

Aristotelian Thought In Eastern Peripatetics: Farabi And Ibn Sina's Philosophical Adaptations

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Received: 23 September 2025; **Accepted:** 15 October 2025; **Published:** 20 November 2025

Abstract: This article examines the adaptation and transformation of Aristotelian philosophy by the Eastern peripatetic philosophers, Farabi and Ibn Sina. Special attention is paid to their interpretation of metaphysical, cosmological, and ontological concepts, revealing a blend of ancient Greek philosophical approaches with new frameworks characteristic of Islamic thought.

Keywords: Aristotle, Farabi, Ibn Sina, peripateticism, metaphysics, cosmology, ontology.

Introduction: Aristotle's influence on Islamic philosophy, particularly through the Eastern peripatetic (mashsha'i) tradition, represents one of the most profound and enduring intellectual developments of the medieval period. His works, translated first into Syriac and subsequently into Arabic, formed the philosophical foundation upon which Muslim thinkers built new conceptual frameworks. Among these thinkers, Farabi (Al-Farabi) and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) occupy a central place due to their systematic reinterpretation and expansion of Aristotelian metaphysics, logic, and cosmology.

Farabi is often regarded as the "Second Teacher" after Aristotle because of his role in organizing and clarifying the Greek philosophical legacy for the Islamic world. He did not merely transmit Aristotle's ideas, but restructured them into a coherent philosophical system aligned with the intellectual climate of the Islamic Golden Age. His exploration of the relationship between intellect, existence, and the hierarchical structure of the cosmos laid the groundwork for later developments in metaphysical thought.

Ibn Sina further advanced this intellectual tradition by offering an original and deeply influential metaphysical system in which being (wujud) and essence (mahiyya) became central categories. His distinction between necessary and contingent existence introduced new ontological dimensions that went beyond the Aristotelian framework. Moreover, Ibn Sina's cosmological model — centered on the emanation

theory and the hierarchical ordering of intellects — significantly shaped later Islamic and even medieval European philosophy.

Thus, the contributions of Farabi and Ibn Sina illustrate not a passive reception of Greek philosophy, but an active and creative transformation. Their works demonstrate how the Islamic philosophical tradition assimilated, reinterpreted, and enriched Aristotle's thought, ultimately producing new metaphysical paradigms that influenced both the Eastern and Western intellectual worlds for centuries to come.

METHODS

This study employs a comparative-historical and textual-analytical methodology, focusing on both primary philosophical sources and contemporary scholarly interpretations. The research proceeds from the assumption that the development of Eastern peripateticism cannot be fully understood without situating it in the broader context of both Aristotelian thought and the intellectual environment of the Islamic Golden Age.

First, key Aristotelian concepts related to metaphysics, cosmology, and ontology were examined, particularly those found in the treatises "Metaphysics" and "De Caelo". These works serve as foundational texts for understanding the philosophical vocabulary and conceptual structures that were later appropriated and transformed by Muslim thinkers.

Second, a close reading and analysis of primary sources

authored by Farabi and Ibn Sina were conducted. Among Farabi's works, particular attention was paid to "Kitab al-huruf" (The book of letters), which reveals his efforts to harmonize logic, language, and metaphysical categories, as well as "Al-Madina al-Faḍila" (The virtuous city), illustrating his synthesis of metaphysics with political philosophy. For Ibn Sina, central texts included "Kitab al-Shifa'" (The book of healing) — his monumental philosophical encyclopedia — and "Kitab al-Najat" (The book of salvation), which offers a concise yet comprehensive exposition of his metaphysical system. Through these works, the study evaluates how each philosopher interprets, adapts, and extends Aristotelian doctrines in relation to Islamic theological and epistemological concerns.

Finally, the research incorporates insights from modern academic literature on medieval Islamic philosophy, Greek–Arabic translation movements, and the reception of Aristotelian thought in the Muslim world. Secondary sources include monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, and specialized encyclopedias that contextualize the intellectual exchange between Greek and Islamic traditions. This combination of primary and secondary materials allows for a nuanced reconstruction of the philosophical dialogue linking Aristotle, Farabi, and Ibn Sina, and highlights the creative transformation that occurred within the Eastern peripatetic tradition.

RESULTS

The comparative analysis highlights several key areas in which Farabi and Ibn Sina not only adopted Aristotelian philosophical principles, but also significantly transformed them to align with the intellectual and theological context of the Islamic world:

Farabi reinterprets Aristotle's concept of the Unmoved Mover and identifies it with the notion of a singular, transcendent First Cause, which is both the source and ultimate end of all existence. Unlike Aristotle, who focuses on the First Mover primarily as a final cause that draws beings toward motion, Farabi incorporates Neoplatonic emanation theory, arguing that all levels of being emanate from the First Cause in a structured and hierarchical order. This reinterpretation allows for the integration of metaphysical unity with Islamic monotheism, transforming Aristotle's metaphysics into a philosophical foundation compatible with the belief in one supreme Creator.

While both philosophers work within the Aristotelian category of substance (*ousia*), Ibn Sina introduces a crucial distinction between essence (*mahiyya*) and existence (*wujud*)—a foundational concept that reshaped later Islamic and Western scholastic philosophy. He asserts that a being's essence does not

inherently imply its existence; existence is something that must be bestowed. This ontological insight leads Ibn Sina to formulate his influential doctrine of the Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujud*), whose essence and existence are identical, in contrast to Possible beings (*mumkin al-wujud*), whose existence is contingent and dependent. This development surpasses Aristotle's ontology, offering a more systematic framework for explaining the nature of existence and divine necessity.

Both Farabi and Ibn Sina adopt and expand upon Aristotle's cosmological model, but they introduce a more complex and structured hierarchy of celestial and intellectual orders. In their system, the First Cause generates a series of Intellects through emanation, each corresponding to a celestial sphere. These intellects serve as intermediaries between the divine and the material world, governing cosmic motion, metaphysical order, and the existence of forms. This cosmology differs from Aristotle's conception of multiple unmoved movers and emphasizes a unified, rational structure of the universe grounded in metaphysical necessity. Ibn Sina further refines this framework by incorporating the Active Intellect, which plays a key role in human cognition and the acquisition of universal knowledge.

DISCUSSION

Farabi and Ibn Sina's philosophical syntheses reflect both a profound respect for Aristotle's intellectual heritage and a remarkable capacity for reinterpretation and innovation. Rather than merely transmitting Aristotelian doctrines, they re-examined and transformed them within the intellectual, theological, and cultural realities of the Islamic world. In doing so, they helped shape a distinctive tradition of *falsafa*—one that integrated the rigor of Greek logical analysis with metaphysical concerns rooted in Islamic theology and Neoplatonic cosmology.

A key example of this creative transformation is Ibn Sina's doctrine of necessary and possible existence, which re-articulates Aristotle's distinction between substance and form into a metaphysical system grounding the proofs of God's existence. This distinction allows Ibn Sina to argue for a Necessary Existent (*wajib al-wujud*) whose essence is identical with existence, a formulation that profoundly influenced both Islamic *kalām* and medieval Christian philosophy. Through translations by figures such as Gerard of Cremona and discussions in the works of Thomas Aquinas, Ibn Sina's ideas entered the Latin Scholastic tradition, demonstrating the trans-civilizational flow of philosophical argumentation.

Farabi's notion of the virtuous city (*al-Madina al-Faḍila*) similarly adapts Aristotelian political theory and

Platonic ideals to the moral and social realities of Islamic society. His emphasis on the philosopher-prophet as leader provides an epistemological bridge between rational knowledge and revealed wisdom—an attempt to harmonize reason and faith at the level of political organization.

Their contributions also stimulated significant intellectual debates. Theologians such as al-Ghazali criticized certain Avicennian metaphysical claims, sparking one of the most influential philosophical exchanges in Islamic intellectual history. Yet, even in critique, the framework initiated by Farabi and Ibn Sina persisted, indicating the lasting impact of their conceptual structures.

More broadly, their works contributed to the flourishing of scientific inquiry, logic, medicine, cosmology, and ethics during the Islamic Golden Age. The translation, commentary, and teaching traditions built around their ideas facilitated the development of scholarly networks that spanned Baghdad, Bukhara, Andalusia, and later, medieval Europe. This underscores the interconnected and transnational nature of intellectual life, contradicting any view of philosophical traditions as isolated or self-contained.

Thus, the philosophical projects of Farabi and Ibn Sina represent not simple continuation, but creative synthesis, intellectual expansion, and cross-cultural mediation. Their legacy is evident not only in Islamic philosophy but also in the broader history of Western metaphysics, epistemology, and political theory—demonstrating how knowledge travels, transforms, and re-emerges in new contexts.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the philosophical adaptations made by Farabi and Ibn Sina represent a significant transformation of Aristotelian thought in the Eastern peripatetic tradition. Their innovative approaches to metaphysics, cosmology, and ontology created new frameworks that bridged ancient Greek philosophy and Islamic ideas. The doctrine of necessary and possible being, as elaborated by Ibn Sina, remains influential in both Eastern and Western philosophical schools. Future research could explore the broader impact of these adaptations on subsequent developments in Islamic and European philosophy as well as their relevance to modern metaphysical discussions.

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