



*bilimname* 46, 2021/3, 69-89

Type: Research Article

Received: 11.14.2021, Accepted: 12.22.2021, Published: 12.31.2021

doi: 10.28949/bilimname.1023347

# THE THOUGHT OF MUSLIM PHILOSOPHERS IN THE CLASSICAL PERIOD ABOUT PRACTICAL ARTS\*

 Ahmet Kamil CİHAN<sup>a</sup>

## Abstract

In this article, some thoughts on practical arts have been examined based on Farabi and Ikhwan-i Safa. Farabi divides arts into theoretical and practical. Practical arts are arts that aim to achieve useful things for life. These arts are related to the dexterous (mihani) aspect of the practical mind. For Farabi, although the arts were born out of necessity, they contribute to human happiness. For Farabi, the aim of man is happiness. To achieve this, it is essential to acquire theoretical, practical thinking, moral and artistic virtues. The happiness of a society depends on these virtues being settled in that society. Thinking that a virtuous society consists of various classes, Farabi stated that every people in the society should have a single job. Drawing attention to expertise in profession and art, Farabi states that an artist who maintains his competence with up-to-date information will be considered distinguished.

Ikhwan-i Safa, on the other hand, considers art as giving form to matter. The art also means imitating God by giving form. Because the artist imitates the Creator by giving shape to a substance in his mind. This can be seen as the metaphysical foundation of artistic mastery. Necessary needs force people to acquire art, and this view presents the purpose of existence of practical art as utility. In order to benefit, there is a need to know the object, which is the subject of art, and to learn the shapes it can take. Therefore, art necessarily leads people to knowledge. Therefore, in a way, art is a way of approaching God.

Although both thinkers state that art arises out of necessity and is aimed at meeting a need, they are of the opinion that it ultimately conduces to the perfection of man. The metaphysical dimension about the aim and goal of art has not been neglected by expressing that the artist is a member of the superior class

---

\* This article was published in Ahilik International Symposium "Quality Centered Life" Proceedings is the final version of the article, which has been revised, updated and improved.

<sup>a</sup> Prof. Dr., Erciyes Üniversitesi, akcihan@erciyes.edu.tr

in this world with his scientific and moral virtues and will be one of the happy people in the hereafter.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Islamic Philosophy, Farabi, Ikhwan-i Safa, Practical Arts, Craft.



### KLASİK DÖNEM İSLAM FİLOZOFLARININ PRATİK SANATLARA BAKIŞI

Bu yazıda Farabi ve İhvan-ı Safa'nın pratik sanatlara, iş ve mesleklere dönük bazı düşünceleri incelenmiştir. Farabi, sanatları teorik ve pratik olarak ikiye ayırır. İlki, özelliği sadece bilinecek olan şeyin bilgisini bize kazandıran sanat; diğeri de yapılması mümkün olan ve onu yapma gücü kazandıran sanattır. Her sanat türünün kendine özgü haz, fayda ve iyiden oluşan bir amacı vardır. Faydalı sanat, haz veren veya iyi olan şeyde faydalı olur. Şehirlerde kullanılan sanatların amacı, faydalı olmaktır. Hayat tarzlarını araştıran, onları yapma gücünü kazandıran sanatların amacı ise bize ilim ve doğruyu kazandırması yönüyle iyidir. Çünkü ilim iyi şeylerdendir. Şu halde bütün sanatların gayesi ya iyi ya da faydalı bir şeyi ortaya koymaktır. Bu durumda pratik sanatlar, faydalı olma amacını güden sanatlar kapsamında yer alır ve pratik aklın maharet ortaya koyan yönüyle ilgilidir.

İnsan, varlığını sürdürmede ve üstün yetkinliklere ulaşmada tek başına yeterli olmadığından, başkalarının yardımına muhtaçtır. İşte bu, insanları topluluklar kurmaya sevk eder. Fakat zaruri ihtiyaçların bir araya getirdiği insani topluluklar erdemli değildir. Ancak hakiki mutluluğu kazanmak üzere bir araya gelen ve yardımlaşan topluluğun erdemli olması söz konusudur. Şu halde pratik sanatlar erdemli topluluk için gereklidir fakat yeterli değildir. Farabi insanı mutluluğa ulaştıran dört tür erdemini şehirlerde oluşturulmasını gerekli görür. Ona göre bu, 1. erdemlerin bilgisinin teorik olarak verilmesi, 2. ahlaki erdemleri ve pratik sanatları toplumda fiilen oluşturmakla gerçekleşir. Topluluk, erdemlerin fiillerine alıştırılmalı, erdemleri elde etmede onlar cesaretlendirilmeli, erdemler onlarda hâkim kılınmalı ve erdemler severek yapılır hale gelmelidir.

*[The Extended Abstract is at the end of the article.]*



### Introduction

Professions and practical arts constitute one of the important classes that make up the society, as well as being the fields of occupation necessary for the continuation of social life in an orderly manner. Activities such as the gathering, organizing, and self-discipline of professionals and art owners can be found in many societies. As a matter of fact, in the Islamic world, institutions such as futuwwa and akhi-order, based on profession and art,

with ethical and political aspects, have been formed. As a matter of fact, the place of Ahi Evran (d. 1261) is unforgettable in terms of Turkish cultural history. “Especially with the great support and help of I. Alaeddin Keykubad, on the one hand, the relations of the sheikh disciples in dervish lodges and lodges by adhering to Islamic-mystical thought and the principles of futuwwa, on the other hand, the relations of master, journeyman and apprentice in workplaces and, accordingly, the economic life of the Anatolian Akhism. Ahi Evran played a major role in the establishment and development of Akhism”<sup>1</sup> Each work or institution that is formed rises on a theoretical basis. There is definitely a theoretical structure that gives it its principles, rules and lifestyle. The theoretical ground is often fed by the religious, historical and intellectual experience of that society. Contribution to the intellectual structure in the Islamic world has been made especially by researchers in the field of Kalam/Theology, Tasawwuf/mysticism and Hikma/philosophy. In this article, the views of the philosophers, who lived in the period when Islamic philosophy was shaped, its terminology, problems and solutions were determined, and who influenced the philosophy understanding of the next generations, about profession and art were examined. With this, it is aimed to examine one of the fields that contributed to the understanding of profession and art in the past and to reveal the dimension of meaning that it can give to the present.

The classical period in Islamic philosophy mainly refers to the period before Ibn Sina (980-1037). This period contains important ideas that shaped the following periods. Farabi (870-950) and Ikhwan-ı Safa (AD. 10-11th century) groups, who were in the center but showed different results, draw attention. Farabi was a philosopher who lived in the tenth century and continued his studies mostly in Baghdad and Damascus. It can be said that the philosophical accumulation he has revealed has shaped the future of Islamic philosophy. On the other hand, he seems to have influenced the next generations by explaining the philosophical foundations of art. As a matter of fact, his follower, Ibn Sina, took this legacy even further and created a magnificent philosophical background, and medieval philosophy almost revolved around it. The Ikhwan-i Safa group was a philosophical organization operating in Baghdad and Basra at the same time, and their views and thoughts were widely disseminated both verbally and in writing. The fact that his works named *Rasail* are found almost everywhere in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Ziya Kazıcı, “Ahilik”, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi, (İstanbul: TDV yayınları, 1988) 1/540.

---

Islamic geography is enough to show the power of their influence. İkhwan-ı Safa was a community that aims to restructure the society intellectually by emphasizing unity, brotherhood, cooperation and solidarity at a time when political activities are intense.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, we believe that examining the two ways of thinking in terms of practical arts will contribute to the understanding of the philosophical dimension in Islamic culture.

It may be helpful to look at the use of the word “art” in Arabic: “*San'* or *sun'* means “to do, to make”, *sana'* is used to mean “to be skilled in your work”, and *san'at* is used to mean “work done, profession”. As a term, art has been defined as “the regular and special way, method followed in a material or mental work and effort”. Again, the word science in Arabic is an infinitive meaning “to gain skill in a job, to decorate”; It is used as a name in the meaning of “the whole of the special rules related to a profession or art, scientific theories, dexterity and application by means of learning, an effort to express an emotion and thought in a way that gives the mind and heart the highest taste of beauty”<sup>3</sup>. This article focuses on the use of art in the sense of “work and skill”.

#### A. Farabi on Practical Arts

Before dealing with the subject of art, Farabi makes a brief explanation about science (*'Ilm*). Because he sees a similarity between science and art. According to him, science is divided into two parts, theoretical and practical. Theoretical knowledge is information that is only aimed at knowing, such as “God is one, the world was created”. Practical science, on the other hand, is science that is practical, such as “helping parents is good, betrayal is bad”. Farabi also states that art, like science, has two classes. The first is art, the peculiarity of which is to give us the knowledge of only what is to be known; the other is art that is possible to do and gives the power to do it. This second group of art is also two classes in itself. The first is the arts that people do in cities, such as medicine, trade, and salt making. The other is art, through which man acquires the best way of life, good deeds, and the power to do them. Since these are actions that people do voluntarily, each action has a humanitarian goal it wants to achieve. In other words, each type of art has its own purpose. According to Farabi, the aims of human actions are of three types: pleasure, benefit and good. Useful art is either beneficial in what gives

---

<sup>2</sup> Bayram Ali Çetinkaya, “Onuncu Yüzyılda Felsefi Bir Topluluk Olarak İhvan-ı Safa”, İslam Felsefesi Tarihi, (Ankara: Grafiker yayınları, 2012) 1/247.

<sup>3</sup> Turan Koç, “Sanat”, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi, (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2009) 36/90.

---

pleasure or useful in something good. On the other hand, the purpose of arts used in cities is to be useful. The purpose of the arts, which research life styles and give them the power to make them, is good in terms of giving us knowledge and truth. Because science and knowledge are good things. The aim of all arts, then, is to reveal something either good or useful. Thus, Farabi classifies the arts in terms of their purpose. According to this, there are two kinds of arts: arts whose aim is to gain the good and those whose aim is to earn the useful. Farabi calls the first philosophy and absolute wisdom; but the latter has absolutely nothing to do with wisdom. However, sometimes it is likened to philosophy and it is called wisdom.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in Farabi's view, philosophy is an art in terms of producing knowledge. Practical arts, on the other hand, are included in the scope of arts that aim to be beneficial for society.

The arts are directly related to the power of intellect. That is to say, intellect is divided into two as theoretical and practical. With the theoretical intellect, only things that are the subject of human knowledge are obtained. What we can do and change from one state to another with practical intellect is provided, and it has an aspect that looks at morality and politics, and another aspect that looks at skill and the arts, as will be discussed below. The first is related to the idea, the other is related to the skill and profession (*mihanî*), with which skills and occupations such as carpentry, farming, etc. are obtained. For Farabi, this intellect provides the craft, profession and skill that will meet the daily needs of the individual and society.<sup>5</sup> As can be understood, skill and power related to the profession lie below the practical intellect, and the arts emerge with it. Professions are performed with this power. This can also be called technical reasoning. In this respect, it can be seen as an inventive faculty.<sup>6</sup>

Practical arts are also dealt with in Farabi's philosophy in terms of ethics and politics. Practical arts with its ethical aspect constitute one of the founding elements of happiness as a moral goal. Because, in Farabi's view, the only goal that people want to achieve is nothing more than happiness.<sup>7</sup> However, happiness is of two kinds, true happiness and false happiness.

---

<sup>4</sup> Farabi, *Kitabu't-Tanbih Ala Sabili's-Saada*, ed. Cafer Al-i Yasin, *el-A'malu'l-Falsafiyya*, (Bairut 1992), 254-256.

<sup>5</sup> Farabi, *Fusulu'l-Madani*, ed. F. M. Najjar, (Bairut: Daru'l-mashriq, 1971), 29.

<sup>6</sup> Ayşe Taşkent, "Farabi'nin Felsefesinde Sinaat ve Mihne (Tekhne) Kavramları", *Medine'den Medeniyete Farabi*, Ed. Yaşar Aydınli-Mehmet Fatih Birgül, (Bursa: Bursa Akademi 2020), 276-277.

<sup>7</sup> Farabi, *Tanbih*, 227.

---

Pleasure, taste, interest, power, wealth, etc., according to him, are false happiness. True happiness, on the other hand, is different from these, and it is a goal achieved by human effort and effort, not as a result of a random or divine donation. To emphasize this meaning, Farabi named his work on the subject as *Tahsilu's-Saada*, that is, the acquisition of happiness. As he states in this work, true happiness occurs only when four kinds of human virtues arise in a society. In order, these are theoretical virtues, practical reasoning virtues, moral virtues and practical arts.<sup>8</sup> As it can be understood, happiness requires a professional and artistic skill as well as intellectual and character competence.

The political aspect of the practical arts can be explained as follows: First of all, it should be stated that man is not sufficient on his own to maintain his existence and attain superior competencies. In these matters he needs the help of others. This need leads to the establishment of human associations. People coming together meet each other's needs. According to Farabi, society is incomplete or complete. The first of the complete society is the city. Therefore, superior goodness and competence can be obtained first and only in the city. The city where people who aim to help each other in goodness and competence come together is a virtuous city in the opinion of Farabi. They help each other to achieve true happiness. This society is also a virtuous society. Farabi likens a virtuous society to a healthy body. Just as there is complete harmony and cooperation between the organs of the body, there is also full harmony and cooperation between the classes that make up the virtuous society.<sup>9</sup>

As it can be understood, Farabi does not consider societies brought together by essential needs virtuous. If a city is built on the basis of cooperation in order to obtain the necessary needs for the purpose of maintaining the physical needs of man, Farabi calls it city of necessity and sees it as the lowest of human associations. In such cities, there may be all the arts necessary for essential needs, while in some cities there are only some.<sup>10</sup> These statements of Farabi reveal that practical arts are necessary in every society. However, seeing the purpose of urbanization as meeting only material needs is not correct in Farabi's political philosophy. He thinks that coming together and helping each other to gain true happiness is the

---

<sup>8</sup> Farabi, *Tahsilu's-Saadah*, ed. C. A. Yasin, *El-A'malu'l-Falsafiyya*, (Bairut 1992), 119.

<sup>9</sup> Farabi, *Kitabu Arâi Ahli'l-Madinati'l-Fadila*, ed. A. N. Nadir, (Bairut 1985), 5. Print, 118-119.

<sup>10</sup> Farabi, *es-Siyasetu'l-Medeniyye*, Tran. M. Aydın-A. Şener- R. Ayas, (İstanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1980), 45.

---

ideal situation.

It is clear that the cooperation of people coming together will be revealed in different ways and social classes will be formed. According to Farabi's virtuous city theory, groups in a city consist of superiors (*afdal*), translators, measurement workers, fighters (*mujahid*), and the wealthy. The group of superiors is the philosophers and those who have practical wisdom, the intellectuals, that is, those who have views on big issues and representatives of religion (*hamalatu'd-din*). The group of translators are orators, writers, poets, musicians and scribes. Those engaged in measurement are accountants, engineers, doctors and astronomers. The group of fighters is the army, the guards and the people who are counted among them. The rich group, on the other hand, are farmers, shepherds, merchants, etc., who gain wealth in the city.<sup>11</sup> Farabi drew attention to the fact that a virtuous society consists of people from all professions, and also included craftsmen among them.

Here, it is necessary to refer to a classification made by Farabi in order to see the intellectual status of the art connoisseur. Farabi divides the society into two groups as the public (*Âmma*) and the elite. The elite group are people who grasp theoretical views as they are. The public, on the other hand, is a group of people who have a common opinion and limited knowledge. When this distinction is considered for art connoisseurs, Farabi considers them in the elite group. He attributes the reason for this to the fact that they do not limit themselves to limited knowledge in the art they are masters of. They follow the works related to their art at the highest level.<sup>12</sup> As it can be understood, Farabi considers it necessary for someone who has mastered his art to have teachable knowledge in order to be counted among the distinguished people. Mastery is directly related to repetitions in art-related verbs. So, specialization happens through repetition. For example, a clerk achieves mastery by getting used to the actions of a master clerk. According to Farabi, this also applies to other arts.<sup>13</sup> The fact that any art is easier than the other can be explained by natural aptitude (*al-isti'dad et-tabîf*). That is, the mastery of a person, for example, in the art of writing or calligraphy, is related to natural aptitude in some, and a lot of repetition in others. But natural aptitude alone is not enough. It also needs to be

---

<sup>11</sup> Farabi, *Fusûlu'l-Medeni (Siyaset Felsefesine Dair Görüşleri)*, Tran. Hanifi Özcan, (İzmir 1997), 49-50.

<sup>12</sup> Farabi, *Tahsil*, 178-179.

<sup>13</sup> Farabi, *Tanbih*, 236-237.

reactivated.<sup>14</sup> It seems that a knowledge and skill that is not repeated or updated will regress and become blunt over time.

Farabi accepts that there is a gradation between the arts according to the means-end relationship. That is, for the performance of an art, tools and equipment produced by another art are needed. In this case, the previous art serves the other art. The one served is superior to the other in degree.<sup>15</sup> Farabi also speaks of an art that no longer serves anyone else and is itself the ultimate goal, which is politics; is state administration. According to him, the art of management is fulfilled by using other arts.<sup>16</sup> As it is seen, every art is a tool that ultimately serves politics and has the purpose of benefit. Politics, on the other hand, is an art that makes people and society competent and makes them happy.

Farabi thinks that the first purpose of some professions is not about making money. For example, representatives of religion and scribes are like this. They form the most important parts of the city. But since they also need money, it has to be covered by the state. In addition, there are people who are disabled or have no money in the society. According to Farabi, what needs to be done in this regard is to create a fund for them. The task of the manager is to find the necessary source for this fund.<sup>17</sup>

Farabi reveals two ways to create four types of virtues that lead to happiness in cities. The first of these ways is teaching (*ta'lim*), and this is the way of transmitting theoretical virtues to people. The other way is education (*ta'dib*) and this is the way to establish moral virtues and practical arts in society. In the work of education, it is necessary to accustom society to actions arising from practical faculties. In acquiring these virtues, they should be encouraged and these virtues should be made dominant in them. Society must, by repetition, become fond of the virtues to which it is accustomed. In Farabi's words, the society's view of these virtues should be like the lover's view of his lover.<sup>18</sup> Farabi states that while bringing practical arts to the society, sometimes persuasion and sometimes coercion will be needed.<sup>19</sup> It is already obvious that the person who brings these arts to them will be an expert in that business. Farabi, through education and training, both revealed the continuity of the virtuous city and stated that one of the

---

<sup>14</sup> Taşkent, "Farabi'nin Felsefesinde Sinaat ve Mihne (Tekhne) Kavramları", 307.

<sup>15</sup> Farabi, Fusul, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Farabi, Tahsil, 158.

<sup>17</sup> Farabi, Fusul, 56.

<sup>18</sup> Farabi, Tahsil, 165.

<sup>19</sup> Farabi, Tahsil, 168.

---



duties of the state is to train artisans. Farabi proposes the following principle for the education of practical arts: People should be educated according to their natural dispositions. Otherwise, the possessed talent will be lost over time. This is especially true for art.<sup>20</sup> Although the subject has been handled in terms of natural disposition, it is understood that issues such as saving time and preventing waste of resources are also taken into consideration.

Farabi emphasizes that people in the virtuous city should have only one job. A person should devote himself to a single job and deal with an art, and not go beyond. The state should not allow this. Farabi summarizes the reason for this in three:

1. A person is not suitable for every job and art. So he is suitable for a job.

2. When a person turns to a job or art, it makes him better and more perfect.

3. Many jobs are done at a certain time. When this time is delayed, that job is not done. When a person has two jobs, sometimes the two overlap at the same time. When he does one, he cannot do the other. As time passes, there will be no other opportunity. For this reason, a person should be assigned to each job so that each job is done on time.<sup>21</sup>

In short, Farabi argues that for people's happiness, theoretical, practical reasoning, moral and practical virtues must be present in a society. When one of these is missing, happiness is also missing. Moreover, every artist and professional should have the theoretical, practical reasoning and moral virtues related to his work and should demonstrate this with his work.<sup>22</sup> Happy people and society is formed only in this way. This also ensures the happiness of the hereafter.

### **B. Ikhwan-i Safa on Practical Arts**

One of the thinkers dealing with the practical arts is the Ikhwan-i Safa group. Ikhwan-Safa accepts the human soul's desire for theoretical and practical arts as a natural inclination<sup>23</sup>, and separates the 8th Treatise of his extensive work, *Rasail*, into practical arts. According to them, human arts are considered in two groups as scientific arts and practical arts. The scientific arts encompass science-related subjects. Practical arts, on the other hand,

---

<sup>20</sup> Farabi, es-Siyasa, 42-43.

<sup>21</sup> Farabi, Fusul, 55.

<sup>22</sup> Farabi, Tahsil, 157.

<sup>23</sup> Mehmet Karakuş, İhvân-ı Safa'da Estetik ve Sanat, (İstanbul: Litera Yayıncılık, 2018), 235.

are the placement of the form (*sûrah*) in the idea of the artist, who is a scholar, into matter. In this respect, the product of art (*masnû'*) consists of the sum of matter and form. Thus, it is stated that the first condition of art is information about the product to be revealed and to bring it into existence in matter. Ikhwan-i Safa makes a metaphysical reference here and states that the beginning of art, that is, putting form into matter, is the effect of the universal soul on the first matter, by the command of Allah, with the confirmation of the universal intellect.<sup>24</sup> This view, which also refers to the source of art, is a matter of their view of emanation (*sudûr*).

Ikhwan-i Safa draws attention to the mental dimension in all the arts that man has made and reveals a hidden evidence for the existence of the soul. In other words, based on art, the existence of an abstract soul is proved once again. For Ikhwan-i Safa, none of the arts in question would exist if it were not for the abstract essence of the soul that handles the acts of art. Therefore, the perpetrator of these magnificent arts can never be the body.<sup>25</sup> For this reason, there is a spiritual basis behind every artistic activity that originates from human beings.

Ikhwan-i Safa states that the objects of art are of four types: human, natural, spiritual and divine arts. Objects of human art are things like shapes, embroidery, paints made on natural objects in the streets and other places. Natural art objects are the shapes of animals and plant species and the colors of mineral ores. Spiritual art objects, on the other hand, are things like the order of the four elements, the order of the realms, and the order of the universe as a whole. Divine art objects, on the other hand, are timeless, spaceless, immobile, immaterial, images created directly by God and abstract from the first matter<sup>26</sup>, that is, metaphysical entities. As it can be understood, all things that have come into existence are works of art in the Ikhwan-i Safa.<sup>27</sup> As a matter of fact, the existence of the Artist who reveals them here comes to the fore.

Ikhwan-i Safa lists the elements that an artist needs in his work as matter, space, time, tool (*adâh*), organ (*âlah*) and movement and goes on to explain some of them. That is, when an object accepts things such as shape, paint and embroidery, it is called the substance of art. When the artist treats an art, such as figure and embroidery, on an object, it is called the subject of

---

<sup>24</sup> Ikhwan-ı Safa, *Rasailu İhvani's-Safa*, ed. Arif Tamir, (Beyrut 1995), 1/270.

<sup>25</sup> Ikhwan-ı Safa, *Rasail*, 1/277.

<sup>26</sup> Ikhwan-ı Safa, *Rasail*, 1/270.

<sup>27</sup> Karakuş, İhvân-ı Safa'da Estetik ve Sanat, 249.

---

the artist. When an object accepts art, it is called a work of art (*masnû'*). When the artist uses the work of art, in his art or in another art, it is called a tool. To give an example of these, for example, iron is a substance that takes all kinds of forms. When the craftsman crafts it, it is called the subject of blacksmith. When the blacksmith makes a knife, etc., it is called a product. When the butcher uses the knife for slaughtering animals, it is called a tool. Every artist needs an organ and tool in his art. The difference between an organ and a tool is this. Organs are organs of the body such as hands, fingers, feet and eyes. Tools and equipment, on the other hand, are things that are separate from the artist's personality, such as needles, scissors, and pencils. The movement is done in different directions with the organ and the vehicle. Ikhwan-i Safa draws parallels between the type of movement made by the artist and the movement of the celestials. According to them, this is explained by the effect of the disease on the disabled, that is, by the effect of the cause on the result. In other words, the feature of the result is to have its cause and effect in itself. According to Ikhwan-i Safa, ancient philosophers said that "the second imitates the first." expressed in words. According to them, children imitating their parents is nothing but this.<sup>28</sup>

Ikhwan-i Safa divides the subject of art into two as spiritual and material. The spiritual are the scientific arts. Material art is also divided into simple and compound groups. Each art takes place on a type of natural beings.<sup>29</sup> Ikhwan-i Safa states that the need for organs and tools varies from art to art. For example, a leather maker and a builder need both in their work, while poets, orators, belly dancers, etc., need only their bodies in their art. Sometimes more than one tool is needed in an art. For example, a clerk needs many tools such as paper, pen and ink in his art. Ikhwan-i Safa states that fire serves as a tool in many arts. That is, in order for matter to accept form, it must soften. This is achieved by fire.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, fire is also essential for the completion of some practical arts.

Ikhwan-i Safa puts the arts in a sequence within themselves. According to them, necessity gave birth to the emergence of some arts for the first purpose. Some arts also depend on it and serve it or complement and mature it. Some arts consist of ornament and beauty. The arts formed for the first purpose are gathered in three groups as farming, weaving and home making. Because man's skin was created open and devoid of wool, skin, mother-of-

---

<sup>28</sup> Ikhwan-i Safa, Rasail, I/271-272.

<sup>29</sup> Ikhwan-i Safa, Rasail, I/272-273.

<sup>30</sup> Ikhwan-i Safa, Rasail, I/274.

pearl, feathers and other things found in animals, necessity led man to the art of weaving in order to acquire clothes. Weaving is completed with the art of wool, which is completed with the art of knitting. Since man is in need of food, necessity has directed him to farming, etc. This group of arts can be examined in two parts as primary and secondary arts. Arts for ornament and beauty, on the other hand, are arts such as fabric, silk, and fragrance art, which are embossed on one side. According to Ikhwan-i Safa, all arts and their mastery consist of creating form in matter, completing and maturing it in order to benefit from it in worldly life. As it can be understood, the purpose of art is to gain a benefit in worldly life, just as Farabi stated. In fact, for the Ikhwan-i Safa, the division of society into various occupational groups is for the purpose of improving the livelihood of each. For example, the merchant seeks to make a profit while shopping. The purpose of the rich in saving is the fear of poverty. According to Ikhwan-i Safa, the fact that most of the people are poor and that the rich are afraid of poverty is to encourage them to acquire art and to persevere. The aim is to improve the needs and deliver them to those in need. The purpose of this is for them to benefit from them until a certain time. This benefit is for the soul to be equipped with knowledge, good habits, right views and good deeds. The aim pursued with this is that the soul gathers these attributes within itself and ascends to the kingdom of the sky (*malakout*). Ultimately, the ultimate goal is to escape from the bondage of matter and nature. It is to ascend from the realm of creation and decay to the realm of spirits, and to remain eternally and permanently in joy, pleasure and comfort.<sup>31</sup> As it is seen, although necessity has led people to acquire art for the sake of living and worldly benefit, the ultimate aim is to reach the spiritual ascent of the soul with knowledge and proper works and to contribute positively to the final destiny of man. In other words, although necessity gave birth to art, the main goal is to ensure that people reach perfection. Every art is extremely important for the continuation and perfection of life. The negligence of one of them negatively affects the competence of the individual, as well as disrupts the social order.<sup>32</sup>

Although all arts are important for Ikhwan-i Safa, it is possible to rank and evaluate arts from various perspectives. The angle taken into consideration in this grading is of five types: the subject of art, the form given to the product, the essential need that calls for acquiring the relevant art, its general utility, and the art itself. The arts that are valuable out of necessity

---

<sup>31</sup> Ikhwan-i Safa, Rasail, I/273-275.

<sup>32</sup> Karakuş, İhvân-ı Safa'da Estetik ve Sanat, 242.

---

are farming, weaving, and building construction. Art that is valuable because of its subject is jeweler, perfumer, etc. The art, which is valuable in terms of the form given to the product, is the art of those who make observation tools such as astrolabe. Art valuable for its general utility is the art of bathers, scum collectors, and clergy. Art that is valuable in its own right is the art of illusionists, painters, musicians, etc.<sup>33</sup> According to this view, no art is absolutely superior to the others. All of them have a positive and more value than others, depending on the point of view.

After all this information, Ikhwan-i Safa deals with the importance of expertise in art in terms of imitation God (*Tashabbuh b'illah*). For them, mastery of each art means to be like the wise Artisan who is creative. In this respect, it is said that Allah loves the expert and master craftsman. Even the prophet Muhammad said: "Verily, Allah loves an artist who is very strong in his art." Ikhwan-i Safa attributes the definition of philosophy as man's attempt to imitate God to the extent of his strength, to this justification. According to them, imitating is about spreading science, art and goodness. Allah gave knowledge to the scholar, wisdom to the sage, made the artist do his art, and favored the good ones. Whoever attains a degree in one of these four genders becomes even closer to Allah. Ikhwan-i Safa states that one cannot approach Allah through any other means other than worship, knowledge and deeds.<sup>34</sup> Based on the expression that philosophy is an effort to resemble God, it can be deduced that the artist sees the world as a model and encourages harmony, order and harmony in his art.<sup>35</sup>

Ikhwan-i Safa thinks that people are inclined to one or more arts. Some people learn an art in a short time, while others take a long time. Ikhwan-i Safa attributes this to the nature of people or to the effects of the celestials at the time of their birth. Ikhwan-i Safa finds it more beneficial for children to learn the art of their father than other arts, and notes that this is important in terms of mastery and usefulness. On the other hand, Ikhwan-i Safa points out that this has to do with preserving sovereignty. According to them, it is ensured that incompetent people are removed from state affairs by keeping everyone busy with a job.<sup>36</sup>

Ikhwan-i Safa also touches on the master-apprentice relationship in learning art, and likens it to the spirit's reviving the body and the fire heating

---

<sup>33</sup> Ikhwan-i Safa, Rasail, I/277-279.

<sup>34</sup> Ikhwan-i Safa, Rasail, I/279-280.

<sup>35</sup> Karakuş, İhvân-ı Safa'da Estetik ve Sanat, 246.

<sup>36</sup> Ikhwan-i Safa, Rasail, I/280-281.

---

the object to which it approaches. That is to say, the human soul has two forces, one that knows and the other that is active. With its knowing power, the soul abstracts the forms of the known from matter and envisions it in itself. It is as if this force becomes the substance of those forms. With its active power, the soul brings out the forms in its mind and embroiders them in a corporeal substance. Now this object becomes his work of art. With this explanation, Ikhwan-i Safa wants to come to this point: In fact, the form of what is known potentially exists in the person who will learn knowledge. When he knows it, the form actually exists. Therefore, in a person who will learn an art, the forms of that art are potentially available. When he learns, the forms in question become current. In this respect, learning is the path from strength to actuality. Teaching is nothing more than showing this way. So the masters are the ones who show this way. The selves of the children are potentially knowing, while those of the masters are actually knowing. But everything that goes from potential to actual needs a reason. The goal that Ikhwan-i Safa wants to reach is the issue of the source of art: Every artist has learned his art from someone. So, from whom did the person who introduced it learn it for the first time? The first artist either created his art with his own idea and thought, as the philosophers stated, or he received it from a non-human teacher, as the prophets said. Ikhwan-i Safa evaluates these two theses as follows: It should definitely be known that if a person has knowledge, this has happened by the will of Allah. The person who claims that art is revealed by man's own idea actually took nature as an example for himself. It is as if nature has become their teacher. Nature, on the other hand, is supported by the universal soul and it is supported by the universal intellect. The universal intellect is also the first created by Allah. In this respect, Almighty Allah is the supporter of everything as He wishes.<sup>37</sup> According to this explanation, learning an art, whether by imitating nature or borrowing from a being other than human, both leads to the same place. Namely, Allah gives shape to the universal mind, that to the universal soul, and that to the specter. The universal intellect and the universal soul are the source of the prophets. Nature, that is, the universal soul shaping the whole substance, is the source of philosophers. The metaphysical basis of both theses takes place in the same system.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion**

When these views on practical arts are examined, both thinkers talk about the necessity of the need for art, the fact that it encompasses the

---

<sup>37</sup> Ikhwan-i Safa, Rasail, I/282-283.

---

scientific and practical field, that mastery in art is necessary, that art is a prerequisite for attaining happiness, and that it is a condition for happiness in the hereafter. If we are to explain them, Farabi talks about four basic virtues for happiness in this world and the hereafter, one of which is practical arts. Without it, happiness is incomplete. Art has such a broad meaning that putting forward views such as philosophy and science is also an art. In his view, philosophy is an art whose purpose is to reveal the good. Practical arts, on the other hand, are arts whose purpose is to achieve useful things for life. Things that are useful in this situation have an instrumental value. So benefit is not a goal. The purpose of utility is not to have it, but to reach another purpose through it. It does not matter whether the goal to be achieved is physical or spiritual well-being. Having art is necessary, but not sufficient, to be among the elite in a society. Because mastery needs theoretical knowledge to do it and teach it to others. This knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for him to be included in the elite. Because theoretical, practical reasoning and moral virtues also need to be acquired. Maybe that's why he insists on the importance of moral virtues and mastery in Akhism.

Farabi also studied the subject in a richer way by processing art in terms of political philosophy. First of all, he considered it necessary to help people to maintain their existence and achieve superior goodness, and stipulated meeting the essential needs for genuine happiness. In a way, this reveals that life is also art. That is, the purpose of living is not to meet the essential needs and have a job. On the contrary, every person should know how to help his fellows to reach happiness and act accordingly.

The fact that Farabi states that one of the functions of the state is to train artisans is also remarkable in terms of the topicality of the subject. In addition to this, it is among the duties of the state to control a person's having only one job and art. Not only is this important in preventing the waste of resources, it also has value in terms of opening up job opportunities for many people. In addition, this is how mastery and expertise is ensured to flourish and settle in society. Expertise is not only necessary to do a job well, but it is also a condition of having a say in decisions that require decisions. The stages of apprenticeship, journeyman and mastery, which show the degrees of specialization that exist in the historical process and today, did not come about by chance. In addition to historical experience, the influence of the theoretical ground in creating these institutions cannot be ignored.

Ikhwan-i Safa considers art as giving form to matter. In this case, every being in nature is a work of art. In fact, art also means imitating God, as it is

giving form. Because the artist imitates the Creator by giving the shape of a substance in his mind. Perhaps this is the metaphysical basis of mastery and robustness in art. Because the Creator does not do an incomplete or corrupt work. Since the artist imitates art in terms of producing art, he must be perfect and complete in his work. This is the metaphysical basis of mastery. Ikhwan-i Safa formulated this situation in a way that sheds light on many issues, including art, with the principle of “the second imitates the first”.

On the other hand, the essential needs of man compel him to acquire an art. People benefit from the art they obtain. In order to benefit, there is a need to know the matter, that is, the object that is the subject of art, to recognize it, and to learn the shapes it can take. Therefore, art necessarily leads people to knowledge. Knowledge is the ornament and food of the soul. With this knowledge, the craftsman should do decent work and have good character. Such a person is ready for high and lofty levels in the spirit world. With his death, that person joins his presence in the kingdom of God. In this respect, art is a way of getting closer to God. A knowledgeable craftsman who is skilled and solid in his work and has good character is counted among those who are close to Allah.

Ikhwan-i Safa thinks that every work and art is valuable. However, as the angle that makes them valuable changes, the ordering becomes inevitable. In our opinion, the importance of this view is clear. Because no work and art is worthless and useless. Every job and profession contributes to the elimination of a problem needed in society. It is certain that life will be disrupted to a great extent in the absence or practice of that art. Since art is essential and valuable, then the person who starts learning it must first learn it for his father's profession, according to Ikhwan-i Safa. This seems to be a well thought-out proposition, both to save time in mastery and expertise, and to keep people from being unnecessarily engaged in government affairs.

It can be said that the views of both philosophers about art are mostly in Akhism. The dimension of meaning conveyed by these views to the present reminds us that mastery, dexterity and virtue are the qualities sought in an artist, that doing a good job leads to happiness in this world and the hereafter, and that artists imitate the creator even if they are not aware of it.



#### **Acknowledgements:**

-



**Declarations:**

**1. Ethics approval:**

Not applicable.

**2. Author contribution:**

The author declares no one has contributed to the article.

**3. Competing interests:**

The author declares no competing interests.



**KAYNAKÇA**

Çetinkaya, Bayram Ali. "Onuncu Yüzyılda Felsefi Bir Topluluk Olarak İhvan-ı Safa", İslam Felsefesi Tarihi, Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2012.

Farabi, Abu Nasr. Kitabu Ârâi Ahl al- Madinati'l-Fadıla, ed. Alber Nasri Nadir, 5. Print, Beirut: 1985

Farabi, Abu Nasr. Fusulu al-Madani, ed. Favzi M Najjar, Beirut: Daru'l-mashriq, 1971.

Farabi, Abu Nasr. Fusûlu'l-Madanî (Siyaset Felsefesine Dair Görüşleri): Tran. Hanifi Özcan, İzmir: 1997.

Farabi, Abu Nasr. as-Siyasatu'l-Madaniyya, Tran. M. Aydın-A. Şener- R. Ayas, İstanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1980.

Farabi, Abu Nasr. Tahsilu's-Sa'ada, ed. Ja'far Al-i Yasin, al-A'malu'l-Falsafiyya, Beirut: 1992

Farabi, Abu Nasr. Kitabu'-Tanbih Ala Sabili's-Sa'ada, ed. Ja'fer Al-i Yasin, al-A'malu'l-Falsafiyya, Beirut: 1992

Karakuş, Mehmet. İhvân-ı Safa'da Estetik ve Sanat, İstanbul: Litera yayıncılık, 2018

Koç, Turan. "Sanat" Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi. 36/90-931/540. İstanbul: TDV yayınları, 2009.

Ikhwanu's-Safa. Rasâilu İkhwani's-Safâ, ed: Arif Tamir, Beirut 1995.

Kazıcı, Ziya. "Ahilik", Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi. 1/540. İstanbul: TDV yayınları, 1988.

Taşkent, Ayşe, "Farabi'nin Felsefesinde Snaat ve Mihne (Tekhne) Kavramları", Medine'den Medeniyete Farabi, ed. Yaşar Aydınli-Mehmet Fatih Birgül, Bursa: Bursa Akademi 2020.



## KLASİK DÖNEM İSLAM FİLOZOFLARININ PRATİK SANATLARA BAKIŞI\*

 Ahmet Kamil CİHAN<sup>a</sup>

### Geniş Öz

Bu yazıda Farabi ve İhvan-ı Safa'nın pratik sanatlara, iş ve mesleklere dönük bazı düşünceleri incelenmiştir. Farabi, sanatları teorik ve pratik olarak ikiye ayırır. İlki, özelliği sadece bilinecek olan şeyin bilgisini bize kazandıran sanat; diğeri de yapılması mümkün olan ve onu yapma gücü kazandıran sanattır. Her sanat türünün kendine özgü haz, fayda ve iyiden oluşun bir amacı vardır. Faydalı sanat, haz veren veya iyi olan şeyde faydalı olur. Şehirlerde kullanılan sanatların amacı, faydalı olmaktır. Hayat tarzlarını araştıran, onları yapma gücünü kazandıran sanatların amacı ise bize ilim ve doğruyu kazandırması yönüyle iyidir. Çünkü ilim iyi şeylerdendir. Şu halde bütün sanatların gayesi ya iyi ya da faydalı bir şeyi ortaya koymaktır. Bu durumda pratik sanatlar, faydalı olma amacını güden sanatlar kapsamında yer alır ve pratik aklın maharet ortaya koyan yönüyle ilgilidir.

İnsan, varlığını sürdürmede ve üstün yetkinliklere ulaşmada tek başına yeterli olmadığından, başkalarının yardımına muhtaçtır. İşte bu, insanları topluluklar kurmaya sevk eder. Fakat zaruri ihtiyaçların bir araya getirdiği insani topluluklar erdemli değildir. Ancak hakiki mutluluğu kazanmak üzere bir araya gelen ve yardımlaşan topluluğun erdemli olması söz konusudur. Şu halde pratik sanatlar erdemli topluluk için gereklidir fakat yeterli değildir. Farabi insanı mutluluğa ulaştıran dört tür erdemini şehirlerde oluşturulmasını gerekli görür. Ona göre bu, 1. erdemlerin bilgisinin teorik olarak verilmesi, 2. ahlaki erdemleri ve pratik sanatları toplumda fiilen oluşturmakla gerçekleşir. Topluluk, erdemlerin fiillerine alıştırılmalı, erdemleri elde etmede onlar cesaretlendirilmeli, erdemler onlarda hâkim

---

\* Bu yazı Ahilik Uluslararası Sempozyumu "Kalite Merkezli Bir Yaşam" Bildiri Kitabı, 2011, s. 139-151 yayımlanan yazının, tekrar gözden geçerek güncellenmiş ve geliştirilmiş son halidir.

<sup>a</sup> Prof., Erciyes University, akcihan@erciyes.edu.tr

kılınmalı ve erdemler severek yapılır hale gelmelidir.

Erdemli topluğun çeşitli sınıflardan oluştuğunu düşünen Farabi, sınıflardan her birinin sadece bir iş sahibi olması gerektiğini belirtir. Zira bir insan, her işe elverişli olmadığı gibi tek bir işe yöneldiğinde onu daha da mükemmel yapar. Ayrıca iki iş, bazen aynı vakte denk gelir, diğeri yapılamaz. Meslek ve sanatta uzmanlığa dikkat çeken Farabi, güncel bilgilerle yetkinliğini sürdüren sanatkârın seçkin kimselerden sayılacağını belirtir.

İhvanı Safa'ya göre, beşeri sanatlar, ilmi sanatlar ve pratik sanatlar diye iki kısımdır. İlmi sanatlar, ilimle ilgili konuları kapsarken pratik sanat, âlim olan sanatkârın zihnindeki biçimi/formu maddeye yerleştirmesidir. Böylelikle sanatın ilk şartının, ilim olduğu ve onu kendi dışında bir şeyde varlığa çıkartmak olduğu belirtilmiş olur. İhvanı Safa, metafizik bir göndermede bulunarak sanatın başlangıcının, yani biçimin maddeye konmasının Allah'ın emriyle; külli aklın teyidiyle külli nefsin ilk maddeye etkisi olduğunu belirtir.

İhvanı Safa sanat ürünü objeleri beşeri, tabii, nefsanî ve ilahî olmak üzere dört cins olduğunu belirtir. Beşeri sanat objeleri sokaklarda ve diğer yerlerde tabii cisimler üzerine yapılmış şekil, nakış, boya gibi şeylerdir. Tabii sanat objeleri ise hayvanların ve bitki türlerinin şekilleri ile madeni cevherlerin renkleridir. Nefsanî sanat objeleri ise dört unsurun düzeni, feleklerin tertibi ve bütünüyle âlemin düzeni gibi şeylerdir. İlahî sanat objeleri ise zamansız, mekânız, hareketsiz, maddesiz, doğrudan Allah'ın yaratmış olduğu ve ilk maddeden soyut olan suretlerdir. Kısaca varlık kazanmış bütün şeyler, İhvanı Safa için birer sanat ürünüdür.

İhvanı Safa'ya göre zaruret, bir kısım sanatların ilk amaçla ortaya çıkmasını doğurmuştur. Bir kısım sanatlar da ona bağlı olur ve ona hizmet eder veyahut onu tamamlar ve olgunlaştırır. Bir kısım sanatlar da süs ve güzellikten ibarettir. İlk amaçla oluşan sanatlar çiftçilik, dokumacılık ve ev yapımı olmak üzere üç grupta toplanır. Bu grup sanatlar, asli ve tali sanatlar olarak iki kısımda da incelenebilir. Süs ve güzellik için olan sanatlar ise bir yüzü kabartmalı olan kumaş, ipek, koku sanatı gibi sanatlardır. İhvanı Safa'ya göre bütün sanatlar ve ondaki ustalık, dünya hayatında yararlanmak için maddede biçimi meydana getirmekten, onu tamamlamaktan ve olgunlaştırmaktan ibarettir.

İhvanı Safa sanatta uzmanlığın önemini, Tanrıya benzeme yönünden ele alır. Onlara göre her bir sanattaki uzmanlık, yaratıcı olan hikmet sahibi Sanatkâra benzemek demektir. Sanat, biçim verme olması itibarıyla de Allah'ı taklit etmek anlamına da gelir. Çünkü sanatkâr da bir maddeye zihnindeki biçimi vermekle, bir nevi Yaratıcıyı taklit etmektedir. Burası sanattaki ustalığın

metafizik temeli olarak görülebilir.

İhvanı Safa'ya göre her sanatkâr, sanatını birinden öğrenmiştir. İlk sanatkâr, sanatını ya filozofların belirttiği gibi kendi fikri ve düşüncesiyle çıkartmıştır veya peygamberlerin söylediği gibi insan dışında bir öğreticiden almıştır. İhvanı Safa bu iki tezi şöyle değerlendirir: İnsan bir ilme sahipse bu Allah'ın dilemesi ile olmuştur. Sanatın insanın kendi fikri ile ortaya konduğunu iddia eden kişi, aslında tabiatı kendisine örnek olarak almıştır. Sanki tabiat onların öğretmeni olmuştur. Tabiat da külli nefis tarafından o da külli akıl tarafından desteklidir. Külli akıl da Allah'ın yarattığı ilk varlıktır. Buna göre bir sanatı öğrenme ister tabiatı taklit suretiyle olsun isterse insan dışında bir varlıktan alınma olsun, ikisi de aynı yere çıkar. Her iki tezin metafizik temeli aynı sistemde yer alır.

Pratik sanatlar üzerine belirtilen bu görüşler incelendiğinde, her iki düşünür de sanata olan ihtiyacın zorunluluğundan, ilmi ve pratik hayatı kuşattığından, sanatta ustalığın gerekli olduğundan, sanatın mutluluğu kazanmanın ön koşulu olduğundan, ahiret mutluluğu için şart olduğundan söz etmektedir.

Farabi daha çok etik ve politik açıdan sanatı işleyerek konuyu ele alırken İhvanı Safa da Tanrı'ya benzeme açısından meseleye yaklaşmıştır. Ayrıca sanatın kökeni Farabi'de ele alınmazken İhvanı Safa'nın ele aldığı bir sorun olmuştur. Farabi her insanın sadece bir iş yapmasını gerekli görürken İhvanı Safa, baba mesleğinin devam ettirilmesini öne çıkarmıştır. İkinin de gayesi, vakit ve enerji israfı olmadan, kısa sürede topluma faydalı bireyler olmanın temin edilmesidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İslam felsefesi, Farabi, İhvan-ı Safa, Pratik Sanatlar, Zanaat, Meslek.



**Teşekkür:**

-

**Beyanname:**

**1. Etik Kurul İzni:**

Etik Kurul İzni gerekmemektedir.

**2. Katkı Oranı Beyanı:**

Yazar, makaleye başkasının katkıda bulunmadığını beyan etmektedir.

---

### **3. Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı:**

Yazar, herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmektedir.

