

Janne Mattila. *The Eudaimonist Ethics of al-Fārābī and Avicenna*. Brill, Leiden: Brill, 2022. vii + 247 pages. ISBN 9789004506473.

### Hümeyra Özturan\*

Turkish literature has many monographic books on leading philosophers of Islamic moral philosophy.<sup>1</sup> However, a similar diversity is lacking in English literature. Existing research in English often outlines the general framework of the field or consists mainly of articles related to practical ethics.<sup>2</sup> Some works focus on the moral theories of theologians, within the context of religion and morality issues.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, however, there has been a rise in conceptual studies on philosoph-

- 1 We can enumerate some of them as follows: Mustafa Çağrı, *Gazzâlî'ye Göre İslâm Ahlâkı: Nazarî ve Amelî Olarak*, İstanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 1982; Cavit Sunar, *İbn Miskeveyh'in Yunan'da ve İslam'da Ahlâk Görüşleri*, Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi, 1980; Mehmet Kasım Özgen, *Fârâbî'de Mutluluk ve Ahlâk İlişkisi*, İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1997; Müfit Selim Saruhan, *İbn Miskeveyh Düşüncesinde Tanrı ve İnsan*, Ankara: İlahiyat, 2005; Nejdet Durak, *Aristoteles ve Fârâbî'de Etik*, Isparta: Fakülte Kitabevi, 2009; Murat Demirkol, *Nasrüddin Tûsî'nin Ahlâk Felsefesine Etkisi*, Ankara: Fecr Yayınları, 2011; Yunus Cengiz, *Doğa ve Öznellik: Câhız'ın Ahlâk Düşüncesi*, İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2015; Anar Gafarov, *Nasrüddin Tûsî'nin Ahlâk Felsefesi*, İstanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2012; Hüseyin Karaman, *Ebû Bekir Râzî'nin Ahlâk Felsefesi*, İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2017; Hümeyra Özturan, *Akıl ve Ahlâk: Aristoteles ve Fârâbî'de Ahlâkın Kaynağı*, İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2017; Ayşe Sıdika Oktay, *Kınalızâde Ali Efendi ve Ahlâk-ı Âlâî*, İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2019.
- 2 The following examples can be provided: Dwight M. Donaldson, *Studies in Muslim Ethics*, London: S.P.C.K., 1953; George F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985; Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991; ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp, *Islamic Ethics of Life: Abortion, War and Euthanasia*, University of South Carolina Press, 2003; ed. Aryn Sajoo, *A Companion to Muslim Ethics*, London: Bloomsbury, 2012; Oliver Leaman, *Islam and Morality: A Philosophical Introduction*, Bloomsbury, 2019; ed. Peter Adamson et al., *Studies in Islamic Ethics*, Brill, 2022.
- 3 For instance, see; George F. Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of Abd al-Jabbar*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971; Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi*, Leiden: Brill, 2006; Sophia Vasalou, *Moral Agents and Their Deserts: The Character of Mu'tazilite Ethics*, Princeton University Press, 2008; Sophia Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics*, Oxford University Press, 2015; Sophia Vasalou, *Al-Ghazālî and the Idea of Moral Beauty*, Routledge, 2021.

\* Assoc. Prof., Marmara University, Faculty of Theology, Department of Philosophy and Religion, History of Philosophy. Correspondence: humeyrakaragozogl@gmail.com

ical ethics in the Islamic world,<sup>4</sup> along with monographs that individually or comparatively examine the theories of prominent Islamic moral philosophers. Mattila's work is one of this genre's most notable recent publications. Initially based on his doctoral thesis, Mattila expanded his research into an independent study beyond the scope of his original dissertation. This book, which we will endeavor to evaluate here, represents a significant contribution to the field.

Mattila's work undertakes a comparative analysis of the ethics of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, focusing on the concepts of happiness and virtue. It is structured into an introduction, two main sections, ten subsections, and a conclusion. In the introduction, the fundamental claims of the book are clearly stated, followed by a discussion of the sources of Islamic moral philosophy, including Aristotle, Plato, Galen, and Neoplatonism. This section summarizes how these influences were received and assimilated into the Islamic world without presenting new research. Additionally, the introduction offers a brief overview of how both philosophers perceive moral philosophy and its position among the sciences. The first section, "Happiness," comprises six subsections, while the second section, "Virtue," consists of four subsections. Each subsection begins with introductory information about how each philosopher addresses the issue. This is followed by a detailed analysis of each philosopher's views on the topic, organized under separate headings.

In the introduction, the author outlines three main claims around which his study is structured: (i) the moral philosophy of both al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā is not a direct derivative of any ancient moral philosopher. (ii) The moral philosophy of these Islamic philosophers cannot be considered separately from their cosmology, psychology, and metaphysics. The book explicitly states: "The moral philosophy of both philosophers is grounded in their theoretical philosophy." (iii) Both Islamic philosophers have systematic and consistent moral theories. The author further asserts that while these theories may appear to conflict, they are fundamentally consistent (pp. 3, 212-213). Mattila asserts that he has substantiated their validity in the concluding section.

First and foremost, it is essential to acknowledge the positive qualities of this work. It is a comparative study of Islamic moral philosophy, which is uncommon in

4 Sophia Vasalou's recent works can be considered as good examples of that: ed. Sophia Vasalou, *The Measure of Greatness: Philosophers on Magnanimity*, Oxford University Press, 2019; Sophia Vasalou, *Virtues of Greatness in the Arabic Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 2019.

the literature. The book addresses various topics without excessive repetition and discusses each topic within a question framework in almost every section. However, our critical reading focuses on points needing further development in each section, leading to a more critical evaluation. From this perspective, it is noteworthy that the second section, which discusses the grounding of happiness, is more prominent than the first section, which focuses on the goal of happiness. This section references the *exclusivism and inclusivism debate* at the beginning within Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* framework. It explores whether al-Fārābī and İbn Sīnā lean more towards the exclusivist view, which posits that happiness is purely intellectual, or the inclusivist interpretation, which includes the realization of virtuous actions. While the author attempts to delve into this issue in-depth in the context of al-Fārābī, he overlooks the surviving fragments of al-Fārābī's commentary on *Nicomachean Ethics*. This source contains the answer to the very question being investigated. Al-Fārābī was aware of Aristotle's rationalist interpretation of happiness in the tenth book of *Nicomachean Ethics*, recognized its difference from the definition of happiness in the other books, and approved this rationalist interpretation.<sup>5</sup> Overlooking such vital information is unfortunate, especially since it is highly relevant to the topic under investigation. The author is aware of this source and references it in subsequent book sections. However, in this section, he behaves as if he has not seen this source yet and even provides incorrect information that "al-Fārābī's knowledge of *Nicomachean Ethics* is deficient" (p. 31). This assertion could be corrected based on the content of al-Fārābī's commentary, demonstrating that the philosopher had accurate knowledge of almost all sections of *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>6</sup>

In the section under consideration, the author presents a critical evaluation of a work exploring the philosophical perspectives of two prominent thinkers, al-Fārābī and İbn Sīnā. The analysis of al-Fārābī spans twelve pages, but the views of İbn Sīnā are summarized in just one page, without explicitly addressing the differences between the two philosophers. This section is crucial, as it investigates the author's second fundamental claim: that both philosophers ground happiness in theoretical philosophy. A similar issue arises in the subsequent section on pleasure, where the

5 Lawrence V. Berman, "Appendix A", ed. Jean Jolivet, *Multiple Averroes: actes du Colloque international organisé à l'occasion du 850e anniversaire de la naissance d'Averroès, Paris 20-23 septembre 1976*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978, p. 309.

6 Hümeýra Özturan, "Fārābī'nin Kayıp Nikomakhos Ahlākı Şerhinden Kalan Parçalar: Tercüme ve Tahlil", *Kutadgu Bilig*, 28, 2015, 74-94.

author fails to provide a comprehensive comparison, merely noting that “İbn Sīnā has more detailed elaboration” on the subject. The primary deficiency, however, lies in the section titled “Theoretical Perfection.” Despite being a critical component for comparing al-Fārābī and İbn Sīnā’s perspectives on the relationship between theoretical perfection and happiness, the author relegates the most vital aspect of this topic to a section on the afterlife (Part I, Chapter 6). This decision hampers a thorough and accurate comparison. Both philosophers acknowledge the connection between ethics and theoretical perfection, a point that is evident in their texts. However, the crux of the matter revolves around whether theoretical competence constitutes a sufficient cause for ultimate happiness. By not addressing this fundamental issue within the section on theoretical perfection, the author misses an opportunity to provide a more nuanced and detailed comparison of al-Fārābī and İbn Sīnā’s views on the relationship between theoretical knowledge and ultimate happiness.

In his treatise *Risāla fī ma’rifat al-naḥs al-nāṭiqa wa aḥwālihā*, İbn Sīnā discusses the possibility of a person possessing deficient theoretical knowledge yet complete virtue, or vice versa. He implies that individuals will attain eternal happiness in proportion to their deficiencies after experiencing deprivation. While this text emphasizes a penalty for a lack of practical virtue, it suggests that those lacking theoretical competence will only witness the truths in the afterlife.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, İbn Sīnā’s assertion does not imply any punishment for those without theoretical competence but possessing practical virtue. In contrast, al-Fārābī contends that both theoretical and practical competences are prerequisites for achieving happiness. He argues that existence and happiness afterlife are not possible for the people who do not have theoretical competence. Also he adds that solely possessing theoretical competence is insufficient for happiness. For al-Fārābī, a person who studies theoretical sciences but lacks practical competence is much further from philosophy compared to someone who, despite not having pursued any theoretical sciences, engaged in good deeds. Consequently, the former is less likely to achieve competence and happiness.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the author does not delve deeply into these differences in this section, possibly deferring the topic to the section on the afterlife. However, as we will demonstrate later, these matters also remain unclear in the section on the afterlife.

7 İbn Sīnā, *Risāla fī ma’rifat al-naḥs al-nāṭiqa wa aḥwālihā*, Ahmad Fuād al-Ahwānī (ed.), *Aḥwāl al-naḥs*, 1952, 187-192.

8 al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl muntaza’a*, Fawzi Mitri Najjār (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-mashriq, 1986, 100-101.

Furthermore, it is imperative to elucidate the concept of *prophecy* (*nubuwwah*) as a pathway to happiness for individuals lacking theoretical proficiency within al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā's frameworks. They posit that prophecy serves as a means for those who do not achieve theoretical knowledge to attain happiness through adherence to prophetic guidance. At this juncture, it would be enlightening to conduct a comparative investigation into the role of prophecy in attaining happiness according to these philosophers. However, it can be observed that the author, who has consistently overlooked the prophethood theory throughout the book, once again merely alludes to it with a single sentence in this context (p. 86).

In another subsection where the concept of approaching the ideal of happiness is considered as a form of ascent, the inquiry revolves around whether the philosophies of happiness proposed by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā allude to a mystical ideal. The question of whether Ibn Sīnā's philosophy inherently possesses a mystical dimension has long been a subject of intense debate within the literature, particularly within the context of the mystical language employed in the *Maqāmātu'l-'arīfīn* section found at the end of his *al-Ishārāt wa't-Tanbihāt*. However, apart from a few sentences mentioned toward the end of the section, the author largely endeavors to sidestep this discourse, treating it as if it were distinct from the issue under scrutiny. Yet the question he is examining here on whether the ascent to happiness entails a mystical experience is intricately linked to a topic extensively and fervently debated in the literature. The debate centers on whether Ibn Sīnā's philosophical framework accommodates a mystical dimension or if the mystical elements are merely rhetorical or illustrative tools. After the section, the author hastily concludes that happiness is not a mystical ideal in either al-Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā. He asserts that it only occasionally assumes a mystical tone in Ibn Sīnā's exposition, avoiding direct confrontation with the ongoing debate.

In the section on the afterlife, the author's reference to the Straussian esoteric reading method while discussing al-Fārābī and his reasons for not adopting this method seem well-founded and provide a fair evaluation. Furthermore, the text mentions the claims of Andalusian philosophers regarding al-Fārābī's views on the afterlife, suggesting a more accurate approach through reliance on al-Fārābī's own texts. This section avoids the book's overall weakness of overemphasizing the difference between al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, opting instead for a comparative narrative style. However, as noted, the connection between theoretical perfection and the afterlife is not adequately established in the section on theoretical perfection, limiting the discussion to posthumous resurrection and failing to offer a clear overall picture.

The most fundamental section that addresses virtues, connecting the first section on happiness with the second, is the part concerning “Virtue and Happiness.” The author begins this section by questioning how both philosophers reconcile their emphasis on theoretical competence with the ideal of moderation in actions. What complicates this matter is the author’s earlier portrayal of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā’s moral ideal primarily as theoretical competence, even characterizing it as intellectualist within the context of the modern Aristotelian debate (p. 131). To resolve this dilemma, the author appropriately references the Neoplatonic moral ideal and Ibn Miskawayh’s reconciliatory intervention in the introduction of this section. In the segments focusing on al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, the author surprisingly concludes that al-Fārābī views moral virtues as means to achieve theoretical competence, while Ibn Sīnā assigns a genuine place to moral virtues as the ultimate goal for humans (p. 142). The thought process leading to this conclusion is summed up this way: “While al-Fārābī does not envision an afterlife and happiness for those who cannot attain theoretical competence, Ibn Sīnā accepts an afterlife for all individuals. However, to reconcile his philosophical views with the concept of divine reward and punishment in religion, Ibn Sīnā defines the cause of reward and punishment as realizing moral virtues and deems moral virtues as necessary” (p. 154). The author’s argument here misses al-Fārābī’s emphasis on the unity of theory and practice and fails to acknowledge “Ibn Sīnā’s acceptance of religious determination in ethics.” This problem becomes evident in the subsequent section titled “Virtue and Rationality.” Let us attempt to elucidate the issue further.

In his work, al-Fārābī delineated ethics as an independent field separate from religious sciences through his classification of sciences in *Ihşā’ al-Ulūm*. He provided detailed epistemological explanations illuminating moral knowledge’s demonstrative and empirical aspects. Based on these explanations, Mattila has accurately presented the relationship between virtue, happiness, and rationality in al-Fārābī’s thought.<sup>9</sup> However, when it comes to Ibn Sīnā, the author follows a perception influenced by al-Fārābī, failing to consider that Ibn Sīnā may have approached the issue differently. There are fundamental differences in their concepts of practical devel-

9 In regards to the author’s assessments of al-Fārābī, it is worth noting the following: The author at some points highlights inconsistencies among al-Fārābī’s works (e.g., pp. 166, 167, 200). However, when considering that al-Fārābī’s *Fuṣūl Muntaza’a* is not an independent treatise on ethics but rather a collection of notes drawn from various Aristotelian works, particularly the *Nicomachean Ethics*, many of the examples cited as inconsistencies may not be deemed as such. The author, however, does not take such a possibility into account.

opment. According to al-Fārābī's system, it is possible to attain knowledge of ethics at both the principle and practical levels solely through rational development, without the necessity of religious knowledge. The application of this knowledge is also achievable through empirical acquisition. In contrast, İbn Sīnā does not entertain the possibility that practical development can be entirely independent of religion, even if theoretical competence is attained. As he explicitly states in *'Uyūn al-Ḥikmah*, practical philosophy's principles, boundaries, and competencies are derived from divine sources.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, according to İbn Sīnā, what leads to eternal happiness is not solely the realization of moral virtues, as asserted by Mattila, but more precisely, one's conformity to shari'ah in actions and moral conduct. Hence, there is a distinct departure from al-Fārābī's perspective in İbn Sīnā's approach.<sup>11</sup>

The author's incomplete assessment of İbn Sīnā becomes particularly evident in the "Virtue and Rationality" section. In al-Fārābī's philosophy, the demonstrative and empirical aspects of ethics are clearly and explicitly delineated. Consequently, his conception of moral knowledge is seen as separate from religion, autonomous, universal, and rational. The author, while attempting to identify this perspective in İbn Sīnā's thought, interprets İbn Sīnā's statement about "moral propositions being famous, widespread, and empirical" as a contradiction to the theoretical, universal, and objective concept of virtue that al-Fārābī had outlined. Subsequently, the author endeavors to resolve this perceived contradiction within their framework (pages 187-188). However, İbn Sīnā's notion of religious determinism and his statements in *al-Shifā'*<sup>12</sup> and *'Uyūn al-Ḥikmah*<sup>13</sup> provide a clear framework for the role of theoretical

10 İbn Sīnā, *'Uyūn al-Ḥikmah*, Abdurrahman Badawī (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-qalam, 1980, 16.

11 There are also some other works that point out such a distinction between the two philosophers' approaches: Morris, James W. "The Philosopher-Prophet in Avicenna's Political Philosophy", *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Charles E. Butterworth, Cambridge, 1992, 154-173; M. Cüneyt Kaya, "Peygamberin Yasa Koyuculuğu: İbn Sīnā'nın Amelî Felsefe Tasavvuruna Bir Giriş Denemesi". *Dīvân: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi*, 27 (2009) 71-90; M. Cüneyt Kaya, "In the Shadow of 'Prophetic Legislation' The Venture of Practical Philosophy after Avicenna", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 24 (2014), 275; Hümeyra Özturan, "The Practical Philosophy of Al-Fārābī and Avicenna: A Comparison", *Nazariyat Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences*, 5/1 (May 2019): 1-35.

12 "The truth of all these matters [i.e. branches of practical philosophy] is ascertained (*tuḥaqqaqu*) through theoretical demonstration (*bi'l-burhāni'n-naẓari*) and the testimony of religion (*bi'sh-shahāh dati'sh-shar'iyya*). The specification in detail (*tafṣil*) and the determination of [particular] judgments (*taqdīr*) are also governed by divine law (*bi'sh-shar'i'ati'l-ilāhiyya*). " (İbn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'/al-Manṭiq I: al-Madḥal*, ed. Fuād al-Ahvānī et al., Cairo, 1952, 14.)

13 İbn Sīnā, *'Uyūn al-Ḥikmah*, 16.

and practical reasoning within the realm of ethics. According to these explanations, İbn Sīnā believes that religious determinations (sharī'ah) provide explanations for happiness and unhappiness in this world, while reason and demonstrative analogy are functional in comprehending, understanding, and applying these explanations to specific situations. Consequently, theoretical and general knowledge transmitted through ethical books and widespread empirical knowledge about ethics are considered in practical philosophy. In contrast, the author's concluding assessments in this section arrive at an entirely contradictory conclusion, suggesting that "since the prophet is endowed with perfect theoretical and practical parts of the intellect, the religious legislation İbn Sīnā stipulates is based on rational principles" (p. 188). This conclusion can only be regarded as an inverted reading of İbn Sīnā's philosophy through the lens of al-Fārābī.

A similar tendency becomes evident in the "Moral Progression" section, where the author explicitly rejects the claim of religious determination in İbn Sīnā's moral philosophy.<sup>14</sup> As a rationale, he states that "if this were true, then İbn Sīnā would only have a rationally justified religious ethics, whereas İbn Sīnā assigns complementary roles to both sharī'ah and philosophical ethics" (p. 201). This is precisely what İbn Sīnā has done. However, he does so not by creating a moral philosophy independent of religion, deriving its principles from theoretical reason, but by taking principles from religion and explaining them through universal and particular aspects derived from theoretical and practical reason. He engages in moral reasoning to realize these principles in everyday life.<sup>15</sup> For someone who does not have theoretical and practical perfection, the path to acquiring sufficient moral knowledge has already been elucidated through the theory of prophecy.

In conclusion, the author restates the claims made in the introduction and asserts that he has confirmed these claims through research. However, the conclusion

14 It remains unclear how the author interprets the passage from *al-Ḥikma al-mashriqiyya*, which serves as the basis for the assertion concerning İbn Sīnā. The author neither provides any elucidation on this work nor includes it among their references. (See the aforementioned passage: İbn Sīnā, *Manṭiq al-Mashriqiyyūn*, ed. Muhyiddin el-Hatib (Qum: Maktabat al-Āyatullahi'l-Uẓmā al-Najafi al-Mar'ashi, 1405, 7-8.)

15 As an inquiry into whether this activity diverges from Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), see; Hümeyra Özturan, "The Practical Philosophy of al-Fārābī and Avicenna: A Comparison", *Nazariyat Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences*, 5/1 (May 2019): 1-35.

appears deficient in two respects. Firstly, it is brief and does not provide a thorough summary of the questions examined in the subsections and the answers reached. This fails to give the reader a comprehensive summary. Secondly, no evaluation outlines the overall picture of the virtue and happiness theory that emerged from all these subsections. This omission means that, at the end of the book, the reader is not provided with a holistic understanding of what virtue and happiness are for both al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā and the general differences between the two, which are the main topics of the book.