

Heideggerian Thought in the Light of Iranian-Islamic Wisdom

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A prominent Iranian philosopher Ahmad Fardid considered the influential German philosopher Martin Heidegger as “the only Western philosopher who understood the world and the only philosopher whose insights were congruent with the principles of the Islamic Republic”. The report aimed to present Fardid’s interpretation of Heidegger in the light of Iranian-Islamic wisdom. Iranian philosopher believes that Heidegger’s thought responds to the most important intellectual crisis of the West civilization that is nihilism and to reach the possibility of an “other beginning” of thinking that he calls “No-longer-metaphysical-thought”. Considering these two fundamental features, Fardid finds powerful religious-spiritual tendencies in Heidegger’s thinking.

Keywords: Heidegger, Iran, Ahmad Fardid, wisdom

Introduction

Iranian society is familiar with ideas of classic and contemporary Western philosophers from Plato, Aristotle, Descartes to Derrida, Foucault. Somehow Heidegger is popular and welcome in the Iranian community of philosophers and intellectuals, based on the mission and role of the Heideggerian school. The only Heideggerian school in the territory of Islam is the school of Ahmad Fardid (1912-1994)¹, the founder of the Iranian group of “Heideggerian Islamologists”, which puts forward the similarities between Heidegger’s thought and that of Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi (1236-1311), medic and philosopher, and Hafiz al-Shirazi (1310-1379), philosopher and Sufi poets of the golden age of Persia. Heideggerian thoughts are attracting due to:

1. The radical critique of the Western civilization. Heidegger pointed his critiques towards the metaphysical traditions as the root of the Western civilization.
2. The regard on the East and West as two different types of ontology, with different ways of understanding being and the universe.
3. Heidegger’s attempts to overcome metaphysics and moving toward a way of thinking that he calls “No-longer-metaphysical thought”, which is precisely what is called “Wisdom” in Eastern traditions. Heidegger’s *Dasein*, namely his conception of human existence and his perception of truth, is very close to the meaning of human being and truth perceptions in Eastern traditions.

Heidegger’s interpretation of the Western metaphysics tradition is like a mirror for Iranians philosophers to see the place of the whole tradition of Eastern thinking.

Fardid coined the concept of “Westoxication” which was popularized by Jalal Al-e-Ahmad on his well-known book *Gharbzadegi*. After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the book became among the core ideological teachings of the new Islamic government of Iran.

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¹ Ahmad Fardid, born Ahmad Mahini Yazdi, was a prominent Iranian philosopher and a professor of Tehran University.

The article presents Fardid's attempt to link the results of his studies of Eastern civilizations with the Western philosophy, as interpreted by Heidegger. This effort remains an enormously intriguing and valuable endeavor.

Heideggerian Thought in Iran

Fardid, inspired by a Heideggerian discourse, re-worked it and pointed to the importance of an examination of Iran's insistence upon an authentic identity (*Eigentlichkeit*). He had organized a group of "Iranian Heideggerians" in the 1970s who according to one of its prominent participants, Dariush Shayegan, would use these meetings to explore "conflicts between modernity and tradition" (Shayegan, 2011). A reconciliation of Iranian identity with an ongoing modernization process became a primary concern for groups of intellectuals in the 60s and 70s in pre-revolutionary Iran. A critique of a decadent West, its technology, and a call to authenticity were also topics dealt with by Martin Heidegger.

Fardid studied philosophy at Sorbonne and University of Heidelberg. He underlined that the departure point of Heidegger's thinking was theology. Heidegger was a student in a catholic school during his youth, and entered the philosophy field to find answers for his theological questions. However, he gradually moved away from theology to phenomenology, and then to what he calls "thought". His doctoral dissertation was on the views of Dun Scott (Heidegger, 1913) and his first course "Phenomenology of Religious Life", placed religion and phenomenology side by side. He was extremely impressed by Saint Augustine, who laid bare all human problems—death, anxiety, doubt, the problem of man and time. All these themes will appear later in magnum opus "Being and Time" (1927): "without these theological reflections, I would never have reached my way of thinking" (Heidegger, 1976).

It should not be surprising that his ideas were widely received and regarded by Iranian intellectuals and students before (and after) the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Heidegger's critique of a decadent West vested in religious terminology made well accepted in a group of Iranian intellectuals unsatisfied with a despotic monarch perceived to be antagonistic to Islam.

Those against Fardid believed that he has distorted the academic Heidegger image and portrayed an Iranian, Eastern, and spiritual image of this Western philosopher. Heideggerian deconstruction of metaphysics is a novel way of thinking, according to Fardid. Fascinated by this idea, he repeats the statement, Heidegger made in the weekly "Der Spiegel" in 1966, that "only God can still save us", and wonders what a new deity might bring to the modern world that would appear at the very end of metaphysics (Gallez, 2014, p. 32). Considering the two fundamental features—overcoming nihilism and nihilistic interpretation of the world from one side and breaking up metaphysics in order to reach a way of thinking that is no longer metaphysical from the other side, Fardid underlined the religious-spiritual tendencies in Heidegger's thinking. His attempt is bridging Heidegger's ontological phenomenology and the theoretical mysticism in the Islamic tradition.

Heidegger's Thoughts in the Light of Iranian-Islamic Wisdom

Heidegger's thoughts in the light of Iranian-Islamic wisdom and mysticism were influenced primarily by the French philosopher and orientalist Henry Corbin, who links Heidegger to the spiritual and wisdom traditions of the East. It was Corbin who first translated a collection of essays by Martin Heidegger into French (Heidegger, 1951). Heidegger's phenomenology gave him the inspiration to his new understanding of *ishraq*, that "shows

itself” in our awareness. To define his own phenomenological method, Corbin referred to the process known among the Muslim mystics and esotericists as *kashf al-mahjub* “unveiling of the veiled things”. For Corbin, the study of Iranian intellectual history was a philosophical and ontological preoccupation: Based on notions of tradition, authenticity, and spirituality, Iran was for him an eternal realm that could provide an alternative to Western intellectual and social systems (Corbin, 1985, p. 47). Corbin is the one who presented a religious-meditative interpretation of Heidegger in the light of Eastern theoretical tradition². He should be considered as one of the most important sources of Fardid’s thought, who also interpret Heidegger in the light of Iranian-Islamic wisdom. Through the title of the book *From Heidegger to Suhrawardī*, Corbin describes his intellectual journey. As a student of medieval Western philosophy in the early 20s, his philosophical thought began from Heidegger’s phenomenology and philosophical Hermeneutics and ended to Suhrawardī’s Eastern meditative philosophy. Corbin in his various books attempted to demonstrate the continuity of this world as a supportive idea for spiritual experiences from ancient Iran to the Islamic period (Corbin, 1946).

Fardid translated a lecture series by Corbin (delivered in Tehran) on Suhrawardī’s philosophy of illumination (Corbin, 1946). The book is a work about Iranian “Oriental” authenticity and its persistence throughout history. Corbin never referred to himself as an “Orientalist”, except in the sense in which Suhrawardī said to be a *mustashriq*; someone in quest of the “Orient of Light” Corbin was a person who devised the idea of the East—in the sense of the philosophy of illumination and not the geographical sense. Heidegger’s regard on the West as an ontological concept is a special way of understanding being that appeared in the Greek metaphysics and its history and, eventually leading to nihilism, neglect of being, and crisis of meaning in Western modern civilization. The East is also not a geographical, political, economic, theological, or moral concept. It is also an ontological concept and a special way for understanding the Eastern theoretical traditions.

The mystical experience of the Sufis refers to a metaphysics without which one cannot explain how Sufism began and developed. The effort of Suhrawardī and of the whole school of the so-called “illuminated” is to unite philosophical inquiry with personal spiritual realization.

Suhrawardī considers himself as an heir to a perennial and profound wisdom, that is, illuminationist wisdom (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*)³. He begins to comment on this philosophy because of Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, the famous commentator of *ishrāqī* philosophy, who said the meaning of real wisdom had been forgotten in the course of time (Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 2001). By real wisdom, Suhrawardī means the one that God has granted to his people and that he has deprived the others of a wisdom which is completely different from the common one among the scholars in his time. Suhrawardī’s main claim for posing the illuminationist philosophy is the revival of the real meaning of wisdom or “Sophia”, based on spiritual wayfaring (Pazouki, 2011). This wisdom of illumination is centered on light and marginalizes darkness. Light is used as a symbol for wisdom, knowledge, guidance, life, insight, revelation, and luminosity, which are set in opposition to ignorance, darkness, death, blindness, deviation. It is a wisdom that is given to the worthy souls, whether these individuals are found in the East or West. Thus, some Greek philosophers are illuminists, even though the source of this wisdom is in the East (Eshkevari, 2014, p. 133).

² Many Western theologians such as Paul Tillich and Nicolai Bultmann tried to use of Heidegger’s thought and the fundamental, existential concepts of ontology of Being and Time for interpreting the holy book and theology of Christianity.

³ Suhrawardī produced around 50 works, and his masterpiece is considered to be *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* (“Illuminative wisdom”). This book contains Suhrawardī’s philosophical views and spiritual findings and is the primary text of reference in Illuminationist Philosophy. It covers both the discursive and the visionary dimensions of Suhrawardī’s philosophy.

The language of ancient Greek philosophers, which was symbolic and represented their state of insight and illumination, turned into Aristotle's language of discourse and reasoning. Thus the Aristotelian philosophy, which entered the world of Islam and was continued by Muslim Peripatetics, was Occidental in Suhrawardī's words. The Oriental philosophy of ancient Greece did not continue in the Occidental philosophy of Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā; in the Islamic world, it was revived and renewed in Islamic Mysticism (Sufism) and among great Sufi Shaykhs, whom Suhrawardī calls Divine philosophers. Suhrawardī argues that the elders of Sufism have travelled "the path of the people of wisdom and reached the fountain of Light" (Corbin, 1976, p. 113). Suhrawardī presents his philosophy through symbolic narratives, and it is an esoteric ontology attesting to the unity of being. Corbin argues that Islamic philosophy in Iran, unlike the Western part of the Islamic world, has followed an Oriental pattern of wisdom, which attempted to overcome the Peripatetic and rationalist trends and provide a spiritual and cosmic philosophy based on ancient Eastern and especially Persian traditions. Hence, Suhrawardī and Mulla Sadra must be understood within this Oriental scheme (Bostani, 2021, p. 6).

According to Suhrawardī, the East represents light and divine angels, whereas the West symbolizes the world of darkness and ignorance. Suhrawardī's interest in the early Greek philosophy lies in the extinction of the light of wisdom in his time, and the appearance of the so-called philosophers instead of true sages. In search for true philosophy (*hikmah*), he wanted to resurrect the theosophy of the sages of ancient Persia, in the *Ishraqi* stream, setting the shape of the philosophy of Iranian Islam in the centuries that followed. In this way, he reaches for the East and the Eastern wisdom in ancient Iran and ancient Greece, as well as for Sufism in Islam. He says that in order to find the beginning of true wisdom (Sophia), we should return to the way of the earlier philosophers who were the people of insight and illumination (*nūr*). In Islam, those who travelled along the path of Sufism inherited this wisdom from them. In fact, these sages are the only people who can save from the grief of nostalgia in such a destitute (in Suhrawardī's and Heidegger's words) time (Pazouki, 2011, p. 104). A human being can become enlightened due to his proximity to the source of light and become wise by drawing near to the Absolute Wisdom.

Heidegger is a great thinker of the end of the modern era. He declares that this era is coming to an end in the following way: "Western history has now begun to enter into the completion of that period which we call the modern" (Heidegger, 1982, p. 28). "It is a period in which Being has completely lost its meaning and nihilism which has turned into the inevitable destiny of the West, has cast its shadow all over the world from there" (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 93).

Heidegger talks about the darkness of the world at the end of this era. His aim is uniting the philosophical and spiritual interpretation of the universe and man. Heidegger's thought opens the self-consciousness to the deep nihilism in our age. His thinking helps to understand the historical and non-metaphysical traditions as well as nihilism and the foundation lessness of the present world.

Fardid followed Corbin and also learned from Heidegger that the history of metaphysics and the West is "forgetfulness of Being" and ignorance. He turned his focus to the East and introduced intuitive knowledge as an alternative (Shari'ati, 2018, p. 205).

Fardid evaluated Heidegger's experience to rediscover man, and every moment of his evolution. What does this man he calls *Dasein* mean, rejecting the metaphysics impeding his freedom? In addition, it revives the hope for new possibilities and destiny in people hearts. He tries to show that in the era of scientific and technological rationalism, we can have a spiritual interpretation of the universe. His thinking liberates from the unsophisticated tendencies and invites to an authentic way of thinking.

In his search for *Dasein*, Heidegger's thought identified itself with phenomenological hermeneutics in order to find the new man at the heart of things, revealing his ontological density. He is for a return of man to thought in its fullness, to restore his wholeness, to connect with the world and solve his problems, not to see the world as part of the problem. This is why he emphasizes the concept of "beginning", from which arises man's wonder at his ability to ask questions globally, in search of truth. Man's integration with the universe does not marginalize, does not ignore, but grasps in all its fullness the meaning of being.

Through Heidegger, Fardid shows that in the current modern world it is possible to maintain the spiritual, meditative thinking, traditional values and insights. This issue is not related to the past, and rather it is a concern of our current time and future. We are still dealing with the question: What is our understanding about ourselves in the current world and what life style we want to or can choose? What are the reasons for this incoherence? The existing injustice, the usurped identity, the confiscated thought, veiled by ideologies, disintegrated man and led to existential suffering, calling to the forefront ontological anxiety, alienation, denial of the self.

Based on the Fardid's works, one new hermeneutics is needed, which invests indirectly in the text through one new conceptuality in the Heideggerian philosophical spirit (Aoun, 2006, pp. 19-20). Man is the shepherd of being in his ontological proximity to the world (Heidegger, 1983, pp. 47-58). Iranians are also being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*), with their fears, anxieties, and concerns (Aoun, 2006, p. 18). Through the desire for a world of justice, Heidegger states the need to reconstruct a society of justice in an ideal world. This is no different from the model of Plato's Republic, or Farabi's virtuous city. Behind this model, Iranian people sees a modern society of subjects, with rights and powers. Entering in the world of equality and justice, man restores his own self-respect and self-esteem. The integration of Heideggerian thought in contemporary Iran is grounded through the state of multipolar openness of contemporary Iranian society. In an era of dying identities, this approach to being can only strengthen the chances of develop Eastern authenticity in a metaphysical scheme (Aoun, 2006, p. 18).

Conclusion

Corbin played a significant role in shaping how Iranian philosophers view their own philosophical and spiritual traditions. He was interested in the Oriental philosophy of Suhrawardī, attempting to revive this philosophical tradition by trying to approve it as the main point of focus in Iranian tradition. According to him, this Oriental view has persisted throughout Iranian history from ancient Iran to the Islamic period. This brings new impulse, new breeding in Iran and a circle of intellectuals following Heideggerian thought.

Fardid's interpretation of Heidegger in the light of Iranian-Islamic wisdom demonstrates an Iranian model which is a new alternative and plays significant role. Iranian and Heideggerian thoughts are not so diametrically opposed. Based on the Corbin's East/West esoteric split, Heideggerian thoughts provided intellectual and conceptual logistics for the ideologies that were supposed to answer questions regarding Iranian identity, modern values, a potential return to tradition, and the true extent of imitation from Western countries.

Through Heidegger, Fardid explains that in the current modern world it is possible to maintain the spiritual thinking, traditional values and insights. The idea that Western civilization was in its final stages states the narrative that the new epoch would be the age of the return to Eastern values and civilizations. Heidegger's questions about the future of the man and protection of the philosophy provoke Iranian society to find solutions of many contemporary challenges.

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