

## ON AL-FARABI'S INTERPRETATIVE METHODOLOGY IN READING CLASSICAL PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

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**ABSTRACT:** *Following Aristotle, al-Farabi divides philosophy into theoretical and practical each of which requires some specific methodology both in interpretation and cognition. Based on this division, there may arguably be four methodologies for four parts: 1) cognition of theoretical philosophy 2) interpretation of practical philosophy 3) cognition of practical philosophy 4) interpretation of practical philosophy. This paper focuses on the last one: the methodology of interpreting practical philosophy. Al-Farabi has an undeniably significant contribution to practical philosophy as a commentator on Greek philosophy and as a founder. In this paper, I investigate how al-Farabi (870-950 AD) read classical practical philosophy to see how to read al-Farabi himself. Although a practical philosopher (e.g., Aristotle), in direct cognition, has his own sources, instruments, and methods of cognition (i.e., deduction, experience, and induction), however, the reader of him (e.g., al-Farabi) requires some adequate interpretative methods and elements, distinct from direct cognitive methodology, to read and interpret the acquired and expressed practical philosophy. Al-Farabi can provide us with a set of relevant methodological elements of an interpretative methodology for reading classical practical philosophy. This paper discusses and classifies the correlated methods and elements of this interpretative methodology into three interacting sections: 1) out-text elements 2) in-text elements 3) intertextual elements.*

**Keywords:** *Al-Farabi, classical philosophy, interpretation of practical philosophy, interpretative methodology, practical philosophy*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

There are various sources of methodologies in the broad field of philosophy, however, they are mostly focused specifically on theoretical philosophy rather than practical philosophy and the *interpretation* of practical philosophy. In some limited studies on the interpretation of practical philosophy, Menn (2008), Black (2008), as well as Strauss (1945, 1996) and his students (Mahdi, 2001; Galston, 1990, 2015; Butterworth, 2013; Colmo, 2005) widely argue how to methodologically read al-Farabi, however, however, their studies are not exclusively focused on al-Farabi's practical philosophy

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but rather provide some unclassified elements (*e.g.*, esoterism) to read al-Farabi's works in general. Also, Skinner, along with other members of the Cambridge School of historians of political thought (Laslett, 1956; Skinner, 1969, 2002; Dunn, 1968; Pocock, 1962, 1985, 1987; Tully & Skinner, 1988; Palonen, 2003), widely argues how to read the ideas of classical political philosophers (*e.g.*, Hobbes), however, they often formulate the reading of the history of political ideas under some limited elements: *e.g.*, context. Although one can learn much from these studies, they do not elaborate a unique and specific methodology for reading classical practical philosophy. Due to the lack of sources for such reliable methodology, al-Farabi may teach us how to read classical practical philosophers including himself.

Why al-Farabi? Because he has an undeniably significant contribution to the field of practical philosophy both on the 'cognition' of practical philosophical phenomena and the 'interpretation' of the inherited texts within this field. This is why he came to be known as the Second Teacher, considering Aristotle the first. As Menn shows: "Farabi is unusual among medieval philosophers in being interested in Greek philosophy not just as a doctrine or as a discipline that he can practice, but as a historical artifact" (Menn, 2008: 67). In this paper, I will show that al-Farabi's methodology in reading ancient philosophy, especially the practical philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, can be taken as a source of inspiration for providing the key elements of an interpretative methodology for understanding and reading classical practical philosophy. Such interpretative methodology can be used for reading and interpreting al-Farabi's own practical philosophy as well.

What is the main difference between practical philosophy and theoretical philosophy that makes such a necessity to have a distinctive methodology for practical philosophy and, in addition, more specifically, for the *interpretation* of practical philosophy? I will show that, as one can read from al-Farabi's definition of practical philosophy<sup>1</sup>, the point is behind the specific topic of practical philosophy: human beings and their actions and dispositions. Unlike the topics of theoretical philosophy (*e.g.*, *being*, *mathematics*, *etc.*), the topic of practical philosophy (humans) has 'intellectual volition'. As inspired by al-Farabi, I will show in this paper how and why this characteristic of volition in humans' actions and dispositions makes such a big difference between the two methodologies, and, accordingly, makes the necessity of providing some special methodology for practical philosophy.

Furthermore, do we still need a more specific methodology for the 'interpretation' of practical philosophy? Yes, and this relies on the distinction between the two varying processes of knowing that consequently demands two varying types of methodologies within practical philosophy: cognition and reading/interpretation. I render the formerly

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<sup>1</sup> Practical philosophy, in al-Farabi's terms, is dedicated to the attainment of the good life and human happiness through investigating human being's voluntary intelligibles including voluntary actions, customs, dispositions, and investigating their sources and ends; as it focuses on the interaction of human and the objects of her/his voluntary actions towards herself/himself, family, neighborhood, city, the global society, and even nature, etc.... (Al-Farabi, 1996a:81-82; 1405c: 54-55; 1408, Vol.1: 141, 144, 271; 1413: 141).

demanded methodology as 'cognitive methodology' and the latter as 'interpretative methodology'<sup>2</sup> with the following differences:

1) Interpretation is a proper subset of cognition. In other words, although 'cognition' includes 'interpretation' the former is more general. According to al-Farabi, cognition is the mental action or the process of acquiring knowledge<sup>3</sup> and understanding through reason, experience, and the senses (Al-Farabi, 1996a:81-82; 1405c: 54-55; 1408, Vol.1: 141, 144, 271) where interpretation is the process of "the extraction of intentional meaning from the text"<sup>4</sup> (Al-Farabi, 1974a: 35-36). In other words, interpretation is cognition about one's expressed cognition (*i.e.*, text).

2) Through the cognitive methodology, as al-Farabi argues, the scholar of practical philosophy directly chooses a topic of practical science (*e.g.*, a topic within politics or ethics) and by grasping the general rules of practical science<sup>5</sup>, the scholar starts to examine and investigate the case under the methodological elements of *induction*, *experience*, and *sylllogism* (Al-Farabi, 1996a:81-82; 1405c: 54-55; 1408, Vol.1: 141, 144, 271). Through interpretative methodology, the scholar of practical philosophy reads a text to extract the author's intentional meanings in the text<sup>6</sup>. While the examination in the cognitive methodology is *direct* (between the author and the object) and cognitive, however, the examination of the object that the very author (which I render as *first subject*<sup>7</sup>) has directly cognized and expressed through his text/utterance

<sup>2</sup> This rendering is mine, not al-Farabi's.

<sup>3</sup> To al-Farabi, *knowledge* is a "necessary true belief". True belief is the certitude that, in a possible division, is divided into two essential and non-essential categories: necessary true belief and unnecessary true belief. Hence, knowledge has at least three necessary conditions to be knowledge: belief, truth, and necessity. Necessary true belief itself is divided into two categories, which are, in a way, the origin of a division in sciences: absolute and non-absolute. By adding three conditions to the former conditions, an absolute branch of knowledge is recognized. These three additional conditions are *awareness*, *eternity*, and *essentiality*. Although it is sufficient for a proposition to have the first three conditions to be considered scientific, however, an absolute branch of knowledge must have all six conditions (al-Farabi, 1408, Vol. 1: 350, 457, 461); though Black (2006) suggests a different reading of these six conditions. This absoluteness is limited to those scientific propositions which are either innate (*e.g.*, the number 2 is even) or resulting from a kind of syllogism (a syllogism that all of its premises are necessary) because only these two sections of sciences have the conditions of eternity and essentiality (al-Farabi, 1408, Vol. 1: 269).

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, all translations from original Arabic texts into English are mine.

<sup>5</sup> Along with the cognition of whether the 'constituents' of the object (for example cognition of human as rational [as differentia] animal [as genus]) or from 'accidents' including 'states' and 'conditions' of the case of study (the object or intelligible) under different 'conditions'.

<sup>6</sup> According to al-Farabi 'reading' or "interpretation" is defined as "the extraction of intentional meaning from the text" (Al-Farabi, 1974a: 35-36). But whose intention? author's intention or reader's intention? It is very hard to prove that al-Farabi gives a role to the reader's intention in the process of interpretation. The reader extracts meaning from the text not creating or adding meaning to the text. If a text could even have multiple layers of meaning all layers of meaning are the sole result of the author's intention. However, some modern scholars give a role to the reader's intention in creating the meaning of the text, and furthermore, some scholars give a role to the "intention of the text" (Eco, 1992: 25).

<sup>7</sup> Based on al-Farabi's epistemology, there are three key elements in the process of knowing and cognition: *eālim*, *ēālim*, *maelūm*. *Maelūm* (in a broad sense which includes the sensibles as well as rationables) is what is cognized by the cognitive faculty of humans (intellect and mind), or the object of cognition, and could be translated to 'object' or 'intelligible'. *Ēālim*, in a broad sense which is equivalent

becomes *indirect*. Since the object of this indirect examination is the expressed text/utterance of the first subject, this indirect examination becomes interpretative. Here, the reader (which I render as the *second subject*) needs a respective methodology for reading with independent elements distinctive from the former methodology. For example, the methodology that al-Farabi uses for reading and commentary on Plato's Laws as a text (Al-Farabai, 1974: 83-84), is typically different from al-Farabi's methodology for the cognition and explanation of laws in themselves as objective phenomena (Al-Farabi, 1413: 186-190). The former methodology is, in nature, cognitive and the latter is, in nature, interpretative.

Based on the mentioned necessities, this paper aims to provide, inspired by al-Farabi, a set of correlated elements of an 'interpretative methodology' for reading classical practical philosophy. However, there is a challenge: Al-Farabi has no elaborate exclusive text on methodology. Hence, I consider the proposed elements of methodology in this paper as 'inspired by' al-Farabi and not as an exact description of al-Farabi's methodology. In this way, some modern studies of classical practical philosophy helped me to approach al-Farabi's methodology, including Strauss' and Skinner's works. Since a comprehensive interpretative methodology is not the first aim of this paper, however, finding some correlated methodological elements can help to get closer to such an ultimate aim. Accordingly, this paper aims to provide, inspired by al-Farabi, a set of correlated elements of an 'interpretative methodology' for reading classical practical philosophy<sup>8</sup>.

In the absence of a methodological source within al-Farabi's heritage, I will argue that if one wants to grasp al-Farabi's methodology one way is to track and extract the key elements of the methodology that al-Farabi used, in practice, in his works. To make this extraction possible one should see how many types and classes of such elements can be considered. Here, I suggest a possible way of the classification of the methodological elements which is based on their relationship with text: 1) the elements inside the text (in-text elements) 2) the elements outside the text (out-text elements) 3)

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to cognizer, is the holder of cognitive faculty (which consists of both rational and sensory perception) and could be rendered as 'subject'. *ʿilm*, is a translation for knowledge and is the true certain correspondence (*ṣidq*) between image/concept (in the subject's cognitive faculty) and object. To cognize the object (*maʿlūm*), the subject (*ʿālim*) along with his cognitive faculty, needs to unify with the form/image of object. Thus, *ʿilm* (knowledge), with respect to *maʿlūm* (object), is nothing but the acquired image/form of object in cognitive faculty (*e.g.*, mind) which certainly and truly corresponds to object. Cognition, as the process of acquiring knowledge, takes place when the image/form of the given object is abstracted by the cognitive faculty, whether the image belongs to a matter or not (Al-Farabi, 1938: 20). This is by correlating and unifying these three elements (cognizer, cognitive faculty, the form of object) that the cognition takes place (Al-Farabi, 1938: 15-16). Hence, by subject, I mean the cognizer (*ʿālim*) who, by and in his cognitive faculty, abstracts and acquires the "image/form of object" (*i.e.*, knowledge). This account of subject is not necessarily equivalent to the correspondent Cartesian concept (Descartes, 1901: 37-39).

<sup>8</sup> In many of Al-Farabi's works "*al-madanī* philosophy" is equivalent to "practical philosophy". Many modern scholars of al-Farabi's philosophy have translated *al-madanī* philosophy to "political philosophy". Although in al-Farabi's terminology, the term *al-madanī* includes politics, it is more general and includes ethics as well. *Al-madanī* is from *al-madīna* which literally means city in Arabic.

the elements between the texts (intertextual elements). I will argue that the elements in these three sections are in interaction and correlation. Also, I will show that the intertextual elements function as the linkage between other elements and make the systematic correlation between all methodological elements.

I consider the components of a text as in-text elements: content and form and their relationship or semantic implications. Regarding out-text elements, I will show that 'context' can be taken as an umbrella for all of the elements affecting the text from the outside. I also examine the intertextual elements within two horizontal and vertical lines. The horizontal intertextual element is about reading the author's works within linear time, or, in other words, the chronology of the author's works. I take chronology as the *linear* intertextual element of an interpretative methodology. The vertical intertextual elements are about reading the author's works within the author's system of thought. The author's system of thought encompasses epistemology and ontology both of which I take as the *systemic* intertextual elements of an interpretative methodology.

## 2. OUT-TEXT ELEMENT

In reading classical texts, should the text be considered a self-sufficient and independent object, or do the understanding and interpretation of text need the understanding of the context within which the text has been constructed? Some modern scholars believe in the independence of text from the context in the process of reading classical texts (Leavis, 1953) suggesting that the texts and ideas have "timeless elements" (Merkl, 1972) as well as universal and perennial implications. Accordingly, the reappraisal of the classic writings must be "quite apart from the context of historical development" (Bluhm, 1965: v). On the other hand, Strauss argues that understanding the text properly, in the field of political philosophy, is impossible without understanding the author's context (Strauss, 1988: 30). Skinner, along with other Cambridge School historians, extends the priority and binding of this *out-text element* (*i.e.*, context) to the study of the history of political thoughts (Laslett, 1956; Skinner, 1969, 2002; Dunn, 1968; Pocock, 1962, 1985, 1987; Tully & Skinner, 1988; Palonen, 2003). Skinner, in a critical article, challenges both of the two "orthodox" 'for' and 'against' approaches to the contextual reading of text because "neither approach seems a sufficient or even appropriate means of achieving a proper understanding of any given literary or philosophical work" (Skinner, 1969: 4). According to Skinner, this supplemental element of methodology, which acts as an interface between text and (social) context, is missed in both orthodox interpretive approaches: (*i.e.*, contextual and merely textual reading) (Skinner, 1969: 47). Thus, the grasp of meaning emerges from the interplay between the author's mind/language and his text and context so that any reference of the text to the context without the clarification of the correlation between mind/language and the two other elements of contextual reading (*i.e.*, text and context) would lead to misinterpretation and semantic deviation (Skinner, 1969: 49; 2002: 87).

I expand this discussion by suggesting a question to address an answer inspired by al-Farabi: what makes the semantic relationship between these elements of contextual reading? Is that the author's subjectivity (e.g., mind, language, intention, thought, and idea), the reader's subjectivity, or the objects including social conditions (e.g., political power surrounding both the author and the reader)? My answer, inspired by al-Farabi, is as follows: both the author's and reader's subjectivity. I discuss that the subjectivity and its content are the only bridge between the text and the author's objective conditions (i.e., all surrounding conditions whether they are created by nature or human volition) so that the author's context affects the author's text only through the author's subjectivity. On the other side, when the given text comes to be read, another subjectivity (i.e., the reader's subjectivity) interplays a role. To distinguish between these two types of subjectivity, I call the author the first subject and the reader the second subject.

However, one general point that is emphasized and widely agreed to in the recent scholarship on philosophical interpretation is that not all of the contextual elements which affect the ancient thinker's subjectivity are indiscriminately relevant but it needs to be sensitive to the purpose of each project of philosophical interpretation. As explained by Mou (2020), "when a project aims to accurately describe relevant historical matters of facts and pursue what the thinker under description actually thought and what resources the thinker actually used, simplification is always oversimplification. Nevertheless, it should be clear that if the purpose of a project is to focus on interpreting or elaborating one aspect or dimension instead of giving a comprehensive historical description, charging the practitioner of this project with oversimplification would be unfair and miss the point" (Mou, 2020: 139).

How does al-Farabi (as a typical case among classical philosophers), by reading ancient philosophical texts, approaches the out-text elements or contextual elements? As discussed earlier, the process of obtaining knowledge varies in direct and indirect modes. Following Aristotle (Aristotle, 1960: 281), in al-Farabi's epistemology, direct cognition divides into two kinds of *substantial* or *accidental* (Aristotle, 1960: 279) which depend on the kind of predicate of the object through which the subject cognizes the object. In other words, cognition (*ma'rifā*) and definition (*ta'rif*) are acquired either from 1) the knowledge of constituents (*muqawwimāt*) of the substance of the given object, including genus (*jins*) and differentia (*faṣl*), which is rendered as essential cognition and 'essential definition' (*al-ta'rif bil-ḥad*), or, 2) the knowledge of accidents (*ʿawāriḍ*) of the given object, which is rendered as descriptive cognition and 'descriptive definition' (*al-ta'rif bil-rasm*) (Al-Farabi, 1408, Vol. 1: 38-40).

Taking human being as an intelligible (object) in practical philosophy, the accidents in direct cognition include human being's *states* or *conditions*<sup>9</sup> (Al-Farabi, 1405c, 29,

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<sup>9</sup> In al-Farabi's terminology, *state* (*ḥāl*; plural: *aḥwāl*) or *condition* (*sharṭ*; plural: *sharā'it*) is equivalent to the Greek term of *katástasi*. According to him, the human states are divided into *praiseworthy* and *non-praiseworthy* parts. The praiseworthy states are divided into three parts: 1) Actions 2) Feelings 3) Discernment. All three categories of these states can be *praiseworthy* and *blameworthy*. *Actions* are praiseworthy or blameworthy because they can be *ugly* or *beautiful*. *Feelings* (e.g., pleasure, lust, eagerness, and fear) are praiseworthy or blameworthy because they can be *deserved* or *undeserved*.

54-55), *time*, *quantity*, and *quality* as well as other respective accidents by which and under some universal laws the practical philosopher investigates human being's actions, costumes, and dispositions (Al-Farabi, 1996a: 82-83). I argue that if the category of a given object 1) is motionable (directly or indirectly) 2) influences the cognition of the object, then, it can be considered as a contextual element for both the first and second subject. The accidents are the non-substantial gates of the knowledge of the object by the first subject. Hence, because of this very non-substantiality of the accidents, they, unlike substance<sup>10</sup> (according to the following arguable account of Aristotle), can change over time (hour by hour, day by day, month by month, year by year, or century by century [Al-Farabi, 1413: 148]), as they can change by each particular authorial object; so that the gradual change in the accidents and states of the object consequently influences the first subject's knowledge of those particular objects.

Adopted from Aristotelian philosophy, al-Farabi suggests that the substance cannot gradually change or have motion<sup>11</sup>, but only some accidents can have motion or gradual change (*kinêsis*) (Aristotle, 2017: 52; Al-Farabi, 1413: 330, 382, 383; 1987: 95,96). Based on this philosophical position, "time is the measure of motion [of motionable things]" (Aristotle, 2017: 109). Taking human being as an object (intelligible) in practical philosophy, one can consider the human city, society, and civilization as well as human life as motionable accidents. These accidents, as the gates of knowledge of objects, are subject to change whenever the "new-coming things", whether "created by nature" or "created by human volition", happen to some or all human beings during different times and places (Al-Farabi, 1413: 149).<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, investigating the actions, habits, and lifestyle of some particular human beings over time or during their

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*Discernment* is praiseworthy or blameworthy as it can be *weak* or *firm*. Only these three types of states can bring people to *happiness* or keep them away from happiness. But to do this, these three categories of states must have four conditions: *rational volition* (*'ikhtiyār*), *satisfaction*, *inclusiveness*, and *habit*. With the fulfillment of these conditions, these three categories of states become dispositions (*behavioral*, *psychological*, *theoretical*). If the disposition is in the way of *good*, it is called *virtue* and can bring a person closer to happiness, and if the disposition is in the way of *evil*, it is called *vice* and takes a person away from happiness (Al-Farabi, 1413: 229-236). Therefore, a beautiful action is not necessarily a virtue. The beautiful action must be repeated by its subject in a satisfactory and rational-voluntary way until it becomes a habit. This habit can be considered a virtue.

<sup>10</sup> Both in the primary sense (*particulars*) and the secondary sense (*universals*).

<sup>11</sup> In Aristotelian physics, the substance also can change but no change in substance can be gradual (to be called motion as the actualization of potentiality which is necessarily gradual), because as soon as the least change happens in the substance of a given object, it will result in the *corruption* of the given object and *generation* of a new object (Aristotle, 2004: 20) which substantially differs from the past one.

<sup>12</sup> Considering time as the measure of motion, it is only by the motion of human society that "the time for human society" is created. I render the very time for human society as "human history". Hence, considering society as the interactional collection of human beings, human history is nothing but human society in motion, or, more exactly, human history is the measure of motion in human society. Consequently, human history, which I render as 'civil time' (in terms of civil philosophy), is dependent on the motion (of the motionable parts of society, i.e., the accidents of society). In other words, civil time or human history is created by gradual changes or motion in humans' actions, customs, and dispositions as well as their sources and ends.

history needs the investigation of their motion and gradual changes which happen with the emergence of each *newcomer* (*wārid*)<sup>13</sup>.

Based on the Aristotelian account of motion according to which motion only happens in (four of) non-substantial (i.e., accidental) categories, such gradual changes only happen in human beings' accidents<sup>14</sup> (e.g., motionable) and not in their substance. If this philosophical account of motion is accepted, the contextual reading (by the reader, i.e., second subject) should be focused on the motionable and influencing accidents of the authorial objects. In other words, to cognize the given object (e.g., particular humans' actions and dispositions), the first subject (i.e., the author or practical philosopher) should cognize, through his practical intellect, the accidents of the given object as well as the motions of those accidents.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the reader (second subject) needs to cognize the influence of the motionable accidents (as contextual variables) on both the first subject's cognition and the first subject's expression of text.

Having discussed the out-text elements adopted from the classical approach, I suggest the following definition for the *context of a text*: "The states, conditions, and accidental elements surrounding and influencing the text (intelligible), whether created by author's volition or others' volition or by nature, whether influencing the content of the text or the way/mode in which the content is expressed". Taking this definition and influence of context into account, one can see that al-Farabi himself paid methodological attention to 'the knowledge of context' as an essential element of an interpretative methodology. He read some parts of Plato's and Aristotle's works and ideas through referring their texts to their historical context which used to be elaborated in a classical genre of books that al-Farabi calls "predecessors news" (*'akhbār al-mutaqaddimīn*) (Al-Farabi, 1405a: 83). For example, al-Farabi in his treatise of *Harmonization* contextualizes Plato's idea of "isolation from the mundane affairs" in the context of lifestyle and objective and actual environment of Plato's life to read the idea correctly and solve the contradiction of this Plato's idea with Aristotle's (Al-

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<sup>13</sup> Unlike *unnecessary true beliefs*, in *necessary true beliefs*, there is a necessary association between the subject and the predicate *as long as* the subject and the predicate exist. In other words, the proposition is true *as long as* its subject and predicate exist. This is an *un-absolute necessity* of association between subject and predicate and includes most branches of sciences, including practical sciences (al-Farabi, 1408, Vol. 1: 350, 457, 461). What ends this necessity across time and place is called "newcomers" and created whether from nature and or from human's volition (only in practical sciences) (al-Farabi, 1413: 148-149). What is moral at a given time in a place might be immoral at another time under some different conditions. Hence, in practical sciences (as well as natural sciences), what makes a proposition scientific is not its eternity but its necessity which is conditional.

<sup>14</sup> Here, by accident, I mean both in the sense of Aristotelian categories and Porphyry's Isagoge.

<sup>15</sup> However, if some philosopher, unlike Aristotelian tradition, proves that the substance is motionable as well (as Mulla Sadra suggests so [Al-Shirazi, 1981, Vol. 3: 83-89; Vol. 5: 342- 344]), then one can consider that in addition to the accidents of the given object (e.g. human being), the substance of this object (i.e. rationality as the "last differentia" of the human being [Al-Shirazi, 1981, Vol. 3: 95]) is subject to the influence of context, and, hence, this respect of influence of context should be considered and be read by the civil reader too; for example, the influence of computer in modern time on the human rationality as his substance.



Farabi, 1405a: 83). Al-Farabi's method to read this given part of Plato's and Aristotle's ideas is to refer to the idea to its context and to the requirements of time and environment of their life (p. 83). Based on this method, al-Farabi concludes that the cause of the contradiction between the two philosophers' ideas on the subject was only "the defect in Plato's natural power" (which I consider as a natural contextual element) and if he had the same surrounding conditions as Aristotle had, he would also increase, theoretically and practically, his social interactions (p. 84).

This very methodological attitude is seen in the introduction of al-Farabi's interpretative treatise of *Summary of Plato's Laws*. In the introduction, al-Farabi, through the explanation of esoteric characteristic of philosophical texts of ancients (*qudamā*) (e.g. Plato and Aristotle), shows that any philosophical text or given idea of an ancient philosopher should not be read separated from that ancient philosopher's context and environment (here specifically: the various types of the ancient philosopher's audience and the audience's intellectual disposition) (Al-Farabi, 1974a: 35-36) because the ancient philosophers used to consider the level of understanding of popular audience (*al-ēamma*), which is based on unscientific induction (*'istiqrā'*), in the way/mode they express their ideas (Al-Farabi, 1974: 35). This methodological attitude of al-Farabi can be seen, as well, in his books of *Logic* (1408) and *al-Horouf* (1986), where he notes the influence of this context, *i.e.*, audience of author's text, on the formation and the manner of expression of instructions for the popular people (*al-nās*) under the title of esoteric philosophy (*al-falsafa al-zāhira* and *al-falsafa al-khārijīyya*) (Al-Farabi, 1408, Vol. 1: 381) and popular education (*al-ta'lim al-ēām*) (Al-Farabi, 1986: 151-152). Al-Farabi, in another interpretative treatise, *Plato's Philosophy and its Arts*, again, focuses on the context in the reading of the philosophy of his predecessors and speaks of the "great danger" as one of the objective conditions and a context that affects the form in which Plato expressed his philosophy (Al-Farabi, 1974: 26).

Nevertheless, the items mentioned above can only show that al-Farabi considered the influence of 'context' only on the form of *expression* of knowledge (of the objects) by the given philosopher (which produces the text), not on the *direct cognition* of knowledge (of the objects) itself by the given philosopher. To address this problem, one, first, should take note of the difference between interpretation and cognition. As mentioned above, according to al-Farabi, *interpretation* and *reading* are the extraction of intentional meaning from the expressed text (Al-Farabi, 1974a: 35-36); but rather, *cognition* is more general and includes all cognitive objects; whether meaningful or meaningless, whether intentional or unintentional, whether textual or non-textual. Considering this difference, the answer to the following question seems more reachable: can the cognition/knowledge of the object, same as the expression of the knowledge of the object, be influenced by the context?

In the part of '*expression* of the knowledge of object', al-Farabi's works show that all areas of knowledge are susceptible to being influenced by the context, but in the part of '*knowledge (or cognition)* of object', al-Farabi restricts the influence of context only on those sciences whose subjects are motionable and changeable across time and under different conditions, *i.e.*, *practical sciences* and *natural sciences*, as he excludes

*theoretical sciences* (e.g., primary philosophy, logic, mathematics) from the influence area of context. According to al-Farabi, the practical science encompasses two branches: *ethics* and *politics* (as somewhere calls it *civil science* or *al-ilm al-madanī*) (Al-Farabi, 1413: 256-257). The subject of practical sciences, contrary to the theoretical sciences (whether the mere theoretical sciences like theoretical music or applied theoretical sciences<sup>16</sup> like applied music), includes voluntary actions (*al-'afēāl*), voluntary customs (*al-sunan*), and voluntary dispositions (*malakāt*) all of which are rendered as *voluntary intelligibles* (*al-maeqūlāt al-'irādiyya*) (Al-Farabi, 1413: 187), and can be judged as *good*, *bad*, *beautiful*, or *ugly* (al-Farabi, 1996b: 78). Accordingly, practical sciences are voluntarily actionable<sup>17</sup> and, in other words, they can be voluntarily acted after their knowledge (Al-Farabi, 1408, Vol. 1: 14, 415), and, contrary to the theoretical sciences, have an inherent association with human actions (Al-Farabi, 1408, Vol. 1: 223). The existence of the very element and characteristic of *volition* (*'irāda*) in human being's actions, customs, and dispositions causes the variation in these actions and dispositions among human individuals and societies at different times, as causes different states (*'ahwāl*) and accidents (*εawāriḍ*) under different conditions (*sharā'iṭ*) (Al-Farabi, 1405c, 29, 54-55). The very variation of states and accidents<sup>18</sup> makes the cognition in *practical sciences* different from the cognition in other sciences, because, this is only within practical sciences that the objects (*i.e.*, the volitional intangibles) have the *voluntary* characteristic (Al-Farabi, 1996b: 77) as the human beings can voluntarily change their states and conditions.

To al-Farabi, experience in civil philosophy means “the ability to correctly infer the conditions” and the civil philosopher (*al-faylasūf al-madanī*) experiences (*yujarrib*), measures (*yuqaddir*), and cognizes the various actions, dispositions, and customs of the human being under general laws through the context of the very various conditions of its “states and accidents” (Al-Farabi, 1996a: 82-84). Accordingly, the very variable element of “conditions” becomes the bearer of the influence of ‘context’ on the knowledge/cognition in practical philosophy including political philosophy and ethics.

As in al-Farabi's political philosophy, the typical legislator (*i.e.*, lawgiver or the first ruler: *al-ra'īs al-'awwal*) makes laws based on the very variant conditions of states (*'ahwāl*) of different human individuals and societies (Al-Farabi, 1413: 186). This can be grasped from al-Farabi's description of civil philosophy or practical philosophy in his treatise of *'iḥṣā' al-eulūm* (Enumeration of Sciences): “Civil philosophy gives some general rules for the examination of voluntary actions (*'afēāl*), customs, and dispositions (*malakāt*) as well as other subjects under examination. In the measurement of these subjects, civil philosophy gives the impressions (*al-rusūm*) according to

<sup>16</sup> According to al-Farabi, applied science is distinct from practical sciences and includes the application of both theoretical and practical science in human life.

<sup>17</sup> Relying on my reading of al-Farabi, I render “actionable” as a kind of knowledge that can be intentionally acted, and it is beyond being applied because any science can be applied by humans but not necessarily can be acted or done by humans. Thus, practical sciences which are necessarily actionable, are dedicated to the human being as the general object of practical sciences.

<sup>18</sup> States (*'ahwāl*) and accidents (*εawāriḍ*), in some parts, are grasped through descriptive cognition and descriptive definition, *i.e.*, *al-ta'rif bil-rasm*.

various states, times, quality, which thing, and the quantity<sup>19</sup> of thing [*i.e.*, the thing under examination]. However, these subjects remain unmeasured until adding another potential to reach actual measurement” (Al-Farabi, 1996a: 82-83). This supplementary potential is “created by experience (*tajruba*)” (p. 4). Experience, in al-Farabi’s civil philosophy, causes “the power to correctly infer (*’istinbāf*) from the conditions”. In other words, by the means of experience the objects of civil philosophy are measured under the general rules and according to the various states and accidents of each human community, city, and society (p. 84).

Accordingly, in theoretical sciences (*e.g.*, theoretical philosophy or mathematics) which encompass the immutable truths, it is only the *form of expression* of the results of cognition (*i.e.*, the *form* of expression of knowledge) that can be affected by the *context*, not the *processes of cognition* itself.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, in theoretical sciences, it is only in the *interpretation* of the form of expression that needs to know the context. But in practical sciences, unlike theoretical sciences, both the *cognition* (knowledge) of and the *expression* of the results of cognition (both of which are done by the *civil philosopher*) are affected by the context. Hence, in practical sciences, both the interpretation of the philosopher’s cognition and the interpretation of the philosopher’s form of expression of knowledge (both of which are done by the *practical reader*) need the knowledge of the context. In other words, in practical sciences, both the *content* (what is said) and the *form* (how it is said) of an idea or text are to be affected by the context that will be explained in the next section.

### 3. IN-TEXT ELEMENTS: THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE FORM AND CONTENT OF TEXT

In addition to the cognition of out-text (contextual) elements that influence both the cognition and expression of civil knowledge, an interpretive methodology needs the cognition of in-text elements including the form and semantic implications of the content (or meaning) of the expressed text. I argue that without the knowledge of the form (and formal semantics) of Aristotle's philosophical texts, al-Farabi would never have been able to grasp the meanings and the semantic implications of their contents or meanings. Al-Farabi applied this methodological element in his *Book of Letters* (*Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*) (1986). This book totally can be considered as a preface and a linguistic tool or a “logical syntax” (Menn, 2008: 64) for the reading of ideas in the various sciences, particularly philosophy. As the science of logic is the fault detection tool for thinking, ‘terminology’ as a science of words and terms (in terms of al-Farabi: *ilm al-ḥurūf* & *ilm al-’alfāz* or the science of particles) and ‘syntax’ (*al-naḥv* and *ilm*

<sup>19</sup> Here, al-Farabi is referring to the motionable accidents (from Aristotelian categories) by which the human object (intelligible) is cognized within practical philosophy: *time, quality, where, and quantity*.

<sup>20</sup> For example, no context can affect the mere cognition of the evenness of the number 2, because the evenness of the number 2 is an immutable truth which means that the number 2 is permanently even and is recognized as even in any context, at any time/space, and under any condition. Yes, someone might, at a time, somewhere, under some condition, understand and believe that the number 2 is odd, but this is not a true belief and accordingly it is not the knowledge of the number 2.

*al-lisān* or the science of language) can be considered as a fault detection tool for both the true expression of scientific utterances and the true understanding of the expressed utterances. According to al-Farabi, the territory of logic<sup>21</sup> is mind (reason) and the territory of terminology is language (Al-Farabi, 1996a: 27; 1949: 54; 1413: 260). Based on this parallel, the table of contents in both al-Farabi's book of *Logic* and *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* are somehow similar. However, the chapter contents in the *Logic* are mostly intellectual and in *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* are mostly linguistic. In *al-Ḥurūf*, the focus is on the semantic implications of words in any philosopher's language and his time as well as the language of the people of his territory (*lisān al-jumhūr* or 'ahl al-lisān') based on which the rhetorical aspect of the to-be-read texts becomes essential (Al-Farabi, 1986: 148, 109-111; 1413: 264).

For example, al-Farabi could not understand the concept of 'being' (*al-wujūd*) in the Greek classical philosophical lexicon without the terminology of this concept which he explained in his *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* as well as his comparative assessment of the position and semantic implications of the word 'being' in the various languages of Greek, Arabic, Persian, Sogdian, and Syriac (Al-Farabi, 1986: 110-112). This is based on the very comprehensive terminology of the concept of *being*, that al-Farabi could first grasp Aristotle's theory of 'being' in *Metaphysics* and then could accurately interpret it in his interpretative *Essay on the Aims of Metaphysics* (Al-Farabi, 1926) and finally could independently philosophize *being* in the first chapters of his books *ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāzila* and *al-siyāsa al-madaniyya* both of which are creatively epistemological and ontological, with some differences between them (Galston, 2015). Thus, al-Farabi read the ancient philosophical texts through the synchronic linguistics and rhetoric frame of the ancients (*qudamā*) themselves. This very use of the term *qudamā* (ancients) by al-Farabi as well as by many other classical Muslim philosophers can be considered as a window to the understanding of al-Farabi's and his fellow philosophers' approach to the classical thoughts of their time (*i.e.*, Greek philosophy). One of the examples of al-Farabi's attention to the ancients' terminology for reading their thoughts is how the ancients used to name the scientific instruments such as the consignor, ruler, and scale (Al-Farabi, 1996a: 18); as another example of al-Farabi's linguistic re-description for the reading of classical thought can be found in some of al-Farabi's works under a phrase like "the ancients used to name" (*al-qudamā yusammūn*) (Al-Farabi, 1996a: 34, 36, 40; 1986: 168, 176-177, 181; 1408: 25).

Also, the form of a text cannot be examined without the examination of its content and its semantic implications as well as the classical author's way of expressing meanings and themes whose example can be the *esoteric* characteristic of some classical philosophical texts. Along with some of his students, Strauss believes that al-Farabi, like many classical philosophers, had an esoteric way of expressing the content and meanings in his philosophical writing, as its disregard by the reader results in the misinterpretation of his texts (Strauss, 1988: 17, 28, 31). One can see that Al-Farabi

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<sup>21</sup> Al-Farabi defines logic in *Iḥṣā' al-ʿulūm* as "a science that principally gives some rules whose function is to safeguard the mind from errors" (Al-Farabi, 1949: 53) or according to another editor of the book "a science that gives all the rules whose function is to safeguard the mind from errors" (Al-Farabi, 1996a: 27).

has some precise methodological statements, at least in four of his books, that indicate the necessity of the philosophical scholar's and reader's attention to the esoteric characteristic of philosophical writing before reading and learning it (Al-Farabi, 1408; 1974; 1405A; 2008). In the treatise of *mā yanbaqī*, Al-Farabi mentions the necessity of learning nine preliminary principles for the learning of Aristotle's philosophy based on two of which the scholar should know "the *type* of Aristotle's statement and the different ways of its use" in three categories of Aristotle's books: *special books*, *interpretative books*, *treatises* (Al-Farabi, 1405a: 7). The distinctive feature of each of these categories is as follows: "compendious in his special books", "deliberate complexity and ambiguity in his *interpretative books*" and "clarity and brevity in his treatises" (7). Thus, according to al-Farabi, to extract the meanings from the text, the learner and the reader after knowing these three textual features need to know the philosopher's reasons for applying complexity and ambiguity (Al-Farabi, 1974a: 36). Al-Farabi, in the treatise of *mā yanbaqī*, mentions three reasons for the deliberate complexity of a philosophical text: 1) the examination and purification of the learner and checking if he/she has the eligibility for learning philosophy 2) depriving ineligible common people of learning philosophy 3) to challenge the learner's mind with pain and tiredness as a type of intellectual exercise when exploring the meanings (Al-Farabi, 1405a: 7). I suggest that one can take this "type of audience" as a context in which either the "private" or "popular" expression of the text is shaped by the philosopher (Al-Farabi, 1408, Vol. 1: 381). Al-Farabi calls this type of popular expression and reasoning for the common people the "superficial philosophy" and "exterior philosophy" (*al-falsafa al-burāna*) (Al-Farabi, 1408, Vol. 1: 381-382). In the *Book of Letters*, he calls the education of exterior philosophy for common people "popular education" which is based on the premises that Aristotle names as "*generally accepted opinions*" (Aristotle, 1960: 273,275) (*mashhūrāt*), as well as on the arts of dialectic, rhetoric, and poetry, in front of "private education" which is based on "demonstrative methods" (Al-Farabi, 1986: 151-152). Although this type of superficial philosophy and popular education is not considered a part of true sciences (certain sciences), but includes an important, although superficial, part of classical philosophy, as al-Farabi says: "Aristotle has remarked in many of his books that some of his books have the function of exterior philosophy" (Al-Farabi, 1408, Vol. 1: 382). Thus, to acquire true knowledge, the reader (as well as the learner) should pass this surface and the superficial philosophy.

Almost the same reasons for complexity and ambiguity mentioned in the treatise of *mā yanbaqī*, are mentioned in the treatise of *Summary of Plato's Laws* as well (Al-Farabi, 1974a: 36), as in the latter, al-Farabi excludes the reason for intellectual exercise. In the treatise of *al-Jame (Harmonization)*, al-Farabi's reiteration of this methodological principle that the reader needs to pay attention to the esoteric aspect of ancient philosophical text takes double importance because he examines this characteristic in both Plato's and Aristotle's works and gives some clear examples. In this case, Strauss convincingly argues that al-Farabi "could show that the esoteric teachings of both philosophers [Plato and Aristotle] are identical." (Strauss, 1945: 359). According to Al-Farabi, Plato, by writing his philosophical works, used to "deliberately

make some enigma and mysteries in order to prohibit [readers] from knowing [the content] of it except the competent persons, and to force the persons to crave, explore, investigate and diligence” (Al-Farabi, 1405a: 85). He argues that “the wise Plato did not feel free to reveal and uncover the sciences for all men. Therefore, he followed the practice of using symbols, riddles, obscurity, and difficulty” (Al-Farabi, 1974a: 84–85). He also adds: “Any person who is an expert of Aristotle’s philosophy grasps that although Aristotle evidently aims to elaborate and explain without any ambiguity in his works, he, as well as Plato, has closure (*’ighlāq*), blinding (*ta’emiya*), and complexity (*ta’eqīd*) in these works” (p. 84). For example, according to al-Farabi, Aristotle has eliminated one of the necessary premises in many of his syllogisms, as he has eliminated the conclusion of the syllogism in many other syllogisms, and he eliminates one of the two sides in polar concepts (Al-Farabi, 1405a: 84-85).

Here, the question is if al-Farabi, in *reading* ancients’ philosophy, not only paid methodological attention to their deliberate complexity but also, in writing his own philosophical ideas, made some deliberate complexity. Strauss as well as many of his students, based on an especial interpretation of some of al-Farabi’s statements on esoteric methodology in the mentioned treatises, believe that al-Farabi himself, for some reasons, had esoteric writing in some of his books. Consequently, they divide his works into two levels: esoteric and exoteric. The exoteric level is maintained according to the level of public minds. The exoteric level is the cover of the second level (*i.e.*, the deliberately-complex esoteric level) which contains the main meanings of al-Farabi’s philosophy (Galston, 1990: 35, 38). For instance, Strauss and Druart discuss that al-Farabi, unlike his works such as *Book of Religion* and *Plato’s Philosophy*, has esoteric writing in the Summary of Plato’s Laws, as he has stated his own secret thoughts under the cover of *Summary of Plato’s Laws* (Druart, 1992: 128; Strauss, 1988: 140). Strauss states the reasons for al-Farabi’s esotericism as follows: “Philosophy and the philosophers were ‘in grave danger’ [...]. The exoteric teaching was needed for protecting philosophy. It was the armor in which philosophy had to appear. [...] From here we shall perhaps understand sometime why Farabi presented the whole of philosophy within a political framework” (Strauss, 1988: 17-18).

Strauss by emphasizing the phrase “grave danger” shows it as al-Farabi’s reason for his esotericism and sees a meaningful correlation between the author’s “writing between the lines” and al-Farabi’s fear from “grave danger” (Strauss, 1988: 32). But in al-Farabi’s treatise to which Strauss refers, al-Farabi only mentions the phrase once (Al-Farabi, 1974b: 26) and it is related to Plato’s time and not al-Farabi’s and accordingly cannot be considered as al-Farabi’s reason for esotericism. However, when al-Farabi in the introduction of Plato’s Laws, by mentioning some reasons (Al-Farabi, 1408: 7-8; al-Farabi, 1974: 36), considers the esotericism as a part of the general methodology of philosophers (*ḥukamā*), he, himself, as a philosopher, is supposed to have used this part of the methodology unless the mentioned reasons of esotericism had lost their function at al-Farabi’s time. By assessing the classical philosophers’ works following al-Farabi, one can see that the same reasons remained in their time. Most of them believed in esotericism and used it and limited access to their esoteric philosophical teachings only to qualified persons. This was based on the same al-

Farabi's reasons at the top of which is "the protection of philosophy from incompetents" (Suhrawardi, 1375, Vol. 2: 258; Ikhwan Al-Safa, 1412, Vol. 2: 343; Shirazi, 1981, Vol. 2: 39; Vol. 8: 221; 1422: 226). Accordingly, as al-Farabi introduces his method in the book of *Summary* as "the extraction of meanings" from the appearances of Plato's Laws (Al-Farabi, 1974a: 36), the current scholar's access to the depth of classical practical philosophy, as well, needs "the extraction of meanings" from the depth of content and behind the appearances of the classical texts and works.

#### 4. INTERTEXTUAL ELEMENTS: INTELLECTUAL CHRONOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY, AND ONTOLOGY

In addition to the above elements, Al-Farabi shows that the reading of the text and the extraction of the meanings from it need the cognition of the philosopher's whole intellectual and philosophical system and the exposition of the reading idea/theory to the totality of the philosopher's intellectual system and structure. Strauss calls the name of this totality through which the text should be read as the "literary character of the whole work" that influences the understanding of the text (Strauss, 1988: 30). Inspired by al-Farabi, I will argue that this third set of methodological elements (*i.e.*, the explanation and drawing of the philosopher's intellectual system) consists of two dimensions: 1) horizontal dimension (*i.e.*, intellectual chronology) 2) vertical dimension (*i.e.*, philosopher's *ontology* and *epistemology*).

##### 4.1. INTELLECTUAL CHRONOLOGY

Intellectual chronology and drawing of the timeline of writings and the process of its change and evolution have a significant role in the study and interpretation of classical philosopher's instructions because the philosopher's thoughts and ideas have been possibly subject to the change and evolution during his/her intellectual lifetime. As Skinner shows (Skinner, 1969: 7, 21-22), disregarding this methodological factor or the failure in its application might cause anachronism for the reader and scholar at the time of facing contradictory ideas, or seemingly contradictory ideas in philosopher's various works which have been written in different periods of philosopher's intellectual lifetime. In other words, a major part of the possible contradictions of a given classical thinker could be the result of the natural process of change and evolution in the given thinker's thoughts. Al-Farabi, in one way or another, has applied this type of chronology in reading Plato's philosophy and, in this regard, drew the timeline of Plato's thoughts and works in his treatise of *falsafatu Aflātūn* (Al-Farabi, 1974b: 5-27). As the title indicates, the main purpose of this almost-15-page treatise is the chronology of Plato's thoughts and works and not the explanation. As this treatise starts with the title of "The First Issue That Plato Examined" (*fahāṣa awwalan*) (Al-Farabi, 1974b: 5) and once the entry of any given treatise and idea ends, the next entry starts with the titles such as "then after that" (Al-Farabi, 1974b: 5-27), which implies al-Farabi's intention for drawing chronology of Plato's works and their procedure and process of writing. For example, al-Farabi, in this treatise, mentions Plato's Laws in a

single sentence (p. 24), but this shows the chronological position of this book among Plato's works and, then, in the context of such a drawn timeline, al-Farabi reads and “extracts the meanings” of the very Plato's Laws in a separate interpretative treatise (*i.e.*, Summary of Plato's Laws) (Al-Farabi, 1974a: 34-83). What is important, in terms of methodology, is that al-Farabi, prior to reading and extracting the meanings of Plato's Laws, in addition to paying attention to all requirements and components of interpretative methodology, had specific attention to the chronological position of this treatise in the whole process and timeline of Plato's thoughts and intellectual evolution. In parallel with *Plato's Philosophy and Its Parts*, al-Farabi has another treatise on the intellectual chronology of Aristotle with the same methodology and under a similar title (*Aristotle's Philosophy and the Parts of His Philosophy*). Both the title and content structure of this treatise show al-Farabi's methodological intention for drawing the intellectual chronology of Aristotle, as al-Farabi's corresponding connectors such as “then” and “then after that” at the beginning of entries of thoughts and books of Aristotle (from the second entry to the final entry) show al-Farabi's aim for drawing the horizontal line of Aristotle's intellectual system (Al-Farabi, 1961).

This element of chronology and al-Farabi's attention to the chronological sequence of Aristotle's works, is evident, in another way, in al-Farabi's treatise of *Harmonization of the Two Opinions of the Two Philosophers* (Al-Farabi, 1405a: 85). Under this methodological element, the current scholar and reader need to know whether those al-Farabi's works which are studied in given interpretative research, were written before al-Farabi's immigration from Baghdad and his ex-communication (*takfir*) by the jurists of this city or after the immigration from the city and during his residence in the territory of al-Ḥamdānī in Aleppo and under their advocacy (Shahrzouri, 1365: 364) to grasp the possible influences of objective contextual conditions (*e.g.* economic and political advocacy, the danger of ex-communication on each work as well as its possible changes and contradiction from/with former works of the philosopher).

#### 4.2. PHILOSOPHER'S ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

In one of the lost treatises of al-Farabi, entitled *The Explanation of Nicomachean Ethics*, a quote has been allocated to al-Farabi: “happiness is to be achieved only in this life, not in the afterlife”. This quote has been controversial among scholars because it apparently contradicts al-Farabi's philosophical system. The most certain form of this attribution and critique is from Ibn Tufail in his book of *ḥay ibn yaqzān*. Ibn Tufail had access to the mentioned treatise and allocates the quote to al-Farabi and accuses him of an “irreparable fault” (Ibn Tufail, 1993: 21-22). Prior to Ibn Tufail, Ibn Bajja also quotes the mentioned phrase from the treatise but calls it fabricated and rejects its attribution to al-Farabi and, in four pages, attempts to prove that only those al-Farabi's thoughts which assert the afterlife happiness (*e.g.*, al-Farabi, 1996b: 23, 79; 1991: 52) are original. Ibn Bajja discusses that “none of the ancestors (*qudamā*) has said anything like that about happiness and this is from the thoughts of *’ikhwān al-*



*ṣafā'* (Ibn Bajja, 1408: 425-429).<sup>22</sup> This interpretative argument has been extended to modern scholars of al-Farabi. Neria (2003), by accessing an ancient Hebrew manuscript which is a translation of the controversial part of the lost treatise of al-Farabi, compares it to Ibn Tufail's and Ibn Bajja's citations and shows that some sentences with this theme existed in that attributed treatise. Also, this attributed quote of al-Farabi has been referred to by Strauss and his students as a piece of evidence for the theory of esoterism (Strauss, 1988: 14; Butterworth, 2013: 337).

Considering all these arguments around the reading of the example controversial text, the question is: through which methodological elements one can encounter and solve such interpretative contradiction in a given classical practical philosophical work? The element of "knowing the context" cannot be independently helpful, because, in terms of comparing the two contradictory ideas, when basically the original side is lost, one cannot recognize the differences between the contexts through which the production of the original idea was influenced. Also, because of the absence of original work, the in-text elements (*e.g.*, the formal semantics of the text) will not help much. Although, generally speaking, the chronology of a set of classical works can unfold the possible change in the author's given idea over time, however, in this particular case, it is unclear what is the status of the disputed work in the chronological sequence of other works in which al-Farabi provides a contradictory definition of happiness (Al-Farabi, 1996b: 80; 1991: 52). I argue that the only way to either prove or disprove the validity of attribution of such text to the under-reading idea is to discover the intertextual relation between the given statement and a more fundamental principle of the author from which the given statement has been deduced and to present the given text/statement to the whole intellectual system of the author (*e.g.*, al-Farabi). In other words, to investigate the validity of such attribution, one should put and contextualize the controversial idea or quotation to the more fundamental ideas and principles which are only traceable in the philosopher's ontology and epistemology as two vertical lines of the philosopher's whole intellectual system. This is the same method that al-Farabi himself applied in the treatise of *al-jame* or *Harmonization* (1405a) to solve the apparent contradictions between Plato's and Aristotle's ideas and to reconcile the ideas of the two philosophers (Al-Farabi, 1405a: 83-84).

In this case, a possible idea and principle which is more fundamental than "happiness" is the idea of "the eternity of the souls". This idea also has been controversial among classical philosophers. By proving that al-Farabi basically did not believe in this more-fundamental principle of "the eternity of the souls", one can certainly conclude that al-Farabi restricted happiness to the secular world; conversely, al-Farabi's belief in the fundamental principle of the eternity of the souls could *possibly* open the way for his belief in the narrower principle of the eternity of happiness. In this case, Ibn Tufail also refers to this more fundamental principle of the eternity of the soul, but he still finds it contradictory as he shows some evidence in some works of al-Farabi (*e.g.* *al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*) that indicates al-Farabi does not

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<sup>22</sup> . However, contrary to Ibn Bajja's claim, it is evident from the treatises of 'ikhwān al-ṣafā' that they do believe in the afterlife happiness, as they repeatedly assert it (Ikhawan al-Safa, 1412, Vol1: 317-318).

believe in the eternity of some types of souls (*i.e.* evil souls) and only believes in the eternity of virtuous souls (as one can obviously see that Al-Farabi's statement in *al-siyāsa* clearly implies this claim of Ibn Tufayl [Al-Farabi, 1996b: 93]) while in some other works, al-Farabi paradoxically states the belief in the mortality of all souls (Ibn Tufayl, 1993: 21). However, Ibn Tufayl does not go further to refer to an even-more-fundamental principle rather than the second fundamental principle (*i.e.*, the eternity of the soul), while Ibn Bajja goes further to refer to a more fundamental principle rather than both "eternity of happiness" and "eternity of the soul". This even-more-fundamental principle is the "eternity of intellect" and, even more fundamentally, the "eternal existence of intangibles" in al-Farabi's ontology. Ibn Bajja, by applying this method, shows that al-Farabi believed in these latter principles, and consequently discusses that based on the necessary sequence of these successive principles, since al-Farabi believed in the eternity of intellect as a more-fundamental principle, it is unlikely that al-Farabi did not believe in other-life happiness as a less-fundamental principle (Ibn Bajja, 1408, 425-429).

In the above-mentioned example of contradiction, referring the text solely to the more fundamental ontological principles, as Ibn Bajja did, cannot solve the problem, because referring a given statement to the more fundamental principles is correct only if this way of referring and reasoning is acknowledged in the philosopher's epistemological system. The inductive thinker issues the general rules and universals in terms of his observation and examination of simple or fundamental constituents of the phenomenon and not by syllogism (in Aristotelian account [Aristotle, 1960: 273]); without discovering any incontestable (certain) necessary correlation/correspondence between the general rule/ universal on the one side and all simple or fundamental constituents of the phenomenon on the other side.

Thus, if the to-be-interpreted thinker is epistemologically inductive, referring his statement (*e.g.*, the eternity of happiness) deductively to a more general and fundamental principle (*e.g.*, the eternity of the souls) would be incorrect. Consequently, the reader or the interpreter is not methodologically permitted to impose his own epistemology (*e.g.*, deductive reasoning) on the to-be-interpreted author's epistemology (*e.g.*, inductive reasoning), because the given inductive philosopher has grasped the general rule and issued his final statement through inductive reasoning, and to interpret this final statement, the reader has to preliminarily and necessarily discover the given philosopher's epistemology. But if al-Farabi is deductive, one (*e.g.*, Ibn Bajja) can deductively refer al-Farabi's given statements and theories to his more-fundamental intellectual principles to grasp the contradictory of these less-fundamental statements with the whole epistemological system of al-Farabi. Considering the above discussion, to draw the vertical line of al-Farabi's intellectual system, the reader needs, in addition to al-Farabi's ontology, some more general aspects related to the way in which al-Farabi obtains and justifies the cognition itself. This supplementary factor in reading classical thoughts and works is the classical philosopher's epistemology which should be embedded into the intertextual elements.

Thus, to read al-Farabi's text, the reader needs to know al-Farabi's epistemology as well, particularly in the case of apparent contradictions such as the instance discussed

in this paper. In this case, to show how the process of reading and the author's epistemology correlates, I briefly outline Al-Farabi's epistemology. According to al-Farabi, the intellect (*ʿaql*) (with its both theoretical and practical sides), the faculty of representation, and sensing faculty are three faculties of cognition (Al-Farabi, 1995: 85, 98). The senses are the primary instruments of perception (*ālāt al-ʿidrāk*) (Al-Farabi, 1405a: 98-99; 1995: 98-99; 1405b, 76-81). After imprinting the impressions of representations on the faculty of representation by senses, the faculty of representation keeps them, sometimes combines them (synthesis), sometimes dissociates them from each other, and sometimes simulates these sensory impressions. All of these functions are based on the obtained from the faculty of reason (theoretical and practical reason). In other words, the faculty of representation mediates between the other two perceptual faculties (Al-Farabi, 1995: 103).

Deductive reasoning (Alqiyas), experiment, and inductive reasoning, all the three, correlated or coherent with each other, are the methods or techniques of cognition (Al-Farabi, 1405c: 54-55; 1408, Vol. 1: 141, 144, 271). In al-Farabi's epistemology, all these constituents and essentials of cognitive faculty, as a holistic system, are inseparable. Inductive reasoning, experiment, and deductive reasoning are three correlated rings and constituents in the cognitive chain that can only in correlation with each other, accomplish their epistemological functions. However, among these three, according to al-Farabi, inductive reasoning does not have independent scientific reliability and validity, because, as he argues, inductive reasoning, contrary to experiment and deductive reasoning, does not imply "necessary certitude" (*al-yaqīn al-ḍarūrī*) and, thus, cannot have a scientific function completely separated from the two other constituents. A given statement resulted from deductive reasoning can imply necessary certitude if and only if the given statement is the minor premise of a syllogism (*qiyās*) (Al-Farabi, 1408, Vol. 1: 271). Thus, al-Farabi's epistemology stands somewhere between rationalism and empiricism (in modern terms). He can be considered an empiricist-deductivist philosopher who conditionally acknowledges the scientific reliability/validity of inductive reasoning and, accordingly, the deductive referring by Ibn Bajja in the interpretation of the discussed controversial statement could be valid; as only through al-Farabi's epistemological system, the reader can draw other vertical lines of al-Farabi's intellectual system (e.g., ontology) through which the interpretation of his texts can be reliably reachable.

## 5. CONCLUSION

I began this paper by showing how al-Farabi read classical practical philosophy and ended by showing how to read al-Farabi himself, as this was a key aim of this paper. I tried to show how al-Farabi read classical practical philosophy through a unique methodology that can be classified under some interacting elements. By using these elements, one can have a proper methodology to read classical practical philosophy. This methodology is in its nature interpretative and necessarily different from cognitive one, as the methods of reading practical philosophy differ from reading theoretical philosophy. By reading al-Farabi's methods of reading, I classified the elements of such

'inspired' interpretative methodology into three interacting sections: out-text, in-text, and inter-textual elements. The out-text element can be labeled as the 'knowledge of context' or the examination of the influence of contexts on texts (whether on the expressed texts or the unexpressed cognition). Inspired by al-Farabi, the author restricted the application of out-text element (*i.e.*, knowledge of context) to 'expression' in all fields and 'cognition' only within the fields of practical philosophy, which according to al-Farabi includes politics, social and political philosophy, as well as ethics. The author embedded the in-text elements into two sections of knowledge of form and content. The 'knowledge of form' was elaborated by referring to al-Farabi's linguistics and terminology, particularly his linguistic discussions in the *Book of Letters*. The 'knowledge of content' was explained by referring to a content characteristic of classical philosophy (*i.e.*, esotericism as an example) and taking critical inspiration from the studies of Leo Strauss and his students in this regard. Intertextual elements were elaborated within two horizontal and vertical lines based on the grasp of the philosopher's intellectual system. The horizontal line of the given philosopher's intellectual system is grasped through the intellectual chronology and historiography of his/her thoughts and works. The vertical line of the philosopher's intellectual system is grasped by drawing the lines of his/her ontology and epistemology. The results of this interpretative methodology are considered to be reliable only for and restricted to practical philosophy.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Ronald Polansky and Giovanna Costanzo for their constructive feedback and comments on the earlier draft of this paper. I am also grateful to the editor and anonymous reviewers of the journal *Comparative Philosophy* for their helpful comments. A summary of this paper was presented at the International Virtual Conference on the theme "Comparative Philosophy toward World Philosophy", San Jose State University, April 2022.

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