



A Comparative Study of Human Communication in Habermas's Civil Society and Al-Farabi's Madinah Fazilah (the Ideal City)

Hossein Mehrabanifar^{1✉} , Mohammad Ali Salimi^{2✉} 

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Razavi University of Islamic Sciences, Mashhad, Iran. (Corresponding Author). Email: mehrabanifar@razavi.ac.ir

2. MA of Muslim Social Studies, Department of Social Sciences, Razavi University of Islamic sciences, Mashhad, Iran. Email: salimimohammadali1@gmail.com

Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article Article history: Received: 02 April 2025 Received in revised form: 27 May 2025 Accepted: 27 May 2025 Published online: 22 June 2025 Keywords: <i>Al-Farabi, Civil Society, Habermas, Human Communication, Madinah Fazilah (the Ideal City).</i>	Human communication is a fundamental element shaping the nature and structure of societies. Civil society and Madinah Fazilah represent two distinct types of societies, each characterized by different forms of communication. Jürgen Habermas and Abu Nasr Muhammad Al-Farabi are prominent thinkers who have examined human communication, its ideal form, and its role in shaping these two societal models. This study employs a comparative-analytical approach grounded in fundamental methodology to examine and compare the levels of human communication in the thought of these two philosophers. The analysis reveals that both thinkers, adopting a critical perspective on their respective societies and the quality of communication within them, propose an ideal society concerned with rationality, mutual understanding, and collective agreement. Habermas's concept of communicative rationality, along with his emphasis on rational-critical discourse and consensus-building, is central to establishing truth and legal legitimacy, yet it remains fundamentally rooted in conventional reason without transcending its epistemic limits. In contrast, Al-Farabi's notion of demonstrative communication and mutual understanding extends beyond the human horizon, achieving its full significance through its connection to the First Leader (Rais al-Awwal) of Madinah Fazilah and its metaphysical relationship with the Active Intellect (al-'Aql al-Fa'āl). This research provides a foundational framework for re-examining and analyzing diverse communicative systems within the two distinct paradigms of Madinah Fazilah and civil society.
Cite this article: Mehrabanifar, H.; Salimi, M. A.. (2025). A Comparative Study of Human Communication in Habermas's Civil Society and Al-Farabi's Madinah Fazilah (the Ideal City). <i>Journal of Social Theories of Muslim Thinkers</i>, 15(2): 76-97. https://doi.org/10.22059/jstmt.2025.392597.1782	



© The Author(s).

Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jstmt.2025.392597.1782>

1. Introduction

While the quality of communications and communication systems is shaped by social forces and cultural backgrounds, it also exerts a substantial influence on the formation of the cultural and social structures of societies. Among prominent figures who have theorized on this subject are Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, representing Muslim Iranian thought, and Jürgen Habermas, representing modern Western philosophy. Each, grounded in their respective cultural contexts and ontological–epistemological frameworks, has developed distinct conceptions of the ideal society and, accordingly, defined the nature and levels of human communication within their own theoretical constructs.

Given that every society must independently define an optimal organizational framework for its social communications in line with its cultural, political, economic, and historical circumstances, this study undertakes a comparative analysis of how human communication is conceptualized in relation to the epistemological foundations of these two thinkers. The aim is to elucidate how the desirable form of communication among members of society is delineated in the ideal societies envisioned by al-Fārābī and Habermas. The study seeks to answer the following central question: How is human communication formulated in al-Fārābī's *Madīna Fāḍila* and Habermas's civil society, and what understanding of the levels and types of communication emerges from these two models?

2. Methodology

This research adopts an analytical–comparative method in the form of a historical–comparative study, examining the distinct historical and environmental contexts of al-Fārābī and Habermas and assessing the influence of these contexts on their intellectual development. Data collection relies on documentary research. The comparative framework employed focuses on how theoretical constructs are shaped in accordance with their contextual backgrounds. Every theory, in its historical formation and development, is rooted in specific epistemological foundations as well as non-epistemological contexts. This study primarily investigates the epistemological foundations of the two thinkers' views through an analysis of their ontological, epistemological, anthropological, and methodological assumptions, and explores their implications for human communication—its levels, dimensions, and qualitative features.

3. Findings

The epistemological foundations of the two thinkers—shaped respectively by al-Fārābī's monotheistic worldview and Habermas's humanistic orientation within the Frankfurt School tradition—lead to the formulation of two distinct ideal societies (*Madīna Fāḍila* and civil society) and, consequently, to different models and qualities of communication.

While both share certain concerns—such as the nature of the ideal society, the role of rationality, rational dialogue, mutual understanding, and collective consensus—there are significant differences in their foundational premises, the articulation of their ideas, and their socio-cultural implications.

For Habermas, the central communicative concern is modern society's deviation from rationality and Enlightenment ideals, and the need for communicative rationality to liberate society from the limitations of instrumental rationality. His model emphasizes consensus, rational discourse, and critical reflection, where shared reason is essential for attaining truth and legitimizing laws.

In contrast, al-Fārābī focuses on the process through which a rational society is achieved—specifically, the elevation of thought and language from probabilistic forms (e.g., rhetoric and poetry) to demonstrative and certain forms of reasoning. In his view, demonstrative communication reaches its highest realization in the *Madīna Fāḍila*, particularly in connection with its ruler (Imam). While Habermas, due to his anthropocentric orientation, does not incorporate communication with God or the sacred into his theory, al-Fārābī's

framework extends beyond human horizons to encompass a vertical dimension—communication with the divine and the sacred..

4. Conclusion

This comparative analysis highlights several components relevant to contemporary governance. These include:

- Upholding rationalism and privileging demonstrative reasoning alongside rhetorical persuasion in policymaking.
- Promoting cooperation and public participation through dialogue and consensus, while connecting such processes to revealed principles.
- Freeing cultural policymaking from illusion and superficial imagery, instead grounding it in reason, demonstration, and demonstrative persuasion.
- Transitioning from a consumerist society to one capable of critically analyzing cultural phenomena.

In Habermas's civil society, communication remains within the human horizon and is limited to consensus-building among individuals, without reference to transcendent dimensions. In al-Fārābī's *Madīna Fāḍila*, by contrast, communication—grounded in monotheism, reason, and demonstration—is intrinsically linked to revelation and the sacred intellect, and culminates in connection with the Active Intellect.

Such a connection enables an individual to achieve the highest level of perfection and comprehension, making them fit to lead society toward ultimate felicity. This leadership is not defined by command and control, but by the capacity to instruct, guide, and cultivate human perfection. Within this hierarchical communicative structure, relationships among individuals and groups are pedagogical and guiding, ultimately serving the goal of human development.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Ethical Considerations: Complied with.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Abbaspoor, Ebrahim. (2011). A critique of the methodology of Habermas's "communicative action" theory. *Ma'rifat-e Farhangi Ejtemai*, 2(2), 35-64. [In Persian]
- Alberts, Jess K.; Nakayama, Thomas K. & Martin, Judith N. (2019). *Human communication in society*, Hoboken, NJ : Pearson Education.
- Al-Farabi, Abu Nasr. (2002). *Ārā' ahl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, Tehran: Soroush. [In Persian]
- Al-Farabi. (1991). *Al-Millah*, Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq. [In Persian]
- Al-Farabi. (1992). *Al-Tanbīh 'alā sabīl al-sa'ādah*. Tehran: Hikmat. [In Persian]
- Al-Farabi. (2010). *Al-Siyāsah al-madaniyyah*, Tehran: Soroush. [In Persian]
- Al-Farabi. (2015). *Al-Ḥurūf*, Tehran: Shahid Beheshti University Press. [In Persian]
- Al-Farabi. (2017). *Fusūl muntaza'ah*, Tehran: Soroush. [In Persian]
- Ashraf Nazari, Ali; Attarzadeh, Behzad (2013). Habermas Perspective on Knowledge, Inter-subjectivity and Communicative Action, *Political and International Science*, 1(1), 33-46. [In Persian]
- Azad Armaki, T. (2023). *Social thought of Muslim thinkers: From Farabi to Ibn Khaldun*. Tehran: Soroush. [In Persian]

- Baghdadi, I. P. (1951). *Hadiyat al-Arifin*. Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi. [In Persian]
- Barkhordari, A. (2015). a comparative introduction to the nature of utopia in the thought of farabi and nasir al-din tousi. *POLITICAL QUARTERLY*, 45(2), 495-512. [In Persian]
- Bashir, Hassan (2008). New Semantics of Communication; Making Possible a Deeper Understanding of Relationship between Culture and Media, *Cultural Research*, Vol 1(3), 22. [In Persian]
- Craib, Ian. (2021). *Modern Social Theories: From Parsons to Habermas* translated by Abbas Mokhber. Tehran: Agah. [In Persian]
- Davari ardakani, Reza (2010), *Farabi: Philosopher of Culture*, Tehran: Sokhan. [In Persian]
- DeVito, J A. (2016), *Human communication: the basic course*, Hoboken, NJ: Pearson Higher Education.
- Donsbach, Wolfgang (2008). *The international encyclopedia of communication*, New York: Blackwell publishing.
- Farhangi, A. A. (2018). *Human Communications*. Tehran: Rasa Cultural Services. [In Persian]
- Goldkuhl, Göran (2000). *The Validity of Validity Claims: An Inquiry Into*. 112 *Communication Rationality*, Aache., Germany.
- Habermas, J. (1971). *Knowledge and human interests* (J. Shapiro, Trans.). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen (1985), *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen (1993), *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen (2016), *The Post- National Constellation and the Future of Democracy*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hassanzadeh, H. (1966). *Abu Nasr al-Farabi and his philosophy*. *Helal Magazine*, Summer. [In Persian]
- Holub, R. (2004). *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*, Translated by Hossein Bashirieh, Tehran: Ney. [In Persian]
- Hoover, S. (2009). *Religion in the Age of Media* (Trans. Ali Amadi & colleagues). Qom: Daftar Aql. [In Persian]
- Hosseini, M. H. (2010). *The manifestation of Imamate in al-Farabi's Virtuous City*. *Kosar Ma'aref*, 14, 77–104. [In Persian]
- Islami Tanha, Asghar (2014). Demonstrative Communication as the Foundation of Culture and the Fazelah Society in Al-Farabi's Political Science, *Journal of Social Cultural Knowledge*, 4(4), 5-30. [In Persian]
- Islami Tanha, Asghar (2015). *Communication in Iranian excellence community from the perspective of al-farabi, ebne miskawaayh & nasir al addin tosi*, Master's thesis, Baqir al-Olum University, Qom, Iran. [In Persian]
- Islami Tanha, Asghar (2015). The production of signs and the exchange of meaning in Al-Farabi's philosophy of communication, *Journal of Islamic Humanities*, 2(4), 5-34. [In Persian]
- Jaafari, M (20). *Society and Rationality in the Thought of Abu Nasr al-Farabi and Jürgen Habermas*. [In Persian]
- Jafari, M. (2010). *Society and rationality in the thought of Abu Nasr al-Farabi and Jürgen Habermas*, Master's thesis, Baqir al-Olum University, Qom, Iran. [In Persian]
- Jowkar, G. (2008). *Al-Farabi's social thoughts*. *Ma'refat Journal*, 17(4), 129. [In Persian]
- Khan Mohammadi, Karim. (2012). the comparison of communication and revelatory rationalism (on the basis of the views of Habermas and Allamah Tabatabaei). *Political Science*, 15(57), 31-74. [In Persian]
- Khaniki, H. (2004). dialogue, from linguistic connotation to global meaning, *Iranian journal of sociology*, 5(1), 90-113. [In Persian]
- Larijani, M. J. (1996). *The Nature of Rationality*. *Qabasāt Quarterly*, 1(1), 116-156. [In Persian]
- Madandar Arani, A. (2019). *Comparative Research Method in Human Sciences*. Tehran: Samt. [In Persian]
- Mahdizadeh, S. M. (2012). *Media Theories: Common Ideas and Critical Perspectives*. Tehran: Hamshahri Publishing. [In Persian]
- Mohajernia, M. (2001). *Political Thought of Al-Farabi*. Tehran: Bustan Ketab. [In Persian]
- Mohsenian Rad, M. (2020). *Communication Studies*. Tehran: Soroush. [In Persian]

- Mohsenian Rad, M. (2020). *Media Studies*. Tehran: Samt. [In Persian]
- Mowlana, Hamid (2011). *Communication Studies*. Tehran: Ketab Nashr Publishing. [In Persian]
- Mowlana, Hamid (2022). *On Human Communication*. Tehran: Imam Sadiq University Press. [In Persian]
- Nekoonam, J. (2011). *Research Methods with Emphasis on Islamic Sciences*. Qom: Qom University Press. [In Persian]
- Noori, Morteza. (2021). A Critique of Foundations of Habermas' s Theory of Communicative Action. *KNOWLEDGE (JOURNAL OF HUMAN SCIENCES)*, 13 (1): 245-265. [In Persian]
- Parsania, H (2012). Social worlds, Qom: Ketabe Farda. [In Persian]
- Parsania, H (2013). Theory and Culture: Fundamental Methodology of Evolution of Scientific Theories. *Strategy for Culture*, 6(23), 7-28. [In Persian]
- Parsaniya, Hamid, Tale'i Ardakani, Mohammad.(2025) Fundamental Methodology and Applied methodology in Social sciences, with Emphasis on the Approaches of Realism and Nominalism. *Ma`rifat-e Farhangi Ejtemai*, 4(2), 73-96. [In Persian]
- Pusey, Michael (2014). *Jurgen Habermas* (A. Tadayon, Trans.; 2nd ed.), Tehran: Hermes. [In Persian]
- Quante, Michael (2007), Habermas On Compatibilism and Ontological Monism, *Philosophical Explorations*, 10(1), 59-68.
- Rahimi ,Salman Ali (2012). Farabi and Habermas's Methodology, *Journal of Social Cultural Knowledge*, 2(2), 65. [In Persian]
- Saboorian, M. (2011). Anthropology of Muslims' human sciences: a comparative study of Farabi and Ibn Khaldun. *Journal of Social Theories of Muslim Thinkers*, 1(1), 73-87. doi: 10.22059/jstmt.2011.54316
- Salter, L (2005). The Communicative Structures Of Journalism And Public Relations. *Journalism*, 6(1), 90-106.
- Saroukhani, B. (2021). *Sociology of communication*. Tehran: Ettela'at. [In Persian]
- Seidman, S. (2016). *Contested knowledge: Social theory today* (H. Jalili, Trans.). Tehran: Nashr-e Ney. [In Persian]
- Shahriari, P. (2012). Fārābī; The Second Teacher. *Roshd-e Borhān*, 22(1). [In Persian]
- Shiri, Tahmoures, & Azimi, Neda. (2012). A Comparative study of qualitative content analysis and hermeneutics. *journal of sociology studies*, 4(15), 79-99. [In Persian]
- Van den Brink, Bert (1995), die politisch-philosophische Debatte über die demokratische Bürgergesellschaft“ In: *Bürgergesellschaft, Recht und Demokratie, von den Brink Bert/van Reijen Willem(Hg.)*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main
- White, S. (2001). *Recent Writings of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, Justice, and Modernity* (Trans. Mohammad Hariri Akbari). Tehran: Ghatreh. [In Persian]
- Zaeri, Q & Moalem, S. M. (2016). "Fundamental methodology" from the perspective of fundamental methodology. *Journal of Social Theories of Muslim Thinkers*, 6(1), 160-129. [In Persian].