

AL-FĀRĀBĪ'S INTERPRETATION OF ARISTOTLE AS AN AUTHORITY IN THE PHILOSOPHY*

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SUMMARY

The purpose of this article is to examine and discuss al-Fārābī's interpretation of Aristotle as an authority in the philosophy and to show that although al-Fārābī does not follow Aristotle in several important issues for numerous reasons, he views him as an authority in the philosophy and considers his philosophy as a true philosophy which should be followed by all students of philosophy. In addition to it, in this article, I will present and analyze the reasons why al-Fārābī, as an original and creative Muslim philosopher, has such a view by referring to his epistemological concepts of true, unity of truth, knowledge, real philosophy, discussing whether this attitude contradicts to be a real and authentic philosopher in the case of al-Fārābī.

Key Words: Aristotle, al-Fārābī, Islamic Philosophy, Concept of Philosophy, Authority.

ÖZET

FĀRĀBĪ'NİN ARİSTOTELES'İ FELSEFEDE BİR OTORİTE OLARAK YORUMU

Bu makalenin amacı, Fārābī'nin, Aristoteles'i felsefede bir otorite olarak yorumunu incelemek ve tartışmak yanında pek çok meselede Aristoteles'i izlememesine rağmen Fārābī'nin onu felsefede bir otorite olarak gördüğünü ve onun felsefesini izlenmesi gereken "doğru bir felsefe" olarak düşündüğünü ortaya koymaktır. Buna ilaveten bu makalede, özgün ve yaratıcı bir Müslüman filozof olarak Fārābī'nin böyle bir görüşe sahip olmasının sebepleri tespit edilip analiz edilecektir. Bu, onun hakikat, hakikatin birliği, bilgi, gerçek felsefe ve benzeri tasavvurları

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bağlamında ele alınacak ve Fârâbî örneğinde, böyle bir tutumun gerçek ve sahici bir filozof olmayla çelişip çelişmediği tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aristoteles, Fârâbî, İslâm Felsefesi, Felsefe Kavramı, Otorite.

Introduction

The influence of Greek philosophical thought in general and Aristotle (d. 322 B.C.) in particular on al-Fârâbî (d. 339/950) has been well documented in both medieval and modern sources. Al-Fârâbî certainly was familiar with the contents of many works of Aristotle; he wrote commentaries on his several books and repeatedly made reference to his philosophical writings. It is true that al-Fârâbî, like many Islamic philosophers, accepted the First Teacher (*al-Mu'allim al-Awwal*) as an authority in the philosophy. However, he differs from other philosophers such as al-Kindî (d. 260/873) and Averroes (d. 595/1198) who criticizes al-Fârâbî for failing to understand Aristotle's philosophy and follow Aristotelian line¹, for instance, in his being influenced by Aristotle and in his seeing him as the authority. Although Aristotle emerged as the authority of rational wisdom from the first century of reception and translation, the response of Islamic thinkers to him was very different from each other. Therefore, it is not possible to explain the relationship between Aristotle and Islamic philosophers in a facile way by only focusing on the intellectual and philosophical power of Aristotle. Since, the way of Aristotle's influence and his being seen as the authority has been shaped and constructed by the Islamic philosophers' conception of philosophy, philosophy of Aristotle, and their programs and goals which are peculiar to them. So, the question of what is the reason behind of al-Fârâbî's being influenced by Aristotle, his acceptance of this influence, and his interpretation of him as the authority provides an important key to the understanding of his attitude toward Greek philosophy in general and Aristotle in particular. It also provides one of the keys for the approach to al-Fârâbî's philosophy and to reading his works.

¹ See, for example, Averroes, *Tahâfut al-Tahâfut*, ed. Sulayman Dunya (Cairo: Dâr al-Ma'ârif, 1981), vol. I, pp. 301-305, 310, 343, 413; vol. II, p. 509; *Tafsîr Mâ Ba'da al-Tabî'a*, ed. S.J. Maurice Bouyger (Beirut: Dâr al-Mashrcq, 1983), vol. II, p. 885; *Risâla Mâ Ba'da al-Tabî'a*, ed. Rafiq al-'Ajam (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr al-Lubnâni, 1994), p. 76.

The aim of this article is to discuss and analyze al-Fārābī's interpretation of Aristotle as an authority in the philosophy by concentrating on the reasons of this interpretation. In order to accomplish the aim, I will, in the first section, deal with al-Fārābī's conception of Aristotle himself and his philosophy and, in the second section, with the main epistemological and political reasons of this conception of him. I'm not, however, concerned here with making a comparison between the philosophy of Aristotle and the philosophy of al-Fārābī, which has been made by a number of contemporary scholars to demonstrate the influence of Aristotle's writings on several aspects of al-Fārābī's thought, but rather with his view of Aristotle, the background of this view, and his attempt to reinterpret him to fit his project and goal.

I. Al-Fārābī's View of Aristotle and His Philosophy

In his *Kitāb al-Hurūf* ("Book of Letters"), a book which provides a historical blueprint for the way philosophy progresses, al-Fārābī bases his view of Aristotle as an authority on his concept of the development of philosophy in the history and Aristotle's position and place in the process of this development. In this book Al-Fārābī asserts that philosophy is latecomer in the history of the human arts and its emergence presupposes the full development of the practical arts (*al-sanā'ī al-'amaliyya*) and of all popular arts (*al-sanā'ī al-'amma*). For it is only after these have been developed that men's souls desire to understand the causes of sensible things that appear on earth and in the heavens and to know many of things discovered by the practical arts. The investigation engendered by the desire to know the causes or reasons characterizes a new period in the development of the human arts, which unfolds by stages. First, the investigation is conducted by means of rhetorical methods to search mathematical things and nature. The second stage is reached when inquirers come to learn about dialectical methods. Initially, or when dialectical methods are being learned, rhetoric, sophistry, and dialectic, are mixed together. Then rhetorical methods are rejected in favor of dialectic. But because there is a similarity between dialectic and sophistry, at first both are used in the investigation and verification

of opinions. The distinction between sophistry and dialectic is the last step in this stage, at which point sophistry is rejected and used only for the purpose of examination or testing. The third stage begins with the discovery of the insufficiency of dialectic and ends with the completion of philosophy. In this stage, dialectic is employed until dialectical methods are perfected. It then becomes evident that they are not sufficient for attaining certainty (*yaqīn*). This leads to the investigation of the methods of instruction and certain science (*turuq al-ta'lim wa l-'ilm al-yaqīn*). While is happening, men discover the methods of mathematics. This methods become perfect or almost perfect. And it appears that as a result of all this the difference between the methods of dialectic and the methods of certainty begins to appear to the inquirers and they begin to distinguish between the two to some extent. After this development, men become inclined to the science of political affairs, and these are investigated with a mixture of dialectic and the certain methods (*wa yafhasūna 'anhā bi al-turuq al-jadaliyya makhhlūtatan bi al-turuq al-yaqīniyya*), at a time when dialectical methods have become so firm as to be almost scientific. This situation continues until philosophy reaches the state it reached at the time of Plato. The fourth stage is reached when the matter rests in the way it rested in the days of Aristotle. At this stage scientific inquiry reaches the highest level (*yatanāhā*); all the methods are distinguished from each other; and universal theoretical and practical philosophy becomes complete, with no place in it for further investigation. Philosophy becomes an art that is only learned and taught².

In his account of history of philosophy al-Fārābī shows that there is not one kind of philosophy but philosophies due to their methods. Thus, he

² Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, ed. Muhsin Mahdī (Beirut: Dār al-Mashreq, 1990), pp. 150-152; translation by Muhsin Mahdi, "Alfarabi on Philosophy and Religion", *The Philosophical Forum* IV/1 (1972), pp. 5-11. In this article Mahdi points out the certain differences between Aristotle's account of the development of philosophy and al-Fārābī's; pp. 8-9.

distinguishes between demonstrative philosophy and non-demonstrative philosophies. The correct and true philosophy is demonstrative philosophy which is based on certainty. The non-demonstrative philosophy which verifies its opinions by rhetoric, dialectic, or sophistry is untrue philosophy³. The demonstrative philosophy has come to perfection after all the syllogistic arts had been distinguished from each other in the time of Aristotle. Therefore, the importance and role of Aristotle in the history of philosophy appears particularly in his influence on the development and perfection of demonstrative art, or the distinguishing and formulating syllogistic thinking, and in his use of it systematically in all branch of philosophy. In his *Kitāb al-Jam' al-Fārābī* stresses that the two Greek sages, Plato and Aristotle are the origin (*manṣa'*) of the true demonstrative methods and he describes that Aristotle's "method was to elucidate, record, arrange in order, communicate, uncover, expound, and to treat exhaustively everything for which he could find a way"⁴. For this reason, "Plato and Aristotle are creators of the [demonstrative] philosophy; they are organizers of principles and roots of this philosophy; and they completed ends and details of it. They are trusted in little and many things of the philosophy; they are authorities on the important and unimportant issues. What arises from them in any subject matter of all disciplines is not but basis which is reliable due to its emptiness from defects and dirt"⁵.

Al-Fārābī's view of Aristotle as the creator of philosophy does not mean he is of the opinion that *all* philosophy and *all* philosophical knowledge were completely produced or invented by Aristotle himself. On the contrary al-Fārābī thinks that he organized and systematized all branch of knowledge under the name of philosophy relying on demonstrative method, which was discovered before Aristotle, and wrote down the sciences existed in his time regarding the existents in the world, without intention of producing a new science⁶. In other

³ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, 131, 153-154.

⁴ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Jam' bayn Ra'yay al-Hakīmāyn*, pp. 35, 65.

⁵ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Jam' bayn Ra'yay al-Hakīmāyn Aflātūn al-Ilāhī wa-Aristūtālīs*, ed. 'Ali Bu Malham (Beirut: Dār wa Maktaba al-Hilāl, 1996), p. 28.

⁶ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Jam' bayn Ra'yay al-Hakīmāyn*, p. 30.

words, though Aristotle did not invent sciences as such, he nevertheless composed the sciences.

Although al-Fārābī conceives the idea that philosophy wholly reached the highest level in the time of Aristotle and it was completed by him, he considers that “this science existed anciently among the Chaldeans, who are the people of al-‘Iraq, subsequently reaching the people of Egypt, from there transmitted to the Greeks, where it remained until it was transmitted to the Syrians and then the Arabs”. However, al-Fārābī continues, “everything comprised by this science was expounded in the Greek language, later in Syriac, and finally in Arabic”⁷. These statements show that the beginning of philosophy goes back to al-‘Iraq; but Greeks, particularly Plato and Aristotle explained everything comprised by philosophy first. Consequently, for al-Fārābī, the true philosophy “was handed down to us [Arabs] by the Greeks from Plato and Aristotle only. Both have given us an account of philosophy, but not without giving us also an account of the ways to it and of the ways to re-establish it when it becomes confused or extinct”⁸.

In addition to it, al-Fārābī uses an Islamic epistemological doctrine developed by Muslim thinkers, consensus (*ijma*), which is one of the criteria of religious truth, and one of the most powerful factors in determining Muslim attitudes and beliefs, to explain the authority of Plato and Aristotle in the history of human arts. According to him, there is a consensus reached by the different nations speaking the different languages on the philosophical superiority and authority of these two Greek Sages. Thus, the consensus of the general run of mankind concerning the preeminence of Plato and Aristotle cannot be seriously

⁷ Al-Fārābī, *Tahsil al-Sa’āda* (“The Attainment of Happiness”) in Muhsin Mahdi (tr.), *Alfarabi’s Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. 43.

⁸ Al-Fārābī, *Tahsil al-Sa’āda*, s. 49-50. For al-Fārābī’s account of the history of philosophy in the period between the rise of Christianity and the rise of Islām, the transmission of Aristotelian teaching from Alexandria, via Antioch and Harran, to Baghdad, the certain role which was played by him in re-establishing logic according to his conception, and a re-evaluation of his account see Sarah Stroumsa, “Al-Fārābī and Maimonides on the Christian Philosophical Tradition: a Re-evaluation”, *Der Islam* 68/2 (1991), pp. 263-287.

questioned. Since, consensus is universally regarded as a positive criterion of truth⁹.

So, al-Fārābī's view of Aristotle and his philosophy may also be summarized as follows:

1. Aristotle, who is the greatest philosophic authority, represents the last stage of development of philosophy, which its first origin goes back to the people of al-'Iraq, due to his great success in completing and creating universal theoretical and practical philosophy.

2. The philosophy of Aristotle represents the highest level of philosophy due to its depending on demonstrative method, which was practiced before Aristotle but all its rules and principles was distinguished and composed by him, in all branch of philosophy and due to its including all knowledge which was produced by mankind up to his time.

3. The philosophy of Aristotle is certainly correct and true philosophy because of his use of demonstrative method, which gives certainty, to verify its opinions in every subject matter.

4. Aristotle, who treated exhaustively all the branches of philosophy and through his own genius and original contributions set it on its feet, assigning each part to its proper place, is the true philosopher because of his giving others an account of philosophy, and also an account of the ways to it and of the ways to re-establish it.

It should be stressed that al-Fārābī did not develop his concept of the history of philosophy through a mere reading of the philosophers themselves or speculating about this issue; in this he was influenced by traditional views prevailing in the literature available to him. As Dimitri Gutas pointed out¹⁰, in the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria during the two centuries prior to the Muslim conquest, classroom discussions in the course on the prolegomena to Aristotle frequently centered on the key question of the degree to which

⁹ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Jam' bayn Ra'yay al-Hakimayn*, pp. 30-32.

¹⁰ Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and The Aristotelian Tradition* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), p. 200.

Aristotle's philosophy was identical with Plato's, and on its corollary, the original contributions to philosophy by Aristotle. The answers that were given to these questions, which were not asked in a historical context about the development of philosophical ideas but in a context of introducing the student to Aristotle's philosophy, varied in detail and emphasis, and occasionally in substance¹¹.

In his picture of the development of philosophy and his emphasizing the central place of Aristotle and his philosophy in this development al-Fārābī aimed not only to give a "scientific" description of the history of philosophy but also to create a philosophical authority for a society in which he lives. Thus, he reconstructed the history of philosophy in a way that agrees with the aim. In doing so, he made original contributions to the previous concepts of the history of philosophy and reproduced the various answers to the question of Aristotle's position in these concepts, picking out the arguments which he could use for his purpose. I will now try to present the background of al-Fārābī's aim in this reconstruction and to explain and discuss the main epistemological and political reasons behind of his regarding and presenting Aristotle as an authority.

II. The Reasons Behind of Al-Fārābī's View of Aristotle as an Authority

Before anything else, it should be stated that al-Fārābī's interpretation of Aristotle as a philosophical authority is related to his conception of certain knowledge and truth as well as his notion of what really constitutes philosophy. Al-Fārābī identifies the true philosophy with the demonstrative knowledge of the beings, conceived in themselves. When one acquires knowledge of the beings or receives instruction in them, if he perceives their ideas themselves with his intellect, and his assent to them is by means of certain demonstration, then the science that comprises these cognitions is philosophy¹². Al-Fārābī

¹¹ For Alexandrian scholars' picture of Aristotle's achievements and his position in the history of philosophy, which was transmitted into Arabic, as well as its influence particularly on Avicenna see Dimitri Gutas. *Avicenna and The Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 199-218.

¹² Al-Fārābī, *Tahsīl al-Sa'āda*, s. 44-45.

considers that Aristotle possesses this kind of philosophy in its highest level. Because he acquired knowledge of the beings by means of demonstrative method that was distinguished from all other methods, which gives untrue, imagined, or guessed knowledge about the things, in his time and, thus, his philosophy is true philosophy which gives the truth and an account of the ultimate principles as they are perceived by the intellect. For this reason Al-Fārābī tends to the philosophy of Aristotle, who used this method in the most perfect level, rather than the others'. Al-Fārābī's this attitude is connected to his theory of demonstration which occupies a central place in his philosophy. He describes the demonstration as an art causing the emergence of the truth and certainty, and causing it to be exposed and comprehended¹³. He also defines it as a syllogistic art which is acquired by using the premises of necessary certitude¹⁴. Thus, according to him, what demonstrative method gives is the true knowledge and certitude, in which what one believes to be the case can not be otherwise¹⁵.

Al-Fārābī's description of Aristotle's philosophy as the highest level reached by mankind and his seeing it as "complete, with no place in it for further investigation" and as "an art that is only learned and taught" is the result of his theory of demonstration. Since, philosophy becomes most complete, most excellent, and most perfect by relying on the demonstrative method¹⁶. Thus, Al-Fārābī's conception of Aristotle as an authority is the consequence of his considering the demonstrative philosophy and science as an authority. Only the demonstrative method is a universal method and only it can give universal theoretical and practical knowledge. In parallel with this approach al-Fārābī makes a comparison between logic and grammar, and upholds a conception of logic as a sort of universal grammar that provides those rules that must be

¹³ Al-Fārābī, *al-Tawṭīa* in Rafiq al-'Ajam (ed.), *Al-Mantiq 'ind al-Fārābī*, I (Beirut: Dār al-Mashreq, 1985), p. 57.

¹⁴ Al-Fārābī, *al-Burhān* in Majid Fakhry (ed.), *Al-Mantiq 'ind al-Fārābī*, IV (Beirut: Dār al-Mashreq, 1987), p. 62.

¹⁵ Al-Fārābī, *Ihsā' al-'Ulūm*, ed. 'Ali Bu Malham (Beirut: Dār wa Maktaba al-Hilāl, 1996), p. 38; see also Deborah L. Black, "Al-Fārābī" in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (ed.) *History of Islamic Philosophy*, I (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 184.

¹⁶ See Al-Fārābī, *Ihsā' al-'Ulūm*, pp. 45-47.

followed in order to reason correctly in any language whatsoever. Grammar, on the other hand, is always confined to providing the rules established by convention for the use of the particular language of a particular culture. As al-Fārābī puts it in his *Ihsā' al-'Ulūm*, “this art [of logic] is analogous to the art of grammar, in that the relation of the art of logic to the intellect and the intelligibles is like the relation of the art of grammar to language and expressions. That is, to every rule for expressions which the science of grammar provides us, there is a corresponding [rule] for intelligibles which the science of logic provides us”¹⁷. By arguing in this way that logic gives the universal rules of reasoning correctly and grammar provides the rules of particular language of particular culture, Al-Fārābī also responds to the idea put by some grammarians of his time such as Abū Sa'īd al-Sīrāfī (d. 368/979) that the philosophers' interest in Greek logic is nothing but an attempt to substitute the grammar of Greek for the grammar of Arabic¹⁸. Consequently, Al-Fārābī's aim is to show that Aristotle's philosophy is a universal philosophy and science due to his basing this philosophy on the universal rules of reasoning provided by the art of logic that “improves the calculative part of the soul, directs it toward certainty and the useful approaches to instruction and study, makes it discern the things that deflect from certainty... , and also makes one discern how to articulate with tongue”¹⁹. On the other hand, for al-Fārābī, it might not be possible to say that Greek philosophy is really “foreign” to them, the people of al-'Iraq, or it belongs only to Greeks; because, as quoted from al-Fārābī before, this philosophy “existed anciently among the Chaldeans, who are the people of al-'Iraq, subsequently reaching the people of Egypt, from there transmitted to the Greeks”, and it was handed down from the Greeks, Plato and Aristotle, to the people of al-'Iraq, the place of origin again.

It could be asked here that why al-Fārābī gave so special importance to the demonstrative method or to the Aristotle's logic that based on the theory of

¹⁷ Al-Fārābī, *Ihsā' al-'Ulūm*, pp. 27, 28, 34-35.

¹⁸ Deborah L. Black, “Al-Fārābī”, p. 180.

¹⁹ Al-Fārābī, *Falsafatu Aristūtālīs* (“The Philosophy of Aristotle”) in Muhsin Mahdi (tr.), *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. 82.

demonstration. It should be stressed that al-Fārābī attempts to base his thought on universality and certainty. According to him religion and religious sciences are not able to give that. Since, religion is the expression of universal philosophical truth in popular language, using the tools provided by the logical arts of rhetoric and poetics. Al-Fārābī asserts that "philosophy is prior to religion in time", and explains: "religion is similar (*shabīh*) to philosophy". Religion supplies an imaginative account of, and employs persuasion about, things of which philosophy possesses direct and demonstrative knowledge. The function of religion is instruction of multitude and vulgar of the nations and the cities in the theoretical and practical things or affairs which have already been discovered in the philosophy²⁰. Moreover, "the theoretical views contained in religion have their demonstration in the area of theoretical philosophy, and are taken over into religion without demonstration. The two parts of which religion is composed [the theoretical and the practical] are both under philosophy"²¹. The religious sciences such as jurisprudence and theology are also rhetorical due to their dependence on religion which is prior to jurisprudence and theology in time²². Accordingly, al-Fārābī has found a great ground in Aristotle's *Analytica Posteriora*, the Book of Demonstration (*Kitāb al-Burhān*)²³ which gives complete account of demonstrative methodology to create and reconstruct his universal philosophy based on certainty. "And since the knowledge that man ought to possess and according to the requirements of which he ought to act is

²⁰ Al-Fārābī, *Tahsīl al-Sa'āda*, pp. 44-45. See also *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, pp. 153 ff.; *Mabādi' Ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fādila* in Richard Walzer (ed. and trans.), *Al-Fārabi on the Perfect State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 280.

²¹ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Milla*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dār al-Mashreq, 1968), p. 47.

²² Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, pp. 131-132.

²³ Al-Fārābī indeed attaches special importance to the *Analytica Posteriora*. In the account of the parts of logic in his *Ihsā' al-'Ulūm* he holds that the fourth part among all the parts of logic (i.e., the Apodictics, the *Analytica Posteriora*) is the most effective for the achievement of dignity and leadership (*huwa ashadduhā taqadduman fī al-sharaf wa l-riyāsa*). And he maintains that all the other parts of logic as either preparatory to or explanatory of it. Al-Fārābī, *Ihsā' al-'Ulūm*, pp. 46-47. Sarah Stroumsa rightly states that al-Fārābī's choice of words suggests a more activist interpretation. Both adding the two words, *taqaddum* and *riyāsa*, which are pregnant with political connotations, al-Fārābī loads the *Analytica Posteriora* with power. See Sarah Stroumsa, "Al-Fārābī and Maimonides on the Christian Philosophical Tradition..." , p. 270, note 25.

the certain science and not any other, it follows that he should strive after the certain science in everything he investigates, be it natural or voluntary”²⁴. In this way, Aristotle’s *Analytica Posteriora* provided al-Fārābī with a coherent universal system of deduction and demonstration, comprising all levels of rational activity, and serving as a guide for division and hierarchical classification of the sciences, leading up to the First Philosophy, metaphysics²⁵.

Al-Fārābī has not only epistemological but also political considerations to interpret Aristotle and his philosophy as an authority. Al-Fārābī’s time was marked by rival dynasties, beginning in the ninth century and the revolt of the Zanj, or slave group, in southern Iraq²⁶. He saw the religious community of his time in serious danger of corruption and dissolution. For this reason, as a true philosopher he offered the true philosophy represented by Plato and Aristotle not only as an epistemology of the rational sciences but also as a remedy for the *Dār al-Islām*²⁷.

The philosopher has an important political responsibility and he must, in so far as possible, realize his theoretical construction of the state in time and space. “The actions which the philosopher should perform are the imitation (*al-tashabbuh*) of the creator according to man’s capacity”²⁸. “The imitation of the creator” refers actually to the task of founding an ideal political community. The philosopher acquires knowledge of the world and God. He constructs an ideal state which resembles the world which proceeded from God. Then, his task is to imitate God by founding such a state²⁹. The relationship of the philosopher to the state is the same as that of God to the world. Therefore, it has become clear

²⁴ Al-Fārābī, *Falsafatu Aristūtālīs*, p. 81.

²⁵ Gerhard Endress, “The Defense of Reason: The Plea for Philosophy in the Religious Community”, *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften*, 6 (1990), pp. 16-23.

²⁶ D.P. Brewster, “Al-Farabi’s ‘Book of Religion’”, *Abr Nahrain*, XIV (1974), pp. 29-30.

²⁷ Gerhard Endress, “The Defense of Reason...”, p. 21.

²⁸ Al-Fārābī, *Risāla fīmā Yanbagī an Yuqaddama Qabla Ta’allum al-Falsafa* in Friedrich Dieterici (ed.), *Alfārābī’s philosophische Abhandlungen* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1890), p. 53.

²⁹ Lawrence V. Berman, “The Political Interpretation of the Maxim: The Purpose of Philosophy is the Imitation of God”, *Studia Islamica* 15 (1961), pp. 53-58.

that "the idea of the Philosopher, Supreme Ruler, Prince, Legislator and *Imam* is but a single idea. No matter which one of these words you take"³⁰.

Moreover, "he who knows with certainty the end and that by which one arrives at the end- that is, he who is equipped for truth by nature- ought to labor for a human end"³¹. Philosophy gives not only true rational interpretation of the universe, but also "Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City", a city whose existence is willed outside the soul. Since, "when the theoretical sciences are isolated and their possessor does not have the faculty for exploiting them for the benefit of others, they are defective philosophy [*falsafatun nāqisatun*]. To be a truly perfect philosopher [*al-faylasūf al-kāmil*] one has to possess both theoretical sciences and the faculty for exploiting them for the benefit of all others according to their capacity". In contrast to the true philosopher, "the false philosopher (*al-faylasūf al-bātil*) is who acquire the theoretical sciences without achieving the utmost perfection so as to be able to introduce others to what he knows insofar as their capacity permits. The vain philosopher (*al-faylasūf al-bahraj*) is he who learns the theoretical sciences, but without going any further and without being habituated to doing the acts considered virtuous by a certain religion or the generally accepted noble acts"³². As quoted from *Tahsīl al-Sa'āda* above, "the philosophy that answers to this description was handed down to us by the Greeks from Plato and Aristotle only. Both have given us an account of philosophy, but not without giving us also an account of the ways to it and of the ways to re-establish it when it becomes confused or extinct".

The implications of these statements of al-Fārābī, together with our knowledge of the political and intellectual climate of his age, leads us to infer that he considered philosophy to have become defective and almost extinct, and that his intention is the revival of philosophy, the restoration of it³³. Therefore

³⁰ Al-Fārābī, *Tahsīl al-Sa'āda*, p. 47.

³¹ Al-Fārābī, *Falsafatu Aristūtālīs*, p. 92.

³² Al-Fārābī, *Tahsīl al-Sa'āda*, pp. 43, 48.

³³ Fauzi M. Najjar, "Fārābī's Political Philosophy and Shī'ism", *Studia Islamica* 14 (1961), p. 65. In similar manner Richard Walzer comments on al-Fārābī's statements quoted above: "Al-Fārābī did not... claim simply to follow the Greek philosophers. He believed that Greek

he worked out his plan to re-establish the true philosophy by depending on its real sources, recomposing *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* and to design “the virtuous city” based on this philosophy, as Plato had attempted it before him. In his *Falsafatu Aflātūn* (“The Philosophy of Plato”), a treatise presents an explanation of how Plato set forth his philosophical investigation in the various dialogues³⁴, al-Fārābī puts it in the name of Plato: “Therefore it became evident that one needs another city and another nation, different from the cities and nations existing at that time. Therefore he had to investigate what distinguishes that city... This will be a city that will not lack anything that leads its citizens to happiness. Now if it should be decided that this city will have *all* the things by means of which happiness is achieved, it is indispensable for its inhabitants that the princely craft in it be true philosophy, that philosophers constitute its highest part, and that those who hold other ranks be subordinate to them”³⁵.

In order to accomplish this plan, al-Fārābī attempted to re-establish the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, demonstrating their philosophical superiority. So, he ended *Tahsīl al-Sa’āda* with the following words: “We shall begin by expounding first the philosophy of Plato and the ranks of order of his philosophy. We shall begin with the first part of the philosophy of Plato, and then order one part of his philosophy after another until we reach its end. We

philosophy was in full decay in Greece, that the ‘Hellens’, the pagan Greeks, existed no more, but that the surviving works of Plato and Aristotle themselves could guide those who were about to revive it and show the way to restoring its glory in the land of Iraq from which, according to late Greek opinion as shared by Al-Fārābī, it had originally come”. Richard Walzer, “Islamic Philosophy” in Richard Walzer, *Greek into Arabic* (Oxford: Bruno Cassier, 1962).

³⁴ Paul E. Walker maintains that “the Aristotelian bias which is quite characteristic of al-Fārābī as a whole controls the manner in which he discovers the “philosophy” of Plato. It is no accident that Plato’s account precedes and prepares the way for Aristotle because al-Fārābī begins with an Aristotelian understanding of what philosophy is. This is equally true of the material which precedes the philosophy of Plato, which is given there in in al-Fārābī’s own name”. Paul E. Walker, “Platonism in Islamic Philosophy”, *Studia Islamica* 79 (1994), p. 16.

³⁵ Al-Fārābī, *Falsafatu Aflātūn* (“The Philosophy of Plato”) in Muhsin Mahdi (ed.), *Alfarabi’s Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), pp. 64-65. See also Gerhard Endress, “The Defense of Reason...”, p. 21.

shall do the same with the philosophy presented to us by Aristotle, beginning with the first part of his philosophy"³⁶.

While re-establishing the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, al-Fārābī tended to eliminate, in his interpretation of Aristotle, whatever divergences from Plato threatened to destroy the unity of Greek thought, as he understood it. He used some sources as the bases of the attempt to bring Plato and Aristotle into harmony. Al-Fārābī's argument in his work *al-Jam' bayn Ra'yay al-Hakīmayn Aflātūn al-Ilāhī wa-Aristūtālīs* ("The Reconciliation of the Views of the Two Sages, Plato the Divine and Aristotle") conducted against the background of an Islamic controversy which saw in the apparent discord of the two major proponents of Greek philosophy a serious challenge to their authority, as indeed to the reiterated claims of their followers that they were the two infallible spokesmen of the truth³⁷. His goal, in his book, was to show, first, that the two primary philosophic authorities did not disagree; that there is a solid philosophic front which cannot be ignored by claiming that philosophers contradict one another and that the philosophic tradition does not, therefore, provide a reliable way to knowledge; and secondly, that philosophic convictions do not necessarily disagree with religious convictions and that one need not suspect philosophers of unbelief; the suspicion that the main philosophic tradition is opposed to religious dogma will discourage believers from studying the works of Plato and Aristotle. In his work he addresses a particular audience and uses some proofs to persuade this audience that Plato and Aristotle cannot be suspect

³⁶ Al-Fārābī, *Tahsīl al-Sa'āda*, p. 50.

³⁷ Majid Fakhry, "Al-Farabi and the Reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle" in Majid Fakhry, *Philosophy, Dogma and the Impact of Greek Thought in Islam* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1994), p. 473. One of those who saw in the apparent disagreement among the Greek philosophers a serious challenge to their authority is the famous theologian Abū Hātim al-Rāzī (d. ca. 330/929), contemporary of al-Fārābī. In his book which has a special chapter examining the discords of the philosophers, he refuses the authority of the philosophers on this base and puts the religious knowledge as an authority instead. For his argument see Abū Hātim al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-Nubuwwah*, ed. Salāh al-Sāwī-Gholēm Rezā A'vānī (Tehran: Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1397/1977), pp. 10-13, 131 ff.

as they are reputed to be, and that one should not listen to contentious people who charge these virtuous, wise men with things of which they are innocent³⁸.

In doing so, al-Fārābī not only reinterpreted and reconstructed the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle in a new philosophical system established by him but also “corrected” what he takes to be the previous misreadings of Plato and Aristotle which weaken their being conceived as an authority. Since, in his opinion, neither the Platonists (*ashābu Aflātūn*) nor the Aristotelians (*ashābu Aristūtālīs*) had succeeded in understanding of their ideas in a true way. Most of the commentators of Plato and Aristotle had misinterpreted their works on some issues and distorted the real meanings of their texts³⁹. In addition to it, he also Islamized the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, as he did it, for instance, in his *Kitāb al-Jam’*. In this book, al-Fārābī attempted to show that Aristotle supports the idea that the world was created by God, instantaneously, in no time and he believes in the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Indeed, we owe it to Plato and Aristotle to have lighted upon the notion of creation in the first instance. For all the ancient philosophers, Pagan, Jewish or Magian, speak of natural processes in terms of becoming and development. These processes are logically at variance with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, advanced by Plato and Aristotle and confirmed by revelation. The difference between the two doctrines, however, is that the latter addresses the masses at large in a manner proportionate to their degree of understanding, whereas the former is reserved for the philosophically initiated few. Moreover he claimed that the survival of the soul after death and its susceptibility to reward and punishment, on which Plato dwells in the *Republic*, is not ruled out by Aristotle⁴⁰.

³⁸ Muhsin Mahdi, “Philosophical Literature” in M.J. Lee Young (ed.), *Religion, Learning and Science in the ‘Abbasid Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990), pp. 78-79.

³⁹ See Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Jam’ bayn Ra’yay al-Hakīmayn*, p. 47-50; *Maqāla fī Agrād Mā ba’da al-tabīa* in Friedrich Dieterici (ed.), *Alfārābī’s philosophische Abhandlungen* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1890), p. 34.

⁴⁰ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Jam’ bayn Ra’yay al-Hakīmayn*, pp. 58-65, 73-74. See also Majid Fakhry, “Al-Farabi and the Reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle”, pp. 477-478. In this text Al-Fārābī claims that on the crucial question of the eternity of the world, alleged to have been affirmed by Aristotle and denied by Plato, the disagreement is only apparent. Those who subscribe to the view that Aristotle supports the eternity of the world have been misled by the some

In fact, from the other perspective, al-Fārābī's interest in demonstrating Plato and Aristotle as the authority of philosophy were the result of his aim to declare philosophy as a universal system of knowledge, comprising all the levels of theoretical and practical science, and necessary safeguard for the integrity and salvation of the religious community itself. He thought that the unity of Islamic society is based on the unity of knowledge and the oneness of aim which is provided only by the true philosophy. Furthermore, he considered that "in the association [*al-ijtimā*] for virtue there occurs no difference and no disagreement, because the aim of virtue is one... They are never at variance so long as their aim is one. Disagreement only occurs through difference of desires and discrepancy of aims. Then there comes the behavior which makes association impossible, because each has a different aim and a different way. These with their analogy also are mischievous and wrong, not good like the first aim and the first association, to seek for truth, attain happiness, and love knowledge and excellent things... Since truth is the aim pursued in everything and likewise good and virtue, the seekers after truth understood their aim and knew it and did not disagree in regard to it. What is not truth and virtue is a path which cannot be trodden, and when a man walks on it he goes astray and is perplexed. The others did not understand their aim and were at variance because of the diversity of their aim, and they trod a path which did not lead to their goal, even though they did not know it, because in the soul the search for truth is natural, even if it comes short of it"⁴¹. Thus, he integrated the sciences in the framework of a formal axiomized system, a system of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. In this system theoretical and practical sciences, philosophy and religion, the universal, rational sciences and the disciplines specific to the

statements in his works such as *De Caelo* and *Topica*. This view is far from being the case, since it is understood from the statements of *Physics* and *Metaphysics* that Aristotle supports the idea that the world is created by God in no time. Hence on the twofold question of the existence of God and the creation of the world in time, Aristotle's works speak eloquently in no uncertain terms.

⁴¹ Al-Fārābī, *Fnsūl al-Madani* ("Aphorisms of the Statesman"), ed. and trans. D.M. Dunlop (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 77-78.

religious and linguistic community, are shown to be complementary parts of the same hierarchical system of cognition and interpretation⁴².

In this point, al-Fārābī's attitude is very different from that of al-Kindī⁴³. From the very outset, al-Kindī intimates that he does not consider philosophy, or at least philosophy as set forth by Aristotle, to be the highest pursuit. In his *Risālah fī Kammiyyat Kutub Aristūtālīs*, in explaining what philosophy is for Aristotle, then, he intends to go further and to clarify how one reaches the ends of another sort of intellectual nobility as well as to exhort to such efforts. According to him, "the human sciences (*al-'ulūm al-insāniyyah*)... are lower in rank than the divine science (*al-'ilm al-ilāhī*)" which is acquired instantaneously and effortlessly without any need of wish and time, or process of learning and instruction⁴⁴. The implication of this statement set forth by al-Kindī in this treatise is that there is a ranking of the two different approaches to science, the human and the divine, and the human is lower than the divine⁴⁵. Thus, al-Kindī sets up the lines of defense for philosophy; but he defends it as an autonomous system of reference, putting it in lower position in rank than the religion. However, al-Fārābī, instead of defending the authority of the ancient sages in a limited, self-sufficient realm of science, proceeds to defend the encompassing validity of reason, submitting all domains of knowledge to demonstrative sciences⁴⁶.

⁴² Gerhard Endress, "The Defense of Reason...", pp. 15-16.

⁴³ It should be remembered that the early history of Islamic philosophy displays two tendencies, or lines of philosophical development. One is associated with al-Kindī and his school and the other with the Aristotelians of Bagdād, Abū Bişr Mattā, Al-Fārābī, and their followers. These two tendencies show different tendencies in their understanding of Aristotelian tradition and in their approach to the philosophical sciences. For a comprehensive examination of their distinct tendencies in their understanding of Aristotelian metaphysics, for instance, see Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and The Aristotelian Tradition*, p. 237 ff.

⁴⁴ Al-Kindī, *Risālah fī Kammiyyat Kutub Aristūtālīs* in Muhammad 'Abd al-Hādī Abū Rīdah (ed.), *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-Falsafīyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1950), p. 372.

⁴⁵ Charles E. Butterworth, "Al-Kindī and the Beginnings of Islamic Political Philosophy" in Charles E. Butterworth (ed.), *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 18-32.

⁴⁶ Gerhard Endress, "The Defense of Reason...", pp. 15, 19-20.

Consequently, al-Fārābī unified all philosophical and religious sciences in single and universal system of knowledge. He reconciled not only Plato with Aristotle but also philosophy with religion in this system. In doing so, he historically and logically demonstrated, first, that Plato and Aristotle represent the true philosophy and “in what they presented, their purpose is the same, and that they intended to offer one and the same philosophy”⁴⁷, secondly, showed that there is no contradiction between the true philosophy and the true religion. Since “religion is an imitation of philosophy” and if it is based on the true philosophy it will be the true religion. This kind of religion is the religion based on a philosophy that is fully developed after all the syllogistic arts had been distinguished from each other. When a philosophy is not yet demonstrative, based on certainty, but verifies its opinions by rhetoric, dialectic, or sophistry, it may contain untrue opinions. If a religion is subsequently based on such a philosophy, it, too, will contain many untrue opinions⁴⁸.

Al-Fārābī gives the true philosophy and philosophers the role of construction of the virtuous city in his project, legitimizing their authorities in the ideal city. Since, according to him, “nations and the citizens of cities are composed of some who are the elect and others who are the vulgar. The vulgar confine themselves, or should be confined, to theoretical cognitions that are in conformity with unexamined common opinion. The elect do not confine themselves in any of their theoretical cognitions to what is in conformity with unexamined common opinion but reach their conviction and knowledge on the basis of premises subjected to thorough scrutiny”⁴⁹. “Therefore the elect absolutely are the philosophers”⁵⁰ and “whoever has a more perfect mastery of the art that qualifies him for assuming an office is more appropriate for inclusion among the elect. Therefore it follows that the most elect of the elect is the supreme ruler. It would appear that this is so because he is the one who does not confine himself in anything at all to what is in conformity with unexamined

⁴⁷ Al-Fārābī, *Tahsīl al-Sa'āda*, p. 50.

⁴⁸ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, p153.

⁴⁹ Al-Fārābī, *Tahsīl al-Sa'āda*, p. 41.

⁵⁰ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Hurūf*, p. 133.

common opinion... The result is that the supreme ruler and he who possesses the science that encompasses the intelligibles with certain demonstrations belong to the elect. The rest are the vulgar and the multitude"⁵¹. Accordingly, the true philosopher who is the elite is not only philosophical authority but also political authority in the virtuous city. Because the science the philosopher possesses it is "the superior science and the one with the most perfect [claim to rule or to] authority. The rest of the authoritative sciences are subordinate to this science"⁵²; as a result, the vulgar that possesses the rest of the sciences in this city are subordinate to the true authority, the philosopher. In Aristotle's words, "... the superior is more nearly wisdom than the subsidiary; for the wise man should give orders, not receive them; nor should he obey others, but the less wise should obey him"⁵³.

Conclusion

Although al-Fārābī presents Aristotle as a philosophical authority and emphasizes the essential place of his philosophy for Islamic milieu, re-establishing and reinterpreting this philosophy in a way that agrees with his epistemological and political projects, he rejects the narrow interpretation of theoretical and practical perfection as the possession of the philosophy of Aristotle. It should be stressed that the works of Aristotle are not but only a system, method, or law that is used to get a particular end, that is, the ultimate happiness which is redefined by al-Fārābī. By arguing in this way he opposes

⁵¹ Al-Fārābī, *Tahsīl al-Sa'āda*, p. 42.

⁵² Al-Fārābī, *Tahsīl al-Sa'āda*, p. 42. By "the rest of the authoritative sciences" he "mean[s] the second and the third, and that which is derived from them, since these sciences merely follow the example of that science and are employed to accomplish the purpose of that science, which is supreme happiness and the final perfection to be achieved by man". He also explains "the second and the third, and that which is derived from them" as follows: "Provided all of these groups exist in nations, four sciences will emerge. First, the theoretical virtue through which the beings become intelligible with certain demonstrations. Next, these same intelligibles acquired by persuasive methods. Subsequently, the science that comprises the similitudes of these intelligibles, accepted by persuasive methods. Finally, the sciences extracted from these three for each nation". *Ibid*, pp. 39-40, 42.

⁵³ Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, with an English translation by Hugh Tredennick, ed. T.E. Page, E. Capps, and others (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1961), I (A) 2, 982 a15-20.

the blind acceptance of Aristotle's authority and the possession of his philosophy imitatively.

Toward the end of *Fusūl al-Madanī*. (*Fusūl* no. 93) al-Fārābī asks the reader to consider two men. One of whom knows what is in all the books of Aristotle, theoretical and practical, and all his actions or most of them are contrary to the prevailing morality. The second is completely ignorant of the sciences possessed by the first and all his actions are in accordance with the conventional view of what is good. al-Fārābī informs the reader that "this second man is nearer to being a philosopher than the first... and is more able to possess what the first man possesses than the first man is to possess what the second man possesses". Since "philosophy at first sight and in reality is the coming to a man of the speculative sciences [*al-'ulūm al-nazariyyah*] and the agreement of all his actions with what is good at first sight in the common opinion and in reality". According to these statements, then, the possession of the theoretical and practical sciences is not the sole aim. The real importance of these sciences put forward by Aristotle is being useful for the real end. The theoretical and practical virtues, properly understood, are never simply imitative.

Moreover, the study of Aristotle's philosophy is a conscious and creative intellectual action that necessitates certain preparation and knowledge before that. In his *Risāla fīmā Yanbagī an Yuqaddama Qabla Ta'allum al-Falsafa* ("Concerning What Must Be Known Before Taking Up the Study of Philosophy") al-Fārābī summarizes these "things" (*al-aşyā'*), which are necessary for a student to study and to know as an introduction to the works of Aristotle, in the nine points as follows: (1) the names of the philosophical schools (*al-firaq*), (2) the aim of Aristotle in every one of his works, (3) which discipline the student of the philosophy ought to study first before the study of philosophy, (4) the goal of the study of philosophy, (5) the method that is followed by those who are willing the philosophy, (6) how Aristotle used certain ways of expression in all his works, (7) the reason why Aristotle used an obscure way of expression, (8) how the man who possesses the science of philosophy and teaches it ought to behave, and (9) the things that is needed by those who are willing to study of Aristotle's works.

All these points and their detailed explanation in the *Risāla* show that al-Fārābī views the study of philosophy in general and the study of Aristotle in particular as a part of philosophical activity which includes both theoretical and practical dimension. This suggests that the study of Aristotle's philosophy naturally is based on a deep understanding of the essence of Aristotle's works, questioning and examining certain aspects of them, as well as an inclination of the student of these works towards the practical perfection by means of the knowledge which is completed by the true acting and practicing. In this way, al-Fārābī explains also "the things that is needed" to know mentioned in the ninth point as follows: the goal of Book of Logic, the benefit of Aristotle's knowledge, the reason of Aristotle's naming his works, the authenticity of his books, the order of the ranks of his works, the terms used in his books, and the divisions of all his works.

As it can be seen, al-Fārābī does not only present Aristotle's philosophy as an authority but also show how to use it for the student's own end in a way that is considered right. It means that al-Fārābī sees himself as a "man who possesses the science of philosophy and teaches it". He, as the Second Teacher (*al-Mu'allim al-Sānī*) after Aristotle, gives a measure of attitude towards Aristotle. In addition to advancing the view that the blind acceptance of Aristotle's superiority and the possession of his philosophy imitatively do not make a person philosopher and cause him to attain happiness which is acquired by means of theoretical and practical perfection, while explaining "the eighth point" mentioned above he reminds the man who teaches the philosophy of Aristotle that "the teacher's degree of love of Aristotle should not go beyond the limit that prevents him from the care more for truth [than for anybody else] and his degree of hate of Aristotle should not go beyond the limit that leads him to the denial of Aristotle". It follows that, for al-Fārābī, Aristotle is not an absolute authority whatever he says always ought to be accepted as a necessary truth. On the contrary he thinks that truth should be dearer to one than adherence to the teacher's doctrines, as the goal of philosophical activity.