



Al-Farabi's Different Approach on The Meaning of "Acquired Intellect"*

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Abstract

This paper deals with the difference between acquired intellect, and natural parts of human's intellect. For al-Farabi actual intellect is the general condition of immortality whereby acquired intellect is the special condition of eternal happiness. The stages of potential and actual intellects mean the intellect that exist in the nature of human and develop after birth; however acquired intellect means the intellect that benefits from superior intellect by hearing. The first part is based on intellect and the second part is based on hearing. The natural intellect deals with for the process of abstraction of sensibles from sensible word while the acquired intellect deals with the entities from separated realm. Also, it will be taken into consideration that al-Farabi while putting forward his theory of intellects might have benefitted from Peripatetic's and Hellenistic sources as well as some others. As a result, it is claimed in this paper that al-Farabi evaluated the issue authentically, based on an intellect understanding that already exist in his own tradition centered around the thoughts of Imam Ali.

Keywords: Al-Farabi; Singularity of immortality; Abstracteds; Separateds; Agent Intellect; Acquired Intellect; Natural Intellect; Heard Intellect.

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Abstrak

Dalam artikel ini, akan dikemukakan bahwa akal *müstefâd* secara hakikat berbeda dengan akal alami yang berkembang dalam jiwa manusia, dan bahwa akal *müstefâd* adalah akal manusia yang memanfaatkan wahyu. Dalam filsafat Fârâbî, akal yang aktual adalah syarat umum bagi keabadian, sementara akal *müstefâd* adalah syarat khusus untuk kebahagiaan abadi. Tahapan akal potensial dan aktual merujuk pada akal yang secara alami lahir dan berkembang dalam diri manusia, sementara akal *müstefâd* merujuk pada akal yang memanfaatkan pendengaran dari akal yang lebih tinggi. Bagian pertama berhubungan dengan rasionalitas, sedangkan bagian kedua berhubungan dengan ilmu-ilmu langit. Jenis akal pertama berkaitan dengan "abstraksi" yang diperoleh dari dunia material, sedangkan akal *müstefâd* berkaitan dengan "pemisahan" yang diperoleh dari dunia intelligibel. Meskipun diterima bahwa filsuf ini memanfaatkan sumber-sumber Peripatetik dan Helenistik dalam merumuskan teori akalnya, perlu dipertimbangkan bahwa mungkin ada referensi lain. Secara keseluruhan, artikel ini berpendapat bahwa Fârâbî mengevaluasi topik ini dengan cara yang orisinal, sesuai dengan pemahamannya tentang akal yang berpusat pada Imam Ali, yang sudah ada dalam tradisi budaya beliau.

Kata Kunci: Al-Fârâbî; Keunikan keabadian; Abstraksi; Pemisahan; Akal Agen; Akal yang Diperoleh; Akal Alami; Akal yang Didengar.

Introduction

In recent times, various studies have been conducted in both the Islamic world and the West on the theory of intellect proposed by Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī (d. 950). In this article, we will focus on the nature of the *acquired intellect* within the context of Fārābī's theory of intellect, examining how he defines it and the specific functions he ascribes to it.

The concept of intellect, expressed as *nous* in Greek and *ratio* or *intellectus* in Latin, arguably received its most profound treatment within the Islamic intellectual tradition from al-Fārābī. It would not be an overstatement to assert this. Al-Fārābī authored treatises on the intellect, addressed this subject across various works, provided definitions, and,

while remaining faithful to the same essence, employed different terminologies and classifications.

According to al-Fārābī, linguists define *'aql* (intellect) as meaning "to restrain" or "to bind," while an intelligent person is described as one who places things in their proper places. Al-Fārābī explains that the expression "he restrained his tongue" signifies holding the tongue back from speaking, thereby protecting it from expressing unintended meanings.¹ He further clarifies that the term *'aql* (intellect) can refer both to the act of comprehension performed by the human mind and to the essence (*jawhar*) through which a person perceives external objects.² The first refers to the intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*) apprehended by the intellect, while the second pertains to the perceiving essence (*'āqil*). This distinction is crucial for differentiating between the *acquired intellect* (*mustafād*), which is attained through external input, and the *natural intellect* (*maṭbū'*), inherent by nature. The former involves the intelligibles that "descend" into the substance of the intellect as an effect of the influence of the higher, separate intellect, whereas the latter represents the essence of the intellect itself and its actualized substance.

The stages of the theoretical faculty of the human intellect are generally outlined in four levels. The first is the *potential intellect* (*hayūlānī intellect*), which is purely a capacity to comprehend intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*) and possesses no actual knowledge, whether necessary or theoretical. The second is the *habitual intellect* (*bilmalakah intellect*), characterized by the knowledge of necessary principles (*darūriyyāt*), which form the foundation of theoretical reasoning. The third is the

¹ Fārābī, *Mine'l-Es'ileti'l-Lāmi'a wa'l-Ecvibeti'l-Cāmi'a*, *Kitābu'l-Mille wa Nusūṣ Uḥrā*, ed. Muḥsin Mehdi, 2nd edition, Dār al-Mashriq, Beirut, 1991, p. 64.

² Fārābī, *Kitābu't-Tanbīh 'Alā Sabīl al-Sa'āda*, in *al-A'māl al-Falsafīyya*, Dār al-Manāhil, Beirut, 1413/1992, p. 259. Additionally, Fārābī, in his commentary on Aristotle's *Kitāb al-Burhān*, discusses the intellect as the faculty of the soul that, without engaging in analogy or deliberate reasoning, derives certainty solely from innate and natural propositions—those true, necessary, and universal premises arising from childhood or from origins unknown. See Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-'Aql*, ed. Maurice Bouyges S.J., Dār al-Mashriq, Beirut, 1983, p. 8.

actual intellect (bilfi'l intellect), capable of deriving theoretical knowledge from necessary principles through acquired reasoning. The final stage is the *acquired intellect (mustafād intellect)*, which fully apprehends theoretical truths in actuality and benefits from the Active Intellect,³ often identified with Gabriel (*Jibrīl*).⁴

In his classification of the intellect, al-Fārābī employs concepts such as *al-'aql al-naẓarī* (theoretical intellect), *al-'aql al-'ilmī* (scientific intellect),⁵ *al-nāṭiq al-naẓarī* (the theoretical rational faculty), and *al-nāṭiq al-fikrī* (the deliberative rational faculty).⁶ Furthermore, he designates the intellect in its potential state as *'aql bilquwwa* (potential intellect) and introduces terms such as *hayūlānī intellect* (potential intellect), *bilmalakah intellect* (habitual intellect), and *munfa'il intellect* (passive intellect) to indicate its various stages and conditions.⁷ In this stage, al-Fārābī also refers to the intellect as *mūmkīn intellect* (possible intellect), *māddī intellect* (material intellect), and *salbī intellect* (negating intellect).⁸ Regarding the intellect's active state, he designates it as *bilfi'l intellect* when compared to lower levels, while referring to it as *munfa'il intellect* in

³ The Active Intellect, according to Alexander of Aphrodisias, the prominent Aristotelian commentator, is identified as divine intellect (see Şenol Korkut, "İskender Afrodisi'nin Faal Akıl Teorisi," *Eskişehir Osmangazi University Journal of Theology Faculty*, 2018, vol. 5, no. 9, p. 76). In contrast, another commentator, Themistius, views it as the highest level of human intellect (see Korkut, "Themistius'un Faal Akıl Teorisi," *Eskişehir Osmangazi University Journal of Theology Faculty*, 2019, vol. 6, no. 10, p. 181). According to Fārābī, however, both interpretations are incorrect. He posits that the Active Intellect should be understood as an angel tasked with facilitating knowledge between God and humanity.

⁴ Muhammad Ali al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn*, ed. Ahmed Hasan Bash, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1418/1998, vol. 3, pp. 309-310. The substance that is abstracted from matter and body in both its essence and action is referred to by the followers of Shari'ah as an angel, while philosophers term it intellect. The Active Intellect, in the language of Shari'ah, corresponds to Gabriel ('alayhi al-salām). See Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, vol. 3, p. 305.

⁵ Fārābī, *Uyūn al-Masā'il*, in *al-Majmū'*, Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, Egypt, 1325/1907, p. 74; Fārābī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Alī Yāsīn, Intishārāt Bidār, (Baghdad, 1394/1974), Qom, 1405/1985, p. 81.

⁶ Fārābī, *Fuṣūl Muntaza'a*, ed. Fauzi M. Najjar, Dār al-Mashriq, Beirut, 1971, p. 50.

⁷ Fārābī, *Uyūn al-Masā'il*, p. 74.

⁸ Dāhir, *Nazarīyat al-'Aql 'inda al-Fārābī*, p. 444.

relation to higher levels.⁹ The intellect that connects with the Active Intellect and is a product of it is referred to as '*aql mustafād*' (acquired intellect) or '*aql tamm*' (perfect intellect).¹⁰ He also names the Active Intellect itself '*aql mufāriq*' (separate intellect), '*aql kāmīl*' (complete intellect), and '*aql bilfī'l*' (actual intellect).¹¹

On the other hand, al-Fārābī classifies the intellect into a threefold division, namely *hayūlānī intellect*, *bilmalakah intellect*, and *mustafād intellect*,¹² as well as *bilquwwa intellect*, *bilfī'l intellect*, and *mustafād intellect*.¹³ He also presents a binary distinction between *hayūlānī* and *mustafād intellect*,¹⁴ which closely resembles the distinction between '*aql al-matbū*' (natural intellect) and '*aql al-masmū*' (received intellect) found in the teachings of Imam Ali. In his *Risāla fī'l-'Aql*, by adding the *mustafād* rational soul that is illuminated and influenced by the separate Active Intellect (*Fā'il 'Aql*), he arrives at a fourfold division of the intellect. While this fourfold division aligns with the classification found in Aristotle's *De Anima*,¹⁵ it is important to note that, particularly in the context of the relationship between intellect and revelation, prophecy, and otherworldly bliss, the meanings and functions ascribed to the *mustafād intellect* and the *Fā'il 'Aql* represent entirely new interpretations. This distinction becomes even clearer in his works beyond the *Risāla fī'l-'Aql*.

The stages through which the intellect passes, from its pure potentiality to its state of perfection, are discussed. The *bilmalakah intellect* and *bilfī'l intellect* are in a state of *bilquwwa* (potentiality) relative to a higher intellect and intelligibles that have not yet been fully apprehended. On the other hand, the *bilmalakah intellect* is *bilfī'l* (actual) in comparison to the *hayūlānī intellect* (potential intellect). Even the

⁹ Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsah al-Madanīyah*, ed. F. M. Najjār, Dār al-Mashriq, Beirut 1993, p. 79; *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, trans. and ed. Yaşar Aydın, Litera Yay., Istanbul 2018, p. 197.

¹⁰ Fārābī, *Uyūn al-Masā'il*, p. 74.

¹¹ Fārābī, *Tecrīd Risālet al-Da'awī al-Qalbīyya*, in *Risā'il Abī Nasr al-Fārābī*, Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmānīyya, Hyderabad Deccan, 1349, p. 10.

¹² Fārābī, *Uyūn al-Masā'il*, p. 74.

¹³ Fārābī, *Risalat fī'l-'Aql*, pp. 12, 15, 20.

¹⁴ Fārābī, *"Tecrīd Risāleti'd-De'āvi'l-Kalbiyye"*, p. 10.

¹⁵ Fārābī, *Risalat fī'l-'Aql*, p. 12.

mustafād intellect, although it is influenced by the separate Active Intellect (*Fā'il 'Aql*), remains in a *bilquwwa* state and is considered its material substrate.¹⁶ Naturally, the material substrate of the *munfa'il intellect* in its actual state is the *bilfi'l intellect*, the material substrate of the *mustafād intellect* is the *munfa'il intellect*, and the material substrate of the *mustafād intellect* is the Active Intellect (*Fā'il 'Aql*).¹⁷ Each level of the intellect, by virtue of being the material substrate for the subsequent higher level, has led to varying definitions, nomenclatures, and classifications of the intellect. On the other hand, since the human soul cannot attain the *mustafād intellect* without the *bilfi'l intellect*, it can be said that wisdom serves as the material for prophecy. The actual state of the human intellect is considered the material of the intellect, while the *mustafād intellect* is thought of as its form.¹⁸

Beings in Terms of Intellect and Intelligibility

According to al-Fārābī, beings are divided into three categories in terms of intellect and intelligibility. The first category consists of those that are *bilfi'l intellect* by nature and can be intellectually apprehended directly. This category corresponds to the realm of angels and the metaphysical world. Their intelligibility does not require abstraction, as they are directly perceived by the intellect. For instance, the Active Intellect (*Fā'il 'Aql*) is associated with names such as "the spirit of truth" (*rūḥ al-amīn*) and "the sacred spirit" (*rūḥ al-quds*), and its level is referred to by terms such as *malakūt* (the celestial or angelic realm).¹⁹ The Active Intellect (*Fā'il 'Aql*) has both an essential (substantial) existence and an existence within human souls (actualized).²⁰

The second category is the complete opposite in terms of intellect and intelligibility. The entities in the material world, by their very nature,

¹⁶ See Fārābī, *el-Medīne*, p. 197, 199; *es-Siyāse*, p. 79.

¹⁷ Fārābī, *el-Medīne*, p. 199.

¹⁸ As stated, Fārābī gives many names to the human intellect, and (see Fārābī, "Uyūnu'l-Mesāil", p. 74) he also refers to it as the "material intellect" (ed-Dāhir, "Nazariyetu'l-akl inde'l-Fārābī", p. 444.), which is crucial for our discussion. As will be discussed below, the form of this material and metbū' intellect is the *müstefād* and *mesmū'* intellects.

¹⁹ Fārābī, *es-Siyāse*, p. 32.

²⁰ Shirazi, *al-Asfar*, vol. 9, p. 140.

are neither potential intellects (*bilquwwa intellect*) nor actual intellects (*bilfi'l intellect*). However, they are in a state where they can be potentially apprehended by the intellect and are open to being intellectually apprehended through abstraction. The transition from being potentially intelligible to actually intelligible occurs only through an external cause, specifically through the mediation of the Active Intellect (*Fā'il 'Aql*).²¹

The third category, which is a distinct and special category of beings, is the human intellect. By its nature, at its initial emergence, it exists at the potential level as *hayūlānī intellect* and, from another perspective, is potentially intelligible. Its actualization as an actual intellect (*bilfi'l intellect*) is made possible through the Active Intellect (*Fā'il 'Aql*). Once intelligibles are apprehended by it, it becomes an actual apprehending substantial being.

In brief, angels are actual intellect beings by their very nature. Objects, in no way, can be intellectual beings. Humans, although actual souls at birth, are only potential intellects (*bilquwwa intellect*).²² While intelligibility applies to all beings, the state of being intellectual is specific to angels and, indirectly, to humans.

Hayūlānī Intellect

Firstly, it should be stated that in his work *Risāle fi'l-Akl*, al-Fārābī uses the term *bilquwwa intellect* instead of the term *hayūlānī*, which more generally refers to the potential and latent state of the intellect. The term *bilquwwa intellect* indicates a state of pure potentiality and capacity, in comparison to the actualized intellect (*bilfi'l intellect*). "An intellect in the state of *quwwa* is a kind of soul or a part of the soul, or a power of the soul, or it is something that is not the matter of beings,²³ but is ready and prepared to abstract all their essence and forms."²⁴ This intellect is

²¹ Fārābī, *el-Medīne*, p. 159, 161.

²² Shirazi, *al-Esfār*, vol. 9, p. 141.

²³ In terms of knowledge, "a form is the essence of the known, in respect to its occurrence in the soul." See: Seyyid Sharif Jurjani, *Sharh al-Mawaqif*, DKI, Lebanese edition by Mahmoud Omar Dymatī, Lebanon 1433/2012, vol. 6, p. 36.

²⁴ Fārābī, *Risalat fi'l-'Akl*, p. 12.

placed in the body merely as a material possibility and power. Since the intellect, in its actualized state, is far removed from both the essence and the actions of matter, it could not be directly placed in the material body. However, in order for the human soul, which has both a material and bodily aspect, to be capable of intellectual apprehension and knowledge, it had to be placed in a purely material and potential state, without any activity, at the outset.

Al-Fārābī says, "In humans, the acquisition of knowledge occurs through the senses (*hawāss*), while the perception of universal things takes place through the sensory apprehension (*ihsās*) of particular things."²⁵ In other words, the intellectual apprehension of universals is only possible after the sensory perception of particulars. The perception of particulars, in turn, is made possible through the body and its sensory organs. The intellect requires physical instruments in order to perceive particulars.²⁶ For the intellect is superior to bodies both in essence and in action. "The child's soul is predisposed to the acquisition of first principles and beginnings (*evā'il* and *mebādī*). These arise in it without the aid of the senses, without any intention, and without the child being consciously aware of them. The reason for their arising in it is its predisposition to them."²⁷ In other words, if the soul possesses a body with organs through which it can act and is predisposed to knowledge, when it begins to receive and accumulate forms through the senses, the first principles and beginnings arise in it without the soul even being aware of them. More precisely, the Active Intellect (*Fā'il 'Aql*) bestows upon it the first intelligibles. For "The potential intellect can only become an actual intellect through the body, because the faculty of knowledge (*bilmeleke intellect*) is only granted within the body."²⁸ This is the way through which the intellect transitions from its pure potential

²⁵ Fārābī, *et-Ta'likāt, el-A'mālu'l-Felsefiyye*, edited by Ca'fer Âli Yâsîn, Dâru'l-Menâhil, Beirut 1413/1992, p. 373.

²⁶ Tahânevî, *Keşşâf*, vol. 3, p. 306.

²⁷ Fārābī, *et-Ta'likāt*, p. 373.

²⁸ Fārābī, "*Risâle fi İsbâtî'l-Müfârikât*", *Resâilu Ebî Nasr el-Fârâbî*, Meclis Dâireti'l-Meârifî'l-Osmaniyye Matbaası, Haydarâbâd Dekkan 1349/1930, p. 8.

state to acquiring actual intellectual existence. There are many powers and influences that emanate from the intellect to the organs.²⁹ When the body is in a state capable of receiving them, these powers emerge in the body through the influence of the Active Intellect, which bestows the forms.³⁰

The thing that accepts the influence from the Active Intellect is the soul, which is a part of the body and the corpse.³¹ In other words, the body must reach a state where it can receive the influence of the intellect, even indirectly. The way to this is through the body's sensory powers, which must have received and accumulated particular forms. For instance, the concept of "motherhood" cannot form without first acquiring numerous particular representations of a mother, so the body's powers need the support of these forms, and the child must repeatedly see their mother and other mothers. If a child is told, "I have candy in my pocket," they will object when no candy is found, because the contradiction between existence and non-existence has been granted. They do not know, in a theoretical sense, that a large object cannot be in a smaller one, or that existence cannot be contradictory to non-existence, but this faculty is granted through their sensory experiences without them consciously realizing it. The reason it is said to be "bestowed" is that they did not directly acquire this knowledge. This is the prior gift from the Active Intellect to the human intellect. The basic condition for this is that the body is healthy and capable of acquiring sensory data.

According to Fārābī, the formation of forms in something occurs in three ways: the first is the appearance of the form in the senses, the second is its manifestation in the intellect, and the third is its formation

²⁹ Fārābī, *"Tecrîd Risâleti'd-Deâvi'l-Kalbiyye"*, p. 10. Ayrıca, bu kavram için bkz. Fārābī, *"et-Ta'likât"*, p. 405.

³⁰ The emergence of these faculties and the actualization of the perfect intellect occurs through the agency of the Active Intellect. See: Fārābī, *"Tecrîd Risâleti'd-Deâvi'l-Kalbiyye"*, p. 10.

³¹ Fārābī, *"Uyûnu'l-Mesâil"*, p. 74, 75.

in the body.³² The formation of a form in the body is a natural process of influence (*infi'āl*) and is not directly related to our topic. The emergence of a form in the senses occurs not through influence, but through "imagination," along with the material dimensions and states. The formation of a form in the intellect, however, involves the process where something is stripped of its material attire and external states, and its form is created independently. It is the conceptualization of that form, even in the absence of external categories, through different states and categories. In short, things that are sensed (*maḥsūsāt*) are not the same as things that are known (*ma'lūmāt*). The sensed things are merely examples of the known things.³³

The Active Intellect cannot activate an intellect that is in a purely material state, because it is distinct from matter both in terms of its essence and its actions. The soul, on the other hand, is distinct from matter in terms of its essence, but the powers it uses are within the body.³⁴ The human soul is able to conceptualize its own essence because it is abstracted from matter in its essence. Animal souls, however, are not abstract, and thus cannot conceive of their own essence. The ability to be conceptualized depends on being abstracted from matter. The soul can only perceive tangible and imaginative things through instruments. However, when it comes to universals and intelligibles, it perceives them not through instruments and organs, but through its essence and soul.³⁵ Therefore, it is necessary for this potential intellect to exist in a body capable of receiving it, and for the body's sensory organs to first isolate the particular forms from matter and acquire their sensory representations. As the forms of similar particular objects are perceived and accumulated, the Active Intellect will perform its function and bestow upon this intellect the capacity to acquire concepts, that is, the first knowledge and principles. Before these first pieces of knowledge arise within it, this

³² Fârâbî, "et-Ta'likât," p. 337.

³³ Fârâbî, "et-Ta'likât," p. 338.

³⁴ Fârâbî, "et-Ta'likât," p. 388.

³⁵ Fârâbî, "et-Ta'likât," p. 387.

intellect exists in potential form. Once they arise, it becomes the actualized intellect.³⁶

Actual Intellect

Fârâbî divided the intellect into four categories: *bilkuvve*, *bilfiil*, *müstefâd*, and *Faal Akıl*, and did not consider *bilmeleke akıl* in his main classification. This is because both *heyûlânî akıl* and *bilmeleke akıl* represent potential states—one being a distant potential and the other a closer one; from the perspective of the primary goal, which is theoretical intellect, both are considered *bilkuvve akıl*.³⁷ Therefore, there is no fundamental difference between them. On the other hand, Fârâbî divided the intellect into three categories: *heyûlânî akıl*, *bilmeleke akıl*, and *müstefâd akıl*.³⁸ Here, Fârâbî mentions *bilmeleke akıl* instead of *bilfiil akıl* because the most important characteristic of *bilfiil akıl* is its ability to obtain theoretical intellect (*nazari akıl*) through the abstraction of forms from material beings and its capacity to benefit from the Active Intellect (*Faal Akıl*). *Bilmeleke akıl* is a closer potentiality on the path toward *bilfiil akıl*, while *heyûlânî akıl* is a more distant potentiality. However, both are considered *bilkuvve akıl*.

The difference between the *ma'kûl* forms in the *bilfiil akıl* stage and those in the subsequent stage of *müstefâd akıl* is that, in the former, the *ma'kûlât* have been abstracted from sensible things through the bodily sense organs. In the final stage, the forms are those that have never existed in matter and are *ma'kûlât* obtained without any need for bodily support.³⁹ Otherwise, what occurs in both stages is nothing more than the emergence of theoretical knowledge.⁴⁰ When the forms abstracted from material entities occur in the intellect, that intellect becomes the actualized intellect (*bilfiil akıl*).⁴¹ At this stage, the acquisition of

³⁶ Fârâbî, *Fusûl Müntaza'ah*, p. 50, 51.

³⁷ For this interpretation of Fârâbî's division of intellect, see Şirâzî, *el-Esfâr*, vol. 3, p. 421.

³⁸ Fârâbî, "Uyûnü'l-Mesâil," p. 74.

³⁹ Dâhir, "Nazariyetü'l-akl inde'l-Fârâbî," p. 457.

⁴⁰ Tahânevî, *Keşşâf*, vol. 3, p. 310.

⁴¹ Fârâbî, *Risâle fi'l-Akl*, p. 15.

intellectual forms through material entities and bodily organs is still taking place. The form present in material objects, meaning the form that is still potential (*bilkuvve*) as a concept, becomes actualized (*bilfiil*) when it is apprehended.⁴² Intellectual conception, or in Fârâbî's other terms, the processing of sensory perceptions (*mahsûsât*) to form "knowledge" (*ma'lûmât*), is the process by which the human senses perceive something external to the soul, and the intellect then processes the form of that thing and conceives it within itself. The external state and the particular form received externally are not identical to what the human intellect conceives. This is because the intellect is the most refined aspect of things; therefore, the form or conception it processes is the most refined of all forms.⁴³ The ability to observe theoretical truths from the higher principles, that is, from the realm of the unseen, and to affirm the rulings, is possible through the utilization of the Active Intellect. In this case, the concept of the "*müstefâd akıl*" (benefited intellect) comes into play.⁴⁴

Benefited Intellect and Prophetic Knowledge

First and foremost, it should be noted that the human intellect does not attain its perfected state by reaching the peak of understanding for all *ma'kûlât* (intelligible objects) equally. As Farabi states, the intellect becomes *bilfiil akıl* (actual intellect) with regard to one form, while it remains *bilkuvve* (potential) for another intelligible.⁴⁵ On the other hand, when the intellect in an individual reaches the state of *bilfiil* (actuality) and has comprehended certain things in actuality, their capacity and ability to deduce other things are enhanced and strengthened.⁴⁶ However, a human being does not ascend to a higher level of intellect for all *ma'kûlât* (intelligibles) in a coordinated and simultaneous manner. The most significant difference between the *müstefâd* (acquired) intellect and the *Faal Akıl* (Active Intellect) lies here. This is because the *Faal Akıl*, by

⁴² Fârâbî, *Risâle fi'l-Akl*, p. 15.

⁴³ Fârâbî, "et-Ta'likât," p. 337.

⁴⁴ Tahânevî, *Keşşâf*, vol. 3, pp. 309–310.

⁴⁵ Fârâbî, *Risâle fi'l-Akl*, p. 18.

⁴⁶ Fârâbî, *Fusûlün Münteze'a*, p. 51.

virtue of its designated function, serves as an actual intellectual essence for all intelligibles necessary for humanity, at least in its entirety.

The human soul possesses an avenue and gateway directed toward the realm of *malakūt* (the celestial domain), as well as an open portal to the realm of *shahāda* and *mulk* (the observable and corporeal world), which is accessed through the five senses. The *malakūt* realm is associated with the *Lawh al-Mahfūz* (the Preserved Tablet) and is also referred to as the domain of angels and *mujarradāt* (abstract, immaterial entities).⁴⁷ However, Fārābī conceptualized this realm, which he referred to as *rūḥāniyyūn* (spiritual beings) and *malā'ika* (angels),⁴⁸ as *mufāriqāt* (separate intellects) with distinct levels.⁴⁹ In doing so, he clarified and articulated the distinction between the two.

The foundation of the possibility of *musta'fād* intellect lies in the notion of human self-awareness and intrinsic knowledge. In this awareness, there is neither a priority nor a separation between the knower and the known. Self-perception and intrinsic knowledge are direct and unmediated, being the essence of the self itself—present as actual intellect within the self. For this reason, the intellect's apprehension of non-material entities (*mufāriqāt*), which have never existed in matter, is akin to this process. The distinction lies in the fact that, in self-apprehension, the known exists within the knower, and there is no differentiation between the knower, the intellect, and the known. On the other hand, the apprehension of immaterial forms—those that have never been associated with matter—precedes the knower and occurs through the **Active Intellect**. Once apprehended, these forms acquire existence within the knower, who thereby participates in the transcendent realm of these entities. The commonality between self-apprehension and the apprehension of purely immaterial forms lies in their independence from abstraction; they are apprehended without any need for prior separation from matter. As Fārābī explains: "When a

⁴⁷ Tahānevī, *Keşşâf*, vol. 3, p. 312.

⁴⁸ Fārābī, *es-Siyāse*, p. 32.

⁴⁹ Fārābī, "Risāle fi İsbāt'l-Müfârikât," p. 2.

person's own essence becomes **actual intellect** and apprehends itself, no entity apart from its own essence comes into being through this act of apprehension. In this state, it becomes **actual ma'qūl** (intelligible). (...) The apprehension of one's own essence, as opposed to the apprehension of external objects, is a direct act of actual intellect and actual intelligibility. External objects, being potential intelligibles (*bil-quwwa ma'qūl*), must first be abstracted before being apprehended. In contrast, no such sequence exists for the intellect's apprehension of its own being; it is already existent and apprehended simultaneously. Thus, when the actual intellect apprehends purely intelligible forms (*suvar-i mufāriqa*), it transitions from being merely actual intellect to becoming *mustafād* intellect."⁵⁰

The initial intellectual apprehension of an immaterial form begins with an individual's recognition of their own soul, which serves as both the condition for and the gateway to comprehending the unseen realm (*‘ālam al-ghayb*). This intrinsic awareness is an illuminative cognition that is unmediated, unabstracted, unacquired, and independent of external facilitation. In this context, distinctions such as knower and known or abstractor and abstracted are purely metaphorical. Building on this foundational awareness, the perception of the *malakūt* realm—defined as being immaterial by its very nature—becomes possible through the grace and illumination provided by the Active Intellect. With the assistance of the Active Intellect, the soul's apprehension of immaterial forms and angelic beings mirrors its self-recognition. As these immaterial forms are apprehended, they are actualized as **intelligible entities** (*bil-fi'l ma'qūl*) within the soul. Through this process, the soul ascends to the transcendent realm, integrating with it, and thereby achieves eternal and individual felicity, existing in unity with the sublime entities.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Fârâbî, *Risâle fi'l-Akl*, pp. 18–20.

⁵¹ It has been suggested that Fârâbî believed that only those who reach the level of the "müstefâd" intellect would achieve immortality. However, Fârâbî states that "since the rational soul is abstracted from matter, it continues to exist after the body's death. It is incapable of degradation." (...) "After the body's death, the soul experiences either

Fârâbî refers to the separate forms that render any intellect *intellectus adeptus* as non-corporeal substances (*al-jawâhir ghayr al-jismâniyya*).⁵² The apprehension of such truths is not achieved through abstraction or separation but rather by encountering them as distinct forms, just as one apprehends their own essence.⁵³ This mode of apprehension occurs through a kind of intuition and inner illumination (*ḥads* and *ishrâq*).⁵⁴

Thus, when the intellect, elevated to the state of actuality, apprehends the immaterial forms that are in the state of actuality as *ma'kûl*, Fârâbî states that the intellect, which we previously referred to as "*bilfiil akîl*" (actual intellect), becomes "*müstefâd akîl*" (acquired intellect).⁵⁵ This definition is important. Thus, the transition of the "*bilfiil akîl*" (actual intellect) into "*müstefâd akîl*" (acquired intellect) occurs

happiness or unhappiness, with the states of each soul varying according to their differences." (See Fârâbî, "Uyûnu'l-Mesâil," pp. 74, 75.) As Fârâbî implies that each soul experiences different states of happiness or misery, it is evident that he believes that the souls, once separated from the body, retain their individuality. The fact that people have different dispositions and temperaments, whether innate or acquired (through will), as well as various health, illness, and preparatory states (according to different qualities and varying conditions), leads to differences in their theoretical and intellectual gains. Moreover, people's distinct moral and practical actions also imply that every soul will experience its personal and individual immortality. (See Fârâbî, "Kitâbu Tahsîlî's-Sa'âde," *el-A'mâlu'l-Felsefiyye, Dâru'l-Menâhil*, Beirut 1413/1992, p. 119; "Kitâbu'l-Mille," *Kitâbu'l-Mille ve Nusûs Uhrâ*, ed. Muhsin Mehdî, Dâru'l-Meşnrk, 2nd ed., Beirut 1991, p. 43; Fârâbî, *es-Siyâse*, p. 74; *el-Medîne*, pp. 213, 215.) After the separation from their bodies, each soul will experience either states of happiness or misery. (See Fârâbî, "Tecrîd Risâleti'd-Deâvi'l-Kalbiyye," p. 10.) On the other hand, Fârâbî suggests that some sinners who fall into misery may have the possibility of "perfecting" (*tekmlât*) in the afterlife. (See Fârâbî, "et-Ta'likât," p. 387.) In this case, he is indicating that these souls can complete their deficiencies without the body, thus attaining supreme happiness, a view also shared by the Ahl al-Sunnah. (See Taftazânî, *Şerhu'l-Mekâsîd*, vol. 5, pp. 136–137. Also, see Salih Aydın, *İslam Düşüncesi Kelam*, vol. 2, p. 251.)

⁵² Fârâbî, *es-Siyâse*, p. 39.

⁵³ For Molla Sadra's interpretation of Fârâbî on the related issue, see Şîrâzî, *el-Esfâr*, vol. 3, p. 425. Also, see Sebzevârî, *Ta'likât ale'l-Esfâr*, vol. 3, p. 425, note 4.

⁵⁴ Bumahîr Hâcer, *Nazariyetu'l-Ma'rife inde'l-Fârâbî*, p. 73.

⁵⁵ Fârâbî, *el-Medîne*, p. 159; *Risâle fi'l-Akl*, p. 20.

when it apprehends those beings that are "bilfiil" (actual) in terms of intellect and ma'kûlât (objects of thought), and are separated from matter, being "beyond and distinct" from it.⁵⁶ This is nothing other than a reference to the truths heard from revelation and the realm of the metaphysical. Otherwise, no substantial difference would remain between the actual intellect (bilfiil akıl) and the acquired intellect (müstefâd akıl).

In Fârâbî's system, the concept of "müfârikât" is more than the concept of "mücerredât," and it is clear that it refers to the angels created through the intellect and the creative act of ibdâ (divine creation).⁵⁷ For they are distinct from matter and possess different levels of truth: "el-Evvel," meaning the cause-less and unique being, "ukûl-ü fa'âle," referring to the angels close to Allah, "kiva's-semâviyye," meaning the operative angels in the heavens, and "nufûs-u insâniyye," referring to the souls active in the human body.⁵⁸ Since these are inherently separate from matter, they have not been abstracted or isolated from it. Therefore, it cannot be said that every "ma'kûlât-ı mücerrede" (abstract intelligibles) is, in the same way, "suver-i mufârîka" (separate forms).

It is believed that this second type of realm of beings refers to the unseen metaphysical world, namely the "semiyyât" (the intelligibles received through revelation by the prophets). This is because the perceptible particular forms of the world of testimony and their intelligible universal forms, although both are completed by the agency of the giver of the forms, are still related to the material world and the natural, subordinate intellect of the one who perceives them.⁵⁹

The perception of these forms makes the intellect an actualized intellect, but it does not make it a benefited intellect. There is also the realm of species-level universal beings whose forms never exist in matter, and thus their particular forms are never in question. The perception of

⁵⁶ Fârâbî, el-Medîne, p. 159. ed-Dâhir, "Nazariyetu'l-akl inde'l-Fârâbî," p. 457; es-Siddîkî, "Nazariyyetu'l-'Akl inde'l-Fârâbî," p. 193.

⁵⁷ Regarding the philosophers' view of intellect as the angels, see Şemsuddîn el-İsfahanî Metâliu'l-Enzâr, pp. 126–127; Tahânevî, Keşşâf, vol. 3, p. 305.

⁵⁸ Fârâbî, "Risâle fi İsbâtî'l-Müfârikât," pp. 2–3.

⁵⁹ Fârâbî, "Tecrid Risâleti'd-Deâvi'l-Kalbiyye," p. 10.

these beings requires the existence of the subordinate intellect and its full actualization in the sense of being an actualized intellect, but it can never be attained solely by this intellect. This is because their individual sensory forms are never in question. The acquisition of this type of intelligibles is only possible through hearing from the higher intellect and benefiting from it. In other words, the benefited intellect is derived from the "semiyyât," and the formation of this intellect or the formation of these types of intelligibles is not dependent on the material world and the functioning of material organs. The intelligibility in the "semiyyât" goes beyond the actualized subordinate intellect of the individual. For this reason, it must be obtained through hearing and benefiting from it.

In Fārābī's philosophy, the intellect referred to as *mustaftād* is the intellect acquired through revelation and what is heard from revelation, i.e., the *mesmū'* (heard) intellect. Therefore, *mustaftād* intellect is not a separate intellectual substance, but rather a level and perfection of the human intellectual substance that benefits by connecting with the Active Intellect (*Fāl Akul*).

The human intellect does not unite with the Active Intellect (*Fāl Akul*) as a substance, but rather through benefiting from the Active Intellect. In humans, before the intellect that benefits through hearing, there exists the *metbū'* intellect, which refers to the power of discernment or judgment.⁶⁰ Here, if it is claimed that Fārābī refers to the intellect acquired solely through reasoning and deduction (i.e., by isolating it), then there would be no difference between *müstefād akul* and *bilfīl akul*. Therefore, it is argued that when Fārābī speaks of *müstefād akul*, he is referring to the esoteric and revelatory knowledge obtained through hearing, which is the cause of individual and eternal felicity.

According to Fārābī, the absolute first ruler, in the fullest sense, achieves this intellectual perfection by first acquiring *münfail akul* (potential intellect) and then *müstefād akul* (the intellect attained through reception and hearing), which enables the connection with the Active

⁶⁰ For these concepts and distinctions, see Altıntaş, *İslam Düşüncesinde İşlevsel Akıl*, pp. 151–170.

Intellect (Faal Akıl).⁶¹ *Münfail akıl* is a designation given to the intellect that constitutes the material foundation of higher intellectual realms, and it refers to what is known in the tradition as *garīzī* or *metbū'* intellect. According to Fārābī, this intellectual perfection arises first in the "theoretical and practical parts of the intellectual power," and then in its "imaginative faculty" (*mütehayyile*). When this happens, the individual becomes a person who receives revelation through the Active Intellect (*Faal Akıl*).⁶² The perfection of intellect in its theoretical and practical aspects, as mentioned here, is a clear reference to the qualities of an individual who embodies the conditions of a true sage, akin to the prophets. The subsequent emergence of this perfection in the imaginative faculty (*mütehayyile*) highlights that prophethood is a higher state than mere wisdom. Fārābī, far from viewing the knowledge derived from the source of prophethood as opposed to or inferior to intellectual and philosophical knowledge, sees it as the most suitable means to reconcile revelation and reason, philosophy and religion, on a common ground.⁶³

In the prophet, just as the rational power (*mu'akkile*) reaches the peak of perfection, the imaginative power (*mütehayyile*) is at the ultimate level of its natural capacity. In this state, this power is inherently prepared to receive the particulars from the Active Intellect, either as they are or through their imitations, both during wakefulness and sleep. (Here, the phrase "receiving the particulars through imitations" refers not to his rational power, but to his imaginative power. This faculty can only perceive particulars, not universal intellects, as they are.) His passive intellect (*münfail akıl*) becomes fully perfected with all the intelligibles and is transformed into both the Active Intellect and the actualized intelligibles. In this way, for every individual whose passive intellect has been perfected with all intelligibles, and whose process of intellectual acquisition aligns with the act of intellect, their degree surpasses that of the passive intellect. This results in a perfect intellect distinct from the

⁶¹ Fārābī, *es-Siyāse*, p. 79.

⁶² Fārābī, *el-Medine*, p. 199.

⁶³ Alâeddin Jebrini, "Fārābī," TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, İstanbul, 1995, vol. 12, p. 155.

passive intellect, separate from matter more completely and decisively, and is termed the "*müstefâd akıl*," which serves as an intermediary between the passive intellect and the Active Intellect. There is nothing between it and the Active Intellect.⁶⁴

If the intellect has not reached the level of *müstefâd akıl*, it cannot benefit from the Active Intellect and receive the divine truths of revelation. If both the intellectual power (*müte'akkile*) and the imaginative power (*mütehayyile*) are not at their peak, then revelation will not be granted to the individual. In this case, they will not receive the divine messages of what is heard and seen from God, nor will they be certain about the source of revelation and the revelation itself. Furthermore, they will be unable to convey or communicate the revelation to others.⁶⁵ The Almighty and Majestic Allah reveals to him through the Active Intellect. What comes from Allah the Exalted to the Active Intellect, the Active Intellect conveys through the *müstefâd akıl* to his *münfail akıl*, and then it is expressed and understood through the imaginative power (*mütehayyile*). Through what is conveyed from the Active Intellect to his *münfail akıl*, this person becomes a sage, a philosopher, and a perfect thinker who uses divine intellect. Furthermore, through what extends to the imaginative power at a more advanced level, this individual becomes a prophet, an alerting figure regarding future events, and a herald of individual occurrences in the present. All of this is realized through the divine intellect that exists within him.⁶⁶ In this way, the power that enables a person to understand things and actions, and to direct them toward happiness, descends from the Active Intellect to the *münfail akıl*. This flow that reaches the *münfail akıl* through the acquired

⁶⁴ Fârâbî, el-Medine, p. 197.

⁶⁵ Fârâbî, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem*, p. 73; İsmail el-Hüseynî eş-Şenb Ghâzânî (also read as Fârânî and Fârâbî), *Fusûsu'l-Hikme ve Şerhuhu*, ed. Ali Ucbî, Tehran 1381/1961, pp. 119, 128; especially p. 125. Also, see Muhammed el-Behiy, "el-Fârâbî el-Müveffik ve's-Şârih," Ebû Nasr Fârâbî fi'z-Zikrâ Elfiyye li Vefâtih, ed. İbrahim Medkûr, el-Mektebetu'l-Arabiyye, Cairo 1403/1983, p. 51.

⁶⁶ Fârâbî, el-Medine, p. 197, 199.

intellect is revelation.⁶⁷ This paragraph clearly demonstrates that the intellect flowing from the Active Intellect and received as a form of knowledge is what is referred to as *müstefâd akıl*. It is this flow that transforms the human's natural intellect into the *müstefâd akıl*.

Revelation is the process of conveying what is in the realm of divinity to the messenger among humans, through the appointed angel. The angels are the entities that receive the knowledge engraved in them, as well as the intelligible beings that come into existence solely by God's command "Be" (Kun), without being confined to time, space, or matter, which are the forms of the separated intellects (*suver-i müfârîka*) found in the preserved tablet (*al-Lawh al-Mahfuz*). What is with the angels is imprinted upon the prophet's soul. This is because the prophet's soul, which is never tarnished and remains like a constantly polished mirror, reflects the knowledge received from the angels into the mirror of the prophet's heart, even when awake.⁶⁸ Prophethood, in essence, is a sacred — or, as stated above, divine — power. It is the human being who is sent from the Divine to the people, possessing three fundamental qualities, with the purpose of showing them the happiness of both worlds. Just as the body, the microcosm, submits and obeys the individual, so too does the nature of the macrocosm bow to these people.⁶⁹ Thus, the person becomes one who is graced by divine signs (*ayat*) and shows miracles within their own being. In the manner described and characterized by Fârâbî, the absolute first ruler is a person who has genuinely acquired knowledge and understanding. This individual is capable of thoroughly comprehending each task they must undertake. They have the power to guide others effectively in everything they teach, direct others in the work they are capable of performing, and determine, define, and evaluate all actions leading to happiness. According to Fârâbî, this situation occurs when a person with great and noble natural inclinations, possessing the twelve virtues he lists, connects with the Active Intellect (*Faal Akıl*).⁷⁰ What is reflected in the hearts of the prophets, which is present with the angels, is a kind of illumination and intellectualization, and in Fârâbî's

⁶⁷ Fârâbî, *es-Siyâse*, p. 79; Fârâbî, *el-Medîne*, pp. 197, 199.

⁶⁸ Fârâbî, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem*, p. 73; el-Behiy, "el-Fârâbî el-Müveffik ve's-Şârih," p. 51.

⁶⁹ Ğâzânî, *Fusûsu'l-Hikme ve Şerhuhi*, pp. 122–123.

⁷⁰ Fârâbî, *es-Siyâse*, p. 79; *el-Medîne*, p. 201.

philosophy, this is expressed as *müstefâd akul* (received intellect). According to Fârâbî, human beings explain things that their natural, actual intellect cannot grasp or clarify through revelation. For him, if humans were able to obtain such knowledge through their natural (practical) intellect, there would be no meaning or benefit in revelation.⁷¹ In this case, he would not need an intellect beyond or above his natural, actual intellect. Moreover, if what is bestowed upon him were not rational, the intellect would not accept it. Therefore, it makes sense to refer to that which is bestowed from the Active Intellect, namely revelation, as intellect as well. However, this intellect is one that is received and utilized (the *al-aklu'l-mesmû'* and *al-aklu'l-müstefâd*) on top of the natural, actual intellect.

Active Intellect

The Active Intellect, after the First Cause, is one of the secondary causes referred to as spiritual beings and angels. It observes and supervises the thinking beings, particularly those responsible for guiding humans towards the highest level of perfection, the ultimate happiness. This role is attributed to the angel known as the Spirit of Truth (Rûḥ al-Amîn) and the Holy Spirit (Rûḥ al-Qudus).⁷² The reception of revelation by humans occurs during their connection with the Active Intellect. Fârâbî believes that even at the highest stage, the human intellect remains in a position lower (dûn) than the Active Intellect in terms of its rank.⁷³ Moreover, according to him, the Active Intellect is not God, as preferred by many commentators of Aristotle,⁷⁴ but rather the intellect that emanates from

⁷¹ Fârâbî, *İhsâu'l-Ulûm: İlimlerin Sayımı*, ed. Mevlüt Uyanık - Aygün Akyol, Elis Press, Ankara 2017, p. 171.

⁷² Fârâbî, *es-Siyâse*, p. 32.

⁷³ Aydın, *Fârâbî'de Tanrı-İnsan İlişkisi*, p. 135; Aydın, *İslam Düşüncesi Felsefe*, vol. 4, p. 190.

⁷⁴ According to Aristotle's system of logic, "nous poietikos" (the active intellect) should essentially be God. Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy*, trans. Vehbi Eralp, Sosyal Yay., 5th ed., Istanbul 1993, p. 84. Fârâbî interprets this as the angel Jibril, who mediates the flow of knowledge between God and humanity. See Mehmet Bayrakdar, *Introduction to Islamic Philosophy*, p. 186.

God, whom Fârâbî refers to as the First Cause.⁷⁵

The human intellect can only constantly approach the rank of the Active Intellect; it can never fully become it. It is inevitable for it to remain behind the rank of the Active Intellect.⁷⁶ According to Fârâbî, the human intellect, while it approaches and connects with the essence of the Active Intellect, will never unite with it, just as it will not unite with God. During this experience, it is not the Active Intellect itself that enters the human intellect, but rather divine effluxes (intelligibles) that descend upon it.⁷⁷ Therefore, when Fârâbî speaks of *hulul* (indwelling) and *ittihad* (union), he is referring to revelation in the former case,⁷⁸ and to the angel of revelation in the latter, where he speaks of *ittisal* (connection).⁷⁹

According to Fârâbî, the potential objects of thought (*ma'kûl*), when they become the objects of actual thought (*ma'kûl*), are considered to have been actualized in the intellect.⁸⁰ Nothing can transform its own essence from potentiality (*kuṣve*) into actuality (*fi'l*), because if the essence of something required actuality, it could never remain in the potential state (*bilkuṣve*).⁸¹ "They (that is, those who do not inherently exist as actual intellects) require something else to move them from potentiality to actuality. The agent that transfers them from potentiality to actuality is an intellect whose essence is actual intellect and separate from matter. This intellect provides something to the potential intellect, similar to the way the sun provides light to the eye for it to see."⁸²

⁷⁵ Fârâbî, *es-Siyâse*, p. 79, 80.

⁷⁶ See Miriam Galston, "Fârâbî's Proposal of Existential Politics: Purpose and Humanity," in *The Development of Political Thought in Islamic Philosophy*, trans. S. Ayaz, Pinar Publishing, Istanbul 1999, p. 101.

⁷⁷ Fârâbî, *Fusûs al-Hikam*, p. 81.

⁷⁸ See Fârâbî, *el-Medîne*, p. 199. Here, Fârâbî states, "The Active Intellect descends," but when interpreted holistically, it means that the divine emanations, i.e., revelation, descend from the Active Intellect during union. Otherwise, statements like these would contradict the idea that one cannot access the Active Intellect.

⁷⁹ For this interpretation, see Shirâzî, *el-Esfâr*, vol. 3, p. 426.

⁸⁰ Fârâbî, *el-Medîne*, p. 161.

⁸¹ Fârâbî, *el-Medîne*, p. 161. Also see Ibn Kammûna, *el-Cedîd fi'l-Hikme*, ed. Hamîd Merîd el-Kubeysi, Baghdad 1403/1983, p. 487.

⁸² Fârâbî, *el-Medîne*, p. 161.

"Those concepts that are actually grasped become entities in the universe and are considered to be among the existing beings, in terms of their status as concepts."⁸³ The expression in *Ta'likât* seems to imply that the act of reasoning is an ontological process. The *ma'kûl* of a thing is its abstracted existence.⁸⁴ The term *vücut* here signifies the essence and nature of a thing, yet it remains ontological in nature. This implies that the *ma'kûl* of a thing is identical to its existence, abstracted from matter and its relations.⁸⁵ If such an *existence* (*vücut*) is present in the external world (*ayanda mevcut*), it will, in any case, become the *ma'kûl* of its essence when it is conceived. If it exists only in the mind and not in the external world, it still exists as the *ma'kûl* of its essence. This shows that acquiring and internalizing knowledge of something entails attaining its essence and form, possessing its intellectual and spiritual existence, and is not merely an epistemic condition.

Ibn Rushd states that the Active Intellect (*Faal Akl*) has two functions: The first is its intrinsic action (*zâtî fiil*), wherein it conceives its own essence as a separate intellect. In this capacity, the intellect and the intelligible (*ma'kûl*) are one and the same essence. The second function is to conceive the intelligibles within the *potential* intellect (*heyûlânî akl*). By this, he refers to its role in actualizing the intelligibles that exist in potentiality within the potential intellect. Through this function, the Active Intellect connects with the human intellect and becomes akin to its form.⁸⁶ The connection (*ittisal*) between the Active Intellect (*Faal Akl*) and potentiality (*heyûlâ*) is not a substantial (*cevherî*) union.⁸⁷ Shîrâzî states that the Active Intellect (*Faal Akl*) possesses both an intrinsic existence and an existence within human souls.⁸⁸ In the context of the

⁸³ Fârâbî, *Risâle fi'l-Akl*, p. 17, 18.

⁸⁴ Fârâbî, "et-Ta'likât," p. 382.

⁸⁵ Fârâbî, "et-Ta'likât," p. 381-382.

⁸⁶ Ibn Rushd, "Makâle hel yettasıl bi'l-akli'l-heyûlânî el-aklu'l-fa'âl ve hüve mültebis bi'l-cism," in *Telhîs Kitâbi'n-Nefs li Ebi'l-Velîd Ibn Rushd ve Erbau Resâil*, Mektebetu'n-Nahdati'l-Misriyye, Cairo 1950, p. 121.

⁸⁷ Ibn Rushd, *Telhîs Kitâbi'n-Nefs li Ebi'l-Velîd Ibn Rushd ve Erbau Resâil*, Mektebetu'n-Nahdati'l-Misriyye, Cairo 1950, p. 9.

⁸⁸ Shîrâzî, *el-Esfâr*, vol. 9, p. 140.

Active Intellect (*Faal Akl*) and the Acquired Intellect (*Müstefâd Akl*), the angel delivering revelation is referred to as the *Active Intellect*, while the revealed knowledge taught is referred to as the *Acquired Intellect*. The human soul, and specifically the prophet, cannot unite (*ittihād*) with the essential, substantive existence and subjectivity of the Active Intellect; such a union is impossible. Instead, the two intellectual entities approach one another—metaphorically, to "a distance of two bows or closer"—achieving *ittisāl* (connection) through their essential existence. Through its active presence within the human, however, *union* (*ittihād*) occurs, and it is in this way that Allah reveals what He wills to His servant. The presence of the Active Intellect within the human being signifies the perfection of the human soul and its attainment of the rank of the Acquired Intellect (*Müstefâd Akl*). From this perspective, the debate over whether the Active Intellect is a stage of human intellect or something distinct, and whether the relationship is one of *union* or *connection*, finds resolution. The human intellect connects (*ittisāl*) with the Active Intellect, and during this connection, certain emanations (*fuyūḍāt*) descend into it. The human unites (*ittihād*) only with what is received and comprehended through this connection. When the human intellect connects with the Active Intellect, the Acquired Intellect (*Müstefâd Akl*) is actualized.⁸⁹

According to al-Fārābī, when there is no intermediary remaining between the Active Intellect (*Faal Akl*) and the receptive intellect (*münfail akl*) of a human being, and this connection (*ittisāl*) is established, a power emerges that defines entities and actions and directs them toward happiness. This power and its flow are referred to as revelation (*wahy*). The Active Intellect itself emanates from the existence of the First Cause (*İlk Sebep*). Therefore, it should be stated that it is ultimately the First Cause that conveys revelation to humans through the mediation of the Active Intellect.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Fārābī, *es-Siyāse*, p. 79.

⁹⁰ Fārābī, *es-Siyāse*, p. 79, 80.

The Concept Of "Mustafad Intellect" As Derived from "Audible Intellect"

The concept of "müstefâd akıl" (beneficial intellect) as a philosophical term is worth discussing in relation to the concept of "mesmû' akıl" (audible intellect), which holds significance within the intellectual traditions of the philosophers and in the cultural context of Fârâbî.⁹¹ It can be argued that within their own cultural milieu and intellectual traditions, Muslim philosophers were motivated to engage with and pay attention to such material from the Greek and Hellenistic traditions, which led to the development of this distinction in their knowledge and jurisprudence. For, the Aristotelian-influenced Fârâbî took a particular interest in the concept of *müstefâd akıl*, which was either absent⁹² or at least not explicitly⁹³ developed in Aristotle's work, this is an important point that supports our thesis. In the metaphor of the eye and the sun within this material, it can be argued that the sun represents the angel of revelation, and its light corresponds to the divine revelation. This conceptual framework and mode of thinking have been transferred into the culture. For, in the relationship between the human intellect and divine revelation, the eye and sun analogy is also found in Fârâbî's own cultural context.

In Fârâbî's philosophy, the actualization of the natural and acquired intellect in humans is generally seen as the condition for immortality, while the *mesmû'* and *müstefâd* intellect are the conditions for immortality in relation to happiness. Eternal happiness cannot be

⁹¹ Râghib al-Isfahânî, *Mufradât: Dictionary of Qur'anic Terms*, Çıra Publishing, İstanbul 2007, vol. 2, p. 232; *ez-Zerîa ilâ Mehâkimi's-Şerîa*, ed. Ebu'l-Yezîd al-Acemî, 2nd ed., Mansûra 1408/1987, p. 169. For the foundations of philosophers' theories of intellect in the Islamic tradition, see Köksal, "The Concept of Intellect and the Fourfold Concept of Intellect in Hanafi Jurisprudence," pp. 5-44. Also see Muhammad Reyshahri, *Mevsûati'l-Akâidi'l-İslamiyye*, Dar al-Hadith, Qom 1386/1428/2012, vol. 1, p. 167.

⁹² Ibrahim Medkûr, "Fârâbî," in *History of Islamic Thought*, ed. M. M. Sharif, İnsan Publishing, İstanbul 1996, vol. 2, p. 79. Also see Fevzi Yiğit, "Intellect and the Nature of Primary Knowledge in Fârâbî: Can Intellect Be Potential?" *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2021, vol. 32, issue 2, p. 340.

⁹³ Kamil Sarıtaş, *Alexander of Aphrodisias and His Philosophy*, Afşar Printing House, Ankara 2012, pp. 190-191.

achieved without heeding and benefiting from the metaphysical knowledge of the spiritual realm, which has never been tainted by matter. Faith-based truths related to the unseen, whether affirmed at the level of imitation and imagination (*mü'minûn*), at the level of conception and realization (*hukemâ*), or at both realization and imagination levels (*enbiyâ*), must be confirmed in some manner for one to reach immortality in happiness. The scope and recipient of *müstefâd* intellect, though in different degrees, is the actual *matbû'* human intellect, but its origin and source from which it derives its influence is the *Faal Akıl*. Hence, in Fârâbî's work, *müstefâd* intellect has been perceived by some as a problematic enigma.⁹⁴ In other words, without the human intellect and its actualization through activity, it will not be possible to benefit from the *Faal Akıl*. Just as the sunlight is of no benefit when the eye does not see, the *Faal Akıl* can offer no advantage without the active participation of the human intellect.

Fârâbî has pointed to this dual distinction by stating, "sometimes the *heyûlânî akıl* and sometimes the *müstefâd akıl* arise."⁹⁵ The *heyûlânî* and human intellects, in all their stages, are *metbû'* (potential) and *münfail* (actual) intellects. Therefore, it becomes possible to divide the intellect into two types: one is the human intellect, which develops naturally, and the other is the intellect that is derived from and benefits from the *Faal Akıl*, which is separate from humans and matter.⁹⁶

It can be argued that Fârâbî's distinction between *münfail* and *müstefâd* intellects is based on the division of intellect attributed to Hazrat Ali:

"I have seen that the intellect is of two kinds: innate and acquired.
Without the innate, the acquired does not bring benefit,

⁹⁴ According to Davidson, the concept of *mustafad* (derived) intellect in Fârâbî is problematic because it does not correspond to the human intellect stage it is attributed to. His choice of this term for the highest level of human intellect remains an enigma. (See Davidson, *Intellect in Fârâbî, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd*, p. 64.) This enigma arises because, from one perspective, human intellect is discussed, while from another, angelic intellect is involved. If it is assumed that Fârâbî is referring to the fundamental principles of his celestial world, this riddle would no longer be an issue.

⁹⁵ Fârâbî, "*ed-Da'ava'l-Kalbiyye*," p. 10.

⁹⁶ The theologians have divided intellect into two categories: *asul/garîzî* (natural) and *fürû'/müktesep* (acquired). See Altıntaş, *Functional Intellect*, p. 151.

just as the sunlight does not benefit when the eye cannot see."⁹⁷

The concept of "metbû" expressed here as innate refers to the material and potential intellect in humans, whether it pertains to the necessary first intelligibles provided without acquisition (aql al-bilmelek), or the acquired theoretical secondary intelligibles (aql al-bilfi'l), in its active form. Mesmû' intellect, on the other hand, corresponds to benefiting from and reasoning through hearing Faal Akıl and divine revelation. The phrase "the intellect of the intellect," or in our terms, "the intellect of the intellect," appears in Fârâbî's works. For he states, "Just as the soul is the intellect of the body, the spirit is the intellect of the soul, the Intellect of Command is the 'intellect of the intellect.'" The Majestic Creator, the Blessed and Exalted, is the intellect of the intellect, meaning He encompasses all intellects as the source of all intelligibles and is the origin of all intellects.⁹⁸ The intellect that enlightens the human mind is the one described as a noble and subtle light,⁹⁹ which is a light upon light, emanating from the Spirit of Command (Ruh al-'Amr), and is the intellect through which divine revelation (wahy) is transmitted and from which it is benefited (müstefâd).

It is not correct to reduce the concept of *mesmû' akıl* to an intellect based on empirical utilization rather than on semitic or theological aspects.¹⁰⁰ Because *metbû'*, *garîzî*, and *tecrübî akıl* are merely different designations of the same intellect, *müktesep*, *mesmû'*, and *müstefâd akıl*

⁹⁷ See Râghib al-Isfahânî, *Mufradât*, vol. 2, p. 232; *ez-Zerîa*, p. 169. Fîrûzâbâdî, *Besâiru zevi't-Temyîz fî Letâifi'l-Kitâbi'l-Azîz*, ed. Muhammad Ali al-Najjâr, *Meclisu'l-a'lâ li's-şuûni'l-İslâmiyye*, Cairo 1412/1992, vol. 4, p. 85. <https://al-maktaba.org/book/9856>; Râzî, *Mefâtîhu'l-Ğayb*, 3rd ed., Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-Arabi, Beirut 1420/1999, vol. 5, p. 190. It is reported that Imam Ali said, "Intellect consists of two types: natural intellect and experiential intellect. Both benefit one." See Reyshahri, *Mevsûati'l-Akâidi'l-İslamiyye*, vol. 1, p. 167.

⁹⁸ Fârâbî, "*Kitabu Makâlâtî'r-Rağ'a fî Usûli İlmi't-Tabîa*," ed. and trans. Necati Lugal - Aydın Sayılı, *Belleten*, 1951, vol. 15, issue 57, p. 112.

⁹⁹ Fârâbî, "*Kitabu Makâlâtî'r-Rağ'a*," p. 103.

¹⁰⁰ For this approach, see Köksal, "The Concept of Intellect and the Fourfold Concept of Intellect in Hanafi Jurisprudence," p. 6, fn. 2. Also, in this article, it is argued that the foundation of the fourfold concept of intellect is rooted in the philosophers' ideas, though this could be contested.

refer to a divine or sacred intellect. Indeed, Fârâbî's concept of *müstefâd akıl* corresponds not to the empirical intellect derived from other human experiences and minds, but rather to the *semiyyât* heard from the *Faal Akıl*, which he refers to as *Ruhu'l-emîn*. It is clear that this is how Şeyhu'r-reîs (Avicenna) also understood Fârâbî: The realization of the theoretical power within humans, the act of reasoning, is made possible through a substance whose essential act is its own reasoning, which is identified as *Faal Akıl*. In relation to this intellect, *heyûlânî akıl* is termed *münfail akıl*, and the intellect between these two is designated as *müstefâd akıl*.¹⁰¹

Just as the intellectual power that prepares one for the acceptance of knowledge is called intellect,¹⁰² the knowledge that a person hears and benefits from through this power is also referred to as intellect. Fârâbî has stated that intellect has two meanings in this context.¹⁰³ According to Râghib al-Isfahânî (d. 506/1108) and Mijadd al-Dîn Fîrûzâbâdî (d. 817/1415), intellect is therefore divided into two parts: *metbû'* and *mesmû'*. When it is said, "It is the first intellect created by God," and "The most honorable of God's creations is intellect," this refers to *metbû'* intellect. Conversely, when it is said, "No one has attained anything more virtuous than the intellect that guides them to righteousness or protects them from falling into error," this refers to *mesmû'* intellect. The meaning of the verse "This is something that no one but the scholars can comprehend" (Al-Ankabût, 43) refers to *mesmû'* intellect. Later, Isfahânî and Fîrûzâbâdî conclude with a general rule: wherever it is stated that the burden of responsibility is lifted from the servant, this refers to *metbû'* intellect; and wherever God reproaches "those who have no intellect," it refers to *mesmû'* intellect.¹⁰⁴

It is accurate to state that the written origin of the distinction between *metbû'* and *mesmû'* intellect in Islamic culture is attributed to Hz. Ali; however, scholars such as Isfahânî and Fîrûzâbâdî suggest that the roots of this dual distinction are found in divine revelation, a point we

¹⁰¹ Ibn Sînâ, *en-Necât*, ed. Abdurrahman Umeyrâ, Dar al-Jil, Beirut 1412/1992, vol. 2, p. 44.

¹⁰² Fîrûzâbâdî, *Besâir*, vol. 4, p. 85.

¹⁰³ Fârâbî, "*Kitâbu't-Tenbîh alâ Sebîli's-Sa'âde*," p. 259.

¹⁰⁴ Râghib al-Isfahânî, *ez-Zerîa*, p. 169; Fîrûzâbâdî, *Besâir*, vol. 4, p. 85.

consider significant.¹⁰⁵ In his *Tafsīr*, Fahreddīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) also states that the intellect referred to in the verse "They are deaf, mute, and blind; they do not reason" is not the *metbū'* intellect but the acquired intellect, that is, the *mesmū'* intellect.¹⁰⁶

In our view, all these explanations clearly indicate that *mesmū'* intellect refers to the divine revelations and the auditory reception of the intellect. Fārābī, having encountered the concept of *müstefād akul* in the ancient tradition, filled its content with the notion of *mesmū' akul* from his own tradition, and with *müstefād akul*, he referred to the intellect that hears and benefits from revelation as a condition for eternal happiness.¹⁰⁷ The reason for using the metaphor in which the angel of revelation is represented as the sun, the revelation as the sunlight, and the human *metbū' akul* as the eye, is due to the comparison found in the *Divan* of Imam Ali. Although this metaphor is rooted in the Hellenistic tradition, it is likely that Imam Ali, even if he had inherited it from ancient traditions, employed it in this way.

Müstefād akul is the type of intellect that can benefit from the angelic intellect, which is the *Faal Akul*, in its understanding of distinct objects of knowledge. For this reason, *müstefād akul* is referred to as "el-akl

¹⁰⁵ Köksal, "The Concept of Intellect and the Fourfold Concept of Intellect in Hanafi Jurisprudence," p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ Rāzī, *Mefātīhu'l-Ġayb*, vol. 5, p. 190.

¹⁰⁷ According to the consensus of scholars, intellect is accepted as a condition for the ability to respond to divine commandments, though exceptions are made for those in the state of *mecânîn* (babies or the mentally impaired) whose intellect is still in its potential (*heyûlânî*) state, as mentioned by Ghazâlî. The second level of intellect, often referred to as *bilmeleke* (acquired), is accepted as the stage where one can begin to respond to divine commandments, albeit incompletely. See Isfahânî, *Metâliu'l-Enzâr*, p. 98; Sa'duddīn Taftazânî, *Kitâbu't-Telvîh fî Keşfi Hakâiki't-Tenkîh*, Sanayi Printing House, Ministry of Education, Istanbul 1310/1892, vol. 2, pp. 716-720; *Şerhu'l-Mekâsîd*, vol. 2, pp. 332, 333; Cürcânî, *Şerhu'l-Mevâkıf*, vol. 6, p. 49; Ghazâlî, *Mi'yâru'l-İlm*, trans. Ali Durusoy, Turkish Manuscripts Institution, Istanbul 2013, p. 423; Beyâzî, *İşârâtü'l-Merâm*, ed. Yusuf Abdurrezzak, Mektebetu Halebî, Cairo 1368/1949, p. 78. In other words, although *bilmeleke* intellect is in the potential state compared to pure intuition (*heyûlânî*), it is considered active in relation to secondary rational knowledge. Therefore, many scholars regard these two as one and the same, accepting them as the basis for responding to divine commandments. See Ghazâlî, *Meâricu'l-Kuds*, p. 47.

al-qudsî" (the sacred intellect). The term "sacred intellect" is used because it is an intellect that benefits from and listens to divine revelation. The term "müstefâd" is used because it is an intellect that continuously draws from the active *Faal Akul* (the angelic intellect).¹⁰⁸ In Hazreti Ali's statement, the term *mesmû'* corresponds to the *müstefâd akul* that is heard through Gabriel and the Prophet. The term "heard" here is equivalent to the philosophical notion of "benefiting from," and both share the same meaning. The abstract and ambiguous conceptual material of *müstefâd akul*, inherited from ancient Greek thought, has been transformed, in the words of the *Muhakkik* scholars, into the understanding of "certain objects of knowledge" related to the *shari'a* and the unseen (ghayb).¹⁰⁹ It is agreed that the Active Intellect (*Faal Akul*) and the angel Gabriel, who represents the source of revelation, are aligned with the intellectual maturity of human reason. In this framework, the *müstefâd* and *mesmû'* intellect, which benefit from the Active Intellect, will also be understood as revelation itself. This interpretation aligns with Fârâbî's attempt to reconcile the relationship between reason and revelation, as well as his effort to harmonize the rational and divine dimensions of knowledge.

Conclusion

In Fârâbî's theory of the stages of human intellect, he first posits that the potential intellect (*bilkuve akul*) must reside in a body that is capable of receiving knowledge, and that this knowledge is acquired through the body's sensory organs by abstracting the individual forms from matter. As the individual forms of the same type are perceived and accumulated, the Active Intellect (*Faal Akul*) performs its function, bestowing the faculty and initial principles required to grasp the concepts. Thus, the potential intellect, which exists in a state of pure possibility and matter, ascends to a state of ability and potential (*bilmeleke*), representing a higher level of intellectual capacity. The soul, which receives these initial principles, gains the ability to engage in active reasoning.

¹⁰⁸ Ghazâlî, *Meâric*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁹ Taftazânî, *Kitâbu't-Telvîh*, vol. 2, p. 719.

In the stage of actual intellect (*bilfiil akul*), a distinction is made between the *ma'kûl* (intelligible forms) of this stage and those in the subsequent stage of *müstefâd akul*. The intelligibles in the first stage are abstracted from sensory experiences through the body's organs, whereas in the final stage, the intelligibles are forms that are entirely separate from matter and can be grasped without the assistance of bodily organs. This distinction leads to the identification of two categories of intelligibles: *mücerredât* (abstract forms) and *müfârikât* (separated forms).

For Fârâbî, the intellect's capacity to abstract the forms from matter leads to the *bilfiil akul* stage, but it is only when one engages with the intelligibles that exist independently of matter and beyond the physical world—forms that are outside of the self—that the *müstefâd akul* emerges. Therefore, Fârâbî maintains that without contemplating the immaterial forms, the *müstefâd akul* cannot develop.

Fârâbî's conception of *müstefâd akul* is not merely intellect gained through reason or inference (*istidlâl*), but rather the knowledge obtained through listening and benefiting from divine revelation (*vahiy*). Thus, the *müstefâd akul* does not merely correspond to an intellectual exercise but involves the reception of knowledge through a divine intermediary, such as the angel Gabriel, which aligns with the conception of *müstefâd akul* in the Islamic tradition as being a form of intellect that receives and benefits from the divine.

In Fârâbî's framework, the *metbû' akul*, which represents the active intellect inherent in human nature, is the condition for immortality in general, whereas *mesmû'* and *müstefâd akul* are conditions for immortality in the state of happiness. Without engaging with the celestial realm, which is separate from matter, and without benefiting from the knowledge of the unseen—whether through imitation and imagination (*taklîd ve tahayyül*), through realization (*tahakkuk*), or both—it is impossible to attain eternal happiness. The *müstefâd akul* is, therefore, grounded in the actual human intellect, but its source and origin lie in the Active Intellect. Thus, without the human intellect and its capacity for active reasoning, one cannot benefit from the Active Intellect. This concept can be understood through the analogy presented by Hazrat Ali: "Just as the sunlight does not benefit the eye when it cannot see."

In summary, *müstefâd akıl* is the intellect that can benefit from the intelligibles related to the sensory world (*ma'kûl*) and those belonging to the celestial realm, which are distinct from material intelligibles. This intellect is able to receive and benefit from the Active Intellect, which is considered to be a divine, angelic intellect. Therefore, Fârâbî clearly views *müstefâd akıl* as an intellect that receives and benefits from divine revelation.

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