

Alfarabi and aristotle: the four causes and the four stages of the doctrine of th...

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Alfarabi and Aristotle: The Four Causes and The Four Stages of The Doctrine of The Intelligence

Alfarabi was raised as a young boy in Baghdad. His early life was spent studying the art of linguistics, philosophy, and logic. His teachers were Syrian Christians experts in Greek philosophy. He studied Aristotle and Plato in detail, and it became evident in his later writings that they were a strong influence on him. He became quite a prolific writer, and he wrote more than 100 works, many of which have unfortunately been lost including his a lot of his commentaries on Aristotle. He was one of the earliest Islamic thinkers to transmit to the world of his time the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle. He is considered by many to be the founder of an authentic philosophy. His writings created a lot of support, debate, and controversy. He contributed materials on the proof of the existence of the First Principle, and on the theory of emanation, as well as the theory of knowledge, in addition to his commentaries on Greek philosophers. The Greek influence is clearly present in his works, especially with his Opinions of the Inhabitants of a Virtuous City, where he laid down a philosophical, religious, and social system for the humanity at large; a system that sought to break barriers and facilitate relations among people and nations. This work sounded very similar to the work presented by Plato in Plato's Republic. They both took into consideration the matter of city/state, who was to govern, who was to be governed, how this governing was to take place, how it was to be enforced, and so on. It also appears clear that he was influenced greatly by Aristotle. This influence is present in his " Doctrine of the Intellect". The Doctrine of the intellect was Alfarabi's approach to giving his own interpretation to the intellect. There are strong similarities between

Alfarabi's Doctrine of the Intellect and Aristotle's "Four Causes". Needless to say that they each are comprised of four stages, but the stages seem very similar, they seem to be representative of one another, almost to the point of defining one another. It will be demonstrated that Alfarabi used Aristotle's "Four Causes" to derive and support the Doctrine of the Intellect. Alfarabi draws off of Aristotle's distinction among four causes; material, formal, efficient, and final. An object's "material cause" is the substance out of which it is made, the "formal cause" is its shape or nature, its "efficient cause" is the most immediate force to bring it into existence, and its "final cause" is its purpose. Thus the Doctrine of the Intellect's "material cause" is latent thought, its "formal cause" is the active thought, its "efficient cause" is conscience thought of one's mind, and its "final cause" is to rationalize everything and to be able to make the first transition to the last spiritual emanation from God. The first cause of Aristotle was called "material" or natural matter. Aristotle borrowed this from the early Greeks. The main question asked by this cause is: "By what is anything made of?" Alfarabi embraces this cause and relates it to the Doctrine of the Intellect as his first stage. The stage in which describes the capability for thinking. Alfarabi argues that this is latent thought, similar to a dry sponge, that is ready to absorb quiddities or whatness. This is the preconscience grabbing of forms, allowing for no differentiation of thought, reason, or abstract sensing. Therefore the essence of one, is the same thing as the essence of other objects. This requires mind and form. The mind sees the forms and collects them merely as forms. Here with Aristotle the first stage is a gatherer. The mind, though not defined what it is, is defined by the function that it has. The

second cause for Aristotle was called "formal" or life force. Aristotle borrowed this form from Plato. The main question asked by this cause is: "What is its identity or what is its name?" This is also the second stage of the Doctrine of the Intellect for Alfarabi. Alfarabi considers this to be the active stage where the sponge is filled with objects. As the objects enter it the process of abstracting out forms begins. This brings on the concept of dualism, once again supplying a strong Greek influence from Plato. The forms are in us, we collect the forms and the objects. The forms are contributing to our thought process, latent to active, dried to wet, the dried sponge is now latently wet. There is no real thought process yet, this is simply just the gathering stages. This is the differentiation between forms and objects. The forms are in us, this is not a consideration of time and space, but rather a consideration of universals. Universals like blue, red, hot, cold, the forms are quazzi things. Object for the object of thought. Things that are recognized as separate. Here with Aristotle we begin to get some separation of the objects, images, and forms. We begin to see differences. The third cause for Aristotle was called "efficient" or natural process. Aristotle borrowed this concept from Democritus. The main question asked by this cause is: "Who changed it from nothing to something, so that it is the way it is?" This concept allows for absence, starting with nothing and now having something. This is the thinking of itself, similar to the squeezing of the sponge. The actual actualizing and using the forms. Thinking about the forms, and the forms that were not abstracted from the objects. These ideas and concepts belong to us, they are in us. This is our mind at work, at this stage it is still very active with the thought of what these forms are and

begins to see functions. The fourth cause for Aristotle was called "final" or to achieve excellence in the city in politics, art, athletics, war, science, or philosophy. This was Aristotle's own contribution. The main question asked by this cause is: "What is its purpose?" For Alfarabi this is the union of the spiritual world to the world of human beings. This is the last emanation of God, and the first step in which man begins to embrace the spiritual world. This is the actual reflection of man, looking upon his own thought process, seeing how his active rational mind works. It is this rationale that allows for the move from the first cause/stage to the second cause/stage, from the second cause/stage to the third cause/stage, and so on. This is the stage at which true thinking about thinking takes place. A very cognitive approach. The only confusion that is presented by Alfarabi's doctrine is: is it really that of Alfarabi? There seems to be contradictions in some of his views and some of the works that have been credited to him, are not actually his. Some interpreters have come to the conclusion that he was honestly trying to unite Islamic doctrines with philosophical teachings. While others thought he was committed to philosophy that was based upon a religious body that would be used mostly as a political resource. Regardless of these interpretations, if these writings are actually those of Alfarabi, then it is clear that there was a strong Aristotelianism influence on Alfarabi. This is evident in several of the writings such as in his mentions of the four senses, intellect in potentiality, intellect in actuality, acquired intellect, and with the agent intellect. There are several other writings that are credited to Alfarabi that were based on Plato and Aristotle, so there is no real reason to assume that these writings were not those of Alfarabi. It appears that Alfarabi uses the basic principles

of Aristotle and has applied them to his principles of the Doctrine of the Intellect in order to rationalize his philosophy. Alfarabi was a philosopher that grabbed new ideas and harnessed them with some of the greatest philosophical minds known to man. He took Aristotle to a new level, doesn't any true philosopher? He embodied the thoughts of previous minds, and united them with his own and became a very powerful influence on Islamic philosophy. It is clear that Aristotle was used to develop his Doctrine of the Intellect. The similarities, the context, and the rational are too similar to belong to anyone else.