

## Comparative Chart: Al-Fārābī's *Fuṣūl al-Madanī* and Maimonides' *Shemonah Perakim* Chapter 4 on the Definition and list of virtues

### 0. Opening Statement on Good Actions

Butterworth Translation	Alfarabi Arabic	Transliteration	הרמב"ם – ערבית יהודית
Actions that are good - are equilibrated actions intermediate .	الأفعال التي هي خيرات هي الأفعال المعتدلة المتوسطة	Al-aḥ'āl allatī hiya khayrāt hiya al-aḥ'āl al-mu'tadila al-mutawassiṭa	אלאפעאל אלתי הי כ'יראת - הי אלאפעאל אלמעטדלה, אלמתוסטה
between two extremes, both of which are evil:	بين طرفين هما جميعا شرا	bayna ṭarafayn humā jamī'an sharran	בין טרפין המא ג'מיעא שרא
one being an excess, and the other a deficiency	أحدهما إفراط والآخر نقص	aḥaduhumā ifrāṭ wa-l-ākhar naqṣ	אחדהמא אפראט, ואלאכ'ר תקציר

**Note:** Fārābī has **نقص** (naqṣ = deficiency); Maimonides has **תקציר** (taqṣīr = falling short). Synonymous but different lexical choice.

### Semantic Nuance

**نقص** (*naqṣ*) — suggests an objective state of lacking or incompleteness. Something is simply *less than* what it should be. More static and descriptive.

**تقصير** (*taqṣīr*) — derives from the verb **قَصَرَ** (*qaṣṣara*), "to fall short, to be remiss." It implies an *agent* who fails to reach a standard. More dynamic, carrying ethical weight — one *could have* attained the mark but did not.

### Greek Background

Both render Greek **ἔλλειψις** (*elleipsis*), which itself has both senses — geometrical "falling short" and ethical "deficiency." Aristotle uses it as the technical term for the vice of deficiency opposite to **ὑπερβολή** (*hyperbolē*, excess).

### Why the Difference?

Several possibilities:

1. **Source variation.** Maimonides is here translating Farabi's text – maybe he had a variant reading in his version.

2. **Stylistic register.** *Taqṣīr* is common in Islamic ethical and legal discourse (e.g., "taqṣīr in duties"), so Maimonides — writing for a Jewish audience steeped in that milieu — may have preferred the more ethically charged term.
3. **Theological resonance.** In religious contexts, *taqṣīr* often implies culpable failure (cf. the common phrase التقصير في العبادة, "falling short in worship"). Maimonides may have wanted to underscore that the deficiency-vice is a *failure* of character, not mere absence.
4. **Judeo-Arabic preference.** *Taqṣīr* appears more frequently in Judeo-Arabic ethical literature generally; it may simply have been the more natural term in that register.

## 01. Definition of Virtues

Similarly, virtues are traits of the soul and states	وكذلك الفضائل فإنّها هيئات نفسانيّة وملكات	Wa-kadhālika al-faḍā'il fa-innahā hay'āt nafsāniyya wa-malakāt	ואלפצ'איל הי היאה נפסאניה ומלכא
intermediate between two traits both of which are vices,	متوسطة بين هيئتين وكلتاها رذيلتان	mutawassiṭa bayna hay'atayn wa-kiltāhumā radhīlatān	מתוסטה בין היאתין רדיתין
one of which is greater and the other lesser	إحدهما أزيد والأخرى أنقص	iḥdāhumā azīd wa-l-ukhrā anqas	אחדהמא אזיד ואלאכ'ר אנקץ
	—	—	וען הד'ה אלהיאה תלזם תלך אלאפעאל

**Note:** Maimonides **adds:** "and from this disposition those actions necessarily follow" — making explicit the causal link between disposition and action.

### 1. Example: Temperance (al-ʿIffa)

like moderation, for it is intermediate	مثل العفة فإنّها متوسطة	mithla al-ʿiffa fa-innahā mutawassiṭa	מת'אל ד'לך אלעפה פאנהא כ'לק מתוסט
between avidity and insensibility to pleasure.	بين الشَّره وبين عدم الإحساس باللذة	bayna al-sharah wa-bayna ʿadam al-iḥsās bi-l-ladhdha	בין אלשרה ובין עדם אלאחסאס באללד'ה
			פאלעפה הי מן אפעאל אלכ'יראת, ואלהיאה מן אלנפס' אלתי תלזם ענהא אלעפה פהי פצ'איל כ'לקיה,
One of the two is greater—namely, avidity—and the other is lesser.	فأحدهما أزيد وهو الشَّره والآخر أنقص	fa-aḥaduhumā azīd wa-huwa al-sharah wa-l-ākhar anqas	אמא אלשרה פהו אלטרף אלואל... ועדם אלאחסאס באללד'ה ג'מלה אלטרף אלאכ'ר,

			וכלאמהא שרא מחץ'. ואלהיאתין מן אלנפס אלתין ענהמא לזם אלשרה והי אלהיאה אלאזיד ועדם אלאחסאס והי אלהיאה אלאנקץ פהמא ג'מיעא רד'ילתין מן רד'איל אלכ'לק.
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**Note:** Maimonides **expands** significantly here, adding:

- ("temperance is among the good actions")
- ("the disposition of the soul from which temperance follows is a virtue of character")
- ("the two dispositions from which gluttony and insensibility follow are both vices of character")
- This is a continuation of the previous expansion by Rambam – he wishes to show the connection between virtues and actions clearer in this example
- We can see how Maimonides rewrites Farabi's text and expands between his lines.

## 2. Generosity/Liberality (al-Sakhā')

Liberality is intermediate between stinginess and wastefulness,	والسخاء متوسط بين التقثير والتبذير	wa-l-sakhā mutawassīṭ bayna al- taqtīr wa-l-tabdhīr	וכד'לך, אלסכ'א - מתוסט בין אלתקתיר ואלתבד'יר
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**Note:** Virtually Identical.

## 3. Courage (al-Shajā'a)

And courage is intermediate between rashness and cowardice.	والشجاعة متوسطة بين التهور والجبن	wa-l-shajā'a mutawassīṭa bayna al- tahawwūr wa-l-jubn	ואלשג'אעה - מתוסטה בין אלתהור, ואלג'בן
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**Note:** Identical.

**4. Wit/Play (al-Zarf / al-La‘b)**

Wittiness is intermediate between  impudence and wantonness [on the one hand] and dullness [on the other]	والظرف متوسط في الهزل واللعب وما جانسهما بين المجون والخلاعة وبين الفدامة	wa-l-zarf - mutawassit	ואללעב - מתוסט
with respect to jesting, playfulness, and what is related to them.		fi al-hazl wa-l-la‘ib  wa-mā jānsahumā	
		bayna al-mujūn, wa-l-khalā‘a  wa-bayna al-fadāma	בין אלג'לאעה ואלפדאמה

**Note:** Fārābī has **الظرف** (al-zarf = wit/elegance) as the virtue; Maimonides simplifies to **אללעב** (al-la‘b = play) which is the domain in Farabi. Rambam has no identification of domains in his lists. Fārābī lists two vices of excess (**المجون والخلاعة** = buffoonery and licentiousness); Maimonides reduces to one: **אלג'לאעה** (al-khalā‘a).

**Comparison of Rambam and Alfarbi Here**

Feature	Arabic Version	English	Maimonides (Judeo-Arabic)	English
<b>Virtue name</b>	الظرف ( <i>al-zarf</i> )	wit, urbanity, refinement	—	(omitted)
<b>Domain</b>	الهزل واللعب وما جانسهما ( <i>al-hazl wa-al-la‘ib wa-mā jānsahumā</i> )	jesting, play, and what is of the same genus as them	אללעב ( <i>al-la‘ib</i> )	play
<b>Excess</b>	المجون والخلاعة ( <i>al-mujūn wa-al-khalā‘a</i> )	buffoonery and shamelessness/dissoluteness	אלג'לאעה ( <i>al-khalā‘a</i> )	shamelessness/dissoluteness
<b>Deficiency</b>	الفدامة ( <i>al-fadāma</i> )	boorishness, dullness	אלפדאמה ( <i>al-fadāma</i> )	boorishness, dullness

**5. Humility (al-Tawāḍu‘)**

Humility is a moral habit intermediate between pridefulness [on the one hand] and disparagement or familiarity [on the other].	والتواضع خُلُق متوسط بين التكبر وبين التخاصس والحقريّة	wa-l-tawāḍu‘ khuluq mutawassit bayna al-takabbur wa-bayna al-takhāsus wa-l-ḥaqriyya	ואלתואצ'ע מתוסט בין אלתכבר ואלתכ'סס
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**Note:** Fārābī has two terms for deficiency (التخاصس والحقريّة); Maimonides has only אלתכ'סס (al-takhassus).

### Term Nuance

تخاصس (*takhassus*) Reflexive form (Form V) of خَسَّ — "to make oneself base/low." Behavioral: acting beneath one's dignity.

حقريّة (*ḥaqriyya*) Abstract noun from حقير (*ḥaqīr*, "contemptible"). Attitudinal: regarding oneself as worthless.

Fārābī's doubling captures both the **outward behavior** (takhassus — demeaning oneself in action) and the **inner disposition** (ḥaqriyya — contempt for oneself). Maimonides, characteristically terse, retains only the first.

## 6. Nobility (al-Karam)

Respectfulness (dignity?) is a moral virtue intermediate between haughtiness, swaggering, or vainglory [on the one hand] and self-abasement [on the other].	والكرَم متوسط بين البَذخ والصف والطرمدة وبين النذالة	wa-l-karam mutawassit bayna al-badhakh wa-l-ṣalaf wa-l-ṭarmadha wa-bayna al-nidhāla	ואלכרם מתוסט בין אלבד'ך ואלנד'אלה
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**Note:** Fārābī lists three terms for excess (البَذخ والصف والطرمدة = extravagance, arrogance, boasting); Maimonides reduces to one: אלבד'ך (al-badhakh).

This makes a significant difference. The term “Karam” has two different meanings in Arabic – it can mean generosity/extravagance, and it can also mean dignity/nobility. Alfarabi definitely mean nobility here since 1) he already has a separate term for generosity above – alasaka (#4). 2) the two terms he adds (salaf and tarmada) don’t fit generosity at all. Tibon translated Maimonides according to this understanding.

But Maimonides, although he has alsasaka above, omits the second two terms, leaving only albadk, which can mean extravagance in spending. The difference between this and alsakka can be explained differently. See Shilat's comments here for how and sources in Maimonides which seem to assume that difference. Vetzarich Iyun Od.

## 7. Contentment - Addition by Maimonides (not in Fārābī)

			ואלקנאעה מתוסטה בין אלרגבה ואלכסל
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**Note:** This virtue-triad is **not in Fārābī's text** here. Maimonides adds it.

## 7. Forbearance (al-Ḥilm). 8 in Maimonides

Gentleness is intermediate between excessive anger and not becoming angry at anything at all.	والجلم متوسّط بين إفراط الغضب وبين أن لا يغضب على شيء أصلاً	wa-l-ḥilm mutawassit bayna ifrāt al-ghaḍab wa-bayna an lā yaghḍab 'alā shay' aṣḻan	ואלחלם מתוסט בין אלחרג' ואלמהאנה
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**Note:** Major difference! Fārābī: "excess of anger" vs. "not being angered at all."

Maimonides: **אלחרג** (al-ḥaraj = vexation/agitation) vs. **אלמהאנה** (al-mahāna = humiliation/degradation). Different conceptualization of the extremes.

## 8. Modesty (al-Ḥayā'). 9 in Maimonides

Modesty is intermediate between insolence and being tongue-tied.	والحياء متوسّط بين الوقاحة وبين الخُفَر والخجل	wa-l-ḥayā' mutawassit bayna al-waqāḥa wa-bayna al-khafar wa-l-khajal	ואלחיא מתוסט בין אלקחה ואלכ'ג'ל
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**Note:** Fārābī: excess = **الوقاحة** (shamelessness), deficiency = **الخُفَر والخجل** (excessive bashfulness and shame).

Maimonides: **אלקחה** (al-qīḥa = shamelessness) vs. **אלכ'ג'ל** (al-khajal = shame). Maimonides drops **الخُفَر**.

**9. Friendliness (Not in Maimonides)**

Friendliness is intermediate between surliness and flattery.	والتودّد متوسط بين التملّق وبين التملّق	wa-l-tawaddud mutawassiṭ bayna al-tamaqquṭ wa-bayna al-tamalluq	
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**Closing**

And similarly for the rest of them.	وكذلك سائرهما	wa-kadhālika sā'iruhā	וכד'לך סאירהא
		—	וליס תחתאג' אלי אסמא מוצ'ועה להא צ'רורה אד'א כאנת אלמעאני חאצלה מפהומה

**Note:** Maimonides **adds** a methodological remark: "There is no need for fixed names for them necessarily, so long as the meanings are grasped and understood." This echoes Aristotle's comment in *NE* II.7 that some means lack names. It is possible that in Maimonides this has another meaning – that the Arabic names aren't always precise, but that this isn't important as long as the meaning is understood.

**List of Virtues Compared and Summary of Differences**

Farabi	Maimonides
al-ʿiffa	אלעפה
al-sakhā	אלסכ'א
al-shajāʿa	אלשג'אעה
al-ẓarf (fī al-haḥl wa-l-laʿīb )	אללעב
al-tawāḍuʿ	אלתואצ'ע
al-karam	אלכרם
	אלקנאעה
al-ḥilm	אלחלם
al-ḥayāʿ	אלחיא
al-tawaddud	

Note: Both lists have exactly 9 items, with one virtue having a different name in Maimonides, (Allab) and Maimonides subtracting one (friendliness) and adding one (contentment).

This gives us reason to think that Maimonides is working of a different version of the same list, or that his addition and subtraction are purposeful.

Maimonides consistently shortens the excess and deficiencies to one word. (Wit, Humility, Nobility, Forbearance)

Two Virtues seem to be differently construed in Maimonides: Possibly Nobility (Kareem) becomes generosity. And Forbearance loses its connection to anger in the second extreme. This might be connected to Maimonides opinion on anger? Or maybe there is some other confusion here. We will see some more options in Tibon's translation.