Comparison of islamic and christian philosophers

According to the Encarta dictionaries, philosophy can be defined as the branch of knowledge that examines the basic concepts of thoughts and a set of beliefs or aims. Islamic philosophy is a style of philosophy that deals with the study of the framework of Islamic cultures, not necessarily religious issues, while Christian philosophy strictly deals with the theological doctrines of Christianity.

However, as time went on there are many Islamic and Christian philosophers who have systematically established their works and have influenced the way people think in the society. Some of the great philosophers to be considered would be Plato, Mohammed Al Farabi, Saint Augustine, Aquinas, Yaqub Ibn Ishaq al-Kindi and Ibn Rushd also known as Averroes. Further, I would examine the views, works and areas of study as an attempt to compare both Christian and Islamic philosophers.

Plato, Mohammed al Farabi and Ibn Rushd were great renowned world philosophers who lived at one time or the other, and whose many contributions including their thoughts and works specifically with regards to philosophy, politics and science have greatly imparted into Islamic political theory. The impact these Islamic philosophers made during their life-times are still felt even up till today.

Plato was an Islamic political thinker that was a well known student of Socrates. Plato established many dialogues and theories such as the Cartesian dualism hypothesis. This theory talks about the mind (soul) and the body. The theory further explains that there are conflicts between the mind and soul because the body is made up of physical appetites which can

lead ones soul to committing sin.* However, Plato has greatly influenced many Arabic philosophers such as Mohammed Al Farabi.

Mohammed Al Farabi was known to be the second teacher of Islamic philosophy after Aristotle. Al Farabi was one of the most famous, well respected, and successful Arabic philosophers. Also, He made an important contribution in the Islamic society by splitting the study of logic into two categories; Takhayyul (idea) and Thubut (proof). (Islamicity. com).

Both Mohammed Al Farabi and Plato came up with philosophical themes. An example of one of these themes is the First theme which is the theory of Knowledge. Mohammed Al Farabi and Plato both stated that Knowledge development is very important in the society and that it was the key to the rise of power in most successful societies. Therefore, knowledge is responsible for the distinct differences between developed countries and the third world countries of the world. This theory of Knowledge is the basis for major societies like the United States of America (U. S. A).

Plato and Mohammed Al Farabi made it clear that in every society, social and political changes are naturally observed and an isolated individual is not capable of achieving perfection. Both philosophers believed that anyone who was trying to be an island could have little or no chances of being successful in life.

On the other hand, well known Christian philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas and Saint Augustine of the late centuries have also impacted greatly into the world. Both philosophers were good writers and made different dialogues.

Thomas Aquinas was born to an aristocratic family and has produced a philosophical and cultural impact on the minds of many in the society today. Thomas Aquinas was a Christian philosopher that elaborated very much on how mankind could understand the truths of the universe through rational thinking. For example following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas emphasized that humans are rational creatures that are capable of much learning and contemplating God. (Moseley, Page 12). He also contributed to Augustinian Christianity with an Aristotelian logic because he felt the followers of Saint Augustine lacked basic understanding of Christianity.* Meanwhile, Saint Augustine was a philosopher who was born into a Christian family and learnt about Christianity through his mother, after he was enrolled as a catechumen into a catholic church. *

Nevertheless, both Saint Augustine and Aquinas came up with different ethical theories. Saint Augustine's ethical theory was based on " the love of God." He claims that people can be categorized into two: good or evil. According to Saint Augustine the good people are those that love and show appreciation to God while the evil people had no regards for God and his laws. Further, He explained that the good people are those that live in the city of God and the evil people are those that dwell in the city of man.*

However, Thomas Aquinas' ethical theory was immensely connected to the belief that everything had an end and an individual's action towards the end is initiated by an agent. As stated by Thomas Aquinas " all actions must have an end otherwise an action without an end would tend to infinity."* Furthermore, Thomas Aquinas explained that an action should not just have an end but a proper end which seeks a lot of perfection. This perfection can

be attained through the guidance of God who is referred to as the only perfect being. Moreover, Thomas Aquinas also discusses on good and evil. He argues that the act of will is not always good, but sometimes evil, indicating that the goodness or badness of a thing is sought in the will of an action.

Initially, Christian and Islamic philosophers were very versatile because they expertise in different fields. One of the common areas of study which was associated with both Christian and Islamic philosophers was the study of medicine. For example Yaqub Ibn Ishaq al-Kindi, Ibn sina also known as Avicenna, and Thomas Aquinas were both philosophers who studied medicine at one point in the life time. Yaqub Ibn Ishaq al-Kindi was an Islamic philosopher who was born in Kufa at around 800 A. D. He did not just study medicine but was one of the chief contributors to the field, because he was known to be the first to systematically determine the doses to be administered of all the drugs to sick patients at his time. Furthermore, this resolved the conflicting views prevailing among physicians on the dosage that caused difficulties in writing recipes. (trincoll. edu).

On the other hand Thomas Aquinas who was a Christian philosopher that also studied medicine and explained that the human body contained innate capacities and non- innate capacities (also referred to as learned capacities). Thomas Aquinas made a related distinction between these two capacities by giving the term " potential" for the innate capacities and " dispositions" for the learned capacities. Moreover, Thomas Aquinas distinguished between the innate capacities and the non-innate capacities by giving examples. Take the case of playing a musical instrument such as the flute and the sense of

sight. Thomas Aquinas stated that playing of the flute is obviously learned unlike someone that does not acquire the sense of sight by seeing; rather because he has the capacity of sight, he is made actually to see. (Books. google. com. ng).

Secondly, Christian and Islamic philosophers share different political views. Take the case of two well known philosophers Plato and Saint Augustine who both had different views of the concepts of politics such as justice and evil. Plato defined justice in a society as the connection and balance of roles occupied by social agents or people in a society. He further explained that justice can only be achieved in a society if there is evil present in that particular society. Moreover, evil according to Plato is anything that is not in accordance with justice.

However, Saint Augustine had a different perspective of evil. Saint Augustine related evil with Gods existence by explaining that evil was transgressing against God's will. He explained that God was the Supreme Being in charge of all creatures and was the only one free of evil. Saint Augustine further elaborated that all human beings are created good but not made perfect, and therefore makes humans liable to committing sin which sometimes fulfills the will of God. Although both philosophers shared different views, Plato and Saint Augustine had it in mind to maintain justice and goodness in the society.

Lastly, Christian philosophers accepted the notion of Greek natural philosophy, while the Islamic philosophers did not. Perhaps the reason that Christian philosophers accepted Greek natural philosophy was that

Christianity is founded within the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, so the Christian philosophers grew accustomed to Greco Roman culture. Unlike Islam which was founded outside the Greco-Roman world. Take the case of Saint Augustine who converted to Christianity after being influenced by the biography of the life of Saint Anthony. Saint Augustine did not only become a Christian but also was inspired to produce more works such as his most famous of all works which was titled " the city of God."*

To conclude, it is obvious that over the years some Islamic and Christian philosophers do not necessarily agree to each other's dialogues or theories, while some succumb and even supplement the theories made. However, as stated earlier both Islamic and Christian philosophers have contributed greatly to the each other even up until today despite the fact that both Islam and Christianity are two different religions that are based on their particular principles.

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