

BEING AND EXISTENCE IN
ŞADRĀ AND HEIDEGGER
A COMPARATIVE ONTOLOGY

ALPARSLAN
AÇIKGENÇ



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A Comparative Ontology**

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Alparslan AÇIKGENÇ

Professor Aıkgen was born in Erzurum, Őenkaya, 1952. He graduated from Ankara University, Theology Faculty in 1974. Later, he was sent to the USA to do his doctorate with the Ministry of National Education scholarship. In 1977, he received a master's degree in the history of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and in 1983, with a dissertation entitled "Being and Existence in Őadrā and Heidegger". After receiving his PhD, he became a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at METU in 1983. He became an assistant professor in 1984 and an associate professor in 1987. He returned to Istanbul Fatih University after serving as a professor at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) in Malaysia in 1992 until 1999. He has conducted many master's and doctoral studies in the fields of Islamic philosophy, history of philosophy and philosophy of science, and has held various administrative and academic positions at Yıldız Technical University and the Institute of Civilizations Alliance of FSMV University. He is also the president of the Asian Philosophical Society. Aıkgen was elected as a full member of Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA) by the Council of Higher Education in 2012 for academic achievement. His *Islamic Scientific Tradition in History*, published in Kuala Lumpur, won the 2014 Malaysian Science Award.

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*Dedicated to the memory of
Prof. Dr. Fazlur Rahman
(1919-1988)*

Teacher, friend and a great scholar

FOREWORD TO
THE SECOND IMPRESSION

The present work was completed in 1982 at the University of Chicago as part of the author's PhD requirements; then in 1993 it was revised and published in Kuala Lumpur by the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC). Since then there have been many studies on both Mullā Ṣadrā and Heidegger. The purpose of this edition is not to incorporate these recent studies because I do not think that they change the general arguments in this old study. They, however, add more comprehension to the themes discussed in this work. I would like to add one of my insights here by way of passing which I had felt in fact when I was working on my thesis. The readers may also notice in this study that some sentences of Heidegger seem to be German translations of Ṣadrā's statements. The general context of these statements are quite different from the statements of Ṣadrā and thus they do not somehow lead to the conclusion that these are taken from Max Horten's (d. 1945) book *Das Philosophische System von Schirāzi: Übersetzt und Erläutert* which is published in 1913. For instance, Heidegger defines time as "the horizon of Being" (for this see the first part of *Sein und Zeit* entitled "*Die Interpretation des Daseins auf die Zeitlichkeit und die Explikation der Zeit als des transzendentalen Horizontes der Frage nach dem Sein*") which is the same in Ṣadrā. Moreover, they both affirm that knowledge is a mode of Being (see here Conclusion, section 5). These are introduced as main parallel ideas. I think this is what makes a comparative study of Heidegger and Ṣadrā interesting and worthwhile.

It is in this understanding that Ibn Haldun University Press is publishing the second edition of my thesis. I am grateful for the Board of the university to make this work once again available. My special thanks go to the Rector of the university, Recep Şentürk, for paying special attention to publish my work. I also thank the editor of the press, Savaş C. Tali for his follow up to see the work through the press; and the assistant, Şehadet Sena Taş for typesetting the manuscript.

Alparslan Açıkgenç
Üsküdar, İstanbul
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PREFACE

Modern existentialism is usually evaluated on social and cultural grounds. Many thinkers admit that the general conditions of society and the problems that arose through technological development are the causes responsible for the appearance of existentialism. Because of these characteristics of modern existentialism, it has been regarded as a transitory and non-philosophical movement which attempts to bring about solutions to the current problems of contemporary man. These claims of critics are not totally baseless. Kierkegaard, for instance, harshly criticizes the industrial society on the grounds that it endangers the dignity of the human person. His violent attack on Hegelian idealism is a sure sign of the existentialist rejection of pure rational analysis. Moreover, according to Kierkegaard, a society that is governed by the impersonal "laws" of production leaves no room for the individual. We must, therefore, reconstruct the society along humanistic lines. This can be accomplished only by paying more attention to a direct reformation of individual life; in other words, success of both social and political revolutions depends upon the basic transformation of individual 'existence'. It is from this humanistic perspective that man as a being becomes an important element in philosophy; and again, it is in this sense that a philosophy becomes existentialist.

Modern existentialism, then, can be characterized as the philosophical system that makes a sincere attempt to solve the social problems of the age by emphasizing the individual human 'existence'. Although in this attempt even the term 'existence' is not always used in the philosophical sense, the development of this trend of thought based on this concept alone led to purely philosophical problems and their ensuing discussions. Heidegger, for example, repudiated the term 'existentialism' for himself.¹ He is, nevertheless, classified as an existentialist. In this case, there are, of course, reasons behind all this debate. I shall too, try to defend the idea that Heidegger must be classified as an existentialist. It is indeed the purpose of this study to examine Heidegger from this perspective.

There is yet another side of this work presenting a particular philosophical perspective in Islam, which we call for convenience of reference the 'Islamic Existentialism'. This philosophical movement began in the Muslim world with the appearance of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, i.e., *unity of being* and reached its zenith with Şadrā, and especially through the celebrated şūfi-philosopher Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240). Islamic existentialism did not arise out of social or moral problems of the society; on the contrary, as a purely philosophical expression of a civilization, it is an attempt to grasp the inner reality of Being, which we experience, in each case, as universe, abundantly exhibiting various forms and grades of existence. This does not mean, on the other hand, that ethical and social issues did not get their due attention in the Islamic existentialism. Many şūfi (namely, Islamic mystical) doctrines are, in fact, introduced as solutions for the social problems of the time. This philosophical movement as represented by Mullā Şadrā arose out of the controversy over essence and existence, as to which one constitute the Reality. The same controversy is, of course, the

1 Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", in the *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by W. Barrett and H.D. Aiken (New York: Random House, 1962), 271-2.

focal point of discussion in modern existentialism too. But the difference is in the way both schools handled the problem. Therefore, we are led to raise a question: In what sense can Şadrâ and Heidegger, as examined in this study, be regarded existentialists?

In a general way; we may classify existentialists into two groups: 1. Those philosophers whose interest is mainly in the social and moral problems faced by the human person in a society. But they give their solutions to these problems in terms of individual existence. Kierkegaard, Sartre and even Nietzsche, to some extent, can be regarded as existentialist philosophers of this type. 2. Those philosophers who are primarily interested in metaphysical (and in this respect, basically ontological) aspects of Being. Existentialists of this group are interested mainly in providing an analysis for the concept of Being. Since in their analysis the main point of reference is Being, we prefer to call them ‘philosophers of Being’. In fact, Heidegger prefers to refer to himself as a ‘philosopher of existence’, since he is searching for the meaning of Being in terms of “*existential analytic*”.² Therefore, together with him, we shall consider Şadrâ as belonging to this trend of existentialism.

Although the concept of existence as referring to an individual consciousness (Dasein) plays an important role in Heidegger’s existential philosophy, his interest in this concept is different from that of the first group of existentialists. For he clearly states that his existentialist interpretations and analyses are purely ontological in their aims and are thus far removed from any “moralizing critique of everyday *human existence*.”³ Therefore, we consider Heidegger an existentialist of the second group. In fact, his main objective throughout his career has been an effort to provide an answer to the question of Being (*Seins frage*). It is precisely in this sense that

2 Ibid., 271-2.

3 Cf., for instance, *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 211.

we also regard Şadrâ as an existentialist. Yet we must, at the same time, allow the differences between the existentialism of Heidegger and that of Şadrâ. The most crucial point in this respect is the terms they use; Şadrâ's term *wujūd* can be translated, depending on the context, as both 'Being' and 'existence'; whereas Heidegger's terms *Sein* and *existenz* can only be translated as 'Being' and 'existence' respectively. The difficulty to handle this terminological difference will be felt in this work. In order not to cause any misunderstanding, a solution is offered in the Introduction. But once this difference is considered, then the difference in Şadrâ and Heidegger's existentialism also becomes more visible. As this point is expressed in the main body of this study, for Şadrâ, existence is the reality of Being; and as such, Being is taken only as a concept. But if its reality is considered, then it is in each case a concrete [individual] existence. In some respect, this is true for Heidegger as well, but he does not consider *Sein* to be merely an empty concept; if, on the other hand, we argue that its rich content is realized by *existenz*, then the parallelism between the two thinkers becomes visible.

The point of departure for this study is that very parallelism, which palpably comes to the fore not only in this respect, but in their solutions of other problems arising as they develop their doctrines. As Heidegger and Şadrâ come from culturally different contexts, it should be expected that their conclusions will remain as mere cases of similarities which, once put into the other context, would miss its original intention. In this case if we take, for example, Heidegger's essence-existence distinction and evaluate it in Şadrâ's context, it will be a gross misinterpretation of his intention. For Heidegger's principle of ontological difference would not allow this. As a result, we face some methodological problems, which we attempt to solve in the first chapter. But, as we have pointed out, the terminological problems are dealt with in the Introduction. Then, each point of parallelism is developed in the subsequent chapters.

As it is the case with every comparative study involving two different cultures or civilizations, we also face the problem of translating certain concepts which are not developed in the other culture into its own concepts. Some may claim that this is irrelevant in the case of philosophical and scientific concepts, but we shall not agree with this position. In fact, many philosophical concepts developed by Şadrā are not found in the philosophical terminology of the Western civilization. For instance, his concept of 'systematic ambiguity' (*Tashkik*) of Being (*wujūd*) cannot be expressed in the Western philosophical conceptual scheme. The same is true for Heidegger's terminology. But, then, how is it possible to compare two thinkers of different civilizations? This question can be answered from two perspectives; first of all, there are in the philosophical enterprise of every civilization concepts, theories, doctrines and ideas that are *objectively* similar. For, on the one hand, what is being investigated is the same reality; and, on the other hand, the rational cognitive faculties of the investigators operate in the same manner. It will not be a futile attempt, therefore, to bring out these similarities. Second, there may be in those philosophical undertakings ideas, concepts, theories and doctrines which are *subjectively* similar; namely, those ideas, etc., may be totally similar, but because they carry with them the marks of their respective civilization, they signify different intentions. Hence, the context of that very similarity may be utterly different. This is what we have called 'parallelism', which will be elaborated fully in Chapter I as a methodological tool for comparing Şadrā and Heidegger. This second perspective is especially important for the study of other civilizations, if they are to be appreciated at all. I do not think that the philosophical systems of other civilizations can ever be appreciated if we do not develop such methodological tools of study, which will enable us to have a proper approach to such human enterprise.

A shortcoming of this study may be its distance from recent publications; more particularly many studies appeared on Heidegger since 1983, the year when this study was completed at the University of Chicago as a doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Profs. Fazlur Rahman, Raymond Geuss and John Woods. On the occasion of its publication, I would like to thank them all and hereby gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to them again. Unfortunately at the moment of its publication, it was not possible to review all the new publications and revise my dissertation accordingly. However, I have completely revised the Introduction, where the reader will find references to some recent publications as well. Some changes were also deemed necessary in the main body of the work, especially concerning the methodological approach and translation of the terminology. Otherwise, the author upholds that the main thesis of this study is to remain unaffected by recent developments.

Studies of this kind are important, as we maintained, not only for mutual cultural understanding, but for mutual dialogues as well. If philosophy is it human endeavor to comprehend the universe and man's position in such an existence, then there must definitely be a mutual dialogue between civilizations toward the realization of that end. Moreover, if this is taken as *objectively* similar problems of humanity in every culture, then the social problems of each culture can be regarded as its *subjective* problems; even in this case, cultural dialogues may help solve problems of societies. Therefore, whether regarding the *objective* or the *subjective* problems, a comparative study of this kind occupies a crucial place in any field of study. Therefore, as a realization to this end, I owe thanks to the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia where I spent two fruitful years (1991-1993). Above all, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to its Founder-Director, Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas for his keen interest in the

publication of this work. Let it be mentioned also in this connection that it is mainly through his concern that the Institute acquired the personal library of the late Prof. Fazlur Rahman (*Rahmatullahi-'alayh*), whose invaluable guidance shaped this study during my graduate studies at Chicago (1978-1983). For this reason, it cannot be just a mere coincidence that this work should be dedicated to his memory. Furthermore, Fazlur Rahman himself was a great admirer of activities toward mutual understanding and dialogues between civilizations. My sincere thanks to Muhammad Zainiy Uthman, Research Fellow at ISTAC, who read the manuscript in its entirety, aided my computer editing greatly, made editorial suggestions and corrections, and personally saw the work through the final stages of its publication. Finally, it is also a pleasure to thank my wife, whose patient support helped in many ways until this work came to daylight.

Alparslan Açıkgenç
Kuala Lumpur
March 1, 1993