**Some Thoughts on the Introduction and Conclusion of Farabi Summary of Plato’s Laws**

With regard to the fact that, at the end of the Leiden manuscripts number 133 the scriber explicitly mentions to the second master or Farabi as the person who has summarized the Plato’s *Nawamis*. Besides, Farabi himself acknowledges that *Nawmis* is one of the texts of Plato (Muhsin Mahdi 1962, 66) and we can consider this summary as Farabi’s. This manuscript which is the basis of our research, is transcribed by a so-called Gholam who apparently has copied that from the writing of his master Mohamad Tabrizi known as Ghazanfar who belongs to the Tabriz philosophical school. This master thinker has some pieces of writings in the fields of mathematics, medicine and philosophy.

Up to present, the Leiden manuscript has been edited four times in this chronological order: Gabrelii (1952); Muhsin Mahdi (1961); Badawi (1974); and Druart (1998). And different translations on the basis of translator’s method: Persian incomplete translation of introduction and the first discourse (Mehdi Muhaqqeq 1994); complete French translation (2007); incomplete German translation (by Krauss quoted from Muhsin Mahdi 1961); and incomplete translation of the first five discourse (Muhsin Mahdi 1970); and the Complete English translation (Charles Butterworth 2015).

Here with exploring and examining the introduction and conclusion of Farabi’s Summary, I’m going to extract his reflections on the method of involving, reception and reading of Plato’s *Nawamis*.

1. **Farabi’s Conclusion**

At the end of his conclusion, Farabi mentions in 7-8 short sentences some important, crucial and rare information on the nature, state, and the order of parts of the writing he and his pertinent group who are working on. In other words, in his Conclusion Farabi gives basic information to the readers about the quality of Plato’s *Nawamis* and the method of the group of scholars who are working on it as a team.

According to him, writing as post facto in regard to speech can be set as the systemic basis of knowledge and research otherwise, spending time and energy for reading any piece of such writings including *nawamis* is a waste of time. Accordingly, being involved with writing will be a valuable instrument for thinking and researching and in this regard, we can say that he is continuing a deep scholarly tradition (F. Rosenthal 1947, 1-37).

In regard to this tradition, I’m going to suggest that depending on the selected and accepted method and approach to the valuable writing, specific scholars come together and shape a circle; for instance “Hunain circle” that do research, edit, and the like but all based on ancient Greek texts (Mehdi Muhaqqeq 1379, XXVI- XXX I).

When we return to Farabi’s conclusion, we see that he uses the plural subject pronoun “we”, for textually editing Plato’s *Nawamis*. Therefore, he is not alone and it is impossible that he works individually. We can guess that this circle consists of scholars such as Matta ibn Yunus and yah ibn Adi as his top student respectively – especially the second person as the top student of Farabi according to Ibn Nadim has a translation of *Nawamis* besides a writing named “Plato’s Writing to the Cretans on *Nawamis*” (Bayard Dodge 1970, 592-593).

Within this circle, the copy of Plato *Nawamis* that scholars work and discuss has nine discourses though some say they should be 10 or and the other 14. This point of Farabi has some clues including that there is not consensus about the number of discourses and it is possible that different groups or individuals have different ones; or we live in a period that has such an experience and it may be not the same for the past periods and individuals. With regard to this background information we re-read Farabi:

" قال و قد بقي من مقالات هذا الكتاب مقالات لم يحضرنا نسخها. ... و قد اختلف الناس في عدد مقالات هذاالكتاب فزعم بعضهم انها ... و .... ولم يقع الينا منها سوي المقالات التي تكلمنا فيها". (Druart 1998, 152)

But before entering the text, we need to have a short outline and microhistory of Laws. But before that a short philological point about the word *Nawamis* is necessary. The singular Arabic-Farsi word namus and its plural *Nawamis* is equivalent with the Greek word nomos/nomoi in distinction of kanon /  In *nomoi* 714 a, Plato makes some structural connections between nous and nomos and according to this sentence nomos should be understood as the distributive dimension of nous as the divine and transcendental entity that exists in the world: ten tou nou dianomen eponomazontas nomon”. And in order to preserve this connection and the distinction of nomos from the other kin words, we only transliterate not translate it.

After this terminological note, we return to the main argument. According to historical facts around Plato’s *nomoi*, the extant and available ordering of this manuscript is the product of different editions by the members of Plato Academy under the auspices of Philip of Opus (D. Nails & H. Thesleff 2003, 14). It means that when Plato was alive, the main body of *nomoi* was not shaped / and as a voluminous writing of the old Plato, it has been given to Philip of Opus as his trusted student and secretary /in order to take its final shape (John Dillon 2003,182).

Though Philip had relative acquaintance with the writing style of the late Plato, but he is incapable of an organic and consistent edition and ordering of the different Books of *nomoi*. As a result, we read a text that has consistencies in words and terms and even some subjects that are discussed by serious readers and Platonists yet. For it is a text that is edited by the members of Academy in a short of time and accordingly is incomplete and has distance from the other manuscripts that have been edited by Plato himself such as Republic.

When we put text microhistory and the Conclusion of Farabi together, we can say that an incomplete manuscript that is edited by the members of Academy is read, used and circulated within the Farabi circle and he uses such a writing. Therefore, Farabi reads and uses a specific edition of *nomoi* that is different from the other and us today.

With regard to the mentioned state of the text, now we consider the approach and method of Farabi in working with it, for it seems necessary to have a special involvement with such a writing. It is in this regard that Farabi uses some terms that are technical and we cannot pass over them easily and simply. At the same time, their meanings are not so clear and explicit that by emic approach we can get their meanings. Heuristically, we refer to the circle of Hunain that has historical documented background in such an activity by stating in explicit terms its approach and method for working with their interested writings. Analogically, from this circle, we can infer and extract some general rules that can be applied for Farabi circle.

According to Farabi, the first step for involving with *Nawamis* in its extant state is deep thinking about the “writing” itself on the basis of Plato’s tenant that is informed reading. It means that we should begin our work with reading/thinking about the text page-by-page and by this practice, we enter to the next phase that is “critical edition” in order that the dubitable, missed, deleted and the like issues in the text become explored and examined. Though, the work has special status but we should consider it for consideration and thinking over.

For these stages Farabi uses two terms: discovering Plato’s “intention”, and inferring “meaning”. As far as I realize, Farabi suggests that by discovering the intention of Plato in *Nawamis,* we can find the meaning of words and sentences, so that the intention of the author becomes the guiding signs in finding the meanings.

As a result, in the conclusion of his summary Farabi gives hints about his scholarly group that are working collectively on a version of Plato’s *Nawamis,* and in this circle the main focus is on reading the extant manuscript as the valuable and trusty source of knowledge. Thus such a working necessitates adopting specific method and approach that he introduces with four terms in this order : reading/thinking; editing; writer intention; and extracting meaning.

**2- Introduction of the Summary**

In his Introduction, Farabi after his theoretical-Aristotelian preface and the story of the unnamed ascetic, both together, focuses on Plato (Leo Strauss 1959, 134) in general, and in particular on *Nawamis* that proposes these titles: Plato and knowledge; Plato’s methods of presenting knowledge; skill and esoterism; and Farabi’s own method as the reader of *Nawamis*.

Before entering to Plato, in his preface, Farabi begins his discussion as an Aristotelian. It means that he repeats the distinction and superiority of human being over the other beings, and it is human being that by activating his or her internal capacity can distinguish between the useful and the useless, and then take the first option and leave the second one respectively. And in this regard, “experience”, the faculty of thinking about particulars and making universal judgements works as the influential factor in the transition of the potentiality to actuality. Besides, higher human experience makes that individual more virtuous and excellent in comparison with the other individuals.

Farabi’s Aristotelian introduction may remind us of Book six of *Nicomachean Ethics* that at his time was translated into Arabic and was available to him. In his sixth Book, Aristotle divides intellectual virtues into five kinds among which phronesis is the one that has a specific significant and salient in its particular and universal meanings. This theoretical / practical virtue makes us capable of distinguishing between good and bad human issues and in order to actualize this capacity, we need to acquire experience with a view to the universals (Aristotle NE, BK VI, Chap. 5 1140 a, b).

Analogous with this, Farabi writes on the faculty that makes us capable of distinguishing useful from harmful issues. Of course, both Aristotle and Farabi accept the possibility of fault and wrongness in human experiences and like Chapter eight of Book six of Nicomachean Ethics, Farabi makes no discussion about such a matter and refers more detailed discussion about it to those who are expertise in sophistry (Druart 1998, 124).

Although experience is something common to human beings, all are not equal and this fact divides humans into wise and public classes. According to the standard of experience, the public make judgments on the basis of their incomplete observations. But the wise which introduced by Farabi is comparable with phronimos individuals in Aristotle who know usual and habitual approach of the public but at the same time use their own specific and not-too-explicit method in their affairs.

In order to clear the meaning, Farabi gives the anecdote of a nameless and ascetic wise man who is famous to worship, ascetic and piety among the people of the city in which he lives. This city has a despotic ruler and his intended wise wants to escape from there and for his purpose he uses a very strange and complicated method that is not easily understandable for the public and his trick is successful and he come out of the city.

It is possible that Farabi anecdote is the result and effect of connecting two separate evidences that are available in Aristotle writings. On the one hand, it is the implicit idea of Aristotle at the beginning of his *Politics* (Book one) where he speaks of and compare divine man that is beyond polis like an isolated piece at draughts (Aristotle, *Politics* 1253 a). On the other hand, in chapter five of Book six in *Nicomachean Ethics* (1140 b, No.,5) he speaks and admires Pericles (etymologically, completely famous) as a phronimos man that has some specific relations with his city-state.

After this theoretical /Aristotelian introduction, Farabi enters directly to Plato thought in general and *Nawamis* in particular. Comparable and interconnected with his anecdote about the nameless ascetic wise man, he speaks of Plato the “wise” and restraints from using “philosopher” for him. The wise Plato has specific relation with his city and its inhabitants and according to this situation determines his introduction and presentation of knowledge to them. It means that city and its inhabitants are not monolithic, therefore it is not expedient and he is not completely free to make his knowledge explicit and public. In other words, Farabi thinks that in ratio to the intellectual and ethical capacities of the people as addressee, Plato presents his knowledge.

With regard to this issue the main and dominant method of Plato, the wise is implicit, encoded, ambiguous and difficult, in order that it does not come into the hands of those who are naïve or unsuitable for it or does not know its value or misuse it. According to Farabi, it is the habitual method of Plato but he has also an explicit and clear ways for presenting knowledge.

According to these words, I think that Farabi considers Plato as a phronimos / wise Athenian who communicate his knowledge in two ways to his addresses. One way is explicit /customary and the other is implicit/unusual. If it is so, then how should we read the text as readers? And this is the next issue Farabi considers.

For him, both methods of reading have an esoteric aspect and as a result we should learn and equip with the science and skill of reading esoteric writings in order to become conversant in it for otherwise it is impossible to understand such writings. As a result, in continuation of his Introduction he writes about his special outlook and conception about esoteric writing and how to read such a text in a methodological way:

" ... و قد عزمنا علي استخراج المعاني التي اوما اليها في هذا الكتاب و جمعها مقاله مقاله”

“ …, in this writing (in means Farabi’s own), we have decided to extract the intended intimated meanings of Plato in his book *(nawamis*), and collect the extant discourses in a special arrangement “ (Druart 1998, 125). These key emphasized words can give us Farabi *modus operandi* in facing and involving with *nawamis*. Farabi says that Plato communicates his meanings through implications or intimations and it necessitates that as reader we think and practice a suitable method.

“Extraction” and “collection” are the key words and processes that are involved in his reading of an esoteric writing. These two words have special meaning in relation to the form and content of an esoteric text and are distinct from terms such as comment, interpretation, summary and the like (Dimitri Gutas 1993,32, 37, 39-40). Now we consider these two terms.

With regard to Farabi overall outlook towards Plato communication of knowledge, “extraction” in its basic meaning means exploring and discovering the hidden and unknown. And in this relation, the reader should delve into the depth of *nawamis* in order to discover and take out the hidden meanings.

In other words, Farabi and his related circle consider *nawamis* as a writing that includes hidden and not-discovered content and meanings that we as participants-readers should try and endeavor to bring them out from their hidden places, in a word we should have and try the ability of inference. Thereby, we try an ability that is equivalent with the technical meaning of extraction for we bring out and infer meanings from *nawamis* by our intellect.

Thereby, we have considered one step/concept and now turn to the next. In the second step/concept Farabi speaks of “collection” of the extant and available discourses that shape the manuscript as a whole. Here I suggest that his meaning is comparable with the Greek word This Greek word means two things together that are, bringing in a short and summary form what is important, long and detailed and these two actions are not mutually exclusive. Interestingly, in the past Farabi has done such a thing in relation of the so-called Organon of Aristotle.

Therefore, for Farabi collecting has the special technical meaning of summarizing of the crucial and vital issues of *nawamis*. Thereby, collecting is not the amateur and simple act of collecting different discourses but a kind of inference with regard to the basic vital meanings. These two processes have direct relations with the purposes of Farabi mentioned initiative too, that are provision of a handbook for reading *nawamis* as the voluminous manuscript, and reducing the hardship of reading text for the interested readers (Druart 1998, 125). It is noteworthy that this method of reading that aims at making reading a thinker’s writing easy and accessible through another pen is an event that we can see in Alexandrian school specially in regard to the writings of Galen that usually and customarily they spoke of *Galen Synopsis* .

**Conclusion**

With regard to the Farabi Conclusion and Introduction about the *nawamis* manuscript; his method for reading it; plus independent historical facts on the special state and development of *nawamis* manuscript in the Plato Academy and then its transmission, it seems that this manuscript is discussed in Farabi scholarly circle and then he presents his ideas according to his own perspective and perception of Plato’s philosophizing and communicating it to his addressee.

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