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David M. DiPasquale
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Alfarabi's *Book of Dialectic* (*Kitāb al-Jadal*)

Widely regarded as the founder of the Islamic philosophical tradition, and as the single greatest philosophical authority after Aristotle by his successors in the medieval Islamic, Jewish, and Christian communities, Alfarabi was a leading figure in the fields of Aristotelian logic and Platonic political science. The first complete English translation of his commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*, Alfarabi's *Book of Dialectic*, or *Kitāb al-Jadal*, is presented here in a deeply researched edition based on the most complete Arabic manuscript sources. David M. DiPasquale argues that Alfarabi's understanding of the Socratic art of dialectic is the key prism through which to grasp his recovery of an authentic tradition of Greek science on the verge of extinction. He also suggests that the *Book of Dialectic* is unique to the extent to which it unites Alfarabi's logical and political writings, opening up novel ways of interpreting Alfarabi's influence.

David M. DiPasquale is Assistant Professor of the Practice in the Department of Political Science and the Islamic Civilization and Societies Program at Boston College where he specializes in Islamic philosophy, law, and political philosophy.

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On the Starting Point of Islamic Philosophy

David M. DiPasquale

Boston College, Massachusetts



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For my mother and the memory of my father

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Do not busy yourself with books on the art of logic except for what was composed by the wise man Abu Nasr Alfarabi. For, in general, everything that he composed – and in particular his book on the Principles of Beings [Political Regime] – is all finer than fine flour. His arguments enable one to understand and comprehend, for he was very great in wisdom.

Maimonides (in letter to Ibn Tibbon)

As regards that which concerns Abu Nasr Alfarabi, it suffices to say that one is more and more impressed by his merit, and that he should not at all be placed on the same level with the others. It is apparent, then, that he is the most excellent of those who preceded us.

Avicenna (in letter to Kiyā)

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Preface

Therefore, if, in the endless time that has gone by, there has been some necessity for those who are on the peaks of philosophy to take charge of a city, or there even now is such a necessity in some barbaric place somewhere far outside our range of vision, or will be later . . .

Plato, *Republic*, 499 c–d

Alfarabi's Life and Works¹

Alfarabi was not the first Muslim to refer to himself as *philosopher*, or the first unashamedly to defend that pursuit in his own name despite the precarious position in which a philosopher might find himself two centuries following the death of the Prophet Muhammad. That honor went to Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Ṣabbāḥ al-Kindī (d. 873). Nor was he, according to al-Shahrastānī's (d. 1158) *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (*The Book of Sects and Creeds*), the “philosopher of the Muslims.” For it was Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 1037) who merited that title. Alfarabi was, however, the first Muslim philosopher ever to be called *teacher* (*mu'allim*). Indeed, more than a millennium following the death of Aristotle, he was understood to have been the greatest philosophic authority in two fields of study, namely, Aristotelian logic and Platonic political science. Such a reputation, granted to him by the most prominent philosophic successors in the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian confessions, called attention to the tremendous significance of his role in recovering a tradition of Greek science that was perilously close to extinction by the time Alfarabi emerged within the largely Christian intellectual context of Baghdad during the ninth and tenth centuries of the Common Era. According to the likes of Avicenna (who announced that Alfarabi was “the greatest of those who preceded us”), Averroes (d. 1198), Maimonides (d. 1204), Roger Bacon (d. 1292), and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), Alfarabi was not

¹ The section titled “Alfarabi's Life and Works” is to be reprinted in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*.

simply “teacher” but rather *al-mu‘allim al-thānī*, the celebrated “*Second Teacher* [or *Master*]” after Aristotle.

Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṭarkhān ibn Awzalagh al-Fārābī is thought to have been born around the year 870 in the eastern-most region of Abbasid rule in a part of the central steppe through which the Syr Darya river meanders, in what is present-day Kazakhstan. As with so much of the information related to the earliest years of Alfarabi’s life, the various biographical details are somewhat sketchy and oftentimes of dubious authenticity due in no small part to the fact that most accounts appeared some three centuries after his death (e.g., al-Qifī [d. 1248],² Ibn Abī Uṣaybī‘a [d. 1269],³ Ibn Khallikān [d. 1282]⁴). Yet the paucity of reliable source material related to these earliest years of Alfarabi’s life is, in the end, not at all problematic. For, as interesting as many of these details are or could have been (and despite the fact that his Turkic family heritage and formative education in law and various traditional Muslim arts could possibly help explain the trajectory of his later career in Baghdad), no such information would offer the contemporary observer any assistance in making sense of the single most important aspect of Alfarabi’s life: his contributions as a philosopher.

To admit that little is known of his earliest days is not to deny that important details are accepted as true. The region of the world in which Alfarabi was raised was governed by the Samanids and was religiously and ethnically diverse. The fact that his father was of Persian descent and a military man in the service of the Persian Samanid governors suggests that Alfarabi’s background was not nearly as refined as that from which many of Alfarabi’s philosophical successors emerged. Following a study of traditional Islamic sciences and music in Bukhara, Alfarabi ventured to Marv en route to Baghdad, which at the time was the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate and acknowledged center of learning within the Muslim world. Of note during his brief stay in Marv is the fact that it was here where he seems to have made the acquaintance of the Syriac-speaking Nestorian Christian Yūḥannā ibn Ḥaylān (d. ca. 910), of whom little is known (except that he belonged to the Alexandrian philosophical tradition that was staunchly Aristotelian and much more accommodating of Christian doctrine than the Athenian Academy closed by Justinian in 529) and with whom he began the serious study of logic while still in his early twenties. Yūḥannā would turn out to be one of the two most important mentors of Alfarabi’s young adulthood (and the only person

² Ibn al-Qifī, *Tarīkh al-Hukamā’*, ed. J. Lippert (Leipzig: 1903).

³ Ibn Abī Uṣaybī‘a, *‘Uyūn al-Anbā’ fī Ṭabaqāt al-A‘abbā’*, ed. N. Rida (Beirut: 1965).

⁴ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a‘yān*, ed. L. Abbas (Beirut: 1969–1970).

Alfarabi himself would call “teacher”), the other being the Nestorian Christian Aristotelian and translator Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d. 940), whom Alfarabi met upon arriving in Baghdad. One of the curious historical oddities surrounding the rise of philosophy in the Muslim world is, therefore, the fact that the teachers of the single greatest representative thereof were both heterodox Christians. And Alfarabi’s only prominent student, the translator and logician Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī (d. 974), was not a Muslim but rather a Christian of the Jacobite Church.

When Alfarabi departed Marv for Baghdad in his early twenties, he traveled with his teacher Yūḥannā and would remain with him as the latter’s only Muslim student in the aforementioned Christian philosophical milieu of the School of Baghdad. And it was here, in Baghdad, where Alfarabi began to study Arabic grammar under the supervision of philologist Ibn al-Sarrāj, who is said to have agreed to Alfarabi’s rather eccentric method of payment: al-Sarrāj would teach Alfarabi Arabic grammar in exchange for Alfarabi teaching al-Sarrāj logic and music. If such a report is accurate, it suggests a number of conclusions, not the least of which is the fact that even during the earliest years of his tenure in Baghdad Alfarabi had already achieved some notoriety as a scholar in general and as a student of logic in particular. Part of this is doubtless related to his having been a disciple of both Yūḥannā ibn Ḥaylān and Mattā ibn Yūnus. But it also suggests a level of intellectual precociousness and acumen that is startling. To take just one example of many: Alfarabi’s native tongue was not Arabic but rather Soghdian (evidenced in the “Awzalagh” of his patronymic), an eastern Iranian language and veritable lingua franca of the fabled Silk Road civilization. By the time he was forty years old and made the momentous trip from Baghdad to Byzantium, he was widely recognized as having mastered not only Arabic but additional languages of scholarship according to the curricula established by the leading philological and philosophical figures within the Baghdad circle. For instance, there is one biographical account in which Alfarabi claimed to have known more than seventy languages. Evidence of a lifelong and abiding devotion to mining the theoretical significance of language and grammar may be found in works he composed at various stages throughout his life, such as (but not limited to) *Kitāb al-Alfāz al-Musta‘mala fī al-Mantiq* (*The Book of the Utterances Employed in Logic*), *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* (*The Book of Letters*), and *Iḥṣā’ al-‘Ulūm* (*Enumeration of the Sciences*).

In the first decade of the tenth century, when Alfarabi was forty or so years old (and for reasons which to this day remain obscure), Alfarabi made the decision to travel with Yūḥannā ibn Ḥaylān from Baghdad to the last remaining pagan outpost of a dying classical world, where he claims to have completed his study of Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*. The

name of the city was Harran, today an archeological site in south-east Turkey and mentioned in the Hebrew Bible in relation to the family of the patriarch Abraham – though it was throughout its history referred to by other names, including Carrhae and the evocative Hellenopolis. “City of the Greeks” is apposite, for Harran was most often associated with things Greek, and especially pagan rites of Sabians that ran afoul of authorities who may have wished to eradicate such rituals in favor of the worship of other gods (or God). Most prominent among those rituals practiced by these Sabians were those that appeared to worship the stars, and references to Sabians found their way into the Holy Qur’an as well as books like Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*. Yet despite (or because of) such associations, to Harran Alfarabi ventured, and spent eight years of his life there and throughout Byzantium studying Greek science with those whom he would later describe as “carrying the books with them.” Thenceforward, Alfarabi would continually refer in his writings to Plato and Aristotle as the “only” foundations of true philosophy or science.

When he returned to Baghdad, he was no longer a student but instead a master who departed from all his teachers and immediate philosophical forebears in a shockingly novel manner. Neither a traditional student within the School of Baghdad nor a Neoplatonist of the influential Athenian variety, Alfarabi instead founded a radical new Platonic approach of his own that looked to recover an authentic Platonic and Aristotelian science untarnished by the accommodations made by the Neoplatonists. His *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* is the key text in this regard and the prism through which the meaning and purpose of his entire philosophical output may be measured. There is nothing in the centuries following the death of Aristotle that presages such a turn, and one is therefore permitted with some credence to suggest that this moment marks the greatest founding (or “re-founding”) of philosophy since the time of Socrates. He develops a reputation primarily as a logician and is reported to have taught Aristotle’s *Physics* forty times, Aristotle’s *De Anima* one hundred times, and Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* two hundred times. Alfarabi’s return to Baghdad would be the period of his greatest teaching and writing, and his efforts during this time – which focus primarily on Aristotle’s *Organon* but also original works on Platonic political science – may therefore rightly be regarded as inaugurating the main tradition of philosophy in Islam.

The reasons behind Alfarabi’s decision to leave Baghdad for Damascus at an advanced age in or around the year 942 are unclear, though one ventures to suggest that political tensions and even persecution may have played a role. After two years in Syria, conflicts forced him once again to flee (this time to Egypt), though he returned to Damascus and the

Hamdanid prince Sayf al-Dawla's lively and eclectic court shortly before his death in 950. Only a small fraction of his books have survived. Of the more than one hundred texts he is said to have composed, the majority were dedicated to Aristotle, including the lost commentary on the *Nichomachean Ethics*. The subject matters of those commentaries were varied (e.g., geometry, astronomy, music, psychology), though his most independent contributions were in the field of Platonic political science.

The philosophy or science that emerges within the Islamic world at the peak of its medieval development is not strictly demonstrative. As established by Alfarabi and subsequently expanded and modified by such figures as Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd, and Moses Maimonides, this philosophical approach stresses above all our lack of certainty regarding the most pressing human concerns relating to nature and things aloft. Proper attention to this fact offers an explanation as to why the tradition places a peculiar emphasis on political science and why, among the Aristotelian logical arts, the art of dialectic receives special attention.

At the beginning of his book entitled *The Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages: Plato the Divine and Aristotle*,⁵ Alfarabi contends that his effort to treat the natural, supernatural, and political sciences of Plato and Aristotle is inspired by a desire to address a controversy that erupted among the people of his time. According to a scholar of our own time, Alfarabi's book, in form as well as content, is especially indebted to the dialectical art we see Alfarabi considering in his commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*, which is known today as the *Kitāb al-Jadal*.⁶

Under normal circumstances, a defense would be required of anyone who undertakes to support the proposition that the writings of a Muslim who lived in Baghdad in the tenth century of the Common Era provides the best and most helpful means of resolving perplexities related to a contemporary crisis. The events surrounding the rise of Islamic extremism demonstrate that we do not live in normal circumstances. Yet those events have brought home to more than academics an aspect of that crisis which no amount of scholarly hand-wringing could ever do.

⁵ Alfarabi's *The Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages: Plato the Divine and Aristotle* (*Kitāb al-Ḥamīyah bayn Ra'yay al-Ḥakīmayn Aflātun al-Ilāhī wa-Aristūṭālīs*) in *The Political Writings: Selected Aphorisms and Other Texts*, ed. and trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); hereafter called the *Harmonization*.

⁶ Cf. Dominique Mallet, *L'Harmonie Entre Les Opinions De Platon Et D'Aristote* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1999), 11–40; 15: “Le commentaire des *Topiques* prévoit la collision de thèses philosophiques et ménage, dans l'inventaire des prémisses dont il déclare licite de faire des ‘problèmes,’ la possibilité conceptuelle de cette opposition où l'*Harmonie* trouve son motif . . .”

Briefly, this crisis concerns a lack of faith in the principles of modern rationalism that form the very core of Western liberal democracies which are in one way or another based on them. First diagnosed by Nietzsche, and then evaluated by more contemporary figures like Weber and Heidegger, the sickness that afflicts the body politic is most certainly at least felt by people from all walks of life. One most conspicuous example of this feeling is the fact that, from the local beauty parlor to the halls of academe, few bother to entertain the opinion that a “science of values” is possible. Yet this was precisely what the author of the *Kitāb al-Jadal* and, before Alfarabi, Aristotle and Plato attempted to provide. What is more, Alfarabi and his Greek predecessors utilized the dialectical art to establish the firmest foundation for that science of values, which was meant to point humans in the direction of their greatest good. Dialectic accomplished this by starting from a position where it examined the authoritative opinions of any given political community.⁷ This of course requires a situation in which there exists a disagreement with those prevailing opinions, for only when all competing alternatives are viewed as viable alternatives will the dialectical art be properly utilized. But how is this possible today in a world where liberal democracy seems to have triumphed over all political alternatives to such an extent that the use of dialectic (and the moral science based upon it) would appear to be of simply antiquarian interest?

A moment’s reflection, however, reveals that liberalism currently faces challenges both from within and from without: from within, to the extent to which pervasive value neutrality does not allow for an assertion of reason’s ability to defend any particular regime (such as the American, for instance) as better or worse. This is especially troubling, as liberalism claimed from its very foundation to offer humankind a *rationaly defensible* alternative to regimes that relied not on reason but faith. The rationalism at the heart of the liberal experiment was not and is not a value neutral science. Liberalism stands or falls according to whether it is able to provide a rational defense of itself. Consequently, any pious attachment to it is gradually over time weakened, especially with growing recognition that even hard sciences (once regarded as the new rationalism’s most promising heirs) can no longer guarantee that their promotion is equivalent to the promotion of human happiness.

That liberalism is also being attacked from without in the form of a particularly old-fashioned interpretation of political Islam has been

⁷ Aristotle, “Topics,” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 167:100b21ff. Hereafter, unless otherwise noted, all referenced works of Aristotle will come from Jonathan Barnes’ *Complete Works* volumes.

especially evident in recent years. One could even say that such a “political” interpretation of Islam presents an even greater challenge to liberalism than Soviet-style communism ever did, as the latter could be said to have emerged from the same modern philosophical soil as liberalism itself. As a result, it is not surprising to hear many call for a return to the thought of those, like Alfarabi, who helped inaugurate that period generally known as the “Islamic Renaissance,” when Arab, Persian, and Turkic scholars of the very highest order endeavored to recover, enrich, and promote Greek learning within the new context provided by the Prophet Muhammad’s teachings. The work of Alfarabi in particular stands out, as he made what is arguably the greatest case in favor of recovering those pagan texts at the very beginning of the Islamic tradition of philosophy. To the extent to which these same Greek books also lie at the heart of Western civilization, Alfarabi’s position at the meeting place between Islam and the West should be of interest to those concerned with addressing a contemporary crisis whose possible resolution would have more than mere contemporary implications. As Alfarabi was neither a conventional Muslim nor a slavish admirer of democracy, his efforts towards recovering ancient science were accompanied by an awareness of the many obstacles that stand in the way of any such recovery. Attention to Alfarabi’s understanding of the strengths and limitations related to the dialectical art outlined in the *Kitāb al-Jadal* may offer to the West the best vantage point from which to make sense of his tremendous accomplishment in recovering that science.

Alfarabi’s theory of dialectic allowed him not only to bridge his logical and political writings, but to rehabilitate an understanding of philosophy that remained dormant for centuries. To view dialectic as a “bridge” allows one to consider the extent to which Alfarabi’s reading of Aristotle may be understood as a necessary link between two different epochs, namely, the medieval and the ancient. Alfarabi placed an emphasis on the importance of political science that was absent from the writings of Middle- and Neoplatonic commentators who preceded him.⁸ It is also true that he lived in a society governed by a Divine Law that revealed itself through the intermediary of a prophet. Alfarabi’s recovery of Platonic political science cannot be comprehended without taking into account

⁸ On this, see Muhsin Mahdi, “Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Philosophy,” in *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1981), particularly 147–170. For helpful background on the commentary tradition that preceded Alfarabi, see the collection of articles in Richard Sorabji, ed., *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); and Richard Sorabji, ed., *Aristotle Re-Interpreted: New Findings on Seven Hundred Years of the Ancient Commentators* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

the considerable obstacles that emerged as a result of such a Law. To what extent was this recovery of Plato impossible without the prior restoration of Aristotle?

Alfarabi's commentary on Aristotle's *Topics* provides an answer. Some scholars in the past have focused on either the logical or political works as two distinct areas of Alfarabi's thought. In contrast, the argument of this book is that logic and political science are not as disconnected as they might first appear. Contemporary scholars of Alfarabi fall into roughly two groups: the first primarily considers the political writings, and although logical subjects are not ignored, they tend to be viewed solely within the context of (what are thought to be) more important political concerns.⁹ Conversely, questions regarding the end of human life and the proper ordering of the community receive little, if any, attention from members of the second group in their studies of Alfarabi's commentaries on Aristotle's *Organon*.¹⁰

⁹ See, e.g., Charles E. Butterworth, "The Rhetorician and His Relationship to the Community: Three Accounts of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 111–136; Charles E. Butterworth, "Rhetoric and Islamic Political Philosophy," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 3 (1972): 187–198; Miriam Galston, "Al-Fārābī on Aristotle's Theory of Demonstration," in *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1981), 23–34; Muhsin Mahdi, "Language and Logic in Classical Islam," in *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, ed. G. E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970), 51–83; Muhsin Mahdi, "Science, Philosophy and Religion in Alfarabi's *Enumeration of the Sciences*," in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, ed. J. E. Murdoch and E. D. Sylla (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1975), 113–147; Muhsin Mahdi, "Alfarabi on Aristotle's Starting Point," in *Philosophies of Being and Mind: Ancient and Medieval*, ed. James T. H. Martin (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1992), 221–231; Muhsin Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Joshua Parens, *Metaphysics as Rhetoric: Alfarabi's Summary of Plato's "Laws"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

¹⁰ See, e.g., Shukri B. Abed, *Aristotelian Logic and the Arabic Language in Al-Fārābī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Deborah L. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's "Rhetoric" and "Poetics" in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990); A. Elamrani-Jamal, *Logique Aristotélicienne et grammaire arabe: Etude et documents* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1983); Dimitri Gutas, "Aspects of Literary Form and Genre in Arabic Logical Works," in *Glosses and Commentaries on Aristotelian Logical Texts: The Syriac, Arabic and Latin Traditions*, ed. Charles S. F. Burnett (London: Warburg Institute, 1993), 29–76; Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works* (Leiden: Brill, 1988); Joep Lameer, *Al-Fārābī and Aristotelian Syllogistics* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); F. W. Zimmerman, "Some Observations on al-Farabi and the Logical Tradition," in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays Presented by His Friends and Pupils to Richard Walzer on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. S. M. Stern, Albert Hourani, and Vivian Brown (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 517–547. Those who first compiled and organized Aristotle's logical works brought them together under the designation *organon* (*instrument*). Among the *falāsifa* there was a longstanding and vigorous debate as to whether Aristotle's arts of *logos* were to be understood simply as tools of the sciences or whether they should be classified as sciences themselves. See Alfarabi, "*Risālah Ṣuddira bihā al-Kitāb*" [*Introductory Risālah on Logic*], ed. D. M. Dunlop, *Islamic Quarterly* 3 (1957): 227 (Arabic), 232 (English): "[logic

There are a number of reasons why the following study is possible and necessary. For one, although the importance of Alfarabi's *Kitāb al-Jadal* was recognized by individuals such as Maimonides, it has been relatively ignored, even by those who devote most of their time to Alfarabi's diverse body of work. One reason why the *Jadal* played only a minor role in explaining the guiding intention of Alfarabi's thought has been that, until recently, a reliable edition of the text that included a critical apparatus did not exist.¹¹ I benefited greatly from the revised edition and critical apparatus that was the subject of Dominique Mallet's 1992 Bordeaux University

is] an instrument by which, when it is employed in the several parts of philosophy, certain knowledge is obtained of all which the general theoretical and practical arts include, and there is no way to certainty of the truth in anything of which knowledge is sought save [by] the art of logic"; and Moses Maimonides, *Treatise on Logic*, trans. Israel Efros (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1938), 63: "as for logic, they [sc. the ancient philosophers] do not count it among the sciences, but rather as an instrument to science." For a helpful review, see A. I. Sabra, "Avicenna on the Subject Matter of Logic," *Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 11 (1980): 746–764. The view according to which logic is accorded only instrumental status is significantly compromised in the case of dialectic, which has as one of its purposes the grounding of each and every science. Both Alfarabi and Maimonides call attention to this complicating and provocative fact. For a more recent background, see Salim Kemal, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroës: The Aristotelian Reception* (London: Routledge, 2010). As it has come down to us, the *Organon* consists of six works: the first considers the "term" (*Categories/Kitāb al-Maqūlāt*), the second handles the "sentence" (*On Interpretation/Kitāb al-Ībrāh*), the third treats the syllogism (*Prior Analytics/Kitāb al-Qiyās*). In the traditional order, the *Organon* culminates in the analysis of demonstration from self-evident first principles (*Posterior Analytics/Kitāb al-Burhān*) and a treatment of dialectic from generally accepted premises (*Topics/Kitāb al-Jadal* and *Sophistical Refutations/Kitāb al-Safsāṭah*). I restrict my remarks here to the traditional ordering of the *Organon*, and not the subsequent Alexandrian expansion (and its adoption by the Arabic philosophers) that added the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*; cf. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's "Rhetoric" and "Poetics"*; Richard Walzer, *Greek into Arabic: Essays on Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford: B. Cassirer, 1962); Ibrahim Madkour, *L'Organon d'Aristote dans le Monde Arabe* (Paris: Les Presses Modernes, 1934). Additionally, to better understand the importance of the medieval Islamic conception of dialectic in relation to the *Organon*, see, e.g., Larry B. Miller, "Islamic Disputation Theory: A Study of the Development of Dialectic in Islam from the Tenth Through Fourteenth Centuries" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1987). Although Aristotle's discussion of those corruptions of dialectic that underlie sophistic reasoning was at one time separated and given the name *Sophistical Refutations*, nevertheless this one book is the conclusion of the *Topics* and forms with the eight books of the *Topics* a single work. See Francis E. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus: The Oriental Translations and Commentaries of the Aristotelian Corpus* (Leiden: Brill, 1968); Francis E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1968). Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) treats the *Organon* at Chapter VI, Section 22 of his *al-Muqaddimah*. See Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, vol. 3 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 137–147; "dialectics" is discussed on 32–34, and Aristotle's *Topics* on 141.

¹¹ Note that as late as 1963, when Shlomo Pines completed his superlative translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, even a scholar of Pines' caliber was forced to admit that the Farabian text to which Maimonides alludes at *Guide* II 15 "has not yet been identified" (Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 292, note 13).

Thèse pour le Doctorat d'État ès-Lettres.¹² Dr. Mallet examined, collated, and corrected five existing manuscripts¹³ to produce a reliable text. His work is especially welcome, as the two most recent editions presented the reader with distinct disadvantages: Rafīq al-'Ajam's edition in *Al-Mantiq 'inda al-Fārābī*¹⁴ suffers from errors that render it unsafe, while the superior edition provided by Mohammad-Taqi Danesh-Pajouh in his *al-Mantiqīyyāt li-l-Fārābī*¹⁵ lacks a critical apparatus. Although Dr. Mallet's French translation signaled the first time the entire text had been rendered into a European language, there was, until this volume, no complete English translation of the text. Relying on Mallet's superior edition, I have translated Alfarabi's commentary in its entirety, and it comprises Chapter 1 of this volume.¹⁶

The existence of a definitive edition only makes the need for a comprehensive study all the more urgent. While Mallet briefly addresses certain philosophic issues at one point in his thesis, his intent was manifestly philological in nature, and his interpretive remarks are overshadowed by the copious technical explanations that lie at the heart of his impressive work. The first volume of his dissertation divides into three roughly equal parts: a careful review of the various manuscripts of the *Kitāb al-Jadal*; a survey of the commentary tradition on the *Organon* in the Islamic world (with special attention paid to the place of the *Topics* in that tradition); and a concluding interpretation of the text. It must be said that, even in the final third of the thesis, Mallet occupied himself with

¹² I am grateful to Muhsin Mahdi and Robert Wisnovsky for providing me with a copy of Mallet's thesis, and to Charles Butterworth, Tim McCranor, and Wolfhart Heinrichs for reviewing my translations from the Arabic.

¹³ These manuscripts are: Bratislava TE (41), Hamidiye (812), Mishkāt (240), Emanet Hazinesi (1730), and Āstāni Qudsi Raḍawī (1583).

¹⁴ Alfarabi, *Kitāb al-Jadal*, ed. Rafīq al-'Ajam, in *Al-Mantiq 'inda al-Fārābī*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 1986).

¹⁵ Alfarabi, *al-Mantiqīyyāt li-l-Fārābī*, ed. Mohammad Taqi Danesh-Pajouh (Qom: Maktaba Ayyat Allah Al-Atma Al-Mirasa Al-Nayfa, 1988).

¹⁶ Dr. Mallet's Arabic edition is superior to those provided by al-'Ajam or Danesh-Pajouh. The following weaknesses afflict the al-'Ajam edition: awkwardness, unnecessary or unexplained division of the text; weak textual apparatus; no extended discussion of why this or that variant reading was adopted; no reference to the Aristotelian texts on which Alfarabi is commenting; limited manuscript sources; etc. Mallet himself addresses this concern in volume three of his dissertation, more than ninety pages of which are devoted exclusively to the critical apparatus. Nothing in al-'Ajam's edition comes even close to this level of accuracy and attentiveness when dealing with the manuscript variants and possible emendations. I would also direct the reader's attention to the second chapter of volume one, which considers at great length the various manuscripts that were collected and collated by Mallet and also touches upon the issue of its superiority to al-'Ajam and Danesh-Pajouh. To cite but one example from the chapter (42): "The work of Rafīq al-'Ajam in the first of his volumes is a perilous effort: all kinds of errors germinate to the point of rendering useless the recension. The edifice is not restorable and the foundations must be reworked; what is more, the text is rendered in arbitrary subdivisions that mislead the reader and the critical apparatus is inexact" (my translation).

literary and grammatical questions that are only marginally related to the guiding concern of Alfarabi's book. In short, he was not interested in offering a comprehensive, passage-by-passage interpretation of the *Jadal* as part of an effort to make sense of Alfarabi's philosophizing *tout court*. Still, he presented difficult and provocative statements that must be addressed.¹⁷ What distinguishes the following treatment from Mallet's is my attempt to reveal the precise nature of the Socratic kind of philosophizing to which Alfarabi alludes throughout his commentary on the *Topics*, and which he utilized in order to revive a Platonic and Aristotelian science that was, according to Alfarabi, on the verge of falling into oblivion.

Mallet makes a persuasive case¹⁸ that Alfarabi's commentary treats the first and eighth books of Aristotle's *Topics*.¹⁹ Book One of the *Topics* is an introduction to the art of dialectic and includes a preliminary discussion

¹⁷ Dominique Mallet, *La Dialectique Dans La Philosophie D'Abu Nasr Al-Farabi*, vol. 1 "la dialectique dans la logique et la philosophie d'al-Fārābī" (Université Michel-de-Montaigne (Bordeaux 3), 1992). Cf. 185: "... de fait, l'un des significations les moins aristotéliennes du *k. al-Jadal* revient à confiner la dialectique toute entière à l'intérieure de la philosophie." Ibid.: "Le commentaire des *Topiques* conspire avec l'*Harmonie* à abolir le duel des 'deux philosophies'; il conspire aussi à abolir les simples partages de l'écriture." "Dans cette 'déchéance', la dialectique trouve une nouvelle raison d'être que Socrate n'aurait pas désavouée: entre la culture générale des grecs et celle des arabes, entre la langue des uns et celle des autres elle fonde la possibilité d'un *dialogue*" (227). "La dialectique n'obéit pas à la division tripartite entre les prémisses logiques, spéculatives et pratiques, elle traverse la spéculation elle-même, la partageant entre ceux qui l'enseignent et ceux, destinés à la connaître, mais qui l'ignorent encore. Elle dessine, dans cette philosophie une ligne de contact entre l'abstraite universalité de la science et la singularité des situations de l'histoire" (229). It should be noted, in addition, that Dr. Mallet in his dissertation also provides a new edition and study of Alfarabi's *Kitāb al-Taḥlīl*, or *Book of Analysis*.

¹⁸ See Dominique Mallet, "Kalam et dialectique dans le commentaire Les *Topiques* d'Alfarabi," *Bulletin d'études orientales* XLVIII (1996): 165–182. See also Dominique Mallet, "Le *Kitāb al-Taḥlīl* d'Alfarabi," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 4, no. 2 (1994): 317–336; and Hatem Zghal, "Métaphysique et science politique: les intelligibles volontaires dans le *Taḥṣīl al-sa'āda d'al-Fārābī*," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 8 (1998): 169–194.

¹⁹ See Alfarabi's other definitions of dialectic in: *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, as *Al-Fārābī's Book of Letters*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 2004), Part I, par. 18, Part II, passim, Part III, passim (and par. 220, where Alfarabi refers to his commentary on the *Topics*); Alfarabi, *Enumeration of the Sciences*, in *The Political Writings*, pt. 64; *Risālah Ṣuddira bihā al-Kitāb [Introductory Risālah on Logic]*, 226; *Alfarabi's Utterances Employed in Logic: Kitāb al-Aḫḫāz al-Musta'mala fī al-Manṭiq*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 1968), 99; Alfarabi, *Book of Religion*, pt. 6 in *The Political Writings*; Alfarabi, *Kitāb al-Shi'r*, in *Ash-Shi'r* 3, edited by Muhsin Mahdi (1959): 268 (Arabic). He surveys Aristotle's *Topics* (which in this instance he refers to not as *Kitāb al-Jadal* but rather *Topikā*) in Alfarabi, *The Philosophy of Aristotle, the Parts of His Philosophy, the Ranks of Order of Its Parts, the Position from which He Started and the One He Reached*, in *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi, revised ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 78.6–79.5. The text hereafter will be divided into *Attainment of Happiness*, *Philosophy of Plato*, and *Philosophy of Aristotle*.

of its subject matter and purpose.²⁰ Aristotle here describes the constitutive elements of the dialectical method (including induction and syllogism), the principles that provide the foundation for the subjects of affirmative and negative discussions, as well as the four steps of dialectic. These steps are: providing propositions, reviewing how many meanings may be attached to a term, revealing distinctions, and seeking similarities. Books Two through Seven of the *Topics* discuss the many ways to produce and test arguments according to their starting points, which are organized around the predicable terms: “accident,” “genus,” “proper attribute,” and “definition.” Book Eight is concerned with the overall procedure and form of arguments.

Alfarabi's *Kitāb al-Jadal* is unconventional in that it mimics the dialectical education it describes. Consequently, *where* Alfarabi says something is sometimes as important as *what* he says. The *Jadal*, according to Mallet's edition, is composed of 135 numbered units, and I organized these into 22 Sections and 5 larger Parts.²¹ The order of the discussion in the subsequent chapters, following an updated translation, is as follows:

- Introduction
- 1 Alfarabi's *Kitāb al-Jadal*: A Complete English Translation
- 2 Dialectic and Political Science
 - A Sections One and Twenty through Twenty-Two
 - B Section Two
 - C Section Fifteen
 - D Sections Three and Four
- 3 Dialectic and the Principles of All Science
 - A Sections Three and Four (continued)
 - B Section Fourteen
- 4 Dialectic and the Method of Natural and Divine Science
 - A Section Sixteen
 - B Section Five
- 5 Dialectic and Education
 - A Sections Six and Seven

²⁰ Helpful discussions of Aristotelian dialectic include the following: R. S. Cohen and H. Levine, eds., *Maimonides and the Sciences* (Boston: Springer, 2000) (especially the article by Joel Kraemer, “Maimonides' Use of (Aristotelian) Dialectic,” 111–130); Malcolm Schofield and Martha Craven Nussbaum, eds., *Language and Logos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) (and especially the articles by Moravcsik and Nussbaum); J. D. G. Evans, *Aristotle's Concept of Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); J. Barnes, M. Schofield, and R. Sorabji, eds., *Articles on Aristotle. Volume 1: Science* (London: Duckworth, 1975) (and especially the articles by G. E. L. Owen and W. Wieland); G. E. L. Owen, ed., *Aristotle on Dialectic: The Topics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) (and especially the articles by I. Düring, J. Moreau, G. E. L. Owen, G. Ryle, and F. Solmsen).

²¹ For the division of those Parts and Sections in the translation, see pp. 2–3 below.

- B Sections Eleven through Thirteen
 - C Sections Seventeen through Nineteen
 - D Sections Twenty through Twenty-Two (repeated)
 - E Sections Eight through Ten
- 6 Conclusion: Alfarabi and the Taxonomy of the Medieval Arabic
Organon

Thus, the following discussion itself is somewhat unconventional due to the fact that it does not cohere with the order of the topics as listed by Alfarabi in his commentary, but instead obeys the argument as dictated by the rather baroque formal architecture of the book. For this reason, the treatment of certain sections has been repeated and Section Sixteen is awarded a special degree of prominence. It is hoped that, by doing so, the main outlines and inner workings of Alfarabi's text will be made available to the reader in a manner that is both clear and helpful.

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