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HEIDEGGER IN THE ISLAMICATE WORLD: NEW PATHS FOR ISLAMIC THINKING

Heidegger in the Islamicate World (edited by Kata Moser of Ruhr University Bochum; Urs Gösken of Zurich University; Josh Hayes of Alvernia University)¹ is a welcome contribution to scholarship because it highlights critically how a «Western» philosophy – here Martin Heidegger’s philosophy – is able to challenge the paradigms of Islamic thought without being conditioned by religious worries and prejudices. This is at the end the reason why the editors chose to call «Islamicate» instead of «Islamic» world and thought their field of interest. They apply Marshall Hodgson’s definition: «Islamicate would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims»².

The editors convey clearly from the beginning their aim: «The aim of our volume consists in challenging the facile preconception that *all* the Islamicate reception of Heidegger is fundamentalist in nature and reductionist in its procedure»³. This intention refers implicitly to the widely misunderstood and misleading presupposition that Heidegger was a «reactionary» thinker, primarily because compromised with Nazism, or for other more *bizarre* reasons. It is worthy of praise that the editors and the authors of the volume did not fall in the trap. Heidegger remains in any case a giant of philosophy, whether he was a reactionary or not.

I will pick up a couple of theoretical points amongst the many the book offers, but preliminarily it is important to stress that contemporary Islamic philosophy and contemporary Islamic thought are not exactly the same. Hasan Hanafī, one of the main authors discussed in the book, wrote that «the term “philosophy” in Islam does not have a strict sense. It refers neither to a method nor to a system. It has a very wide sense including religious reform, socio-political thinking and secular scientific thought. The word “thought” is more adequate than philosophy. [...] Systematic contemporary philosophy is absent [in Arab-Islamic culture] since tradition is playing even now the role of epistemology, ontology and axiology. God exists, the Word is created and the soul is immortal. [...] There is no *coupure épistémologique* between the past and the present»⁴. This is the reason why I suggested that contemporary Islamic thought is eminently a thought of praxis⁵. Any time Islamic thought develops an original path, a struggle with modernity is inevitably involved, and struggling with modernity involves the change of the *status quo*. Although Mohammed Arkoun (1928-2010) labeled negatively contemporary

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Received: 19.05.2019; Approved: 20.05.2019.

¹ K. MOSER - U. GÖSKEN - J. HAYES (eds.), *Heidegger in the Islamicate World*, Rowman & Littlefield, London 2019.

² *Ibi*, p. 2.

³ *Ibi*, p. 23.

⁴ H. HANAFI, *Islam in the Modern World*, Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, Cairo 1995, vol. I, pp. 430-431.

⁵ M. CAMPANINI, *The Qur'an. Modern Muslim Interpretations*, Routledge, London - New York 2011.

Arab-Islamic thought as an *idéologie du combat*⁶, when the Islamic world faced modernity and its challenges since the second half of the Nineteenth century, it was obliged to react. Modernity was the outcome of Western/European encroachment on the Islamic world through colonialism and economic/political submission. Western Europe imposed on Islam its superiority in science, technology and military power and introduced new ideas and concepts like secularism (separation between religion and society), democracy, nationalism, freedom of expression and belief, individual liberty, liberation of women and so on. Islamic thought reacted either by modernizing Islam or by Islamizing modernity. Modernizing Islam meant to believe that traditional Islam was no more able and fitted to face and solve the problems of contemporary society; thus it must be «modernized» (especially by denying its public, social and political role) and subordinated to secularism, technology and «progress». Islamizing modernity meant to believe that Islam is in itself fully rational and modern; it is able to govern and orient society and history upon the very basis of the Qur'ān and tradition. In both cases, intellectuals were obliged to engage themselves in society going far beyond pure speculation.

In the same vein, we can wonder whether there are differences between Islamic philosophy and Islamicate philosophy. Obviously, they are not the same thing. Have we to consider Islamic philosophy as the thought so heavily burdened with past heritage (*turāth*) that it is unable to think the unthought? This complex (and probably not completely perspicuous) formula echoes Mohammed Arkoun's distinction between *pensée* (thought), *impensée* (the unthought) and *impensable* (what cannot be thought). Arkoun argued that the Muslim world today is unable to think the *impensée*, which has become *impensable*⁷: democracy or historicity are two cases in point according to Arkoun. In his short Preface, Fred Dallmayr brought the question back to Martin Heidegger himself⁸. If Islamic philosophy represents the space of accepted common knowledge in the Muslim world, then it seems that Islamicate philosophy could become one key to open the door of the unthought (*impensée*) in Islamic lore in order to enrich, and perhaps strengthen, the thought (*pensée*).

An interpretation of this dialectics emerges from Fathi Meskini's work on Heidegger. As Khalid el Aref put it⁹, according to Meskini, who translated in Arabic *Sein und Zeit*, «modern philosophy as a byproduct of the metaphysics of subjectivity does not transcend the foundationalism of the theologico-political community (*al-milla*). Such a critique of metaphysical subjectivity owes a great deal to Heidegger (and Hannah Arendt, Foucault and Ricoeur) who introduces the question of the “who of Da-sein”. According to Meskini, Heidegger's question of the “who” instituted a new and solid basis for the problematization of being». Indeed, Meskini seems exploring, in an Islamicate perspective, often prohibited areas of the *impensée* in Islamic thought: foundationalism, political theology, metaphysical subjectivity.

The first theoretical point I try to discuss briefly is Hasan Hanafi's methodology in relation to Heidegger. Sylvain Camilleri, in his article, argues that there is an «eccentric reception of Heidegger in Hanafi's *French Trilogy*», insofar as Hanafi's interpretation of Heidegger moves away from the center. In Camilleri's opinion, Hanafi makes an «operative» and not systematic use of Heidegger, striving to think the reform of Muslim Qur'anic exegesis *through* Heidegger¹⁰. The *French Trilogy* is the famous Hanafi's three volumes enterprise published in the 1960s, intended to apply phenomenology to the study of *usūl al-fiqh* (the roots of jurisprudence) and Qur'anic hermeneutics¹¹. Camilleri recalls that the author

⁶ M. ARKOUN, *La pensée arabe*, PUF, Paris 1990.

⁷ See M. ARKOUN, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, al-Saqi Books, London 2002.

⁸ F. DALLMAYR, *Preface*, in MOSER - GÖSKEN - HAYES, *Heidegger in the Islamicate World*, p. VIII.

⁹ MOSER - GÖSKEN - HAYES, *Heidegger in the Islamicate World*, p. 188.

¹⁰ *Ibi*, p. 94.

¹¹ See H. HANAFI, *Les méthodes d'exégèse. Essai sur la science des fondements de la compréhension*, Publications du Conseil des Arts, des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, Cairo 1965; *Id.*, *L'exégèse de la*

describes the *Trilogy* as an effort to make an Islamic reading of phenomenology and a phenomenological reading of Islam¹². Seeing that Heidegger's phenomenology is very different from his master Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, because it moves away from the strictly transcendental approach of Husserl, Hanafī's proposal to make the Text running through the existential consciousness of the Being-in-the-world is undoubtedly Heideggerian in flavor. It points out, as Camilleri says, that «the hidden meaning of the text must be fully "disclosed" so that the "Ontology of the Text" can be gradually recreated through interpretation. [...] Interpretation stands for "the way any givenness under the form of a text turns itself into knowledge within the spirit of the interpreter"»¹³. Aptly, Camilleri stresses the concept of «disclosure» (*a-letheia*) which allows the interpreter to grasp immediately the truth-reality (*haqq*) of the Being/God (God is *haqq*, the Qur'an states many times). As I wrote elsewhere, Qur'anic truth is manifestation, that is disclosure (*a-letheia*) in Greek and in Heideggerian sense, and disclosure is not simply *ostensio* («showing») and *unveiling* (*kashf*), but also *orientation* of the text («orientation», that is «to produce meaning»). Provided that the Qur'ān is the «disclosure» (*kashf*) of the Absolute and Divine Being, it is consequently possible to study the Holy Book philosophically and start up a «Philosophical Qur'anology»¹⁴. It is exactly what also Hanafī did, unfortunately without writing any comprehensive book of synthesis. The phenomenological/Heideggerian approach led Hanafī to consider knowledge not as a merely theoretical fact, but, using Camilleri's words, quite the opposite, as a practical fact involving struggle to change society. In Hanafī's view, the fundamental duty of Muslims is to transform the ancient discipline of *'ilm usūl al-dīn*, that is the science of the religious principles regarding the *'ibādāt* (worship) and the *mu'āmalāt* (society), from a juridical science onto an instrument of social action and practical re-orientation of the masses. The science of God (theology) must become a science of man (anthropology) at the service of human necessities, thus losing every purely abstract characterization. Hanafī says that knowledge is revolution, and that intellectuals have the binding duty to engage themselves in society, because life's experience (*Lebenswelt* in Husserlian terms) is the place wherein knowledge loses its abstractness and opens itself, discloses itself (*a-letheia*) to the subject. Far from being conservative, then, the Islamicate philosophy of Hanafī on the footsteps of Heidegger aims to renew completely Islamic thought.

The second theoretical point I try to discuss briefly is the issue of poetry and language. It is well known how Heidegger enhanced the philosophical role of poetry, contending that poetry is the place Being better comes to language therein. Hölderlin was the preferred poet of Heidegger. In this perspective, Saliha Shah, in the chapter she has written in this book, discusses Muhammad Iqbāl's (1877[1873]-1938) work in a comparative way with Heidegger (Hölderlin is cited but remains in the background). She is right in saying that «Iqbal sees in what he calls "higher poetry" thought realizing its higher possibilities and deepest aspirations, thus opening up horizons that philosophical thinking precludes»¹⁵. This is certainly a Heideggerian stance. Saliha Salih, however, argues that Heidegger and Iqbāl are at odds insofar as the former believes misleading the idea that philosophy expresses through language inner experiences and inwardness of the soul, while Iqbāl sees language as an expression of subjective interiority. This is agreeable. Rather, I find questionable Saliha Shah's contention that in both, Heidegger

phénoménologie. L'état actuel de la méthode phénoménologique et son application au phénomène religieux, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, Cairo 1966; Id., *La phénoménologie de l'exégèse. Essai d'une herméneutique existentielle à partir du Nouveau Testament*, Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, Cairo 1966.

¹² MOSER - GÖSKEN - HAYES, *Heidegger in the Islamicate World*, p. 86.

¹³ *Ibi*, p. 89.

¹⁴ M. CAMPANINI, *Philosophical Perspectives of Modern Qur'anic Exegesis*, Equinox Publishing, Sheffield (UK) - Bristol (CT) 2016.

¹⁵ MOSER - GÖSKEN - HAYES, *Heidegger in the Islamicate World*, p. 153.

and Iqbāl, «poetry emerges as a site of non-representational thinking, one that finds itself on the threshold between the human and the divine realms»¹⁶. The concept of divine, at least, is very ambiguous in Heidegger, and must be defined for Iqbāl in the context of his poems or reflections about the possibility of reconstructing religious thought in Islam. Moreover, I do not perceive any shadow of mysticism in Heidegger.

In his famous lectures on the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam¹⁷, Iqbāl put forward a very controversial idea of God, while he said nothing about poetry. On the one hand, he pictured God as an almost immanent force that continuously stirs up reality – an image of the divine not everybody would recognize as Qur’anic. On the other hand, Iqbāl’s total silence on poetry in these fundamental reflections aimed to «build up again» Islamic thought is puzzling – Iqbāl being a philosopher-poet. In any case, Saliha Shah emphasizes that «thinking in the Islamicate world has found expression in poetry»¹⁸. Poetry became one of the keys opening the door of the unthought (*impensée*) in the Islamicate world. Probably we must consider Iqbāl’s *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* as an Islamic and not an Islamicate project.

Two points are worthy of further attention. First, Saliha Shah is aware of the contradiction existing between the harsh Qur’anic condemnation of poetry (in the *sūra* Q. 26 *al-shu‘arā’*, *Of the Poets*) as idle talk making people go astray, and Iqbāl’s intention «to talk like a poet». The solution, in Shah’s words, would be that Iqbāl charts out the social, political, historical, moral and spiritual responsibility of the poet acting in the world. Not by chance, he was a nationalist engaged in politics and a father of Muslim India (Pakistan). But much more important is that, according to Iqbāl, word is seen as the bridge between God and the humans¹⁹. Saliha Shah stops here, but we can make a step further stressing that the Qur’ān, the direct speech of God according to Muslims, is the Logos, tantamount to Jesus in Christianity, and that, insofar as Logos, the Qur’ān discloses the unthought, the unseen, the unsaid. Not only in the Qur’ān God’s word is creative («When He desires something, His command is to say to it: “Be”, and it is»: Q. 36:82), but the Qur’ān itself has an ontological value. The «Mother of the Book» (*ummu’l-kitāb*: Q. 3:7) and the Tablet (*lawh mahfūz*: Q. 85:22), where the Qur’ān is preserved, are the archetypes where all reality, present and future, is eternally written.

It is not frequent to recall that the philosopher-poet Iqbāl shares with the philosopher-poet Dante the vision of God during a heavenly journey. Iqbāl describes his journey in the *Javid-nama*²⁰, Dante, obviously, in the *Comedy*. Both profess to be annihilated by the sublime experience of ecstasy, but their attitudes are different. Dante says that poetical word is unable to grasp the sublimity of contact:

Oh quanto è corto il dire e come fioco
al mio concetto! E questo, a quel ch’i’vidi,
è tanto, che non basta a dicer ‘poco’. [...]

Qual è ’l geomètra che tutto s’affige
per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova,
pensando, quel principio ond’elli indige,
tal era io a quella vista nova:
veder voleva come si convenne
l’imago al cerchio e come vi si indova.
Ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne:

¹⁶ *Ibi*, p. 162.

¹⁷ M. IQBAL, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Kitab Bhavan, Delhi 2013.

¹⁸ MOSER - GÖSKEN - HAYES, *Heidegger in the Islamicate World*, p. 150.

¹⁹ *Ibi*, p. 157.

²⁰ See the Italian translation by A. Bausani, *Il poema celeste*, Libreria Editrice Aseq, Roma 2017 (reprint of a previous edition unavailable since many years).

se non che la mia mente fu percossa
 da un fulgore in che sua voglia venne.
 A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa;
 ma già volgeva il mio disio e il *velle*,
 sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,
 l'Amor che move il Sole e l'altre stelle
 (*Par.*, XXXIII, 120-145).

Iqbāl describes attentively the bliss of his experience (I report here Arthur Arberry's translation):

Epiphany of the divine majesty.
 Suddenly, I beheld my world,
 That earth and heaven of mine,
 I saw it drowned in a light of dawn;
 I saw it crimson as a jujube-tree:
 Out of the epiphanies which broke in my soul,
 I fell drunk with ecstasy, like Moses.
 That light revealed every secret veiled
 And snatched the power of speech from my tongue.
 Out of the deep heart of the inscrutable world
 An ardent, flaming melody broke forth²¹.

Evidently, according to Iqbāl, poetic language is able to convey to the reader a bit of the supreme moment of divine acquaintance. Language remains – for him, along with Heidegger – central for any philosophical endeavour.

The article of Ahmad Ali Heydari is also concerned with Heidegger, poetry and Hölderlin, but this time the focus is on a «Medieval» poet, Hāfez (died 1390), and a modern author, Sayyed Ahmad Fardid. Heydari takes for granted that everybody knows who Fardid is, but unfortunately it is not so. Fardid correctly recognizes the metaphysical dimension of Hāfez's poetry, as much as the modernity of Hölderlin. However, it is difficult to understand, in the perhaps too schematic presentation of Heydari, why Fardid, identifying a «threefold [quite odd in my opinion] darkness of the contemporary world» (ascetism, logic, and the inescapable evolution of time), seems to attribute this nihilistic attitude to Heidegger²². Heydari's concluding remark that the capacity of the poet to conform to «authentic time» prepares the ground for a new historical beginning²³ is coherent with the Islamicate approach presented in this book.

Other important issues could be discussed starting from this stimulating book. The overall impression I drew from it, however, is that Heidegger's legacy is not yet fully received in Islamic thought. Otherwise, we cannot explain why Iranian intellectuals, among others, exhibit a «reductive» approach to Heidegger (so writes Seyed Majid Kamali²⁴). Also Abdurrahman Badawī, studied here by Sevinç Yasargil, is a case in point: he was a very keen thinker, but as an existentialist he remained a lone-wolf in the Arab world. The problem is that these intellectuals move within «Islamic» thought, while Islamic thought and «Islamicate» thought – where Heidegger's legacy has to be found – represent two different paradigms of thinking. How is it possible to bridge the gap? Could be onto-theology the/a common ground of encounter? Many contributors of this volume, among whom Nader el-Bizri, draw attention to Avicenna's metaphysics. The same editors – Moser, Gösken and Hayes – stress how much the Islamicate reception of Heidegger depends on the juxtaposition of various

²¹ M. IQBAL, *Javid-nama*, Eng. transl. by A.J. Arberry, Islamic Books, Ajman (UAE) 2003, vv. 3625-3634.

²² MOSER - GÖSKEN - HAYES, *Heidegger in the Islamicate World*, pp. 174-175.

²³ *Ibi*, p. 177.

²⁴ See *ibi*, p. 212.

traditions of Islamic philosophy, that is the Platonic and the Peripatetic, being Avicenna and *sourtout* Mullā Sadrā two long-standing reference authors. Moser, Gösken and Hayes point out that Henry Corbin's hermeneutical encounter with Avicenna and Suhrawardī may be compared to Heidegger's own initial encounter with Aristotle²⁵. Corbin's fascinating interpretation of Islamic thought, however, is, at least in my view, far from being... Islamic, at least on Qur'anic basis. Muhammad Iqbāl, a poet and a mystic, was plainly *against* any kind of esotericism à la Corbin, preferring by far the pure air of the Arab desert instead of the fog of Persian theosophy where Neo-Platonism, Shiite imamology, Ishraqī illuminationism, theopatic Sufism (and even Zoroastrism) mix together in an indistinct *mélange*. Iqbāl extolled «I am-ness»²⁶, personality – in God (the Ultimate Ego) and man alike. Probably, Corbin's approach remains useful in an Islamicate environment; but I am sure neither of this.

Perhaps, a link between the Islamic and the Islamicate way happens in the work of Taha Abderrahmane who, writes Monir Birouk in his article, «following Heidegger, claims that the key to understanding *Ereignis* lies in the *es* of the *es gibt*». In Arabic, the German *es* can be readily translated as *huwa* from which the noun *al-huwwiyya* (ipseity) is derived. In this sense, *Ereignis* is understood not as a being – which is part of being – nor as being itself, but as «the origin of the whole Being». Abderrahmane contends that this conception of *Ereignis* is very close to the Sufi concept of *huwa*, which the Muslim mystics like Ibn Sina and Ibn Sab'in understood as «the ontological origin that speaks of divinity. [...] The second word Abderrahmane proposes for the translation of *Ereignis* is *al-'ayniyya*»²⁷, derived from the Arabic *'ayn*, meaning «eye» but also «essence». Defining Ibn Sinā as a mystic could be questionable. However, Islamicate is Abderrahmane's proposal to translate *Ereignis* as «*al-'ayniyya*», while Islamic is Abderrahmane's idea of God's Ipseity (*huwwiyya*) as *Ereignis*²⁸. Divine Event (*Ereignis*) is «disclosure» of Being (*a-letheia*), self-manifestation of the identity of God with Himself (ipseity or *huwwiyya*).

It is a stimulating and intriguing path of thinking in Islamicate terms, and the book contains many suggestions of how Islamicate approach could help the future developments of Islamic thought. It will be interesting to see how the two paths can converge soon or later lest to run independently towards independent goals and thus failing their objectives.

²⁵ *Ibi*, pp. 3-5.

²⁶ IQBĀL, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 57.

²⁷ MOSER - GÖSKEN - HAYES, *Heidegger in the Islamicate World*, p. 125.

²⁸ The principle of divine Ipseity as self-manifestation of God's identity (*huwa huwa*) was already formulated – in quite Avicennian metaphysical terminology – by Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī. See M. CAMPANINI, *Al-Ghazali and the Divine*, Routledge, Abingdon - New York 2018.