Faculty Standard F3.2 – Professional Development Events

Amended Philosophy Documentation

In the Faculty Standard F3 Coversheet, there was mention of philosophy having a single partner school in their course offerings.

The original document, “F 3.2 PHILO Development Day,” was an essay required of the instructor as part of his continuing personal development through graduate philosophy work at Saint Louis University. The high school instructor has already met full approval requirements and in consultation with the department chair took advantage of additional course work for professional development.

At the request of the NACEP Accreditation Application Review team, we investigated further with the high school instructor and SLU Philosophy department chair about professional development opportunities that he has been invited to and taken part in to satisfy the department’s requirement of development opportunities that are in line with the mission, expectations, and philosophy of the department.

The professional events are hosted by the department and on-campus faculty are expected to attend one of the many conferences or colloquiums. The high school instructor receives a special invite and is asked to attend at least of the events to satisfy the department’s professional development requirements.

Please find the colloquium information that the high school instructor attended on the next page.
Christine Korsgaard
Harvard

will present

“On Having a Good”
SLU Philosophy Talk

on FRIDAY, March 21, 2014
at 3 p.m.

in XVH , Room 332

TALK IS FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

Please contact Heather Hulsey or Jamie Hendrix, if you have any questions, at (314) 977-3149.
Reading al-Farabi’s Harmonization of the Two Opinions of the Two Sages

Introduction

Known as the “Second Teacher”, the work of al-Farabi marks a consolidation and innovation of philosophy in Arabic. A fascinating intersection of Ancient Greek, later Hellenism, and Christian Syriac scholarship merge with the onset of Islam to create a new chapter in the history of philosophy. Al-Farabi stands at that intersection to show both what sort of debt Arabic thinkers owed to the past and what sort of intellectual synthesis and innovation they could produce. Of special interest to this intersection are al-Farabi’s thoughts on the “two sages” of philosophy, Plato and Aristotle. In no text does al-Farabi consider their philosophical relationship more explicitly than in his Harmonization of the Two Sages, Plato the Divine and Aristotle. Superficially, it would appear that if one wished to understand how classical Arabic thinkers considered this relationship, the Harmonization would be the clear starting point.

However, contemporary scholarship by historians and philosophers on al-Farabi would make one think this is not as clear as one would expect. In this paper, I wish to consider exactly why this is the case and then to clarify key points of al-Farabian historiography in order to determine how one ought to read the Harmonization. First, I will summarize the most prominent view on how al-Farabi’s works should be read, a method called multi-level writing. Second, I will use the Harmonization itself to identify key content, context, and purpose. Finally, on the basis of that content and context, I will argue that though the multilevel writing method aids reading the Harmonization in some respects, the method should not and cannot be adopted en masse.

Al-Farabian Scholarship and Multilevel Writing
In a scathing survey of the historiography of Islamic philosophy, Dimitri Gutas attempts to makes sense of why this scholarly field has failed to progress as parallel fields such as Latin Medieval Philosophy have. This general concern can be narrowed to the work of al-Farabi because one of Gutas’ reasons given for the lack of advancement is an hermeneutical framework attributable to Leo Strauss. Strauss’ strategy argued that because of the fear of retribution from religious authorities who would regard philosophical theses as heterodox and impious, al-Farabi and others had to present their views in “disguise”, hiding their full arguments in the shadow of superficially orthodox rhetoric. Thirty years ago, Oliver Leaman thought Strauss’ interpretations of al-Farabi were the “Standard View” for Farabian scholarship, and though that may no longer be the case, the effects of the view on being done is still pervasive. What was this hermeneutical framework and what scholarship on al-Farabi has been done under its umbrella?

A key example of Gutas’ point and Strauss’ legacy is the distinction Miriam Galston calls “multilevel” writing in al-Farabi, especially in the texts under investigation here, primarily the Harmonization of the Two Sages and secondarily the Philosophy of Plato and Philosophy of Aristotle. First, writing at a level that popular, religious readers could understand and interpret is exoteric. Second, writing at a level that is fully philosophical and only understood by philosophers is esoteric. Though religion and philosophy may be of the same truth, according to al-Farabi the philosophical account, which is characterized by demonstrable argumentation, is superior to the religious account, which is characterized by rhetorical or dialectical argumentation that mirrors full philosophical reasoning. In al-Farabi’s Harmonization, Aristotle himself is said to “have put these sciences and their well-guarded and sparingly-revealed

1 Gutas, 2002, p. 6
2 ibid, p. 20
3 Leaman, 1980.
maxims in writing, (yet to) have nevertheless ordered them in such a manner that only those suited for them will get them."⁵ Omitting necessary premises, omitting conclusions, discussing obvious topics at length yet passing over obscure topics quickly are all examples of multilevel writing found in Aristotle that al-Farabi is said to have used as a model.

Multilevel views are not homogenous, however. One summary of views of multilevel writing, proposed in different ways by Muhsin Mahdi, Charles Butterworth, and Joshua Parens, emphasizes the exoteric/esoteric distinction between al-Farabi’s writings, and occasionally, within a single work. The example most relevant to this discussion relates to the Harmonization as well as the Philosophy of Plato and Philosophy of Aristotle. To explain the difference in writing style as well as some perceived discrepancies, Mahdi argued the Harmonization was rhetorical and exoteric rather than philosophical. He writes, “In general, exception can be taken to Alfarabi’s mode of argumentation...the reasoning is too flexible for a reader having first-hand acquaintance with the works of Plato and Aristotle or of Alfarabi’s commentaries on them.”⁶ The arguments are presented in a popular fashion that include religious deferential language lacking in his more esoteric or explicitly philosophical works. Of the use of rhetoric in Islamic philosophy more generally, Butterworth thinks “rhetoric can be used to translate highly complex arguments into popular language, and it can preserve an appearance of the logical necessity of the original idea.”⁷ The threat to any full philosophical inquiry is so real, though, that Butterworth wonders, “Can a Muslim philosopher ever really engage in philosophy?”⁸ As the translator of the Harmonization into English, one can be sure Butterworth wondered this of al-Farabi.

Joshua Parens has used the rhetorical reading of al-Farabi to retroactively understand

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⁵ Harmonization, p. 133.
⁶ Mahdi, 1962, p. 4
⁷ Butterworth, 1972, p. 194.
⁸ ibid, p. 187.
the metaphysics of Plato. Using Straussian hermeneutics Parens argues that al-Farabi and Plato himself use metaphysics as rhetoric. That is, political aims take precedence in both philosopher’s views, and so Plato’s Laws and al-Farabi’s own commentary of it reveal, under careful reading, that Plato himself was using the sort of esoteric, philosophical writing that Parens takes to be characteristic of al-Farabi’s own work. A “second-best” city to the ideal of the Republic, Plato has settled for the practical aims of law rather than the ideal aims of metaphysics, turning metaphysics into a means rather than an end.

Galston’s own multi-level writing is simultaneously influenced by Straussian hermeneutics while attempting to distance itself from Strauss by playing less on the exoteric/esoteric distinction and more on the importance al-Farabi is said to place on dialectical reasoning. In fact, she resists Mahdi and Butterworth’s emphasis on rhetorical arguments and focuses on dialectical arguments. In Aristotelian and al-Farabian traditions dialectical argumentation proceeds from mutually accepted premises or beliefs to more general universal conclusions as a method to both look for knowledge and refine earlier arguments. For Aristotle, the mutually accepted premises derive from the endoxa, or common opinions. Aristotle’s dialectic used the endoxa to open his considerations of philosophical material in the Physics, Metaphysics, and Nichomachean Ethics. Galston’s interpretation of multilevel writing argues “that Alfarabi’s works proceed on several levels simultaneously because they are dialectically written” because they are “works at once made public and not made public,” and used to train philosophical minds in inquiry through dialectical argumentation. That is, Galston thinks that al-Farabi’s writing style is dialectical because it communicates publically and privately

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11 see Physics 184a16-b14, Metaphysics 1004b17-26, or NEs 1145b2-7 for examples.
12 Galston, p. 10
13 ibid, p. 35
14 ibid, p. 39
simultaneously. It is also dialectical because it can be used to train students for philosophy.

Gutas’ criticism of this Straussian influenced methodology is two fold. First, he finds it ridiculous to argue a philosophical tradition of which al-Farabi was a key part could develop under 1,000 years of early and medieval Islamic persecution. In fact, Gutas thinks this line of historiography is cloaked in a renewed 19th century Orientalism that sees all Islamic culture as anti-rationalist or as a conflict between religion and philosophy. Second, the idea that multilevel writing of whatever stripe, would have a “hidden meaning” decipherable by only the philosophical elite, disregards the evidence of quality scholarship from “religious” sources (sometimes even from al-Ghazali himself!), and emphasizes modern scholars’ concerns of power and politics over traditional concerns of metaphysics. Whereas Plato perceived the ideal state deriving its origin from the knowledge of philosophers, “the Straussian position,” Gutas argues, “has been the assumption that the key to understanding the allegedly secret meaning of the philosophers is politics.” Besides, excluding al-Farabi no other Islamic philosophy has been or should be considered a political philosopher par excellence. Even then, as strong an authority as Ibn Khaldun thinks al-Farabi’s work does “not mean the kind of government that the members of a social organization are led to adopt through laws for the common interest. That is something different. The ‘virtuous city’ of the philosophers (al-Farabi) is something whose realization is rare and remote.”

Following Gutas it seems right to both critique Straussian influenced “overinterpretations”

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15 Gutas, 2002, p. 21; To be sure, the relationship between religion and philosophy in al-Farabi’s own writings is an important yet difficult and complicated topic. More on its importance to consideration of the Harmonization is footnoted at 42, and al-Farabi’s explicit handling of the subject best comes in the Attainment of Happiness. Gutas point here, though, is more historical than textual, indicating that void of any evidence of persecution and oppression of philosophy in Classical Islam, contemporary scholarship should not presume inherent conflict or animosity between the two in a text.
16 ibid, p. 22
17 ibid, p. 24
on a few common points, yet identify the distinguishing features of what al-Farabi scholars mean by multilevel writing. There is little reason to assume that any writing, including the Harmonization and the Philosophies are overly concerned with any conflict between religion and philosophy. In fact, barring textual evidence, it would be wise to avoid any predisposed interpretive hermeneutic that assumed as much. Also, there is little reason to follow Parens and overemphasize al-Farabi’s “political” philosophy at the expense of “metaphysics”. In doing so, it prejudices an investigation against traditional concerns and focuses more on contemporary philosophical (Straussian) interests. As a result, one may miss the import and significance of the text itself, as I think is the case with “overinterpreting” the Harmonization.

However, not all multilevel examples above are void of valuable interpretative insight. For example, as any philosopher may be inclined to do, writing to an audience could affect the tone and strategy of al-Farabi’s production. In fact it seems clear to me that this is true of the Harmonization in contrast to the Philosophies, as long as one does not also therefore assume there are two arguments at play in these sorts of works. I also think both the ideas of rhetoric and dialectic turn out to be useful in characterizing the Harmonization. One need only be able to clearly distinguish what these terms mean and how they reveal themselves from the text of the Harmonization itself.

The context, structure, and content of the Harmonization

Regrettably, little is known about the actual biography of al-Farabi. After being born in either Khurasan or Turkistan around 870 CE, he studied logic in Baghdad with a Christian cleric. The association with Christian scholarly circles connects him directly to the Neo-Aristotelian tradition from Alexandria. Teaching in Baghdad until 942 CE brought him near the Abbasid

18 from Eco, 1992
centers of power at least once when he wrote the *Great Book on Music* for the minister of the caliph.\(^{19}\) After visiting Egypt, he died in Damascus around 950 CE. Even less is known about the character and audience for the *Harmonization*. Presumably it was written for a Baghdad audience, but even that is not certain. Though Ian Richard Netton and others have attempted to contextualize al-Farabi’s place in court, Netton spends as much time deconstructing misused paradigms as constructing useful new ones.\(^{20}\) In the end al-Farabi’s writings are probably the most significant source of evidence for determining the sort of text al-Farabi was producing in the *Harmonization*.

The *Kitab al-Jam bayn Ra’yay al-Hakimayn Alfatun al-Illahi wa-Aristutalis* or *The Harmonization of the Two Opinions of the Two Sages, the divine Plato and Aristotle*, parallels the ending of the *Attainment of Happiness* which reads,

> 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 an account of the ways to it and of the ways to re-establish it when it becomes confused or extinct...So let it be clear to you that, in what they presented, their purpose is the same, and that they intended to offer one and the same philosophy.\(^{21}\)

According to the *Harmonization*, “these two sages are the fountainheads of philosophy,”\(^{22}\) and since some argue there are fundamental disagreements between Aristotle and Plato, he wishes to determine why one would think this and show how the sages may be distinct in method and approach but not in philosophy fundamentally. Primarily the *Harmonization* Al-Farabi defines philosophy as “knowledge of existing things in so far as they are existent.”\(^{23}\) The apparent disagreement of Plato and Aristotle derives from either a false definition of philosophy, a

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\(^{19}\) Reisman, 2005, p. 53  
\(^{21}\) *The Attainment of Happiness*, al-Farabi, p. 50  
\(^{22}\) *Harmonization*, al-Farabi, p. 125-6  
\(^{23}\) *ibid*, p. 125
misplaced esteem of Plato and Aristotle, or a misunderstanding of Plato and Aristotle themselves. Since al-Farabi thinks his definition is correct and that Plato and Aristotle are rightly esteemed because “we know for certain that there is no proof more powerful, more persuasive, or more masterful than the testimonies of various cognitions to the same thing and the unanimous agreement of many intellects about it,” he sets out to explain why any perceived disagreement is not fundamental.

The text is accessible enough and Majid Fakhry has summarized its contents elsewhere, but a brief catalog of the *Harmonization*’s topical concerns is useful. Broken down by chapter according to dispute, or apparent disagreement between Plato and Aristotle, al-Farabi begins by accounting for differences in lifestyle and writing styles. Al-Farabi’s Plato is almost ascetic, shedding worldly concerns for philosophy, while Aristotle is worldly, enjoying marriage, family, and political life. Plato’s writing is thought obscure, and accessible only to the “deserving,” while Aristotle’s procedure is to “clarify and elucidate.” Al-Farabi follows with the objects and method of investigation. Whereas Plato is said to begin from universal substance and divide to sense perceptibles, Aristotle begins from sense-perceptible substances and synthesizes to universal concepts. Logically, Plato’s major premise is universal-necessary and conclusions are contingent, while Aristotle proceeds from one necessary and one contingent premise to a necessary conclusion.

In matters of perception, vision for Plato is said to be an “emanation” from the body on the object of vision, while Aristotle thinks vision is light’s “affection” on the body. In moral character, Plato thinks nature prevails over habit, while Aristotle thinks habits undergo change and none are by nature. In the acquisition of knowledge, Plato is said to rely on a doctrine of

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24 *ibid*, p. 127
26 *Harmonization*, p. 131
recollected that Aristotle denies. Regarding the world and its origin, Aristotle is said to think it is
eternal when Plato thinks it is generated and has a maker. Metaphysically, Plato thinks the Ideas
or Forms have abstract existence in the divine world, while Aristotle reproves him for this.
Finally, they have either disagreed or not have had an opinion on eternal punishment or reward
following death.

Mahdi is right to classify the Harmonization in a different style of writing from other works
such as the Philosophies. The tone is unique, though not unequivocally so. Often familiar and
even witty, al-Farabi seems to be addressing a broad audience. At one point, he admonishes
the readers to, “not let yourself be misled”\textsuperscript{27}, elsewhere comments, “anyone who reflects upon it
will be spared from whatever occasions bewilderment about this subject,”\textsuperscript{28} and echos that later
with “it should be clear to anyone who considers those statements...”\textsuperscript{29} He even jokes when
regarding Plato and Aristotle’s account of vision that antagonists should “let their eyes relax a
little.”\textsuperscript{30} By contrast, the comparative texts of the Philosophies and the Attainment, do not include
such general, inclusive phrases or light tone. Personal pronouns there such as ‘we’, ‘you’, or
‘one’ indicate an audience, yet a more narrow one than the Harmonization.

The brevity of arguments is striking, especially in contrast to the Philosophy of Aristotle.
Of course, each of the disputes cataloged above could be the source for a single treatise, and
for the most part, al-Farabi has taken up each in other texts. The beginning of the Philosophy of
Aristotle is thought by some scholars to serve as a more extensive outline of al-Farabi’s other
Enumeration of the Sciences, covering that content addressed in the dispute over the objects
and methods of investigation. His commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics is more extensive

\begin{footnotes}
\item[27]\textit{ibid}, p. 127
\item[28]\textit{ibid}, p. 140.
\item[29]\textit{ibid}, p. 142
\item[30]\textit{ibid}, p. 145
\end{footnotes}
in addressing the origin of habits in moral character. The acquisition of knowledge is fully philosophical in his *On the Intellect*, in contrast to the brief coverage given in the *Harmonization* to the dispute over Plato’s recollection.

Also, numerous times, consensus or popular opinion is used to consolidate a position. Al-Farabi claims we know Aristotle and Plato are rightly esteemed as the sages of philosophy because “we know for certain that there is no proof more powerful, more persuasive, or more masterful than the testimonies of various cognitions to the same thing and the unanimous agreement of many intellects about it.”[^31] We also know that texts are reliably Aristotle’s because “the books articulating those statements are too well-known to presume some to be spurious.”[^32] By contrast, consensus opinion or the views of “many intellects” are rarely considered in the *Attainment* and the *Philosophies*. It is interesting to note, however, that al-Farabi does claim in regards to the discussion on recollection that “an upright intellect, solid opinion, and an inclination to truth and fairness are wanting in most people.”[^33] Generally speaking, consensus opinion is evidence for certainty in the *Harmonization*.

Lastly, the use of religious language sets the *Harmonization* apart. In it al-Farabi prays “God, may He be exalted, willing!”[^34] He piously claims the world “came to be only by the Creator, may His majesty be magnified, innovating it in one stroke and in no time; and from its motion, time is generated”[^35] following it with a Qur’anic allusion “the Creator is the governor of the world...not even the weight of a mustard seed escapes His attention; nor does any part of the world elude His providence.”[^36] Finally, the last dispute is an explicitly religious topic, the recompense for good and evil actions in this life. By contrast, nowhere in the *Attainment* or in

[^31]: *ibid*, p. 128
[^32]: *ibid*, p. 161
[^33]: *ibid*, p. 151
[^34]: *ibid*, p. 137
[^35]: *ibid*, p. 155
[^36]: *ibid*, p. 158
the Philosophies are included prayerful utterances or pious Qur’anic references. When discussing Plato’s consideration of death through Socrates in the Crito, Apology, and Phaedo, recompense of good and evil after death are not considered. Instead, only reference to the virtue of the soul and the city are included.

**The Purpose of the Harmonization**

Based on these textual and contextual preliminaries, why and for whom was the Harmonization written? It is not clear who the audience is, but it is clear the Harmonization is a more popular work than the Attainment, the Philosophies, or other more systematic treatises. By popular I mean the texts seems to be written for a more widely considered audience than merely the most immediate class of students a scholar such as al-Farabi might have had in a city such as Baghdad. The light tone, less than systematic content, use of consensus opinion as evidence, and inclusion of religious language lacking elsewhere all justify this conclusion. In that sense, I think the Harmonization can be considered in a different class than other texts such as the Philosophies, as scholarship has followed Mahdi and Fakhry’s earlier claims. However, the Harmonization does seem to share with the Attainment and Philosophies an aim toward instruction. In fact, David Reisman includes them all as “educational” treatises, meant to elucidate and clarify the positions of the ancient philosophers for Islamic students. We do know al-Farabi had students. Could the Harmonization have served as one prolegomenal text for such students? Perhaps the text, however, is even too basic or even public for this purpose. Could the Harmonization have served as an introductory text for all scholars, astronomers, theologians, translators, and young philosophers alike?

Further answers can be given when considering al-Farabi’s aims as a whole and another

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37 Mahdi, 1962; Fakhry, 1965
38 Reisman, 2005, p. 54
related question. Why would al-Farabi think there was a need to reconcile the philosophical views of Plato and Aristotle at all? Fakhry’s claim that the *Harmonization* should be viewed against the background of the Alexandrian Neo-Platonic tradition of Porphyry, Syrianus, Simplicius, and Damascius who tended to reconcile whatever divergences seemed to exist in the Greek philosophical tradition\(^{39}\) is support by Franz Rosenthal’s reading as well.\(^{40}\) Reisman and Jon McGinnis write, “al-Farabi’s works show the mark of a man driven to rehabilitate and then reinvent the Neoplatonized Aristoteleanism of the late Greek world.”\(^{41}\) The purpose for writing the *Harmonization*, then, ought to be considered in a more broadly conceived context. If all of al-Farabi’s work is a reconciliation of the two philosophies, the *Harmonization* is merely the most explicit. Each work, whether educational, a commentary, or an original treatise, may orient itself with this aim. Al-Farabi was a student and rehabilitator of the Alexandrian philosophical tradition. Indeed, this is the very reason he is considered the illustrious “Second Teacher” by later scholars.\(^{42}\) The *Harmonization*, then, seems to be an educational popular text of an entire philosophical movement for a broader, less explicitly philosophical audience.

**Multilevel Writing Revisited**

If it is a popular text, does it also mean the *Harmonization* is a rhetorical text as Mahdi and Butterworth have and Parens might claim? To ask this question returns us to one strand of

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39 Fakhry, 1965, p. 471
40 Rozenthal, 1990, p. 412
41 McGinnis and Reisman, 2007, p. 54
42 Fakhry, 2001, p. 1; Butterworth, 2001, p. ix; Of too much scholarship to include in this particular study yet too important to pass over without note is al-Farabi’s own thoughts on the relationship between religion and philosophy. Depending on the characterization a scholar gives al-Farabi’s ideas of religion and philosophy, the importance of Plato and Aristotle having the same philosophy seems to be either of great importance or only of helpful importance. On the one hand, if philosophy is to stand in contrast with revealed religion as the primary source of demonstrable truth, the two sages of this truth ought to be unified, if not in approach and method, then at least in fundamentals. Otherwise, the strength of philosophical knowledge through demonstration weakens. On the other hand, if philosophy is one method used by logic and reason to reach the same truths as revealed religion through other means, then it is helpful for philosophers to agree on key points, but not essential to the enterprise.
al-Farabian scholarship and multilevel writing. To answer it depends on what is meant by rhetoric. Butterworth remarks that Averroes’ use of rhetoric is,

reasoning reminiscent of that mentioned by al-Farabi in his *Philosophy of Aristotle*:

Rhetoric provides a solid understanding and explanation of ideas that the populace cannot grasp by the strict pursuit of logic; since these ideas are necessary for the populace to understand, the rhetorician must use the art of rhetoric to communicate these ideas to them. 43

Similarly, Galston might substitute the term “rhetoric” for “practical” when she argues that the *Harmonization* is motivated by practical and not theoretical considerations, aiming to defend philosophy against the attacks of Muslim theologians. 44 Likewise, Mahdi may have “rhetoric” in mind when in considering a similar religious-philosophical bifurcation he thinks, “philosophers and mystics tended to agree that the divine law contained a surface meaning suitable for everyone and a higher meaning suitable only for a chosen few.” 45

Aristotle himself famously describes rhetoric as the art of persuasion. In one plain sense, the conclusions drawn here show the *Harmonization* should be considered as rhetoric. That is, there are philosophical disputes between Aristotle and Plato that concern a wider population than the most narrowly considered group of philosophical Baghdad scholars. These disputes and the arguments given to resolve them in the *Harmonization* are not the most systematically or philosophically robust al-Farabi presents in his broader body of work. It is also clear he intends to persuade the audience that Plato and Aristotle can be reconciled fundamentally. The *Harmonization* can be considered as a text that “provides a solid understanding and explanation of ideas that the populace cannot grasp by the strict pursuit of logic,” whomever that populace is, but who can be persuaded of the idea’s truth. In this plain sense, the *Harmonization* is rhetorical.

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43 Butterworth, 1972, p. 194
44 Galston, 1977, p. 19
45 Mahdi, 2001, p. 25
On the other hand, if rhetorical means the Harmonization contains two meanings, one surface religiously suitable meaning al-Farabi intended for everyone and one higher meaning suitable only for philosophers, then the Harmonization is not rhetorical. As cited from Gutas above, the orientalist notion of an overt, political, and oppressive conflict between religion and philosophy should be rejected. In fact, Gutas bolding claims there is not a single such philosopher who was ever persecuted, let alone executed, for his philosophical views.\footnote{Gutas, 2002, p. 20}

Besides, consider alone the varied number of scholars from the innumerable locations along the vast expansion of Islamic civilization from 632 for the next 1,000 years who engaged in philosophy. There is no reason to think the Harmonization is rhetorical in this sense, and to answer Butterworth’s question above, scholars need not be considered with whether a Muslim philosopher could actually engage in philosophy.

Lastly, narrowly following Strauss and possibly Parens, if rhetoric means in some sense political rhetoric, then the Harmonization is not rhetorical. In a strong critique of Parens’ project, Fakhry writes “that Plato and al-Farabi resorted to dialectical or rhetorical arguments in their discussion of politics is not synonymous with the claim that, for them, metaphysics was reducible to rhetoric or dialectic.”\footnote{Fakhry, 1996, p. 290} To claim that a work like the Harmonization that includes metaphysical disputes subordinates those disputes to political ends is to “overinterpret” the given text at best and overemphasize modern scholarship’s concern with power and politics at worst. Plainly, there is no evidence for the sort of esotericism in the Harmonization that Strauss or Parens think they have found elsewhere.

What about Galston’s own argument that al-Farabi’s writings should be read as multilevel dialectic? In contrast to Mahdi who thinks the Harmonization is strictly exoteric, Galston thinks
“the dominant understanding of multilevel writing for Alfarabi is thus of works at once made public and not made public.”

Her primary basis for thinking this comes from two of al-Farabi’s texts, his commentary on Aristotle’s *Topics* (*Kitab al-Jadal*) and the *Harmonization*. According to the *al-Jadal*, dialectic and training in dialectic is necessary for philosophers in order to habituate their minds in syllogistic argumentation, even if the premises are only commonly held rather than necessary (as in demonstrative arguments). Without training one cannot attain what is real philosophy, so in this sense, dialectic comes before demonstration. This training can come by live disputes between scholars, but when these are not possible, “books can supply the requisite training in their stead.”

In the *Harmonization*’s second dispute, Plato and Aristotle are said to have presented their writings in different ways, ways that are irreconcilable. Plato “intended thereby to put in writing his knowledge and wisdom according to an approach that would let them be known only to the deserving...in contrast, Aristotle’s procedure is to clarify, elucidate, put in writing, order, communicate, uncover, and explain.” The two sages are said to be fundamentally “in harmony” because Aristotle intentionally leaves out key premises or clear conclusions from some arguments, and in one letter to Plato writes, “I have nevertheless ordered them in such a manner that only those suited for them will get them, and I expressed them in an idiom that only those adept in them will comprehend.” Galston’s al-Farabi, then, follows the examples of the Plato and Aristotle of his *Harmonization* and the reasoning in the *al-Jadal* using a dialectically argumentative writing style to at once conceal that which must be hidden from those undeserving and to train those other minds for understanding full philosophy. Is this what we see

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*Galston, 1990, p. 35
*ibid, p. 40
*ibid, p. 42
*Harmonization, p. 131
*ibid, p. 133*
Similarly to the use of rhetoric, I think it depends on what we mean by dialectic. If by dialectic we mean that there are shared common opinions from which readers can reason and argue, then the Harmonization is certainly dialectic in this way. Each dispute gives al-Farabi’s characterization of two views, those of Plato and those of Aristotle. Then, it goes about explaining or reexplaining the views in a way that show the two thinkers are not as different as they superficially appear. These two initial contrasting characterizations are the opinions or theories as given, and the reconciliation or reexplanation forms the argumentation. For example, in the dispute over Plato’s argument from division and Aristotle’s arguments to synthesis, al-Farabi replies that it is like walking up or down a flight of stairs. “The distance is the same, although there is a difference between the two pursuits.”\textsuperscript{53} It is the same thing to seek a thing’s genus and differentia (as Aristotle does) and seek a thing in its genus and differentia (as Plato does). There are two views given at the beginning, and al-Farabi then considers them in a novel way, presumably reconciling the two initial views. In this sense the Harmonization is dialectical.

Additionally, if by dialectic we also mean that the opinions of the many or the endoxa are included as evidence, then in this sense the Harmonization is dialectic. In fact, thinking of the text in this fashion actually helps to explain one of its peculiar features. That is, why does al-Farabi seem to give such undo appreciation for the views of the many? If al-Farabi is willing to begin arguments from common beliefs or the opinions of the many, then there is reason to assume that Plato and Aristotle are rightly esteemed as sages of philosophy or that certain works attributed to them are theirs. The most notable and controversial example here is al-Farabi’s use of the Theology of Aristotle to answer the disputes on the eternity of the world and Plato’s Forms. In his Philosophy of Aristotle al-Farabi does not reference or catalog the

\textsuperscript{53} ibid, p 136
Theology as one of Aristotle’s works and in his more systematic works on metaphysics, the Theology is also not referenced or cited. In fact Butterworth thinks that al-Farabi, “must surely have known (it) to be spurious.” Yet, in the Harmonization it is used as a the final, solid piece of evidence to reconcile the sages in metaphysical disputes. If the Harmonization is dialectic in this sense, than al-Farabi need not reject a premise from common opinion, that of the authenticity of the Theology, regardless of his own philosophical view. That sort of argumentation is left for demonstration and full philosophy.

Finally, if by dialectic we mean that a text can be used as philosophical training in identifying and consideration of arguments, the Harmonization also seems to be this kind of text. In fact, if the text is a sort of educational treatise meant to introduce the two sages to a broader audience, then perhaps this is exactly just what we would expect to find. Broad opinions are given about both Plato and Aristotle in each of the disputes and then brief, unsystematic rationale are provided for why they are reconcilable. This could be used in philosophical training. Yet, here we begin to see one characterization by Galston of al-Farabi’s work generally that overstates the use of dialectic in the Harmonization. She writes, the reader of al-Farabi “who assumes a dialectical method will begin by assigning each explicit doctrine...approximately the same weight and then play them and their consequences off against one another, without the expectation that any one doctrine or formulation will prove entirely true or false.” If we are to apply this to the Harmonization then, is the reader to give the same weight to the arguments for why the two sages’ philosophies do not reconcile as one does to the arguments that they do? This runs counter, not just to the Harmonization, but to central theses of the Attainment and the Philosophies as well. For al-Farabi Plato and Aristotle are reconcilable. If those are not the arguments to which we should assign equal weight, are the dialectical arguments those of Plato

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54 Butterworth, 2001a, p. 122
55 Galston, 1990, p. 51
and Aristotle themselves? But why would we need to assign two arguments equal weight if we are to also consider them as to be fundamentally the same? It is right to conclude, therefore, that this sort of dialectical training is not present in the Harmonization.

Furthermore, if by dialectic we mean that the text itself is at once both private and public, that it has two meanings, one which is accessible to the public and one that is accessible to only philosophers, I think we are back in the realm of “overinterpretation.” For one, when in the Harmonization itself Aristotle is characterized as having “ordered (his writings) in such a manner that only those suited for them will get them,” al-Farabi gives examples of how. “(Aristotle) omits the necessary premise from many of the syllogisms,” or “mentioning two premises of a certain syllogism and following them with the conclusion of another syllogism; and finally, “mentioning certain premises and following them with the conclusion of the concomitants of those premises.”

However, in the arguments of the Harmonization, the syllogistic demonstrable arguments explained above are not used. Without those arguments it is difficult to see how al-Farabi could use the same strategies in this work that Aristotle is said to have used elsewhere. If Galston thinks dialectic is the key to understanding how all of al-Farabi’s texts are written, and she understands it in this sense, then she is mistaken in the case of the Harmonization as it is not written in this way. That does not discount her interpretation for use in other more systematic philosophical texts. This is also not to say the Harmonization could not serve as some sort of beginning tool for dialectical argumentative training, either. There is plenty to argue about in the text for each dispute. In fact, if I am right that the text is one for educational purposes for a broader, non-philosophical audience, then it can also serve as an initiator and endoxa beginning for those debates. Yet, the debates and arguments in the text itself are not complete.

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56 Harmonization, p. 132
Conclusion

In the end, contrary to Gutas’ more sweeping claim, it does seem that some progress in al-Farabian scholarship has been made. Classifying al-Farabi’s *Harmonization* as rhetoric or dialectic follows from textual evidence. Al-Farabi’s intention could have reasonably been to persuade a wider audience of difficult philosophical concepts, and he certainly uses *endoxa* opinions and contrasting views to form the text’s many disputes. However, Gutas’ overarching criticism of the multilevel hermeneutic is well taken. Calling the *Harmonization* rhetorical to emphasize political theory is overinterpretation that obscures more than it clarifies while possibly misrepresenting the text itself. To call it exoteric “religious” rhetoric meant to satisfy an oppressive, overtly hostile audience is to not take full account of the broader evidence for the actual lives of Islamic philosophers. Additionally, characterizing the text as dialect does not follow from the dialectical writing one would expect based on al-Farabi’s own accounts of Aristotle’s dialectic. He does not use the syllogistic method required nor intended the audience to regard the two opinions as potentially equally valid. Instead, it is sensible to consider the *Harmonization* as an educational text, meant to introduce Plato and Aristotle to a broad audience convincing them of the unity of philosophy, even though that text is not al-Farabi’s most significant contribution to philosophy.
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