on three basic topics: the First Being, namely God, the emanation and hierarchy of beings, and the internal structure of beings.

The First Being as the cause that gives existence to other substances is the highest being. Al-Farabi draws on Aristotle's conception of God as "self-thinking thought". He defines God primarily as Intellect whose primary operation is the contemplation of himself. God is the source of supreme wisdom and knows both himself and all other things in the most perfect manner. As a result of God's intellectual activity he becomes by way of emanation the cause for the existence of other beings. The existence of the other beings that depend upon the First Being is not qualitatively different from God's existence, and his existence is his substance. The beings derived from the First Being as ordered into six genera: heavenly bodies, rational animals, non-rational animals, plants, minerals, and four elements. Only one emanated being is caused directly by the First Being. This is the secondary intellect, and after the secondary intellect come nine others as well as the active intellect.

The structure of beings has a necessary character derived from the First being, whereby they all have within themselves some fragment of God and are comprehended by God's knowledge of the world. All beings below the heavenly bodies are composed of the two elements of matter and form. Matter is the first stuff and the foundation for form. It can exist in an imperfect manner without form and therefore is that whereby substance is in potency. Matter has no opposite or substratum, but itself is the substratum for all changes. Form is the active element of being as is marked by the arrangement of heavenly bodies. It is the act of a substance but can endure only in matter. The hierarchy of forms depends upon how distant a body, which is a mixture of elements, is from the sphere of these materials.

Al-Farabi introduced something completely new to philosophy in his work, *Bezel of Wisdom*—the problem of the real difference between existence and essence in created beings. Al-Farabi makes this distinction in the context of logic. He draws on Aristotle and states that the concept of what a thing is does not at the same time include the fact that the thing is. The knowledge of a thing is not at the same time a knowledge of its existence; existence is not implied in essence. It is not the principle of a thing, but only an accident. The entire argument rests upon an analysis of essence: existence is ordered as an accident to essence in the metaphysical order, and ordered as a predicate in the order of logic.

Al-Farabi's views on psychology are found in his metaphysical and political writings. We find a theory on the human soul in *Mabadi' ara' ahl al-madinah al-fadilah*. The souls of rational creatures come from the soul of the world. The human soul is the form of the body and makes prime matter real in order to be a substantial body. Al-Farabi lists six powers of man's soul: the power of nutrition, the sense power, the imaginative power, the appetitive power, and the rational power, which is divided into the theoretical power whereby man acquires knowledge, and the practical power that guides man's action. The powers of the soul are arranged in an hierarchy: one power comes after another and is related to the preceding one as matter to form. Each of them has a specific function to perform with respect to the body and to the rational power that coordinates the operation of the others. Because of the rational power man is the most perfect being in the sublunary world since he can acquire knowledge and thereby approach and unite with the active intellect. In *Risalah fi'l-'aql*, al-Farabi presents his theory of intellectual knowledge and lists the various ways that intellect ('aql) is understood in Arabic. He follows Greek commentaries on Aristotle's *De anima* and lists several stages in the human intellect as it becomes actualized. He thought of the intellect under four aspects: first as intellect in potency (this is a pure disposition to abstract forms from mental images), then intellect in act (after it acquires forms for intellectual knowledge), the fully actualized intellect (called *intellectus adeptus*), and the active intellect. The active intellect according to al-Farabi is a spiritual substance that is separate, transcendent, and is the efficient cause of human knowledge. The fully actualized intellect (or acquired intellect) possesses all cognitive forms and all the knowledge that man can achieve. It becomes a pure form that has the same rank as other intellectual substances in the hierarchy of beings, together with the active intellect, and it is of the same or a similar genus. In connection with this, it may contemplate not only itself and the previously acquired forms in intellect knowledge, but it may also contemplate the active intellect and other separate spiritual substances. This conception of intellectual knowledge is presupposed in al-Farabi's eschatological theories within his political philosophy.

The core of al-Farabi's political philosophy is his concept of happiness (sa'adah) which he takes from Greek philosophy. Man's goal is to acquire happiness. In order to reach this goal, he must learn the virtues, which al-Farabi identifies with knowledge. Knowledge is the basis for achieving happiness after death and is the way between the two worlds. After being liberated from material conditions, we may achieve complete happiness. Al-Farabi presents the perfect society as one in which people cooperate in striving for happiness. Al-Farabi developed a conception of a state which, although it is an earthly society, is a stage on the way to eternal life.

Al-Farabi's works in logic and philosophy include commentaries on Aristotle's writings (on the *Organon* and others), and his own independent treatises (e.g., *Kitab al-huruf*), where he gave special emphasis to the need to understand the link between philosophical terminology and everyday language and grammar. He also wrote much on the theory of demonstration

and regarded demonstration as the proper method for philosophy. He also wrote on syllogistics and epistemological questions.

Published editions and translations of al-Farabi's most important works are: *Al-Farabi philosophische Abhandlungen*, ed. F. Dieterici (Lei 1890); *Rasā'il Al-Farabi* (Hyderabad 1927); *Risalah fi'l'aql*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut 1948); *Falsafah Aristutalis*, ed. M. Mahdi (Beirut 1961); *Al-Farab's Political Regime: Al-Siyasah al-Madaniyah also known as the Treatise on the Principles of Being*, ed. F. M. Najjar (Beirut 1964); *Kitab al-alfaz al-musta'malah fi'l-mantiq*, ed. M. Mahdi (Beirut 1968); *Ihsa' al-'ulum*, ed. U. Amin (K 1968³), *Al-Farabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. M. Mahdi (Ithaca 1969); *Al-Farabi's Book of Letters (Kitab al-Huruf): Commentary on Aristotle's "Metaphysics"*; ed. M. Mahdi (Beirut 1969); *Al-Farabi: Deux ouvrages inédites sur la rhétorique*, ed. and trans. J. Langhade and M. Grignaschi (Beirut 1971); *The Letter Concerning the Intellect* (in: *Medieval Philosophy: the Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions*, Indianapolis 1973², 215–221); *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abu Nasr al-Farabi's Mabadi' Ara' ahl al-Madinah al-Fadilah*, ed. and trans. R. Walzer (Ox 1985; *Państwo doskonałe. Polityka* [Perfect state. Politics], trans. J. Bielawski, Wwa 1967); *Al-Mantiq 'ind al-Farabi*, ed. R. al-'Ajam and M. Fakhry (I–IV, Beirut 1986–1987).

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