



The Metaphysical Distinction between Existence and Essence: A Foundation for the Non-Greek Philosophical System

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Abstract

With a rational reflection on possible beings, Farabi presents an analysis of the relationship between existence and essence, which requires a new philosophical system distinct from Greek philosophy. In his view, all possible beings are composed of two metaphysical aspects, i.e. existence and essence. By distinguishing constituents (*muqawwamāt*) from accidental things (*‘araḍiyyāt*) and using terms such as *‘ārīḍ* and *lāzim*, Farabi explores the structure of possible beings. In possible beings, existence is not the same or a part of essence; rather, it is an accident of essence, and since any accidental thing is subject to causality (*mu‘allal*), thus the possible things require something out of themselves for their existence. The main point is that the container of this distinction is not merely the world of the mind or the objective world; rather, it is the product of rational analysis. In other words, the distinction of existence and essence is neither a mental distinction nor a physical one; rather, it is a rational distinction which is called, in today’s metaphysics, metaphysical distinction. In metaphysical distinction, the existence and essence of the possible beings are two ontological principles and two metaphysical

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modes of the being that compose its identity. The metaphysical distinction designs the foundation of the non-Greek philosophical system based on which one can explain, from the theological viewpoint, proving the existence of the Necessary Being, the evolution of the ultimate causality, natural agency with the agentive causality and divine agency; from the cosmological viewpoint, proving the essential contingency of the universe and the philosophical explanation of the creation; from the ontological viewpoint, dividing beings into necessary and possible, and explaining the structure of possible beings; and from the epistemological viewpoint, evolution in dividing knowledge. This article is an applied study that attempts, by relying on the descriptive-analytical method with an exploration of the metaphysical distinction between existence and essence, to deal with applying that distinction in Farabi's philosophical system and its products and results.

Keywords

existence, essence, metaphysical distinction, kinds of distinction, Farabi.

Introduction

With a glimpse of the contemporary metaphysical discussions, one can conclude that the issue of existence and essence and their relationship are among issues of great concern and much disputed among philosophers. Whether existence and essence are equal or different and, in the latter case, whether this distinction is mental, physical or metaphysical have preoccupied philosopher and theologians in the history of philosophy and even theology, both in the Islamic world and the Christian world as well as – to some extent – the Jewish world. In Izutsu's words, since the early periods of Islamic thought, the dichotomy of essence and existence has played such a prominent and evident role that it even had a deep effect on the historical formation of the west's scholastic philosophy in the Middle Ages (Izutsu, 1379, p. 12). Besides, the distinction, in the metaphysical sense, between existence and essence is an issue that, for the first time, was posed in the tradition of Islamic philosophy, and the Jewish and Christian philosophies in the Middle Ages got familiar with it through the Islamic philosophy. The way the existence is distinguished from essence, and the type of accidentality of the existence were proposed by the Muslim peripatetic philosophers and criticized by Suhrawardi and Ibn Rushd. Accordingly, the mode of the relationship between existence and essence in the possible beings is one of the disputed issues in the history of philosophy. Considering the fact that the Muslim philosophers would philosophize in the religious context, they faced issues such as God's existence and the creation of the universe; thus, to present arguments for proving God's existence, they considered a dichotomy of structure for the possible beings along with other arguments and the philosophical explanation of the theological issue of creation, a structure with no precedent – at least – in the Greek

philosophy, and explained by Muslims with the proposition “any possible being is a composite duality with essence and existence”. In effect, this proposition consists of three parts: “any possible being is composed of existence and essence”, “there is a distinction between the existence and the essence of possible beings”, and finally, “the existence of any possible being is accidental to its essence”. This proposition, with its subsidiaries, institutes the new philosophical system. By the philosophical system of an Islamic philosopher, we mean his collection of theology, cosmology, ontology and epistemology that, together, form a philosophical system.

Statement of the Problem

Upon reflection on Farabi’s philosophical system, we may conclude that he, based on the new analytical foundation of the relationship between existence and essence, has been able to establish a new philosophical system distinct from the Greek philosophical tradition. For the first time, Farabi proposed the dichotomy of possible beings in the form of ‘essence’ and ‘existence’ vividly and definitely in the Islamic philosophy. On the importance of his view, we may say that the dichotomy between the essence and existence is – undoubtedly – one of the most fundamental philosophical views in the Islamic thought and prepares a foundation upon which all the construction of the Islamic philosophy is founded. Rightly, we must say that Farabi, in the Islamic world, is the first one who initiatively rethinks on the mode of relationship between existence and essence and attempts to present a non-Greek philosophical system harmonious with the Islamic religious tradition. Besides, his linguistic and etymological reflections on terminologies such as existence and essence in his treatise entitled *al-Ḥurūf* adds to that importance. On the importance of Farabi’s innovative analysis regarding the

relationship between existence and essence, its position in generation of the non-Greek philosophical system, and its effect on the later philosophies including Islamic, Christian and Jewish philosophies, one may refer to the views of those who study Farabi, including Shehadi, Richard Netton and Hammond. According to Shehadi, Farabi's distinction between existence and essence plays an important role in the history of philosophy of the Middle Ages, whether in the Islamic sphere, Christian sphere and Jewish sphere. One cannot understand that theory without considering the views of Farabi and Avicenna. Farabi founded that theory, but Avicenna used it in his own philosophical system in a more fundamental and broader way (Shehadi, 1982, p. 52). According to Netton, the two concepts of existence and essence are highly important not only for Farabi's own philosophical system, but also – in general – for the success of the Islamic theology and metaphysics. Similarly, it has had a considerable importance in the evolution of the Christian theology of the Middle Ages, for those two concepts are among the key issues in the scholastic discussions, especially those proposed in Thomas's philosophy (Netton, 1994, p. 109). In his view, the evolution of those concepts by Thomas Aquinas and his followers is perhaps one of the sources for the great revolution in the rational thought, especially the theology of the Middle Ages in Europe in 13th century (Netton, 1994, p. 109). Hammond, who compares Farabi's philosophical system with that of Thomas Aquinas, especially in the spheres of theology and studying the soul, believes that Farabi, about 300 years before Thomas, has spoken in detail about the distinction between existence and essence in possible beings and their sameness in the Necessary Being. Thus, philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas, who speaks of existence and essence, has certainly taken the theory of distinction between existence and essence from Farabi (Hammond, 1974,

p. 55). Madam Goichon, the famous scholar who studies Avicenna, has referred us to Farabi in his book on Avicenna's distinction between existence and essence; and, relying on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, she says that the distinction between existence and essence is Farabi's theory (Goichon, 1937, p. 131). Thus, in this article, I am not seeking to deal with philosophical, linguistic and historical importance of Farabi's theory about the distinction between existence and essence; rather, I try to deal with a neglected point, i.e. the kind of distinction between existence and essence. This has been, unfortunately, somehow ignored in the tradition of Islamic philosophy and, thus, has led to some sophistries. Thus, I deal – though briefly – with the Greek and Greek-like background of the distinction between existence and essence; then, I deal with the kinds of distinction between existence and essence; and finally, I deal with Farabi's distinction and its results.

1. The Greek and Greek-like Background

Although efforts have been made to show that the metaphysical distinction has been proposed in the Greek tradition, especially that of Aristotle and Plotinus, or even in the Christian tradition like the work of Boethius and Muslims theologians to present – in this way – a Greek, Christian and theological background for that theory, upon reflection on Farabi's rational analysis regarding the relationship between existence and essence, we will find out that Farabi's distinction between existence and essence existed before Farabi in the philosophical and theological tradition. However, what is important is the certain distinction called the metaphysical distinction innovated by Farabi in the tradition of Islamic philosophy. And it is this kind of distinction that can alter the whole philosophical system (for more information, see Akbarian and Haghghat, 1387 SH,

pp. 40-61). In his philosophical works, Aristotle has implicitly spoken of the distinction between existence and essence, but explicitly proposes it in his second analytical logical treatise. For Aristotle, the one who knows what the man, or anything else, is must necessarily know it exists, because no one knows anything about the nature of what does not exist. Definitely one must know what the meaning of a word like antelope or deer is, but nobody can know what it really is. If someone wants to show what something is and show that it exists, how can he do that with a single reason? Definition shows something and argument shows something else. What the man is and that the man exists are two quite different things (Aristotle, 1993, 92b4-12). Elsewhere, he says after we know that there are things, we try to find out what they are (Aristotle, 1993, 89b34). In a similar statement, he says if something does not exist in a fact, or if we do not know whether it exists or not, we cannot say what it is (Aristotle, 1993, 93a21-33). A reflection on Aristotle's statements, mentioned in the logical section of his works, suggests that he proposes the mental distinction between existence and essence, but the metaphysical distinction has not been discussed and, basically, Aristotle cannot propose such a distinction because the universe Aristotle deals with is a universe that exists in actuality. Aristotle's universe is a universe without events and, in effect, is a universe without history. It is not the universe that cannot exist. In such a metaphysical system, there is – from the very onset – no room for the difference and distinction or the relationship between the “essences” that do not exist, and this is proposed due to the fact that one cannot get to something's existence just through essence and definition of the substance. Of course, Farabi has used Aristotle's analyses in achieving the metaphysical distinction.

Similarly, among Neo-Platonic scholars, the distinction between

existence and essence is proposed in the mental level, but the metaphysical distinction has not been discussed and explored. We may refer to Plotinus who has been effective in formation and completion of the Islamic philosophy. In the seventh and eighth chapters of the sixth treatise of *Enneads*, Plotinus has descriptions about the One and His attributes that, somehow, show the distinction between the existence and the essence. He says: “The One is the intellect with no dimension and greater and stronger than anything appeared; nothing is greater or stronger than Him. Thus, He gets neither His existence from others nor He acquires His Howness” (Plotinus, 1992, VI, 8, 17, 24-25; Lutfi, 1366, p. 1068). Elsewhere, he says that the One is not referred to anything else in the fact that He exists and He is the substance (Plotinus, 1992, VI, 8, 12, 16). These statements by Plotinus can be the mental distinction, not the metaphysical distinction, between the existence and essence, because the metaphysical distinction creates a system, which is realized by Farabi. Of course, the scholars who study Plotinus, like Corrigan, believe that Plotinus would use “*to einai*” for anything and “*to on*” for real beings and intelligibles, as well as speaking about the One and His features, has prepared the ground for metaphysical distinction (Corrigan, 1996, p. 106). This is because for Plotinus, this distinction is not running in the One who is the Self-subsistent being and the cause for any other things; rather, it is running in the reason and the soul as composed of existence and substance, and in the material beings as composed of quantities, qualities and the like (Corrigan, 1996, p. 107). Despite these opinions, we must say that what is proposed as the metaphysical distinction and contains numerous results from theology to other components of the philosophical system is the product of Farabi’s reflections, which we will discuss in the next sections.

It is worth noting that some works have been composed about Farabi's opinion regarding existence and essence, including Kamali-zada's article in *Hikmat Sānavī* journal (1387 SH), Pur-Hassan's article in *Tārīkh Falsafa* (1393 SH), and Hedayat-afza and Leva'i's article (1395 SH). Although these three articles have explored the relationship between existence and essence in Farabi's works in proportion to their discussion, basically dealing with the three mental, physical and metaphysical distinctions, adjusting them with philosophers before Farabi in brief and Farabi in detail as well as the results of the metaphysical distinction in Farabi's whole philosophical system are among the innovations in my article, not dealt with in the abovementioned articles.

2. Kinds of Distinction between Essence and Existence

With a glimpse of the contemporary metaphysical discussions, one can conclude that the issue of existence and essence as well as their relationship is one of the issues much discussed and disputed among philosophers. Whether existence and essence are the same or different and, if different, whether this distinction is mental, physical or metaphysical has preoccupied the minds of philosophers and theologians, in the history of philosophy and even theology, in the Islamic world, the Christian world and somehow in the Jewish world. Reflection on the kinds of distinction, while preventing sophistries, can be a great help in understanding the difference between the reason and the mind as well as the sophistries arising from mixing them. another importance of this discussion is the status of the relationship between existence and essence in the contemporary metaphysical discussions. For instance, one can name the Neo-Thomists who have been able, using the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas, to present a new reading of Thomas's thought in various

fields. Among the much disputed issues in the circles of Neo-Thomists is the kinds of existence and essence. Entries such as “essence and existence” and “kinds of distinction” in encyclopedias such as Neo-Catholics, especially the fourth and fifth volumes (Glanville, 1967, pp. 908-911; Taylore, 1967, pp. 548-552) as well as the series of Cambridge publications including the history of philosophy and other works show the importance of this issue (Corrigan, 1996, pp. 105-129; Wippel, 1982, pp. 131-164; Wippel, 2000, pp. 385-410). In metaphysical studies, kinds of distinction between existence and essence is discussed, but the best-known and mostly disputed one is the tripartite distinction, i.e. the mental, the physical and the metaphysical distinctions, which we will define and analyze respectively.

2-1. The Mental Distinction

The mental distinction, which is also called conceptual and logical distinction, means that the reason, by analyzing an external thing into two components – i.e. existence and essence – in the mental order, attributes existence to the essence or describes essence with the existence. In this kind of distinction, the external thing is a monolithic and simple entity, and speaking of distinction or composition of the existence and essence in that thing in the world outside the mind is quite nonsense. The main characteristic of this kind of distinction is that it is quite dependent on the mind, in a way that without mind and rational analysis, one cannot speak of this kind of distinction. That is, as long as there is a subject, we may speak of this kind of distinction in the external thing, but without a subject and the analysis of the rational faculty, this kind of distinction is also non-existent (Copleston, 1963, pp. 97-98). This kind of distinction can be observed in Aristotle’s philosophy (Aristotle, 1993, 92b, p. 10-11) and the opinions of Muslim theologians and philosophers

such as Suhrawardi (Suhrawardi, 1380 SH, pp. 64-66). For this group, the external beings are simple realities that can be analyzed into two concepts of existence and essence just in the mental world. The peripatetic philosophers, even though they believe in mental distinction too, maintain that this kind of distinction is not restricted to the mind; rather, it follows the metaphysical distinction, which will be dealt with in the next sections.

2-2. The Physical Distinction

The physical distinction is proposed in contrast to the mental distinction. In the physical distinction, one may distinguish and even separate the existence from the essence of the external thing in the outside world; that is, one can separate the existence of something from its essence in the outside world. In this view, existence and essence are two things (*rei*), and this kind of distinction is not dependent on the subject's mind (Taylor, 1967, Vol. 5, p. 549; Glanville, 1967, pp. 908-910). Using the language of 'thing' in explaining the relationship between existence and essence in the philosophy of the Middle Ages is attributed to the Roman Gilles (Taylor, 1967, Vol. 5, p. 549; Glanville, 1967, pp. 908-910). In the Islamic world, the peripatetic philosophers consider this kind of distinction as an inconsistent idea whose mere conception leads us to inconsistency. Philosophers like Suhrawardi, however, attribute such an opinion to peripatetic philosophers. He maintained that, according to peripatetic philosophers, if we consider existence as superfluous over the essence, we must necessarily consider those two as two independent things. Thus, he maintained that the adherents of peripatetic philosophy, by accepting the superfluity of existence over essence in the outside world, consider – in effect – those two as two separate things, which have led them to some sophistries (Suhrawardi, 1380 SH, pp. 64-66). It must

be said, however, that Suhrawardi has misunderstood the case in criticizing the peripatetic philosophy and he has not had, basically, a right image of the existence as the subject of the peripatetic philosophy and as the foundation of other philosophical issues (See: Haghghat, 1401 SH, pp. 343-370). Using the term 'thing' and the language of 'thingness' about the two philosophical conceptions of existence and essence, and even other conceptions and secondary philosophical intelligibles, is the very physicalization of metaphysical issues, which is the heritage of Suhrawardi's philosophy.

2-3. The Metaphysical Distinction

The third distinction, which has been neglected, is the metaphysical or rational distinction, also called real distinction. This kind of distinction is neither mental nor objective; rather, it is proposed both in the mental order and objective order. In other words, in this kind of distinction, the existence and essence of the external possible being are neither identical as we see in the mental distinction, nor quite separate and like things as in physical distinction; rather, the existence and essence are two ontological principles and two metaphysical modes of the being that form the identity of the possible beings. This kind of distinction is not merely dependent on the subject's mind and is completely independent of mind. The subject, whether existing or not, is the external being of these two modes and two ontological and metaphysical principles (Copleston, 1963, p. 98; Taylor, 1967, Vol. 5, p. 549; Glanville, 1967, pp. 908-910). Indeed, this kind of distinction, as the title shows, is not the product of the mind's creation; rather, it is the result of the reason's discovery of the objective and external beings. The innovation of the Muslim peripatetic philosophers in ontology is precisely pertaining to this mode of distinction. As mentioned before, there is mental distinction

in Aristotle's works, but the metaphysical distinction has not been mentioned there and cannot exist, for the universe with which Aristotle deals is the universe that exists in actuality; that is, the universe of the things that exist. It is not the universe that one thinks it can be non-existent. The creation of the universe as mentioned in the Torah, the Bible or the Quran cannot exist for Aristotle, for the universe he imagines is the one without the possibility of non-existence, the universe that is impossible not to exist in the preexistent past. In such a metaphysical system, there is no room for the issue of the difference and distinction as well as the relationship among essences that do not exist; and Aristotle proposed this issue because one cannot achieve the existence through essence and the definition of substance. But the Islamic philosophers, including Farabi, and afterwards Avicenna, believed in the metaphysical distinction between the essence and the existence in addition to the mental distinction between them, considering that distinction as the metaphysical foundation for their philosophical thought. Farabi and – following him – Avicenna went beyond Aristotle's logical and epistemological distinction to the metaphysical and ontological distinction between the essence and the existence to be able to present a new interpretation and explanation of theology, cosmology and ontology. As a result of this evolution, the new philosophical system distinct from the Greek philosophy emerged. Now, the question is how Farabi acquired the metaphysical distinction and, through it, established the new philosophical system. We continue with analysis of Farabi's theory regarding existence and its relationship with essence as well as his innovations there.

3. Farabi's Theory about 'Existence'

Farabi's theory about the distinction between existence and essence

is based on his theory about 'existence' and 'essence from the viewpoint of its nature'. Farabi believes that existence is among the meanings and concepts that are, firstly, evident and axiomatic in the mind; secondly, it is imagined without intermediation and help from another concept; and thirdly, it is inscribed in the mind through unanimity (Farabi, 1349 AH, p. 2; Farabi, 1890, p. 56). That is, unless the existence is imagined, no other conception can be imagined; and finally, it cannot be known. Thus, existence is the imaginal origin of all imaginations. In other words, conceptions such as existence, necessity and possibility are not, for him, an empirical and *a posteriori* conception; rather, they are rational, primary and *a priori*, which are inscribed in the mind through initial imprinting. These conceptions are not products of acquisition; rather, we obtain those conceptions through awakening and admonition. In other words, the early conceptions that the man has from the childhood are not the product of applying the senses; rather, they are acquired by the child without intention and without any conscience. They are acquired by the child's talent (Farabi, 1371 SH, p. 129). In Avicenna's words, only through reason one can achieve conceptions such as being, thing, cause and the like, and even typical realities such as human being, which is out of sensible things, not through illusion and imagination which are preceded by sensory perception and limited to sensible things (Avicenna, 1405 AH, p. 65). But the question is whether the concept of existence forms the foundation of Farabi's philosophy. The answer is undoubtedly negative. The concept of existence as an evident concept is not the subject of philosophy, for the philosophical issues are formed around the objective truths, and the mental subject cannot be the axis of the objective issues. Thus, we must say that beyond the mental concept, the existence enjoys a rational truth and, from this angle, is the subject of philosophy and the uniting epicenter of the philosophical issues. Thus, it must be said that

existence as the metaphysical truth – which is a meta-conceptual and metaphysical entity – is the subject of Farabi’s philosophical system. Indeed, Farabi designs his philosophical system based on the rational intuition of the existence, and thereby, he affects the whole Islamic philosophy after himself. In Farabi’s philosophy, existence is neither a mental and psychological idea nor an objective sensible one; rather, it is a non-sensible entity. In other words, it is a metaphysical truth which is discovered by using reason. Existence as the subject of the peripatetic philosophy is not a mental concept or a physical and external entity; rather, it is a metaphysical and rational truth which is the result of confrontation between human’s reason and his belongings, an entity that reason discovers through its activity. The sphere of appearance of metaphysics is the analysis of reason. In other words, the way Farabi achieves the metaphysical truth of existence is the rational and philosophical intuition of existence. Transition through the mere concept to rational truth is Farabi’s metaphysical art, which achieves its perfection through Avicenna’s efforts. For Avicenna, existence is neither a thing nor a certain type of essence like accident, substance and the like, nor a mental or physical entity; rather, it is a metaphysical truth. As a result, we must say that existence in Farabi’s philosophical system is something that cannot be explained through the innate nature of essence alone; rather, as we will say, it is something more than essence and superfluous to it. “Essence” is the other side of the distinction between existence and essence. When Farabi speaks of the accidents of existence to the essence, he does not mean the essence of a being or non-being, because in that case, we are involved in vicious circle, acquiring the acquired, and inconsistency. Rather, the ‘essence’ in that discussion means the essence from the viewpoint of what it is, which is the product of the reason’s validity. ‘The essence from the viewpoint of what it is’ is neither a mental entity nor an external one. It is placed

neither in the container of mind nor in the order of objectivity; rather, it is a rational entity. Understanding this fact is rooted in understanding the difference between the mind and the reason in metaphysical issues. Reflection on the difference between mental distinction and metaphysical distinction clarifies the difference between the mind and the reason. Of course, this is true about all philosophical conceptions and confusion of these two will lead to a confusion between conventional laws of the essence, leading to some sophistries. Rational truths are not, in principle, the fabrications of the mind; rather, they are the result of the reason's discovery as the objective and external truths. Thus, the philosophers consider the superfluity of existence over essence as the product of rational analysis, and it is not discussed as a mental or objective matter.

4. Farabi and the Metaphysical Distinction of Existence and Essence

Now, after understanding existence and essence in Farabi's philosophy, we can delineate the relationship and, more precisely, the distinction between them. It seems that with a reflection on Farabi's works, we can find two logical and epistemological statements as well as philosophical and ontological statements in distinction between existence and essence. Indeed, the distinction between existence and essence is not, for Farabi, an intuitive matter; rather, it is an argumentative one. We will pose and reconstruct Farabi's opinion in the form of an argumentation.

4-1. The Logical and Epistemological Statement

Farabi's mechanism in logical and epistemological statement of the distinction between existence and essence is using the three interrogative words: *mā*, *hal*, *lim*. In answering the question on *mā* (what) and the essence of something, we are trying to imagine it.

That is, to recognize the truth of something, we need to imagine it. What comes to imagination is its essence and quiddity, not its existence or anything other than its essence, including the time, the place and amount of that thing. If the existence of that thing was imagined, we would find out its existence by recognizing its essence, and any imagination would necessitate affirmation. But this is not the case. On many occasions, we are aware of the essence of something, but we do not know whether it exists or not. Thus, the essence of something is other than its existence (Farabi, 1404 AH, pp. 48-49).

We may reconstruct Farabi's statement in the form of an argument as follows:

1. For recognizing the whatness of something, its essence is imagined.
2. Imagining the essence of something is its being known.
3. Not any imagination needs affirmation (auxiliary assumption).
4. Imagining the essence of something does not necessitate its existence.
5. The essence is known and the existence is unknown.
6. The known is different from the unknown.

Thus, the essence is different from the existence.

This statement and argument proposes the epistemological distinction, or the very conceptual distinction, of existence and essence in the container of the mind. Such an argument, in addition to being somehow present in the works of predecessors of Farabi like Aristotle and other Greek-like philosophers, cannot design a foundation for the new philosophical system; rather, it reveals – at most – non-companionship of the essence and the existence in the

level of mind as well as the semantic and conceptual conflict between them. Besides, it can be – from the viewpoint of the priority of logics over philosophy – an introduction to Farabi’s philosophical statement about the metaphysical distinction between existence and essence.

4-2. The Philosophical and Ontological Statement

In his philosophical works, Farabi proposes the metaphysical distinction between existence and essence in possible beings and asserts that this distinction is specified to possible beings, and is not running in essentially Necessary Being. Of course, he has used – in this statement – the logical statement as the introduction and, then, through it, he deals with the metaphysical distinction between existence and essence. The right understanding of this argument is definitely important for perceiving and promoting the metaphysical thoughts in Islamic tradition. In his treatises entitled *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, *Zeynūn Kabīr*, and *Ta’līqāt*, in describing the relationship between existence and essence, he uses the words ‘*āriḍ* (i.e. what is accident and originated from outside) and *lāzim* (i.e. an essential or inseparable attribute) or *mulāzim* (Farabi, 1371 SH, p. 42). In the first chapter of *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* as well as in *Zeynūn Kabīr* treatise, Farabi considers all possible beings as composite, dealing with proving the Necessary Being through discussing the existence, the essence and the relationship between them in possible beings and discussing that existence is neither the same as essence, nor a part of possible beings; rather, their existence is accidental and requires a cause. Farabi, like Aristotle, starts from the objective and concrete existing things, which are – for him – primary and prior reality. By analyzing an existing objective and concrete thing, he deals with essence and existence, and this is where he transits from logics to metaphysics.

The necessary point for logical statement was that existence is not among the constituents of essence; thus, it must be a part of accidents of essence. Accidents also include both posterior and consequent. Existence is not accident for posterior, for it necessitates previous existence of essence, and that leads to vicious circle and inconsistency. Thus, existence is the consequent accident of essence; and since any accident is a caused entity, the possible beings are the effects of a cause. That cause is either the essence or something outside the essence. In the former case, due to the existential priority of cause to effect, the essence must be prior to existence, and the previously mentioned restrictions will necessarily be repeated. And the latter case, due to invalidity of vicious circle, must lead to an external entity not inconsistent with existence; and that external entity is the very essentially Necessary Being (Farabi, 1381 SH, pp. 81-82; Farabi, 1387 SH, pp. 107-108). Thus, “any possible being is a composite entity with essence and existence” and “the Necessary Being’s essence is His nature”.

Reconstruction of Farabi’s statement in the form of an argument is as follows:

1. We have some beings.
2. These beings have common points and differences.
3. Existence is their common point and essence is their difference.
4. These beings are composed of existence and essence.
5. Existence is not inherent for essence.
6. Existence is accident for essence.
7. Any accident is a caused attribute.
8. Existence is a caused attribute.

9. Vicious circle is invalid.
10. Existence is the effect of an entity out of essence.
11. That external entity is not composed of existence and essence.
12. The external entity is impossible, that is necessary.

Thus, the possible beings are composed of existence and essence and the Necessary Being is free from this composition.

In this rational analysis, with a focus on external beings, Farabi considers existence as accidental to essence, and this accidentality occurs in the outside world. In *al-Ḥurūf*, he deals – in detail – with the semantic and conceptual meaning of ‘*araḍ*’ both from literal and philosophical viewpoints, as well as its difference from ‘*araḍī*’ and ‘*āriḍ*’ (Farabi, 1970, p. 95). In philosophy, however, ‘*araḍ*’ is an attribute with which a noun is described, and that attribute is not inside the essence of the noun; rather, it is outside its essence and nature. Now, that ‘*araḍ*’ is either essential or non-essential. In the essential ‘*araḍ*’, its subject is its essence or part of its essence, but in the non-essential ‘*araḍ*’, its subject is not the essence or part of the essence of that ‘*araḍ*’. And this type of ‘*araḍ*’ is what is meant in philosophy (Farabi, 1970, pp. 95-96). Therefore, the existence of ‘*araḍ*’ is not from the categories; rather, he means the ‘*araḍ*’ from the *isagoge*, which is contrary to essence.

With a reflection on philosophical statement of the relationship between existence and essence, it is clarified that Farabi’s metaphysical system is the rational analysis of the direct reality. He does not start from ‘essences’ as the ideas that are initially and directly known to us. He does not consider the essence and existence, from the onset, as the elements mutually separate to attempt to compose them as one single thing. On the contrary, he

starts with objective and concrete thing; then, makes it subject to a conceptual analysis and finds in it two substantiating and composing elements: essence and existence. As a result, the proposition “any possible being is a composed pair with existence and essence” is the metaphysical foundation for Farabi’s philosophy. In that theory, our mind can analyze the external things into two ontological principles and use that analysis for constructing its philosophical system.

5. The Results of the Metaphysical Distinction between Existence and Essence

As mentioned before, the philosophical system is a series of theology, cosmology, ontology and epistemology. By proposing the metaphysical distinction, Farabi has created an evolution in the whole philosophical system and established a new philosophical system. These results are mentioned in a list as follows:

A) Evolution in Theology: by transiting from Aristotle’s logical and epistemological distinction into the metaphysical and ontological distinction between essence and existence, Farabi could present a new argument for proving the existence of the Necessary Being, known as the “argument of necessity and possibility”. Farabi could establish an argument, in proportion to his philosophical system and the metaphysical distinction between existence and essence, for proving the Necessary Being, based on the analysis of existence as the reasonable truth and the center of all philosophical issues, an argument known as the existential argument in the philosophical tradition of the West with numerous readings. The alteration in the meaning of the Necessary Being’s causality for the possible beings means a transition from the ultimate causality and

natural agent as the motion-giving to the agentive causality and divine agent as the existence-giving, changing the non-moving mover into the pure Necessary Being and its implications, including turning the pure action and pure thought into the pure existence, are all the results of theology of the metaphysical distinction.

B) Evolution in Cosmology: explaining the essential origination of the universe and the philosophical statement of the theological issue of creation are among the cosmological evolutions arising from metaphysical distinction; and this is what is not found in Aristotle's philosophical system. This is because in the process of predicating existence over essence, indeed, the Primal Cause emanates the existence to the possible beings, and accordingly, the being is realized. The container of this predication, which explains the doctrine of creation, is not the mind, but the object. The essential createdness of the possible beings, meaning that the possible being is preceded by its nothingness both in the levels of essence and nature, is based on the rational analysis of the possible beings into two metaphysical modes of existence and essence as well as the explanation of the relationship between the two. The continuous relationship between the possible beings and the essentially Necessary Being is another fruit of the metaphysical distinction. Indeed, although the metaphysical distinction between essence and existence leads to the distinction between possible beings and the Necessary Being, the possible beings are continuously related to the Necessary Being through effusion of existence.

C) Evolution in Ontology: from the ontological viewpoint, dividing existence into necessary and possible, analyzing the structure of possible beings, and relating possible being to the Necessary Being are among the results of metaphysical distinction. Accordingly, we are moved from the tripartite structure of existence for the Greeks (i.e. inconsistent existence, potential existence, and actual existence) to the tripartite structure of impossible existence, possible existence and Necessary Existence. Besides, in terms of the relationship between 'existence' and 'essence', the essentially Necessary Existence is imagined as His essence is the same as His existence, while the possible beings are known as beings whose essences is the same as existence, and they are not capable of being the cause of their own existence. Their existence must be emanated from another source, that is the creator of the existence. This distinction divides the beings of the universe into the necessary and possible beings. The Necessary Being is infinite, uncreated, pure action and pure existence; and the possible being is finite, created, composed of potential and action (materials) and composed of existence and essence. We can say that in Aristotle's view, in primary division, the being is divided into substance and accidents, while Farabi divides the being, in primary division, into necessary and possible and, then, in the secondary division, he divides the essence into substance and accidents. Similarly, the metaphysical distinction between essence and existence prepared the ground for dividing the Aristotelian 'four reasons' into the reasons of subsistence (essence) and

reasons of existence in Farabi and the philosophers after him.

D) Evolution in Epistemology: Although philosophers such as Aristotle have spoken of intuitive knowledge, founding system on the basis of the intuitive knowledge is the product of efforts made by Muslim philosophers, especially Farabi. Thus, we must say that dividing knowledge into intuitive and acquired is rooted in the metaphysical distinction, because the intuitive knowledge is concerned with essence and the acquired knowledge is concerned with existence. We can find this evolution clearly in the transcendental theosophy in particular. For Mulla Sadra, the truth of existence is not of the type of essences; thus, it cannot be known through intuitive knowledge. However, it is not unknown; rather, it is known through acquired knowledge (for example, Mulla Sadra, 1410 AH, vol. 1, pp. 53, 61, 392). The necessary condition for this reflection made by Mulla Sadra and considering the fact that the knowledge of truths of existence is a source for other forms of knowledge, dividing knowledge into intuitive and acquired is considered as an initial division, and the intuitive knowledge is referred to the acquired knowledge (Allameh Tabataba'i, 1362 SH, p. 138). Thus, this kind of distinction also changes the philosopher's epistemology. That is, there is a difference between two types of conceptualization. The first type is based on essences such as being human, being a horse, etc. The second type is based on the entities of the actual beings in the world. Conceptualization of the first type is a quite mental affair, without a need of the entity existing outside the mind. But

the conceptualization of the second type is dependent on the entity existing independent of our mind. Such an entity has no precedent in the philosophy before Farabi. Besides, the metaphysical distinction overshadows the discussion of generalities. The natural general is the very essence; thus, the way existence is related to essence affects the discussion of generalities. Finally, we can say that the ground is prepared for discussion on principality of existence and conventionality of essence and vice versa. Thus, we can say that by proposing the metaphysical distinction between existence and essence, an independent philosophical system emerges.

Conclusion

We can say that by proposing the project of metaphysical distinction between existence and essence, Farabi departs from Greek philosophy, and this kind of distinction is one of the distinctive aspects of Islamic philosophy as compared to Greek philosophy. It is, indeed, the sublime instance of defending the identity of the Islamic philosophy as the non-Greek philosophy. This, of course, has no inconsistency with the fact that the Greek philosophy has a great role in formation of Islamic philosophy. I think that Farabi, by reflecting on the relationship between existence and essence, established a new philosophical system in the Islamic world that was developed by later philosophers such as Avicenna. This new philosophical system can be found in the evolutions arising from the metaphysical distinction in philosophers' theology, cosmology, ontology and epistemology. Presenting new argument in proving the Necessary Being, evolution in the meaning of causality, and transiting from ultimate causality and natural agent to agentive

causality and divine agent as well as changing the non-moving mover into essentially necessary being are among the theological evolutions. Explanation of the essential createdness of the universe and the philosophical explanation of the theological issue of creation are among the cosmological evolutions arising from metaphysical distinction; and such an analysis is not found in Aristotelian philosophical system. Besides, the universe's continuous need of the Necessary Being, due to the emanation of existence by the grantor of existence, is also among the cosmological evolutions. Dividing beings into necessary and possible, analyzing the structure of possible beings, and relating possible beings to necessary being are among the results of metaphysical distinction in ontology. In the epistemological sphere, dividing knowledge into intuitive and acquired, and being acquainted with two epistemic conceptualization system are among the fruits of metaphysical distinction. That is, the intuitive knowledge is concerned with the essence, but the acquired knowledge is concerned with the existence. Thus, we must say that the metaphysical distinction between existence and essence is a new foundation for proposing the new philosophy.

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