

## BOOK REVIEW / ULASAN BUKU

### **From Essence To Being: The Philosophy Of Mulla Sadra And Martin Heidegger By Muhammad Kamal.**

London: ICAS Press, 2010, 207 pages.

(Daripada Khayalan Ke Realiti: Falsafah Mulla Sadra Dan Martin Heidegger oleh Muhammad Kamal. London: ICAS Press)

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### **Reviewed by Ibrahim Abu Bakar**

Mulla Sadra al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Yahya Shirazi Qawami was born in Shiraz in 1572 and died in Basra in 1640 on his way to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was born and died in Germany. These two philosophers are different in many aspects namely geographical origins, religious tendencies, cultural orientations and educational backgrounds. Mulla Sadra lived in the East and Heidegger lived in the West; Mulla Sadra was a Muslim and Heidegger was a Christian; Mulla Sadra grew up and educated in Muslim culture while Heidegger in Christian culture. Heidegger attended the university education and became a professor at the universities but Mulla Sadra did not. In spite of these apparent differences in place, time, religion and culture that have separated Mulla Sadra from Heidegger, Muhammad Kamal has seen some similarities in their philosophical ideas and concepts. Therefore, Kamal proposes, "to demonstrate that it is possible to establish similarities between the philosophical views of these two thinkers." To prove the existence of some similarities in the philosophical views of both Mulla Sadra and Heidegger, Kamal has searched for three philosophical concepts namely the principality of Being, Plato's metaphysics and Aristotle's logic. Kamal presents the philosophical views of Mulla Sadra and Heidegger on these three philosophical ideas in his small book. Their philosophical views are said to be different from the philosophical views of the two great Greek philosophers namely Plato (427-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.).

Kamal divides his small book into seven chapters including introduction and conclusion. The introduction is the first chapter and the conclusion is the seventh chapter. In addition, his book has bibliography (pp.189-195), glossary (pp 196-200)

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and finally index (pp.201-207). The introduction (pp. 1-18) introduces the aims and themes, the contents, the main references from the works of Mulla Sadra and Heidegger and other secondary sources on them, and finally the acknowledgments and thanks to persons who have assisted the writer in preparing and publishing the book. Kamal includes the acknowledgments and thanks in the introduction since the book has no special pages for acknowledgments. The aim of the book is to demonstrate and establish the similarities between the philosophical views of Mulla Sadra and Heidegger although they are different in many aspects as mentioned above. The three assumptions constitute the themes of the book namely the principality of Being is advocated by Mulla Sadra and Heidegger, Mulla Sadra and Heidegger argue against Plato's metaphysics, and they also criticize Aristotle's logic and categorical system.

The second chapter is on the lives, works and intellectual backgrounds of Mulla Sadra and Heidegger (pp. 19-50). Mulla Sadra lived during the Shiite Safavid dynasty (1504-1732) and Isfahan in Persia was the capital dynasty. Intellectually, three philosophical traditions flourished in Persia during the Safavid dynasty; they were the post-Ibn Sina intellectual tradition, the philosophical tradition of Ibn Arabi and of Suhrawardi. Philosophers and theologians like Mir Damad (1561-1631), Mir Findiriski (d. 1641) and Shaykh Baha al-Din Amili (d.1622) established.

The philosophical and theological studies centre in Isfahan and known later on as the Isfahan school. Mulla Sadra grew up in this philosophical and theological tradition. His father Mirza Ibrahim ibn Yahya Qawami was a religious scholar and the government officer in Fars province including Shiraz where Mulla Sadra was born in 1572. His father was his first religious teacher. After his father died in 1587, Mulla Sadra went to Isfahan to pursue his studies. He studied philosophy, Gnosticism and religious sciences under the guidance of Mir Damar, Mir Findiriski and Shaykh Baha al-Din Amili. Due to some problems with the Shiite religious authorities in Isfahan, Mulla Sadra secretly left Isfahan for Kahak in 1610, located near the city of Qum. He stayed in Kahak more than a decade before he returned to Shiraz. During his sojourn in Kahak in solitude, he speculated and meditated and he was able "to articulate his ontological turn from the principality of essence to the principality of Being and his philosophy of existentialism became fully manifest"(p. 26). Mulla Sadra was able to write many works when he was in Kahak. Kamal divides the life of Mulla Sadra into three periods namely the period of formal education in Shiraz and Isfahan, the period of isolation, asceticism and self-purification in Kahak, and the teaching and writing period in Shiraz.

Like Mulla Sadra, Heidegger began his education with the religious studies but they studied different religions. Mulla Sadra studied Islam while Heidegger studied Christianity. He studied Christianity at St George Seminary in Freiburg and then at

Albert-Ludwig University for the priesthood. In 1911, Heidegger withdrew from the theological studies and began to study mathematics, natural science and philosophy at Freiburg University. Prof. Arthur Schneider taught Heidegger Catholic philosophy and Prof. Heinrich Rickert taught him philosophy. Heidegger submitted his doctoral dissertation in 1913 entitled "The Doctrine of Judgment in Psychologism" (p. 35). With the support from Prof. Schneider and Prof. Heinrich Finke to Heidegger, Freiburg University accepted him to teach Catholic philosophy upon the retirement of his supervisor Prof. Schneider. Later on Heidegger shifted from Catholicism to Protestantism under the influence of Martin Luther. Heidegger also devoted to phenomenological and ontological studies. In October 1927, Heidegger accepted the teaching position at Marburg University. Prof. Edmund Husserl (1859-1937), the founder of phenomenology became the good friend of Heidegger. Husserl was responsible for introducing phenomenology as a method of analysis and a system of philosophy called the transcendental phenomenology. However, due to his Jewish origins, the Nazis who controlled the German government cancelled Husserl's license to teach phenomenology at the University of Gottingen in 1937 and he felt seriously ill and died in Freiburg on April 27, 1937.

The university professors elected Heidegger to become the rector of Freiburg University on April 22, 1933 and he resigned from the rector post on April 23, 1934. Due to the pressure from those who opposed the Nazis, Heidegger had to endure suffering and academic stagnation, nervous breakdown and lived in solitary retreat in Todtnauberg for five years from May 1945. After five years, Heidegger lived in the miserable state, a group of philosophers and thinkers in Freiburg, Munich, Gottingen, Zurich and Paris appealed and campaigned for the restating Heidegger to the chair of philosophy at Freiburg University. They succeeded in their appeal and campaign. Heidegger was reappointed to the university chair of philosophy. He died on May 26, 1976 at eighty-seven years old. The book second chapter also includes the works written by Mulla Sadra and Heidegger in particular periods of their lifetimes.

Kamal elaborates on the philosophical shift from the principality of essence to the principality of Being (pp. 31-80) in the third chapter. Kamal states, "Mulla Sadra and Heidegger were both critical of Plato's philosophical thinking and revolted against it." Kamal indicates that his book uses interchangeably the terms "Plato's philosophy" and "Platonism" because "they have a necessary connection: there is no Platonism without Plato" (p.51). Moreover, both Mulla Sadra and Heidegger criticize both Plato's philosophy and Platonism. On the concept of existence, Mulla Sadra did not agree with Suhrawardi (1154-1191), a neo-Platonist in Persia and the founder of Illuminationist philosophical school. Suhrawardi advocates the principality of essence since the essence is the reality while Mulla Sadra advocates the principality of being since being is the reality and essence has no reality. Similarly, Heidegger advocates

the principality of being rather than the principality of essence. “Mulla Sadra’s as well as Heidegger’s interest in the question of the Being of beings works to retrieve the most primordial philosophical question about the meaning of being,...”(p.77).

The fourth chapter is on the rise of a new ontology (pp. 81-120). The new ontology here refers to the ontology conceived and advocated by both Mulla Sadra and Heidegger. Mulla Sadra proposes the new ontology to replace the metaphysical views of essentialism. His new ontology is termed as theosophy. “In his definition of philosophy and theosophy, the sole theme of inquiry is Being as such.” For Mulla Sadra, theosophy “has become the science of Being or ontology” (p. 89). The new ontology proposed by Heidegger is meta-ontology since philosophy engages with the meaning of Being is ontological and such philosophy transcends “the knowledge of beings and regional ontology” and it becomes meta-ontology. “The ambition of Heidegger’s ontology is understanding and interpreting the meaning of Being rather than beings... This is the theme of his turn from fundamental ontology to metaontology.”(p.93). Both Mulla Sadra and Heidegger advocate the ontological differences between Being and beings. For both of them, “Being is reality; it is transcendent and passes beyond all beings in the sense that it is not a being but the Being of all beings” (p. 100).

Kamal presents three concepts namely becoming, nothingness and temporality in chapter five (pp. 121-156). Becoming indicates change, for example, becoming existence from nonexistence or becoming strong from weak. Nothingness is the opposite of Being since nothing produces nothing and something produces something or being produces being or beings. Temporality indicates time. “Change belongs to the realm of Becoming where Being and Nothingness pass into one another” (p.122). The ontological endeavor of Mulla Sadra and Heidegger is “an investigation into the meaning of Being. Being, for them, is the foundation of truth and knowledge” (p. 123). Being, for them, is “simple, unitary and complete” (p.130). For Mulla Sadra, becoming is “an essential aspect of Being, and all accidental changes should be grounded on substantial change. Becoming is nothing more than the substantial change of Being” (p.131). Temporality indicates time. For Mulla Sadra, “time cannot be conceived without Being. Time is the determination of Being and the existential horizon in which Being manifests itself into its own modes; the modes of Being then change to achieve perfection in their own being”(p. 149). Heidegger also understands time similar to that of Mulla Sadra. Therefore, Mulla Sadra and Heidegger “go beyond the Aristotelian definitions of time as the measure of movement in respect to *before* and *after*” (p. 152).

The sixth chapter clarifies two concepts namely the “transubstantial change” and the “ecstasical projection of Being” (pp. 157-178) from Mulla Sadra’s and Heidegger’s understanding of change and the self-projection of Being. Mulla Sadra does not agree

with Aristotle's concept of change that change is accidental, not substantial. He presents three arguments to disagree with Aristotle's concept of change. The three arguments base on the potential and actual change, the relationship between motion and a moveable being, and the nature of the changing being respectively. For Mulla Sadra, "the generator of change and motion should be a being that is essentially capable of change and motion" (p. 161). Mulla Sadra's and Heidegger's concept of transubstantial change is in line with their concept of Being "as a dynamic reality. *Dasein* is in constant change aiming at disclosing the meaning of Being. Being also discloses itself only to *Dasein*" (p. 166).

Kamal concludes his study of the philosophy of Mulla Sadra and Heidegger in the seventh chapter. Three of his conclusions are namely, 1) Both Mulla Sadra and Heidegger oppose Plato's metaphysics that "has resulted in the principality of essence in the Muslim world and the oblivion of Being in the West" (p.180). 2) On ontology, "Mulla Sadra and Heidegger moved beyond any regional ontology by making Being rather than beings a subject for their ontological inquiry. They established metaontology" (p. 182). 3. For Mulla Sadra and Heidegger, Becoming is "another aspect of the reality of Being. This is also a point of contradiction with the Platonic understanding of reality" (p. 184).

The aim stated by Kamal to compare some similarities between Mulla Sadra's and Heidegger's philosophy has been achieved since this small book clearly focuses on those similarities. No doubt that his comparative study of these two different philosophers is "one of many possible ways of comparing the ontological ideas of two great thinkers from two different times and places" (p. 188).

Kamal refers to the works of Heidegger for his book but they are all translated works of Heidegger (pp.191-192). It seems that Kamal does not read German. Some academicians are not happy with the translated works for an academic work, and Kamal has no choice but to rely on the translated works of Heidegger.

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