THE CONCEPT OF VERSTEHEN AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SELF.

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The Self-consciousness or Self of man is, according to Iqbal, the reality of his being. Self-consciousness is also the ultimate reality and the sole creative and directive force of the universe. This self-consciousness of the universe is known to the religious man as God. After evolving the universe through its various stages, the universal self-consciousness has manifested its creative will in the human form of life, as human self-consciousness, for the achievement of its own ends in creation — man is now the instrument of Divine purpose in the universe. The essence of the human self-consciousness is its urge to love the universal self-consciousness. Thus to the human self God is the most satisfactory of all ideals, the ideal which accords fully with its nature and which alone has all the highest qualities of beauty and perfection. In fact the terms beautiful and ugly true and false, good or bad, praiseworthy or detestable acquire their meaning from the nature of this innate urge of the human self which is its only criterion of beauty and goodness and the only motivating force of its activities. That which is consistent with the self's ideal is true, beautiful and good and that which is inconsistent with it, is false, ugly and bad. As the human self acts consciously and deliberately for the expression and satisfaction of its urge to love God, the universe changes and evolves gradually, at its highest level, which is the human level, towards the stage of its greatest perfection. But when the self is not aware of its true ideal or when it cannot feel or experience its beauty it loves substitute ideals which are really lacking in the qualities of beauty and perfection and cause the self's disappointment later on. Every ideal of life which is the final end of the activities of an individual is achieved by him through a series of smaller subordinate ends, purposes or goals which owe their existence to the ideal and lead upto the ideal. Whether the smaller ends and goals of an individual are right or wrong, true or false good or bad depends upon the fact whether the ideal which gives birth to them is right or wrong, true or false good or bad. The ideals and the resulting ends, purposes or goals whether right or wrong and true or false, good or bad are thus according to Iqbal the very essence of the life of the human self. This means that the social activities of men cannot be understood and social services cannot be formulated apart

from the understanding of their ideals. But ideals and the resulting ends are not external observable objects which are studied by the physical sciences but internal mental or psychic concepts. Hence the methodology of social sciences must be radically different from that of the physical sciences. The concept of "Verstehend" introduced by the recent western philosophers is an indication that they have realized this important fact. In my opinion this concept is not only relevant to Iqbal's philosophy of the self but also constitutes, when properly understood and formulated, an elaboration or development of an important aspect of that philosophy. I propose, therefore, to explain in this paper the meaning of this concept es it has been used by these philosophers with some of the difficulties being faced by them in its proper annunciation and articulation. I am doing so in the hope that the future research scholar of Iqbal will make use of this concept for the development of Iqbal's philosophy appropriately.

II

The theory of verstehen stands for the general methodological approach that the subject-matter of the social sciences is typically different from that of the natural sciences, and as such the techniques of the physical sciences cannot be applied to the study of the social sciences. The subject-matter of the social sciences is frequently identified as 'purposive behaviour directed towards ends', conscious and unconscious. But, motives, dispositions and goals cannot be publicly observable in the sense certain physical and bodily movements can be. Nevertheless, they can be 'understood'. The social sciences are the "Sciences of Understanding", and as such not only they require objectively observable behaviour but also "subjectively intended mean. ing". 'Meaning' plays the role of a useful concept for the analysis of behaviour in its varied aspects.

III

As to the origin of meaning, it may be said that the social sciences study human social relations. These relations are the creations of the human will determined partly by the social environment. They exist as social facts only through the wills of the individuals. They are willed because of the demands of the social living, around some end, and by the overall needs of the normative social order. Thus, the psychic interaction is the essence of society with wants, demands, volitions and ends in it. Consequently, a social relation

is a psychic relation. It is willed to exist and persist. For this reason, a social relation is not a simple observable fact like a natural phenomenon; it is highly complex and intricate. As it exists between psychic entities, it cannot be adequately studied by observation and by the experimental method alone.

The social relations are purely human relations. Being psychic events, they are "internal" in character; a quality which is not possessed by the physical events.

Moreover, the human actions are motivational. Their understanding ranges from the bodily manifestation to the deeper analysis of inner motives. A human action is not all what is apparently known. The subtle nature of the social relations is expressed and communicated with the help of language, and the words, gestures and signs that convey their meanings to us. For example, the red and green signals express a traffic rule which is understood by the people who are conversant with it. However, those who do not know about it can be made to understand it. We see that a red signal forces a motorist to stop because ho knows what it means to violate it and what will be its consequences?

Similarly, the various forms of intercourse as co-operation, sympathy, imitation, accommodation, conflict, etc. are based on social relations existing in a society. The human motives are understood in close relationship to other persons in the social environment. They are not the outward acts but the psychic manifestations determined by the social values, customs and traditions, which in turn are based on accumulated will of the people.

IV

In the nineteenth century it practically became a dogma in Germany that the methodology of the natural sciences could not be applied o the study of the social sciences, as the latter deal with the contents of the social life and with the intimate understanding of the subjective feelings, ideas, thoughts and values peculiar to the experiencing individuals and the norms existing in the society. Wilhelm Dilthey, Max Weber, Werner[19] Sombart originated the method of verstehen. Werner[20] Sombart distinguished the two methods of

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[19] Barnes, H. E. An introduction to the History of Socology" Chicago, 1961, p. 319. Barnes & Becker, "Contemporary Social Theory" Boston.

[20] Feigl & Brodbeck. " Readings in Philosophy of Science," article by Theodore Abel.

inquiry: "the Ordnend" and "the Vers'ehend", the former for the natural sciences and the latter for the social sciences. The method of the natural sciences is characterized as an "external" ordering of phenomena for the purpose of forming laws of nature conceived as empirical generalisations. On the contrary, not just remaining content with external ordering, the "Verstehend method" is a "grasping of meaning". The term Verstehend may be followed in the English as "genuine understanding" or "imaginative insight" of "meaningful behaviour". The verstehen theorists were dissatisfied with the empirical procedure of testing and observing human behaviour and with the attempt of translating the mental concepts into physiological terms.

V

The concept of "verstehen" represented as "ideal type" or "pure form" does not exist as such in the empirical world. It must be treated as an "explanatory concept", to guide collections, selections and systematization of the facts of social life so that they may be analysed and explained. One can talk of various "operations" or "forms" of verstehen rather than verstehen as such. As an ideal type verstehen can be understood as "genuine understanding" but in its varied manifestations, it can take on more or less different forms which can be distinguishable from but not antithetical to the basic concept. For example, space and time are the ideal types or pure categories. They are understood in their various spatial and temporal relations found in nature but all these forms are subsumed under the "logical types" of the two categories. Similarly, various forms of verstehen can be brought under one category of verstehen.

VI

Theodore' Abel has tried to evaluate the operation of verstehen. According to him the operation which he translates as understanding works in two ways: (i) internalizing of observed facts in a given situation (he gives three examples: a single case, a generalization and a statistical regularity), (ii) and the application of a behaviour maxim which works as the connection between different but relevant factors of the situation.

On a cold day he (Theodore Abel) saw that his neighbour went out, brought some wood, lighted it and then resumed his daily work. The behaviour of the neighbour was understood as: having felt chilly, he lighted the fire to warm himself. Abel is certain of this explanation because on a

similar occasion he did the same thing. Thus we understand a given human action if we can apply to it a generalization based on our own personal experience. But, on the other hand, and it is its most obvious limitation, some other man, guided by experience of his own may interpret the behaviour differently. He may say that the person who lighted fire wanted to have tea or prepare food. Thus, different explanations of a single piece of behaviour are possible. But, how are we to judge which is the correct one? Many explanations may be correct or nearly correct. Understanding or the operation Verstehen, therefore, provides us with many possible solutions to one single cast, without pin-pointing the only correct explanation. Moreover, the ability to define behaviour will vary with the amount and quality of the personal experience and the introspective capacity of the interpreter and his ability to generalise. Most of the explanations may remain mere guesses. Verstehen, therefore, is of no scientific value for certain knowledge.

Secondly, it is not a method of verification. From the affirmation of a possible connection between a stimulus and a response, we cannot conclude that it is the only one. From the view-point of verstehen, any connection that is possibly conceivable is equally correct. But in the scientific inquiry, the probability calls for objective methods of verification i.e. experiments, comparative studies, statistical operations. For example, we do not accept a statistical generalisation 'that birth rate decreases with an increase in the standard of living' as valid because we simply understand it but because we have found reliable statistics supporting it.

These limitations virtually preclude the use of the operation of verstehen as a scientific tool of analysis. It can, however, perform one positive function in scientific investigation. It can serve as an aid in preliminary explorations of a subject and in setting up hypotheses though it cannot be used to test them.

The above criticism of the theory of verstehen misses the point, as the theory requires not understanding (in the sense used above) but genuine understanding which is over and above the superficial level of testing and observing. Verstehen is not to be understood as an aimless speculation but a deeper probe concerning the various aspects of a problem. *Hypotheses are set up when the problems are analysed and synthesized by thought, while 'geniune understanding' is needed both before and after the scientific inquiry. It is understanding alone which tries to evaluate the findings of the scientific inquiry:* whether the data validates the conclusions or not? The statistical generalizations do not speak

by themselves but need to be interpreted which is helped by *'understanding.'* Various psycho-sociological problems connected with them are studied, analysed and synthesized. *Understanding* not only helps us to set up hypotheses but enables us to critically examine the statistical and empirical laws which do not fit-in with the data. Is it not a fact that many generalisations and statistical inquiries are not wholly intelligible to us? For example, to say that there is 1: 6 ratio between divorce and marriage is not itself intelligible, unless all the problems of the married life are analysed by the process of the *genuine understanding.* Marriage is a social relationship between a male and a female and the divorce is the breaking up of this relationship. It is not a simple but complex, intricate and many-sided social relationship, affecting not only the individuals concerned but other persons connected with them. It is based on customs, traditions, psychological and social needs, geographic and economic conditions and religion. Socio-psychological causes for divorce need to be studied in the widest possible context and then a relation is established between marriage and divorce. All this is to be done by the genuine understanding. What it means is that social phenomena are to be studied not in their outward manifestations and observable contents but in their socio-psychological aspects which need *a* penetrating grasp so as to synthesize the facts in their proper perspectives. To accept the statistical inquiry only will be an acceptance at superficial level without any genuine understanding of the problem.

VII

The social scientists formulate social regularity and there are therefore criteria for the study of social behaviour. These criteria are the conventional rules. The individuals describe their activities and their description is also governed by these rules. For example, the activity of "praying" is not all that people do physically i.e. bending or kneeling in mosques or in churches and uttering certain words; but these bodily movements have their mental accompaniments — belief **in** God, religious faith, obedience, duty, humiliation, feeling of joy, etc. Only when the social scientist takes account of all these mental aspects, he has the genuine understanding of what is a "prayer". On the other hand, if prayer is understood as a sum-total of bodily movements alone, it will not be a case of genuine understanding. Herein are implicit some rules of the selection of data based on not only external observation, but also on the operation of understanding.

The social scientist must elucidate these rules to achieve genuine understanding in his capacity as an epistemologist.

Rules presuppose language in which words are used and understood. Rule governing the use of a word or a phrase relates the expression to certain attitudes of those who employ it and also to certain objects in the world, if they exist. The word "prayer" is understood in a series of observations, mental and bodily, as it is used according to the rule. Human behaviour is a "meaningful behaviour", as it is a rule-governed behaviour. *A meaningful behaviour is one which is easily understood by a group of people sharing a common social life and a common language.* We have devised certain rules of language to stand for certain kinds of behaviour and to express certain mental facts. These conventional rules help us to communicate with one another. Max Weber formulates the rule that we are concerned with human behaviour "if and in so far as the agent or agents associate subjective sense with it".

The concept of meaningful behaviour is associated with motive and reason. Motive for an action is defined as a "meaningful configuration of circumstances" which to the person appears as a "meaningful reason for that action". It may be a consciously worked out reason or some unconscious motive. The unconscious motivation assumes an important place in the scheme of meaningful behaviour. With the help of various psycho-analytic techniques, the inner motives or reasons are unearthed. Both at the conscious and unconscious levels, reference needs be made to inner springs of action.

Peter Winch[21] says that to understand a human behaviour as meaningful behaviour, one must have a participative feeling, sharing a common social life with common beliefs, attitudes and aspirations. For example, if I am to understand the behaviour of "praying", I must have a participative feeling *i.e.* I must be one with the members of a religious group, understand their prayer as a religious belief and as a duty and share the religious feeling connected with it. This is an important point. A person who does not have this participative feeling will not understand "prayer" as a meaningful behaviour in its true perspective involving social and religious sentiments and

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[21] Winch, Peter "The Idea of a Social Science", Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Ch. II. Peters, R. S., "The Concept of Motivation", London. (leach, Peter, "Mental Acts", London. Wittgenstein, L., "Philosophical Investigations", Blackwell 1953.

psychological motivation. For example, a non-Muslim, who sees a Muslim praying may notice that he is praying (if he is told that such is praying) at the superficial level and not in the same way as another Muslim will understand it because of having the participative feeling and the same faith. Participative feeling gives rise to more penetrating and empathetic considerations and digs out many valuable details which enrich the explanation. Participative feeling is no doubt limited to certain cases, as it cannot be taken as a generalisation for all rational explanations, but, none the less, its importance cannot be minimised.

<center>IX</center>

Among the social sciences which have tried to use the conceptual framework of the natural sciences to make them objective and scientific, we take the case of Psychology. We find that the results are not encouraging. In its extreme form of Watsonian Behaviourism, it has miserably failed. Watson took up the impossible task of reducing psychology to the study of the visible and concrete facts of behaviour which could be observed and recorded. He discarded the mental concepts of sensation, perception, thinking, memory, imagination, and reduced all of them to the stimulus-response formula. He rejected the method of introspection. But we find that later he relaxed his rigorous requirement that all facts be tangible and observable. He admitted that there are changes which cannot be externally observed. He classified behaviour into implicit and explicit. Explicit behaviour is observable behaviour of bodily expressions and movements. The implicit behaviour is unobserved physiological changes going on in the body. He also admitted the use of introspection, as a person can observe his own behaviour, give verbal reports and compare his experiences with the experiences of other persons. He also realised the role and importance of unlearned activity (instinct) in learning and habit formation. The latter behaviourists continued to blunt its edge and with the admittance of "purpose" in behaviour, all rigour was gone. E. C. Tolman admitted that there is some end or goal in all behaviour activity. Trial and error behaviour in animals is also goal directed. The behaviourists began to accept the psychological concepts. C. L. Hull added the concepts of expectation, purpose and guiding ideas. Every behaviour manifestation needs to be observed in its acquisition, guidance and extinction in relation to the condition which gives rise to it. The behavioural and mental concepts have

been brought under the one concept of "activity". Admittance of the value of introspection and employing mental concepts supports the theory of verstehen.

<div align="center">X</div>

The Gestalt Psychology is associated with the names of Wertheimer, Koffka and Kohler. They accepted the value of introspection. Excellent psychological data could be gained from "direct experience" than by external observation alone. The importance of introspective reports in experimental studies is acknowledged by them. Behaviour is neither reflexive nor conditioned. It is a unitary fact, a meaningful whole. It has its own properties which are revealed in its organization. Stimulus-response formula is revised as stimulus-organizationresponse formula. The principle of organization is basic and it works two ways: the organism is not passive to stimulus but accepts it after scrutiny and then makes an appropriate response. The response is the result of organization done by the organism. The principles of organization are more clear in learning, memory, emotion, thinking. The relationship between the organism and the environment is dynamic and functional. The functional relationship is both physical and psychological. The behavioral environmental is determined by the outside-inside interaction; inside interaction being determined by the individual's needs, interests, attitudes and abilities.

The Gestalt Psychologists gave another concept of "insight". For Kohler insight is a transition from helplessness to mastery; it is more than trial and error; it is the ability of observing and understanding the situation as a whole; it is an ability to perceive relations in the environment and to connect them to make a meaningful whole. Insight is exploratory in nature. If it is gained in one situation, it can be transferred to another more or less similar situation.

The two concepts of "organization" and "insight" are verstehen concepts.

<div align="center">XI</div>

The theory of verstehen is a revolt against the use of statistical and experimental methods used in the social sciences and to their claim that these methods can explain the social phenomena and bring the social sciences at par with the physical sciences.

Statistical methods are no doubt amenable to certain social data which led themselves to quantification, but the method is misused when an attempt is made to quantify which cannot be quantified. Before discussing the matter in detail I want to state some of the assumptions which the statisticians of the social sciences have:-

1. Counting and the manipulation of the statistical studies in the social phenomena is the best and the surest method for discovering uniformities;

2. that the results of the counting can be generalised far beyond the phenomena counted and can be expressed in quantitative formulae as either universal or significant uniformities;

3. that these statistical operations permit one to define precisely and quantitatively many fundamental categories;

4. that each quantitative study is considered as a sign of the progress of the psycho-social sciences towards an objective, exact, and mathematical phase in their existence towards a maturity approaching that of the physical sciences;

5. that all non-quantitative studies are either armchair philosophy or subjective speculation or inexact and superficial.

I think that these assumptions are not well founded for the reason below:

I have already said that certain social phenomena are amenable to statistics. The problems relating to population growth, migration, crimes, unemployment, etc., are amenable to counting and yield important results. They establish empirical or statistical semi-uniformities with limitations on the prediction of their future course. Population census gives us the knowledge of its size, density, sex-age composition, religion, education, economic condition, death and birth rates. No doubt that the results are valid under certain conditions and are of great value. But the trouble arises when the statisticians forget this limitation and try to apply it to other phenomena not amenable to statistics. The passion for quantifying all sorts of qualitative data has manifested in many fields: in measuring the intensities and qualities of beliefs, emotions, intelligence, ideologies, attitudes, personality traits, public opinion, etc. As to the success of these efforts, the matter could be

foreseen. If the quantified qualities have units, they can be measured or scaled; if they do not have units, they cannot be adequately scaled and measured. In spite of this if an effort is made, the result is bound to be fictitious and arbitrarily superimposed upon the phenomena. What I mean by the quantification of the data is obvious from the above example of the population study. The population problem is split up into units which can be measured. The units are: size, sex, age-composition, marital status, education, profession, etc. The data can be collected under each head. The units are simple and natural. But the difficulty arises with regard to the qualitative data. For example, in the study of the personality traits, it is not possible to have units because the traits are psychological entities. The social psychologists generally scale a personality trait on its two extremes. "Honest" *e.g.* may be quantified as 'always honest', 'most of the time honest', 'honest on less occasions,' and 'completely dishonest'. The qualifications attached to the word honest are ambiguous and vague. To make it more exact, it may be expressed in percentage as 100 per cent, 75 per cent, 50 per cent and 0 per cent honest. But this quantification is inadequate. The trait of honesty is not something static and exact. It is not a fixed entity. It cannot be measured as objectively as height and weight. It is a mental entity connected with the psychological problem of motivation. At every' stage of inquiry, it is not like a simple physical trait but a complex mental trait. The scale measures not the trait of honesty, but the extent to which an individual has been honest in a social situation. Estimation is of the timely behaviour and with reference to a particular situation. An over-all estimation of it is not possible. One may be rated, as honest in one aspect of his life and dishonest in another. From this timely appraisal and restricted domain of inquiry, it cannot be generalised that the individual either is or is not honest.

Similar is the case with the quantification of "intelligence". Intelligence is not one ability but a number of abilities found in the individual which make him proficient in different pursuits. If one is intelligent in science, he may not be so in arts and literature; he may even be proficient in one branch of study than in other. Intelligence is a capacity, partly given to use by nature in the form of an aptitude, a natural inclination, and partly developed by hard work and training. Intelligence is an ability to integrate the elements of experience, to reason, compare, comprehend and to tackle new situations.

One obvious defect of statistics is that it cuts the problem down to the size of the technique instead of raising the technique upto the size of the problem.[22]

The knowledge of social sciences cannot be had alone by the empirical and the statistical approach but by direct co-feeling, co-experiencing and co-living in the psycho-social states. A scientist who has never experienced joy or sorrow, love or hatred, religious and aesthetic bliss, justice or injustice can never obtain even the remotest knowledge of these states of living, feeling, wishing, emotion and thought. This leads to the significant conclusion that in spite of all objective technique verstehen functions as the basic tool of grasping the 'meaningful behaviour' of the individual and the group.

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[22] Sorokin, P. "Fads and Foibles About the Social Sciences". P.129