



## THE DIALECTIC OF BODY AND SOUL IN FARABI'S PERIPATETIC PHILOSOPHY

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**Аннотация** В статье рассматривается диалектика тела и души в философии Абу Насра аль-Фараби как ключевое звено восточного перипатетизма и его учения о человеке. Показано, что в онтологии Фараби тело (жисм) и душа (рух) образуют иерархически упорядоченное, но внутренне связанное единство, восходящее к Первоисточнику через систему интеллектов. Анализируются его гносеологические и этико-политические взгляды, в которых совершенство души, рациональное познание и добродетельная жизнь в “фозил-городе” выступают условием истинного счастья человека и непрерывности духовной культуры.

**Ключевые слова:** Абу Наср аль-Фараби, восточные перипатетики, тело и душа, жисм и рух, онтология, гносеология, перфектный город, счастье, рациональное познание, исламская философия.

**Abstract** The article examines the dialectic of body and soul in Abu Nasr al-Farabi's philosophy as a central component of Eastern Peripatetic thought and his conception of the human being. It argues that in Farabi's ontology the body (jism) and soul (ruh) form a hierarchically ordered yet internally connected unity that proceeds from the First Cause through a graded system of intellects. The paper also analyses his epistemological and ethico-political views, showing how the perfection of the soul, rational cognition and virtuous life in the “virtuous city” constitute the conditions for genuine human happiness and the continuity of spiritual culture.

**Keywords:** Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Eastern Peripatetics, body and soul, jism and ruh, ontology, epistemology, virtuous city, happiness, rational cognition, Islamic philosophy.

### Introduction

Abu Nasr al-Farabi (c. 873–950), widely known as “The Second Teacher” after Aristotle, is one of the central representatives of the Eastern Peripatetic tradition in the Islamic intellectual world [1, p. 5]. By creatively assimilating the legacy of Greek philosophy and the scientific debates of his time, he constructed a comprehensive system in which metaphysics, logic, ethics, political theory and the theory of knowledge are organically interconnected [2, p. 17]. Within this system, the relation between body and soul is not a marginal topic but a key to understanding his conception of the human being, happiness and the ultimate purpose of social life.

Farabi's ontology is grounded in the distinction between the Necessary Being and possible beings, from which he develops an emanative hierarchy of intellects, souls and celestial spheres that culminates in the sublunar world [1, p. 9]. In this hierarchy, the human

composite of body (jism) and soul (ruh) occupies a special place: the body belongs to the realm of changeable material substances, while the soul, through its rational faculty, is oriented toward immaterial intelligibles and the Active Intellect [4, p. 30]. The dialectic of body and soul thus expresses the tension between material conditions and the spiritual vocation of the human being.

At the same time, Farabi links the perfection of the soul to the structure of the city and the organization of political power [2, p. 60]. In his famous treatise on the virtuous city, the rightly ordered polity is described as a macrocosm that mirrors the harmonious order of the human soul, guided by a ruler whose intellectual and moral virtues integrate bodily needs and spiritual aims into a single teleological whole [5, p. 73]. Therefore, the dialectic of body and soul in Farabi's Peripatetic philosophy is not only a psychological and metaphysical problem, but also a foundation for his ethical and socio-political doctrines, where true happiness is attainable only through the rational and moral actualization of the soul within a virtuous communit.

## Methodology

This study is based on a textual and comparative analysis of Farabi's main philosophical works and modern secondary literature. The primary sources include his treatises on metaphysics, psychology and political philosophy, where the structure of being and the nature of the human soul are systematically discussed [1, p. 11]. These texts are examined in the light of the broader Eastern Peripatetic tradition, with particular attention to the reception of Aristotle and Plato in Farabi's thought and to the way he adapts Greek concepts to the intellectual and theological context of the medieval Islamic world.

The research also employs a problem-oriented approach focused on the dialectic of body and soul as it appears in Farabi's ontology, epistemology and ethics. Passages describing the hierarchy of being, the faculties of the soul, and the structure of the virtuous city are selected and interpreted with the aim of reconstructing an integrated picture of how jism and ruh interact in the process of human perfection [3, p. 37]. Comparative references to later thinkers such as Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd are used not to shift the focus away from Farabi, but to clarify the originality and long-term influence of his position within the Peripatetic movement.

## Results

Farabi's metaphysical system begins with the Necessary Being, from which all possible beings proceed through a graded process of emanation. Within this process, celestial intellects and souls occupy the higher levels of reality, while the material world, formed from the four elements, constitutes the lower realm subject to change and corruption [2, p. 33]. The human being, composed of body and soul, belongs simultaneously to both levels: the body is rooted in the elemental world, whereas the soul, especially in its rational dimension, is oriented toward the intelligible order and the Active Intellect [3, p. 44].

For Farabi, the body is necessary as the locus and instrument of the soul's operations, but it does not exhaust the essence of the human being. The soul organizes the body, governs its faculties and directs it toward actions that can either support or hinder intellectual and moral growth. The dialectic between jism and ruh thus appears as a dynamic tension: bodily states and dispositions affect the cognitive and ethical life of the soul, while the soul, through discipline and education, strives to master bodily impulses and align them with the pursuit of higher, immaterial goods [6, p. 64].



At the epistemological level, knowledge in Farabi's philosophy begins with sensation and imagination but reaches its full realization only in the activity of the rational soul [2, p. 47]. Through perception and experience, the human being grasps particular, changeable features of the material world, yet true science is achieved when the intellect abstracts universal forms from these particulars and contemplates them independently of their bodily conditions.

The progression from potential intellect to actual and acquired intellect marks the gradual liberation of the soul from the limitations imposed by the body and the senses. The culmination of this process is the conjunction of the human intellect with the Active Intellect, which Farabi describes as the highest stage of intellectual and spiritual perfection. In this sense, the dialectic of body and soul is resolved not by denying the body, but by integrating and transcending its functions through rational activity and virtuous living, which open the way to a form of happiness that survives bodily limitations [5, p. 83].

## Discussion

The analysis of Farabi's texts shows that his doctrine of body and soul is a structural axis of his entire philosophical system rather than a marginal anthropological theme [1, p. 35]. The human being appears as a composite in which the body, rooted in the realm of matter and change, provides the necessary conditions for perception, imagination and practical action, while the soul, especially in its rational dimension, opens the person to the intelligible world and to participation in the Active Intellect. Farabi thus understands the dialectic of *jism* and *ruh* as a dynamic relationship in which bodily dispositions can either assist or obstruct the soul's ascent from potentiality to actuality, and in which intellectual and moral education functions as the main mediating factor that harmonizes these two levels of human existence.

At the ethical and political level, this dialectic becomes the foundation for Farabi's theory of happiness and the virtuous city. The well-ordered soul, in which rational guidance governs appetitive and irascible faculties, serves as the microcosmic model for a rightly structured community whose laws, institutions and educational practices aim at the perfection of citizens' souls rather than the mere satisfaction of bodily desires [2, p. 78]. In this way, the Eastern Peripatetic ideal of human perfection is translated into a concrete socio-political program: true felicity is attainable only when individuals, through rational knowledge and virtuous action, transcend the limitations of their corporeal nature while still using the body as an instrument for realizing intellectual and moral goods within a cooperative civic order.

## Conclusion

The investigation of Farabi's doctrine of body and soul demonstrates that the dialectic between *jism* and *ruh* is inseparable from his broader metaphysical and epistemological framework. The body anchors the human being in the world of material change and provides the conditions for sensation, imagination and practical activity, while the soul—through the progressive actualization of its rational powers—enables a gradual ascent toward the intelligible realm and conjunction with the Active Intellect, in which true knowledge and enduring happiness become possible.

At the same time, Farabi's treatment of body and soul has direct ethical and political consequences, since the inner order of the soul functions as the paradigm for the virtuous city and its institutions. By insisting that genuine felicity is achieved only when bodily capacities are subordinated to rational and moral aims within a just civic community, Farabi integrates anthropology, metaphysics and political philosophy into a single Peripatetic project, in which



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the perfection of the human soul represents both the goal of individual life and the ultimate measure of a well-ordered society.

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