Chapter 3

Causality in Al-Farabi: Aristotelian Causality and Neoplatonic Philosophy of Emanationism
Introduction

Al-Farabi was an Islamic philosopher who was influenced by Arabic translations of Greek philosophers by Nestorian Christians in Syria and Baghdad. He has been recognized as one of the most important philosophers of Islam. In tenth century, by using of Arabic translation of Aristotle, al-Farabi Attempted to bring new language that would be more philosophical and technically specific. It is suffice to say that al-Farabi had deep engagement with translated Greek philosophy and he internalized it more thoroughly than al-Kindi.

Al-Farabi also brought greater Arabic philosophical words to express ideas in Arabic context. Famous Islamic philosophy scholar Kiki Kennedy-Day says “al-Farabi marks the mid point in the growth cycle of the philosophical vocabulary: it is more exact and rigorous than in al-Kindi’s writings, but it does not yet flow as smoothly as it will in coming generation.”

He created an extraordinary philosophical system in the intellectual tradition of the Muslim world to unify the various branches of knowledge ranging from theology, metaphysics and ethics, to politics and astronomy. He has put an epoch making influences not only on his immediate successor, ibn Sina and Andalusian Muslim polymath Averroes but also on the Akbarian and Sadrian traditions.

As predecessors, the second teacher perceived philosophy into two categories; theoretical and practical, the former based on in understanding the latter in action. In theoretical philosophy, al-Farabi synthesizes the Aristotelian causal concept with neo-platonic emanationist scheme. He brings the theory of Intellect into this above mentioned metaphysical scheme which is briefly given in this chapter.

He has given much effort to logic and he believed that the base for all morality is the human individual’s ability to distinguish between good and evil. According to the

195 Kennedy-Day, Kiki,(2003), op. cit, p.13
historians he is the one who preserved some of the Aristotle's works; otherwise these might have been forgotten or destroyed during the Dark Age.

Apart from the area of Logic, al-Farabi deals with Cosmology and Metaphysics. His substantial contribution in these areas makes him an outstanding figure in Islamic thought. In his metaphysical scheme, al-Farabi interprets the Qur'anic concept of creation, God's sovereignty in the world and the fate of the soul after death. In an entirely new sprit which is not seen in the thought of his predecessors such as al-Kindi and al-Razi. According to Majid Fakhry, "Al-Farabi should be regarded, therefore, as the first system-builder in the history of Arab-Islamic thought. He built upon Plotinus's emanationist scheme a cosmological and metaphysical system that is striking for its intricacy and daring."

Unlike al-Kindi, al-Farabi has entirely different view of philosophy which is the highest product of the human mind. According to al-Farabi, philosophy is the only path to the real knowledge and it has a wide universal account. But religion is always culturally relative and one religion cannot be transported to the other religious cultural context from its own cultural context. Although, he believed that the Qur'an is a revealed truth, but it was limited to its own cultural context that which expressed its own symbolic way of truth.

He places philosophy as the highest possible activity of human being and philosophers are the selected capable agencies of God. Al-Farabi takes the position of Aristotle against immortality of Soul and he thinks that Qur'an's talks on paradise are just a symbolic expression of truth. He categorized intellect into three categories; highest, potential and lowest which will be discussed in this chapter.

**Al-Farabi: Life and Works**

Abu Nasar Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Tarkhan Ibn Auzalagh Al-Farabi, often referred as simply al-Farabi was born in the village of Wasij, Farab (now Otrar) in Turkestan, towards the end of ninth century AD. He was a native speaker of a Turkic dialect,

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Soghdian. He came from a noble family and his father had held highest military post in Samanid court. He received traditionally Islamic education before his adulthood at his native palace. When he was young, al-Farabi moved to Damascus, where he worked as a gardener-keeper. Thereafter, he went to Baghdad for his higher studies where he devoted himself to become an expert in Arabic Language. In Baghdad, al-Farabi came into contact with his teachers; among them were two Christians, the Nestorian Yuhanna ben Heilan, who was a proponent of philosophical tradition of the school of Alexandria and the leading logician of the period and translator, Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunus. Then, he spent his time to study logic, philosophy, mathematics, science, music and grammar. He acquired proficiency in different branches of knowledge and technology as well as he became authority in different languages. His mastery in logic and philosophy earned him the title of Magister secundus (Aristotle was the Magister primus), and which led him to be called as the first great Muslim philosopher.

Al-Farabi travelled to many places in Islamic heartland and studied in Damascus and Egypt. He occasionally came back to Baghdad as he considered it as a center of his education. Later on, he gave more attention to music which was highly regarded by Saif-Daula. Apart from his in-depth involvement in philosophical engagement, al-Farabi is reported to have been a skillful musician. Following his sojourn in Egypt, he returned to Damascus where he died in 950 A.D.

Al-Farabi is more recognized in Arabic philosophy than al-Kindi as he set foundations of logic in Islamic philosophical system. He has written many treatises on different subjects. Most of his books have been lost except 107 books which are now attributed to him. Out of which 43 are on logic, 11 on metaphysics, 7 on ethics, 7 on political science, 17 are on music, medicine and on sociology, and 11 are commentaries. Al-Farabi wrote many treatises specifically dealing with the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle which gave a new direction in the arena of Islamic philosophy. His attempt to harmonize both the

198 Corbin, Henry, (1962), op. cit, pp. 155-158
199 Ibid p 158
201 W. Hazmy C.H., Zainurashid Z., Hussaini R. (eds), Biography: Muslim Scholars and Scientists, p.46, 77
Aristotle's and Plato's thoughts in *al-jam' bain ra'yai al-hakimain Aflatun al-ilahi wa Aristu* is being persuaded by most of the later Islamic philosophers.\(^{202}\)

Al-Farabi's works is being used as the textbooks in various centre of learning and are still taught in different institutions in the East. Among these books: *Fusus al-Hikam*, which remained as a text book of philosophy for several centuries, and the book *Kitab al-Ihsa al 'Uloom*, which deals with the fundamental principles of Science in an effective manner.\(^{203}\)

Al-Farabi is to be credited not only with the writing of the first systematic exposition in Arabic of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Also he was the first one to have the earliest comprehensive commentaries of Aristotle's Logical Works. The measure of Al-Farabi's acquaintance with the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle can be measured from his major works which is now translated into English. His treatises on logic and commentaries on Aristotle's *Organon* opened a new tendency in Islamic philosophy and most of his predecessors followed this to explore their thought.

In *Kitab al Ihsa al Ulum*, Al-Farabi talks about five sublunary elements. According to the early notions there consist of four sublunary elements, which is fire, air, earth and water. He substantiates it with the fifth, what he explains as the "matter of the Heaven." It is the terminology (*māddah mā fī ḥaṭīdah*) of which the heaven and its various parts are made of. All the constituents consist of single matter. This inclusion is in accordance with the De caelo tradition of the late antique period according to which the heavenly matters are the most perfect one.

The Second teacher explicitly refers to the first book of the Aristotle's work *huwa fī al-juz' al-awwal min al-maqālah al-īlā min kitāb al-samā' wa al-'ālam*. Furthermore, the use of the term *maddah* is vital in the sense that, it is here, he reiterates that Heaven is something material. Ironically, he avoids the notion of material heaven in his emanationist works.


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Al-Farabi substantiates his theory of celestial matter from his work *The Philosophy of Aristotle*. The concept of aether theory had a great impact on Farabi’s observation. The former claimed that there are five primary simple bodies that constitute the world. In which the outermost moves in a circular motion. The remaining four have same material but different forms. The fifth is the primordial substance of all the rest. It actually dictates its form (suratihi) and it’s Cause (sabab). Thus, aether is the causal force of the primary bodies that constitute the world. This makes him a strong spokes person of the *De caelo* assumption of Aristotle. So, Farabi takes the aether theory in a very high esteem.

In his treatise, “Against Philoponus,” he defends Aristotle’s metaphysics against Philoponus. The latter, who is an empiricist, attacked Aristotle’s views on Cosmology. This was directly a real questioning of the aether theory which Aristotle propounded. The second teacher comes strongly against Philoponus to rescue Aristotle’s notions on Cosmology. He emphasizes that the heavenly matter is the causal element for the all the other four. Al- Farabi resists Philoponus empiricist methodology by coming in terms with *De caelo* observations of Aristotle.

The book *Ara’ ahl al-Madina al-Fadila* (The book of the Principles f the Opinions of the people of the Virtuous City), is a significant contribution to Sociology and political science, in which, Al-Farabi attempts to portrait the ideal political organization of the society through a Utopian View of the city. In this book, Al-Farabi presents a metaphysical structure in order to legitimize political system. As *al-Madina al-Fadila* goes on, it places broad Neo-platonic concepts such as Emanation (in which, everything is said to flow from the one), and the active intellect and human intellect: It describes division of labor between the active intellect and human initiative. Famous scholar Ian Richard Natton says:

“Indeed, in what is often regarded as al-Farabi’s most platonic reflection, *The books of the opinions of the virtuous city* (*kitab Ara’ Aḥl-al Madina al-Fadila*), supposedly modelled on Plato’s *Republic*, the theology appears to take over

204 Kennedy-Day, Kiki,(2003), op. cit, p.33.
from the political intent of the title and the work is utterly dominated by al-
Farabi's Well-known description of the First Being and related Neo-Platonic
matters. Only the last twelve, out of a total of thirty-seven chapters (fusul), may
be described as purely political-or, at least, more overtly political than religious
in the light of the politico-theological link in al-Farabi's thought stressed
above.206

In The Opinions, al-Farabi starts with a detailed analysis of the divine nature
and essence. In first chapter, he refers to the Deity as "The First Existent" because of its
Ontological infallibility. He opines that 'the first existent' manifests the highest perfection
which is distinguishing it from every other existent.

The central book of al-Farabi is Kitabul-Huruf (The Book of Letters), which
deals with the metaphysical terms and meanings of Arabic words used in Philosophical
discourse. The title of this book has been taken from the Greek letters in Aristotle's
Metaphysics. While Al-Farabi considered his work Kitabul-Huruf as a commentary on
Aristotle's Metaphysics that deals with the many of the same subjects, one can see the slight
differences in following the order of Aristotelian Metaphysics.

In the first and last portion of the Kitabul-Huruf (The Book of Letters), al-
Farabi devoted to bring genetic account of the origin of various disciplines, culminating in
philosophy and religion. In Part one, he discusses the Particles and the Categories such as
anna (that), mata (when) from the particles then he brings the categories followed by Nisba
(relation). In second part, al-Farabi discusses language in terms of relationship between
nations and languages and in fact the third part is on "interrogative particles."207

His treatise, The Aim of Aristotle's Metaphysics, brings to light the aim and
divisions of the book, which is written by Aristotle titled Metaphysics. Al-Farabi opined that
none of the ancient philosophers have commented on this book in a correct and proper

207 Ibid, p.35
manner. This treatise explains the essential differences of three sciences namely, natural science, mathematics and theology.

**Al-Farabi and Greek Legacy**

Islamic philosophy actually can be taken as a mixture, blend or synthesis of Aristotelian, Platonic, Neoplatonic and of course Islamic doctrines. In this category of synthesizing Greek philosophy, al-Farabi is taken as the forerunner. The greatest quality of Farabi was to solve the conflict within western philosophy and resolve it in favour of his religious faith and Islamic world view. His famous political writings include *The Harmonization of the Opinions of Plato and Aristotle*, *The Virtuous City*, *The Political Regime* etc.

The second teacher followed a tradition of philosophical studies based solely on an accurate knowledge of Aristotle plus the Political teachings of Plato without going in depth to their theological assumptions. Al-Farabi presents three separate and largely independent accounts of philosophy. At first in his own name, another in the name of Plato and third in the name of Aristotle, without attempting to harmonize any doctrines or teachings of the two masters. He departs from this course in two instances. At the end of *The Attainment of Happiness (thahseel al-Saada)*, he admits that both philosophers have the same aim and both had the same philosophy in presenting their thoughts.\(^{208}\)

At the beginning of the *Philosophy of Aristotle*, al-Farabi opines that Aristotle had views similar to that of Plato on the concept of “Perfection of Man”. But, Farabi was dissatisfied with the lack of sufficient evidence. This was the reason he took an alternate position to proceed differently. In the Book of Letters (*Kitab Al Huruf*) he observes that genuine or demonstrative (*burhaniyah*) philosophy was preceded in time by dialectical, sophistical and other modes of false logical discourse. The real upheaval, according to him was the rise of religion or humanly speaking, which was a real platform for the rise of

\(^{208}\) Muhsin Mahdi, Al-Farabi’s Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, p. 5
philosophy. Its discourse entirely took a different path. The major method was to replace philosophy’s theoretical concepts with purely imaginative representation.

The second teacher had grave problems in the practical application of philosophy. Though his major philosophical output has been influenced by Aristotelian thought, his practical philosophy is based on that of Plato. In accordance with the Republic of Plato, al-Farabi emphasizes that philosophy is both theoretical and practical disciplines. He condemned those philosophers who did not apply their erudition in practical pursuits. He labeled them as futile philosophers.

The ideal society, according to him, is directed towards the realization of true happiness, which can be taken as a sort of philosophical enlightenment. In Farabian terms, an ideal philosopher must imbibe all the necessary arts of rhetoric and poetics to communicate abstract truths to ordinary people as well as having achieved enlightenment himself. David C. Reisman quotes from Al-Farabi’s Appearance of Philosophy:

"Philosophy as an academic subject became widespread in the days of the (Ptolemaic) kings of the Greeks after the death of Aristotle in Alexandria until the end of the woman (ie; Cleopatra’s) reign. The teaching continued unchanged in Alexandria, after the death of Aristotle, through the reign of thirteen Kings....... Thus it went until the coming of Christianity. Then the teaching came to an end in Rome, while it continued in Alexandria, until the king of the Christians looked into the matter." 

Though admittedly philosophy gained widespread popularity in the days of Ptolemaic kings, al-Farabi was not unaware of pre-Socratic philosophers such as Heraclitus and Empedocles. In fact, all Greek philosophers- Socratic and pre-Socratic- were held in very

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209 Corbin, Henry, (1962), op. cit, p.53
210 Corbin, H, (1993), op. cit, p. 54.
high regard by al-Farabi as well as other proponents of Islamic philosophy and theology. The philosophers themselves were known as “the wise” (hakim, Plural Hukama).  

Al-Farabi was wholly influenced by Greek thought. In his understanding of Epistemology and his emphasis on logic, al-Farabi is “Aristotelian through and through.” In his *Enumeration of the Sciences*, the second teacher identified eight major headings under which knowledge may be classified. And the first two headings are the science of language and science of logic which are then followed by mathematical sciences, physics, metaphysics, civil science, jurisprudence, scholastic theology. Here, the emphasis and the primacy accorded to language and logic is entirely Aristotelian.

But, when looking into metaphysical questions of what happiness is or the cause of such happiness, the second teacher shows having been more influenced by platonistic thought than Aristotelian logic. According to Majid Fakhry, “In his works, al-Farabi identifies man’s perfection with the knowledge of God, His unity, wisdom and justice, adding that the true philosopher is one who seeks likeness unto God (homoiosis Theo) as far as is humanly possible’, as Plato actually states in Theaetetus, 176 b.” Further, Fakhry notes that

“In the treatise *the Philosophy of Plato, Its Parts and the Order of Its Parts*, al-Farabi appears to be fully conversant with these translations in addition to some other Greek source, which may have embodied a summary of the subject-matter of all the Dialogues in an Arabic translation. He begins his exposition of Plato’s philosophy by an account of his statement in the Alcibiades that human perfection does not consist in a sound body, goodlooks, political office, prosperity, a noble birth or a large company of friends and kin. That perfection, with which human happiness is bound up, consists instead in acquiring genuine knowledge (*'ilm*) and leading a virtuous way of life (sirah).”

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214 Fakhry, Majid, (2002), op. cit, p.17
215 Ibid, p.17
Al-Farabi and Neo-Platonism

Islamic Neoplatonism developed on account of the impact of both Plotinus and Aristotle. The city of Alexandria into which the Arab armies of Islam marched in AD 642 had been the hub of lot of philosophic endeavors. Plotinus, the founding father of Neoplatonism, studied in Alexandria for eleven years under the scholar Ammonius Hierocles. The Alexandrian philosophical syllabus was imbued with Neoplatonism and quoted with Aristotelianism. Alexandria was one of the major cities to promote the rise of Neoplatonism before the rise of Islam.\textsuperscript{216}

Neoplatonism is generally a religious philosophy and Neolatonists can be considered mystics. It is a form of idealistic monism which combines the elements of polytheism. Plotinus taught the existence of an ineffable and transcendent one from which emanated the rest of the universe as a sequence of lesser beings.

It is with the works of two philosophers that Islamic Neoplatonism reaches its apotheosis where the Neoplatonic concepts is developed and integrated into metaphysics of being. Al-Farabi is rightly regarded as a father and founder of Islamic Neoplatonism. Ibn Sina is often considered to be Islam’s greatest Neoplatonic philosopher. Farabi has a complex scheme of emanation with ten intellects emanating from the necessary being. Al-Farabi’s emanation constitutes a bridge between the unknowable God and earthbound humanity.

The platonic reflection in Farabi is very much contained in his work, \textit{The Book of the Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City}. This work is supposedly molded on Plato’s republic, in which al-Farabi deals with his description of the first being and the Neoplatonic matters. He revived the study of Neoplatonism through this treatise and he presented his own philosophical system in a Neoplatonic mould. He didn’t limit his search for order into theology only, but it has found its place in politics too. He established a chosen hierarchical method for each. For Farabi, this order starts from the wise ruler in the virtuous city who

\textsuperscript{216} Ian Richard Natton, Neo-Platonism in Islamic Philosophy, www.muslimphilosophy.com
ranks its citizens in the same way the God ranks all the natural phenomena beginning with
him and dissenting to prime matter and elements. 217

Al-Farabi’s work *al-Madina al-Fadila* gives a clear picture of dominant
Neoplatonic elements in his thought. In this books he presents ‘The Theory of Ten
Intelligences’ in order to give explanation for the relationship between the God, heavenly
bodies and terrestrial world. This is quite similar to Neoplatonic emanation theory. 218

The second teacher’s hierarchy starts from the One, i.e. God is necessary by
himself. Farabi called this necessary one as ‘the First.’ From this flows a second being which
is called by Farabi as the ‘First intellect.’ A total of ten intellects flow form first being which
is God. The first intellect comprehends the First being (God) and in effect to that
comprehension a third being (The Second intellect) coming to exist. Each and every intellect
in his ten hierarchies is related to astronomical phenomena.

In its activity, the second teacher’s active intellect takes the role of emanation
of forms in the sublunar world which is resembled to Plotinus’ Universal Soul and its activity.
Richard Netton notes that “As with much of Al-Farabi’s writing,... form is emanated to the
inhabitants of sublunar world by the active or agent intellect an adaptation, albeit a
Neoplatonic one of Plotinus’ doctrine of the emanation of the form by the universal soul.” 219

The second teacher divided intellect into the “active intellect” (*al aql al-fail*),
“potential intellect” (*al aql al-hayulani*), and acquired intellect (*al aql al-mustafad*). The
active intellect is seen in Plotinus as the nous and in Plato as the “world of ideas” or the logos
of Philosophy. The ‘potential intellect’ here is the potentiality to acquire eternal truth which
subsists in the “active intellect.” 220

For him, the acquired intellect is learned knowledge or the level where human
intellect can have the idea of abstract things which has no connection with concrete things.

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219 Ian Richard Natton, (1999), op. cit, p. 43.
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Mohd Noor Nabi notes that according to al-Farabi the acquired intellect "is a kind of intuition and inspiration, or in another words, it's a kind of immediate apprehension. This is the noblest level of human apprehension and it is reached only by few. This acquired intellect rises to the level of communion, ecstasy and inspiration." 221

His explanation of Acquired intellect is equivalent to Plotinus’ intuition and inspiration. Latter explains that intuition is as a form of knowledge its in ‘altogether in one’. The known object of Knowledge is acquired in its totality. Therefore, this intuitive knowledge is possible without having any intermediary process. 222

Al-Farabi’s affinity towards Neoplatonism can be traced from his references to God in a negative method where he describes that God is ‘indivisible’, indefinable, immutability, immateriality and ‘he has no partner, etc. The similar negative metaphors are used by Plotinus in enneads. He uses the names ‘the One’ as “ineffable,” “formless”, “without intelligence”, “non-being”, “without dimensions” and “without limits”. 223 But, Richard Walzer views that “al-Farabi does not share the uncompromising negative theology of the main trend of Neo-Platonic teaching, that is, he does not describe God exclusively by what he is not.” 224

The Qur’anic interpretation of transcendence of the God ‘unto whom nothing is like’ (Qur’an 42:9) is held up by Islamic Neoplatonism. It does not match its views on the origination of the world with the Qur’anic concept of creation ex-nihilo and in time. Both the views - rationally plausible interpretation of the origination of the world and the Qura'nic creationism- are utterly irreconcilable.

Al-Ghazali’s blatant attack on Islamic Neo-Platonism, and its apostles Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, in his great polemic treatise, The Incoherence of Philosophers is mainly

221 Noor Nabi, Mohd., 1997, p. 66.
223 Stamatellos, Giannis (2007), Plotinus and the Presocratics: A philosophical study of Presocratic influences in Plotinus’ Enneads, New York: State University of New York, p.34.
marked by three questions; the eternity of the world, the denial of the resurrection of the body and the denial of God’s knowledge of particulars. These three questions are fully conflict with the fundamentals of Islam. Therefore, Ghazali declared both al-Farabi and ibn Sina as infidels (takfir). 225

After devastating onslaught of Ghazali, and Ash`arites in general, Neolatonic thoughts continue to exist in Sufi circles. Consequently, the Ishraqi philosophers led by Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (d1191) did successful reconciliation of Neoplatonic thoughts with mysticism. According to Suhravardi, the peripatetic philosophers al- Farabi and ibn Sina misunderstood the teaching of Plotinus. At the same time, Suhravardi accepted the Neoplatonic emanation scheme of Al-Farabi, but he replaced Farabi’s hierarchy of intellects by hierarchy of lights. At the top of the hierarchy, Surawardi placed the light of lights (Nu”r al-Anwa”r) which is equivalent to al-Farabi’s First Principle (al-Awwal). 226

Suhrawadi’s emanation scheme starts from the light of lights (Nu”r al-Anwa”r) which emanates the series of subordinate lights. Sequentially these subordinate lights begins with the first light which is similar to Farabi’s first intellect, then the secondary light seems to be his heavenly bodies and the final is the world of elements. 227

Emanationism: Al-Farabi on Causality

Emanationism implies a transcendent principle from which everything is derived. Emanationism is opposed to both creationism and materialism. Farabi’s pivotal point of the world view is the theory of emanation. Plotinus had introduced this concept as a bridge between the intelligible and the material world on the one hand and a coherent account of the evolution of the universe on the other hand. 228

Al-Farabi perceives that God is the centre of the universe and God is the absolute one which transcends everything. According to him, from the Absolute One the

226 Ibid, pp. 146-147.
227 Ibid, p.147.
228 Fakhry, Majid, (2002), op cit, p. 78.
emanation starts. It flows to the plurality of things and its gradual process of coming down the level of perfection, will be the cause of the existence of matter. Al-Farabi’s God or the First being is identical with Aristotle’s unmoved mover. Majid Fakhry says,

“In the metaphysical scheme, God or the First Being (al-Awwal), as al-Farabi prefers to call Him, following the example of Proclus of Athens (d.485), the last great Greek expositor of Neo-Platonism, stands at the apex of the cosmic order; but unlike the One (toben) of Plotinus (d.270) or the first (To Proton) of Proclus, who are above being and thought, al-Farabi’s God is identical with Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover, who is thought thinking itself (aql, aqil and Maqul) and the Being from whom all other beings emanate. From this First being, through a process of progressive emanation or overflowing (fayd or sudur) arise the successive orders of intellect (‘aql), soul (nafs) and prime matter (hayula) Once it has fulfilled its destiny as a citizen of the higher or intelligible world, the soul is able, through conjunction (ittis al) with the last of the intellects, known as the Active Intellect, to rejoin its original abode in that higher world.”

The chief merit of this theory is that, it gives the rationally credible account of the metamorphosis of the universe. Thus, it dispenses the two presupposition of the creationist theory, according to which the world was created by God out of nothing and in time by an act of divine.

This doctrine of emanation in al-Farabi’s Neoplatonic theology poses a basic problem with the Qura’nic explanation of Universe. God, for al-Farabi, must always be the first; he calls the first emanation out of God. The second being is Farabi’s First intellect. This itself produces the body and the soul of the first heaven. The first intellect is the only one in the complex hierarchy that is not directly associated with the planet or star. The rest eight immaterial intellects in the course of emanation are responsible for a variety of named planets and stars as well. The tenth is the last of those separate or transcendent entities, which doesn’t

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229 Fakhry, Majid, (2002), op. cit, p.3.
require matter nor substrate for their existence. The main connection between the heavenly world and the terrestrial is made possible by the tenth intellect. This is also called as active intellect just because it juxtaposes between the two worlds.

In his treatise *The Principles of Existing things*, al-Farabi divided six types of bodies on which accidents subsist in six major levels. “The first cause is in the first level. The secondary causes are in the second. The active intellect is in the third. The soul is in the fourth. Form is in the fifth. Matter is in the sixth.” And he further says “the first three levels (the First cause, the secondary causes and the active intellect) are neither bodies, nor are they in bodies. The second three levels (namely, soul, form and matter) are in bodies although they themselves are not bodies.

It would be helpful to understand Al-Farabi’s emanation scheme from the below given Hierarchy:

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\begin{align*}
\text{God} &= \text{the First (al-Awwal)} \\
&= \text{(The Necessary Being)} \\
\text{First Intellect ('aql)} &= \text{The second Existent: the Soul and Body of the First Heaven (Al-Sama' al 'Ula)} \\
\text{Second Intellect} &= \text{Fixed Stars, (al-Kawakib Thabita)} \\
\text{Third intellect} &= \text{Sphere of Saturn (Zuhal)} \\
\text{Forth intellect} &= \text{Sphere of Jupiter (Al-Mushtari)} \\
\text{Fifth intellect} &= \text{Sphere of Mars (Al-Marreekh)} \\
\text{Sixth intellect} &= \text{Sphere of the Sun (Al-Shams)} \\
\text{Seventh Intellect} &= \text{Sphere of Venus (al-Zahra)} \\
\text{Eighth Intellect} &= \text{Sphere of Mercury ('Atared)}
\end{align*}
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Ninth Intellect Sphere of the Moon (al-Kurat al-Qamar)

Tenth Intellect (Active or Agent intellect): it is known as eleventh existent. The role of Active intellect in Farabi's cosmology is to act as bridge between heavenly world and sublunary world. Moreover, it helps rational animal to reach its highest level of perfection.

Prior to his discussion of emanation, the second teacher's concept of Virtuous Cities should be taken into consideration. The prime assertion whirls around the argument of the First as the progenitor of all existing entities. He affirms that the existence of this is best and most ancient. It is everlasting and entirely self-sufficient. It is free from matter and devoid of a particular form.

Al-Farabi regards the First as the proximate cause of the existence of the secondary causes and the active intellect. Consequently, "the secondary causes are the causes of the existence of the celestial bodies." Further, he says "the highest level of the secondary causes necessarily entails the existence of the first heaven; and the lowest level of the secondary causes necessarily entails the existence of the orbit containing the Moon. The secondary causes in between these two necessarily entail the existence of each of the spheres in between these two spheres. The number of secondary causes equals the number of celestial bodies. One ought to call the secondary causes 'spiritual beings,' 'angels,' and similar names."

Expressing his deep reverence to Islamic doctrine, Farabi goes on to state that, the first being has no partner in its being or perfection. His treatise also emphasizes that the first being is devoid of any opposite. Khalil notes that, according to Farabi, "when two contraries come together they have the potential to mutually annihilate. One can think of this

\[232\] Al-Allaf, Mashhad (2003), op. cit., p.117
\[233\] Fakhry, Majid, (2002), op. cit, p.81
\[234\] Al-Farabi, (2007), op. cit, p.82
\[235\] Ibid, p.82.
by considering the neutralization of coolness and heat upon contact. Since the First is eternal there cannot exist something which would threaten the continuation of its being.”

Al-Farabi emphasizes that the First is completely immaterial, indivisible and which lacks corporality and magnitude. Matter exists only in confined spatio-temporal world where First is beyond this. In this view, the second teacher seems to be indebted into Aristotelian insights. He perceives that the First is in its substance actual intellect. It is neither a form which is being intellect nor an actually thinking (intelligizing) matter in which a thing exists. Therefore, we can trace the resemblances between Farabi’s First with Aristotle’s concept of Divine essence and intellect. Thus, this essence is intellect in act.

The second teacher denotes that the matter always stands the way of intellection so that the First contemplate without any obstruction since its ‘being’ doesn’t comprise matter. Therefore, divinity is the most perfect being and it is the most impeccable thought lies in contemplating itself. This way, Farabi sees First as the most perfect thinking because it acts without the help of any matter. Atif Khalil quotes the second teacher that “the essence which is thought is the essence which is thought is the essence which thinks.” It is “intellect and intelligized and thinking, all this being one essence and one indivisible substance.”

In *On The Intellect*, Al-Farabi emphasizes that the active intellect is an emanator of form, and he believes the soul to be the substantial form of the body. Thus the souls of men are derived from the supralunary celestial world via the active intellect. The nature of emanation that proceeds down the chain of being from the first cause again and again is explained by the word called *yalzam* literary meaning which is necessary.

The active intellect plays a similar role with man, which in turn explains that the causation between the celestial world and the active intellect in the terrestrial world is a

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236 Khalil, Atif, Some tensions in Farabi’s Metaphysics of the One and the Emanative Descent, p.86
237 Ibid.
238 Ibid, pp. 86-87
239 Ibid , p. 87
240 Netton, Ian Richard, (1989), op. cit, p.119
mediate process.’ God, the first cause, may be said to operate through his intermediary hypostases and spheres in an involuntary manner. So, it is worth understanding that Farabi’s doctrine of intermediate causation involves a separation in his Cosmology between God and the direct movement of the sublunary world. 241 Al-Farabi says: “The function of the Active Intellect is to watch over the rational animal and endeavor to have him reach the highest level of perfection that man can reach, namely ultimate happiness, which is for man to arrive at the level of the active Intellect.”242

Farabi deviates in respect with the first intellect or thought in relation to the neo-platonic tradition of Plotinus. For the latter, the first intellect is entirely transcendent lying above being and thought, out of its super abundant goodness. He argues that the first one rises by the way of emanation to the first genuine being, the intellect or nous. Plotinus sometimes called this ‘the second good’. Accordingly, the first one lies in a mysterious and indeterminate way. Both Aristotle and the Qur’an removed this indeterminateness. The first teacher regarded God or the first principle as an immovable and eternal substance. While the Qur’an distinguished God as the only One, everlasting (samad).243

For Farabi God is alim (knowing), Hakim (wise), haqq (true) and Hayy (living). According to him, God is intelligible, in the sense he is knowing everything including himself. He is true in so far as truth is equivalent, to existence of which he has the highest share.244

Even though Al-Farabi’s indefinable attribute of God manifests Qura’nic attributes of God, he did not consider Allah as an active Creator of the Universe. For him, God didn’t create the world out of nothing. Moreover, Farabian Emanationism did not consider the Qur’anic concept of the will of God. Mashhad Al-Allaf notes that, according to Farabi, “the absolute knowledge of God is very source of existence, thus there is no will to control or to initiate the coming into existence. The existence of the world follows necessarily

241 Ibid, p.121.
242 Al-Farabi, (2007), op. cit, p-82
244 Ibid, p.82.
from the absolute knowledge of the Divine. 245 It is clear that this deviation from the Qura’nic concept happens when Farabi makes an ontological conclusion on the base of his epistemological premises.

This scheme of emanation elaborated by Al-Farabi sought to give ‘the first’, the place of preeminence, which the Quran demanded for the creator. This was done by modeling creation on a logical system where by all things emanated necessarily from this One. 246 From the prime matter, Farabi proceeds to discuss the human soul and its faculties. It actually begins with the nutritive, followed by the sensitive, the desiderative, the imaginative and finally the rational, with its two subdivisions, the theoretical and the practical. Each of these faculties has its own axillaries residing in the lower organs of the body which are all subservient to the principle organ: the heart.

When we have a glimpse of the Farabian universe of theological discourse, the essence of Neoplatonism is very evident. The basic triadic paradigm of Plotinus is adapted and transmuted by Al-Farabi into a separate entity. The paradigm of Divine transcendence is established by the eternal interrelatedness of each hypostasis through eternal emanation. 247

Dialectics in Farabian Thoughts

Indeed, the Second Teacher’s attempt to reconcile Islamic thought with Greek Philosophy is very prominent. Al-Farabi believes in the fundamental principle of Islam that the truth must be One (tawhid). The mission of philosophy is to achieve a universal outlook. Al-Farabi thought that the truth of religion and philosophy must not be contradictory as both of them share common platform when it comes to a practical outlook.

For Farabi, this reconciliation is possible in three ways: first one is to understand Islam as a religion in a broad sense instead of analyzing the minute problems. For example, Al-Farabi opined that Allah is an efficient cause. There was a comparison with

245 Al-Allaf, Mashhad, (2003), op. cit, p.114.
Aristotelian first cause. However, he did not consider the issue on Divine eternal will seriously because he knows that it contradicts the concept of First cause.

The Second way is to connect one source for both of them. For example, Farabi equates philosopher with prophet by placing the active intellect as a source of knowledge for both of them. Therefore, for him, a philosopher like Aristotle and Prophet Muhammad are equal in this regard. But Islam never considers any knowledge at par with the knowledge of revelation. Here, Farabi’s view completely contradicts with Islamic view.

The third way is to interpret the Qura’nic terminology in philosophical understanding. He ascribed a meaning for Arabic term “ibda” as eternally coming to exist. But, Qur’an uses the same term for Creation out of nothing. Therefore, it is very clear that Al-Farabi attempts to incorporate the Qura’nic ideas with philosophy even though it contradicts when it comes to Aristotelian scheme. 248

According to Mashhad Al-Allaf, al-Farabi did not give enough attention to any of the logical argument of Qur’an to assert the Oneness of God. The below given Qura’nic verses do offer the arguments on the topic of the Unity of God:

1. “Say: if there had been (other) Gods with Him-as they say-behold, they would certainly have sought out a way to the lord of the Throne!” Quran (17:42)

2. “Had there been therein (in the heaven and the earth) aliha (Gods) besides Allah, then verily, both would have been ruined. Glorified is Allah, The Lord of the Throne, (High is He) above all that (evil) the associate with him! (Quran, 21:22)

There are tow premises in this Argument. If there were Gods happen to control the heaven and the earth, then both would have been ruined. And the second premise is since the universe is systematically functioning ‘they are not destroyed’.

248 Al-Allaf, Mashhad, (2003), op. cit, pp.105-106.
Thus, the argument concludes that there is only one God. Modes Tollens can be applicable here if $P$ is true then $Q$ is true. If $Q$ is false therefore $P$ is false.$^{249}$

Islamic philosophers devoted considerable attention in identifying the subject matter studied by logic and the aims at which logical studies are directed. Al-Farabi’s logical and linguistic writing comprise the majority of his philosophical output. In his *Ihsa Al uloom* (Enumeration of the Sciences), he defines logic as an instrumental, rule-based science aimed at directing the intellect towards the truth and safeguarding it from error in its acts of reasoning.$^{250}$

The place of Dialectic within the theory of argumentation is perhaps the most ambivalent factor in Islamic logic. Dialectics is seen as inferior to demonstration; its importance for philosophy is nonetheless recognized. A good example of this is found in Al-Farabi’s enumeration in his *Kitab Al-Jadal* (Book on Dialectic) of the ways in which dialectics serves philosophers.$^{251}$

Concept, for al-Farabi, is an idea that represents the objective essence or the essential notes of thing. Concepts are determined by definitions. They are arranged in the systematic way that they imply one another to arrive at the universal ones. A man’s mind is directed to him, but his soul may be a contingent entity. He fails in demonstrating it to its full extent. Judgment is the overall process which helps in delving us to a universal idea.$^{252}$

In Farabian terms, logic means the process of reasoning from our innate thoughts and then have a journey to the knowledge of unknown. Therefore, philosophy is a sort of mediation and demonstration. All concepts are classified under 10 headings called categories. These categories follow a linear path which enters into judgment. Farabi, following Aristotle, enumerate ten, namely: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, 

$^{249}$ Ibid, p.111  
$^{251}$ Ibid, p.711.  
$^{252}$ Hammond, Robert (2008), *Philosophy of Al Farabi and its influence on Medieval Thought*, www.forgottenbooks.org, p.10
action, passion, posture and having. Aristotle believed that some of them are innate and the cause of others might be of some accidents or differences.\footnote{253}

Aristotle believed that since the substance is divisible, accident occurs. In this, he takes quantity as the first one and quality as the second. Since substances are interrelated, he chooses relation as the third. The connection of time and relation made the former the fourth. Aristotle took place as the fifth. The ability of a substance to mould into different shapes made posture as the sixth category. The influence of a substance on the production of the other made him take action as the seventh. He chose passion as the eight and having as the ninth.\footnote{254}

Farabi’s respect for logic had an impact mainly on the content of his metaphysics. He stretched this aspect on the theoretical classification of the subject matter of knowledge itself. Logic had a profound impact on the thought and classification of Al-Farabi. His emphasis on logic in enumeration of sciences was to defend science against the onslaught of the grammarians. The second teacher’s classification provided a powerful paradigm for all the Muslim classifications in the various forms in which it was followed.\footnote{255} It received a great impetus in the medieval Europe where it was translated twice into Latin in 12th century, as well as into Spanish and Hebrew languages.

An exhaustive account of the terminology of logic is laid down by the second teacher. This is summarized when he defines logic as an art that put forth the road map of reasoning as demonstrative, dialectical or sophistical. This in turn becomes the greatest tool for the study of physics, metaphysics, politics and ethics. Farabi discusses the matrix of physics too. He confesses that Aristotle has given a right platform pertaining universal principle pertaining to physics. This was done by taking universal proposition and laws common to the natural being.

\footnote{253 Ibid, p.11.}
\footnote{254 Ibid, p.12.}
\footnote{255 Netton, Ian Richard. (1989), op. cit, p. 37.}
Farabian logic is not a mere interpolation of his scientific quest. It contains a systematic dialogue on the epistemology of knowledge. He feels that grammar is entitled to a language of particular set, where as logic accumulate the whole space of the sum of intelligence of mankind. Logic is divisible into subjects related to the actuality.\textsuperscript{256}

Ideas cease to have no element of relation to the whole sense of actuality. In this category, the second teacher locates a simple psychological form, the objectifying of individual object through sensory perceptions. This might have been eluded from the mind first. On the thesis of proof, Farabi derives that this leads us to situation in which the point of destination makes us feel of something unknown. Here, the question of confusion is taken as the highest principle where the truth of a necessary proposition and untruth of a possibility is attained.\textsuperscript{257}

In brief, al-Farabi argues that the philosophy and religion bring to light one truth in different methods. Qur'an uses very simple, precise and specific language because it is addressed to the public who are not intelligent enough. But, the language of philosophy is more abstract and demonstrative because it is addressed to the elite. Therefore, al-Farabi opined that the prophet addresses to the public in very simple and symbolic language in order to make them understand very easily. However, the philosophers, having high intelligent, are exempted from the teaching of prophet. This argument of Farabi makes influence on his immediate successors ibn Sina, Ibn Baja and ibn Tufail. As practicing the Farabian theory, Ibn Sina argues the consumption of alcohol for a philosopher is justifiable just because of the fact that he is intelligent and he knows why to drink and when to drink. But, this Farabian thesis is vehemently criticized by al-Ghazali and Ibn Taimia.\textsuperscript{258}

\textbf{Al-Farabi on God}

The basic question of contention in Farabian synthesis is pondered around the concept whether the so called God is knowable or not. There could be a basic problem in a

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{256} Boer, De. T.J. (1903), op. cit, p.112.
\item \textsuperscript{257} Ibid, pp.112-113.
\item \textsuperscript{258} Al-Allaf, Mashhad. (2003), op cit, pp. 106-107.
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concrete description of the almighty by the Holy script. Another Herculean task is to define it in the rational self of a philosopher which Farabi is trying to be.

His *cogito ergo sum* cannot suffix to the extra terrestrial space of the particular master narrative. So the main thing to confess is of the limitation of the human intellect and figure out a particular synthesis which would turn be a blend of both. Farabi is always at odds for a concrete explanation of God's essence. He evades through out his writing by giving the phrase, God is to be self evident in itself. This at once gives rise to myriads of explanations, but eventually very problematic to define. According to the Second teacher, God is necessary being (*al-wajib ul wujood*), the One, and Eternal. He does not change from one state of being to another and as a first cause he is uncaused and independent. His being doesn't contain by form or matter. Farabi notes that form exists only in matter.²⁵⁹

For Farabi, the existence of the God is the perfect existence who is the absolute and transcending beauty, most splendid and most adorned. Al-Farabi says:

"The beauty, splendor, and adornment of every being is to exist as perfect and to reach its final perfection. Now, since the existence of the first is the most perfect existence, its beauty surpasses that of every beautiful being, as does the adornment and splendor. It has its substance and being. (All of) that it has in itself and by virtue of the intellecting itself."²⁶⁰

Farabi points out that the God owns the most absolute internal happiness, pleasure, delight and joy. We cannot grasp or understand the real nature of the pleasure which the First enjoys and there is no way to relate our pleasure in ourselves to that of the first except some relation which is incredibly miniscule.²⁶¹

There are some names used by humans to call God which are essentially Divine by nature and some are reference to the relation of the Divine to the universe. But Farabi perceives that these attributes should be taken metaphorically and it should not affect

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 112
²⁶⁰ Al-Farabi. (2007), op. cit, p. 90
²⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 90-91
the Unity of the Divine essence. He further argues that the purified soul can only understand the necessary being with these attributes. Above all, one should train his mind to understand an abstract necessary being. Therefore, he believes that it is very difficult to understand the divine essence while God’s attributes are understood by human metaphorically. And this essence of necessary being is beyond the human understanding.\textsuperscript{262}

He thus, gives very authentic testimonials to prove that there is a God above all mental affinities. According to Robert Hammond, this can be placed in parallel to St. Thomas’s confession on the almighty. This can be divided into three.

1. On motion: if the world consists of immovable thing, every object which is in motion has an agent. If the agent itself is moved there must be another supra agent for this task. But, it is impossible or arbitrary to go on for an infinite series of motion. So there must be an immovable agent to do this and this is God.

2. On efficient cause: in introspecting, the world we come across, beings with the definite cause and this cause is linked to other’s cause. So in the array of these causes we are not able to proceed to an infinite space. Just because if A is the cause of B of C, C of D and so on. Then A would be the cause of itself, which is not admissible. Therefore, outside the terrain of causes there must be an uncaused efficient and this is God.

3. Proof of contingence: For al Farabi, this proof is based on the principle that all change must have a cause. In order to explain this, the second teacher makes a distinction between a necessary being and a contingent being. Robert Hammond quotes al-Farabi: “Contingent being have had a beginning. Now, that which begins to exist must owe its existence to the action of a cause. This cause, in turn, either is or is not contingent. If it is contingent, it also must have received its existence by the action of another cause, and so on. But a series of contingent begins which would produce one another cannot proceed to infinity or move in a

\textsuperscript{262} Al-Allaf, Mashhad. (2003), op. cit, p.113
circle. Therefore, the series of causes and effects must arrive at a cause that holds its existence from itself, and this is the first cause (ens primum).”

Farabi’s argument on the existence of God which is in a way intermingling can be purely taken as a cosmological concept. This source of argument derives its roots primarily from the tenets of causality. Since the credibility of causality is taken as valid, it indirectly upholds his argumentation. The main idea whirling around, Farabi is the concept of dasien or being. The implication is the existence of a ‘being’ demonstrates its self existent being. This goes on to the wider explanation that for a being to exist it must have a cause for existence.

Since al-Farabi calls his Deity as “First Existent,” (al-mawjud al-awwal), he gives an ontological preference to it. Atif Khalil notes that the Deity of the Second teacher “manifests the highest possible perfection, with its perfection distinguishing it from every other existent in which there must exist, by virtue of its separation from the First, some trace of deficiency. And since non-existence (‘adam) is a type of deficiency, “there is no possibility whatsoever that it shouldn’t exist”. Because its essence implies its existence, by its very nature it cannot but be. The First is also free of both form and matter because form and matter stand in mutual need, and the Deity is beyond all needs. Because the essence of the first is not a composite, its very substance is simple and indivisible. And therefore it is most deserving of the name, “the One” (al-wahid).”

The main concept or the vital one can be taken as the nature of Tawhid or the unity of God. This is an important affidavit to the existence of the Islamic theological philosophy. This problematizes the validity of a single entity and reciprocally gives a rejuvenated idea of the reflection in the unity of God in cosmological tenets. The role of philosophy, according to Avicenna, is to know God and to be in tune with him. He takes

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264 Ibid, p.23.
265 Atif Khalil, op.cit, p. 85
instruction and divine illumination as the path. Farabi goes a bit further in defining it as a mystical union of the soul with the God.  

In their juxtaposition, both Avicenna and al-Farabi weaken Aristotelian notion with a distinction between necessary and potential existence. The eternal original being which they attached with Aristotle as intelligence is essential and uncaused. The rest depends for its existence which is causal. For Farabi, matter is a face of this process. For Avicenna, it is eternal and uncreated.  

Human being is entitled to find what he knows only through his sense and intelligence. The only method he has in his anvil is to know the divine nature by observation. According to the second teacher, man can never locate the nature of the divine signified. This leads him to the method of tracing God through symbols or to the method Aquinas suggested by analogy. He states that almighty is the product of the recurrent overflowing of perfection generated by the God itself. The second teacher deployed various theologemes with binary set of emphasis. The first being is attached to the basic Qura'nic paradigm.  

This exhibits God's Oneness, perfection, majesty and eternity. The latter includes indivisibility, indefinability and immateriality. These theologemes are very vital to the development of Islamic philosophical theology. It is clearly evident that, the Frabian theology has taken enroot from the Qura'nic creative paradigm to a state which is Napoleonic in language. The basic paradigm of Plotinus is metamorphosed into an enlarged array of Neoplatonic transcendent entity.  

God is unique in the sense that nothing can be posed in parallel to him. Any nomenclature for his identity is impossible. But human being has many significations and

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266 Frank Thilly. (2007), *A History of Philosophy*, p. 185  
267 Ibid, p.184  
269 Ibid, p.126.
narrations adhered to him. He can be located in a regular gradation of existence from the beings. 270

The second teacher asserts, when he philosophizes on the simplicity of God that is he is absolutely indivisible. This is a direct rejection of the attributes of Ash'arites conception of the attributes and essence of God. 271 Atif Khalil notes that, for Farabi and Aristotle,

"the One can only remain nominally One because it is logically split into an actor (intellect) and an acted upon "intelligized." It might be argued that the division is possibly threefold if one takes into account the presence of the act of intellection itself. A Farabian response might be that the act is merely a state of the one, not a division or a component. Yet the problem of the dyadic nature remains posing more of a dilemma for al-Farabi than Aristotle." 272

It is just because of there is a meticulous effort from the part of Farabi to assert the radical unity of the First.

In the whole philosophical journey on the thesis of God's existence, Farabi employed his free will in a majestic way. It was not contaminated at any particular juncture because of his strong genealogical asset of archival. This was mainly because he had a strong philosophical background behind him. This was, at the same time, infusing in him the ability to merge different dialectics into a normative discourse. His process and praxis was undoubtedly anew. This enabled him to build his own niche of systematic theologemes which was always flexible to anything fresh.

270 Hammond, Robert. (2008), op cit, pp.115-116
272 Khalil, Atif, Some tensions in Farabi's Metaphysics of the One and the emanative Descent, p.87