

Iqbal Academy Scandinavia
Copenhagen 14. November 2010.
Kinship in Thought between Islam and the West
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Today we are talking about the relationship between Islam and the West, but this is as we all know an asymmetrical relationship where you put a religion toward a geographic area. However this has been a part of a public discourse, a discourse which applies to both the West and the so called Muslim world. Why? Because Islam is perceived as more than a religion. It is culture and ideology and a civilization. The West is also perceived more than just geography. It is also a culture and a civilization.

Encounters between Muslims and Westerners / Christians have been marked by conflicts during the history as well as actually (Terrorism and war in Iraq, Afghanistan). Although the conquests, the Crusades, forced conversion and oppression is a part of history, one may ask: Is conflict between Islam and the West inevitable?

The answer depends on whom you ask.

Some see this relationship in light of political differences, and they regard Islam and the West as two confronting sizes. These focus on the issue of political Islam vs. western democracy and human rights. From this viewpoint where Islam and the West are perceived as two monolithic blocks, their ideological struggle is inevitable (Huntington).

Some others consider Islam and the West are competing. Here the focus is on Islamic theology vs. Christian theology, Islamic morals and lifestyle vs. Western morals and Western lifestyle.

Both these two approaches are ideological. They underline differences without taking account of the historical change and the importance of interactions. It is a reductionism approach to the complexity of the relationships between Islam and the West.

But there is also a third approach which takes account of both differences and similarities, and treats them in a historical perspective. Within this approach we can identify elements of the relationship between Islam and the West.

We can talk about common historical and geographical background. These reflect a common oriental religious-spiritual kinship. Islam and Christianity are sister religions coming from the same area.

We can talk about philosophical kinship. Both Islamic and western philosophy relate to the Greek philosophy as a common reference. Both Islam and Christianity have struggled to reconcile Greek logical principles and theology with a monotheistic Abrahamic God.

In the Middle Ages philosophy was perceived as a human universalistic discipline which had a goal to reach the ultimate truth about the world and man. Muslim philosophers - whether they were advocates for falsafa or hikma - never used the prefix Islamic or Muslim. Philosophy was philosophy. And their philosophy contained in fact elements of Greek cosmology, Persian spirituality, the ancient Indian wisdom, etc.

Today we talk about Islamic and Western philosophy, on European continental philosophy distinguishing between the German and French philosophy, and Anglo-Saxons philosophy. But also on Chinese, Japanese, Indian and African philosophy.

Of course it is legitimate to distinguish between these regional philosophical traditions, but it would be incorrect to identify only one single philosophical tradition as a universal absolute philosophy.

The western post-modern critique of modern philosophy and its logocentrism is in this context is very important but Western postmodernity must also take a showdown against ethnocentrism. The Algerians-French philosopher Muhammad Arkoun and the Argentinean philosopher Enrique Dussel agree when they argue for a new joint epistemological platform, they call meta-modernity or inter-modernity, which includes all philosophical traditions and give legitimacy also for the marginal votes.

This is a common philosophical challenge. And it is linked to a second challenge to rethink modernity and its impact on different geographic areas. It is not enough to shift the focus from the universality and totality to diversity and difference. We have to think contextual and inclusive. It is about to loose oneself in the other's interpretations and traditions, to study comparative each other's traditions, to come out of it as Arkoun call institutionalised ignorance. "

We should not be afraid to highlight our similarities. For identity includes both difference formulas and similarities. And a real mutual recognition is not possible without a critical examination of our own history, not just the history of others.

This can also be a prerequisite for understanding the role of religion in a pluralistic society. The relationship between religion and ethics, between ethics and politics. These are some typical questions which relate to the philosophy of religion.

A common philosophy of religion would probably open new ways of thinking relationship between Islam and West. This could demonstrate that the so-called Islamic and Western thinking is not in conflict with each other but maybe they are complementary.