

# **IQBAL: A REFORMER OF ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY<sup>1</sup>**

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It is often suggested that the Islamic resurgence of recent years is a purely political movement. This is certainly not true of events in Pakistan. In that country's independence and in its progressive governmental philosophy can be seen one of the very few cases in history of the translation into reality of a philosophic theory of the state and life of man. The suggestion for a separate State for Indian Muslims came in the first instance from the philosopher Iqbal. Further, much of the political character that the new State now exhibits can be traced to the philosophic theories which Iqbal developed, and which were circulated by him both in Urdu and Persian poetry, and in the more conventional medium of English prose.

To understand the kind of revolution Iqbal brought about, as well as to appreciate his quite daring originality, the conceptual scheme which he recommended must be seen against the background of the intellectual history of Islam. The conventional Muslim account of man has, from the earliest times, been of a Cartesian orthodoxy, and parallel to this account there has been a similar account of the world as consisting of both physical and

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spiritual elements. In the early days of Islam both kinds of elements were accounted equally real and equally worthy of investigation. Muhammad himself instructed his followers in the great benefits they would derive from the study of nature. However, some five hundred years after the Prophet's death a marked change came over Islamic philosophy and religious practice. While it had formerly been an act of piety to study by the appropriate techniques either the physical or the spiritual world, it became, under the influence of a group of mystics called Sufis, proper to study only the spiritual. The explanation of this revolution need not detain us, but its effect was pervasive; the intellectual freedom and activity that had characterised the first five centuries of Muslim civilization rapidly disappeared. It required nearly a thousand years for a counter revolution to develop within this tradition, for Iqbal was the first Muslim philosopher wholly to oppose this orthodoxy.

His opposition is quite fundamental, and hangs, not upon piece meal revision of the traditional conceptual scheme but on the recommendation of one compounded partly of elements from the early centuries of Islamic culture, and partly of elements derived from an evolutionary view of the world, owing much to Bergson and Whitehead. The result is a new view and a novel interpretation of Quranic doctrines what Iqbal called his “reconstructions” that is wholly at variance with Sufi tradition.

Iqbal's reconstructions are based upon three main principles which he believes to be interconnected. They are:

1. There are three fundamentally different kinds of things we can study: inanimate matter, living organisms and minds. The attempts that have been made to study these three kinds of things (these three areas of experience) have given rise to three groups of sciences, the physical, the biological and the psychological. It is important to understand that Iqbal regarded psychology as one science among a group of mind studies, others being, for example, theology and the striving for mystical experience. The total picture of the world that we derive from all three groups of sciences is what Iqbal calls religion.

2. It is proper for an individual to be active. Blind obedience to that fate which is taken to be the will of God cannot offer any theoretical grounds for immortality, nor is the belief in predestination, which is supposed to justify the acceptance of Qismat, supported by experience in any of the three realms.

3. All these three kinds of things we can study are changing from what they were into something else. The world, the animate creation and God are each changing. Muhammad was the last prophet, not because he gave a final description of the three realms of experience, but because he recommended a method of enquiry that enables a day-to-day record of the change to be kept.

The metaphysical background is supplied by a theory of time. It is a principle for Iqbal that there are three main levels of experience, each with its appropriate group of science, but of these sciences only physics has provided us with a theory of time. The most developed form of the theory Iqbal takes to be that advocated by Whitehead, for whom "Nature is not a static fact in an adynamic void but a structure of events possessing the character of continuous creative flow, which thought cuts up into isolated immobilites out of whose mutual relations arise the

concepts of space and time.” This, however satisfying as a physical explanation of a certain kind of temporal experience, cannot be taken as a complete philosophic theory, for it concerns only one of the three “regions of Reality.” Iqbal says, “Time as a free creative movement has no meaning for the theory. It does not pass, events do not happen (on this theory), we simply meet them.” No mathematical theory which treats time as another dimension of space will do as an explanation either, for this takes away the essential element of change which is the central feature of our experience of time. For a complete theory we must turn to the other levels of experience, since if physical explanations will not do for time as experienced in other ways, perhaps from them we may derive an explanation for the character of physical time.

A theory satisfying to the three realms is provided by Iqbal by the exploitation of an analogy between the relation of perception to physical reality and the relation of the third realm to perception. Iqbal argues that there must be two selves going to make up each individual, these he calls the efficient and the appreciative self, for there is an inner as well as an outer experience, and so there must be an inner something to be experienced. The efficient self is that which concerns itself with, and which is itself partially formed by, the physical world. We know quite well that the time of the physical world is serial time and the succession of impressions is what the efficient self apprehends. This self Iqbal likens to Kant's transcendental unity of apperception. The other self, the appreciative self, is available only to keep introspection, and when we do find it, by, for example, religious exercises, we

find ourselves in “appreciative time,” a “changeless now.” This, of course, cannot be described by us consciously since to do so we would be required to use categories applicable only to serial time. In our ordinary experience of ourselves the efficient self is dominant and breaks up this changeless now into a series of nows ; and these, so Iqbal says, are the instants of linear time. It is in various analogies with this process that Iqbal finds the “typical movement of life.” Analogies drawn are: God to his creation ; from a confused to a clear perception of reality; from “knowledge-as-a-whole” to the abstractions of the physical and other sciences.

Having made this analysis Iqbal then makes another conceptual recommendation of great importance. We are to regard, he says, the appreciative self and its analogues as creative. We do not, for example, find things, we make them. “What we call things are events in the continuity of nature which thought spatializes and thus regards as mutually isolated for the purposes of actions.” Not only do we make things, but in political and ethical action, among other things, Iqbal believes that we also make our ends. He regards this view as a consequence of the two kinds of experience, the inner and the outer. The result of our inner experience is the grasping of a continual succession of goals and purposes which give significance to everything that happens. The past and the future are carried into every event. There is no final cause, for this would involve the loss of that spontaneity that Iqbal regards as one of the facts about our lives that are indubitably given.

Now what holds the efficient and appreciative selves together into an individual? Iqbal answers this by invoking a Bergsonian term “duration,” by which he means that all events which come one after another in serial time are held in a kind of suspension. Only out of such a suspension, Iqbal argues, can creation take place. There is no time logically prior to this background self. However, this vague exposition is not Iqbal's last word on “duration,” for in discussing the nature of God he provides an explanation of the queer notion of suspension. Both Iqbal's religious theory and his ethical principles are developed within the conceptual scheme that I have just sketched.

Let us now see how Iqbal put this metaphysics to work. It must be remembered that Iqbal's main purpose as a philosopher was practical, he aimed at the reformation of the character of a culture and his method was the philosophic reconstruction of the fundamental tenets of Islam. This practical purpose showed itself in a reconstructed theology and reformed ethics.

Iqbal's theology begins with the proposition that God must be capable of change. This is not “change in the serial sense where change is marked by one state giving way to another but in the appreciative sense. This means that when, in our perception of him, God is serialized, he appears to change, the many aspects which are held in intimate, contemporary suspension in him appreciatively are serialized by our understanding into a changing, evolving Godhead and his Creation.” It follows from this doctrine that God can be both continuously creative and yet remain the

same. When we understand him and the universe in a serialized procession of states, the source of these states is the suspension in God of everything that has been, is and will be looked at by our efficient selves. God is creative, but perceived by the deep experience of our appreciative selves he is complete and together, existing, as it were, all at once. From this theology follows an altogether new explanation of the traditional Islamic doctrine of the finality of the prophethood.

Prophets appear in history, one following another, each contributing but a deep appreciative understanding to our serialized knowledge of God and the Universe. Iqbal talks of this process, the paradigm of all mystical experience, as the “supercharged ego” bringing back knowledge from God. Now since both God, in his aspect as the serialized Universe, and Man as his efficient self are changing, it is quite unreasonable to believe that any revelation which occurred at a given Point in the serialized succession of states that is history, is a final revelation of the character of God which is wholly appreciative, and which can only be understood serial-wise at the end of time, that is never. Muhammad was the last prophet, not because he brought the final revelation of truth, but because he brought the method of free, personal enquiry which made further revelations unnecessary. Each man has the way clear for him now, if he wishes, to experience God and understand the world for himself. The search for understanding is keyed to our metaphysical explanation of ourselves as having through the two selves, efficient and appreciative, an entrance to both worlds of knowledge, without

and within. It was the mistake, Iqbal believes, of the Sufis to concentrate upon the exploration within, and it is the mistake of the Franks, the people of the technocratic cultures, to concentrate upon the exploration without. The acceptance of true Islam Muhammad's Islam, commits a man to both kinds of exploration if he would understand the whole world. From being a creature upon which knowledge is imposed man has evolved into a creature who demands knowledge for himself. Since both God and Man have changed, is it surprising that relations have changed too?

This is the broad metaphysical picture that Iqbal sketches. Within the details we will find his moral theory. The question which leads to the statement of a moral theory, is: how can the free creative appreciative egos of men exist within the free creative appreciative Ego of God? How can both be free? Iqbal answers as follows.

“The truth is that the whole theological controversy relating to predestination is due to pure speculation with no eye on the spontaneity of life, which is a fact of actual experience. No doubt the emergence of ego endowed with the power of spontaneous and hence unforeseeable action is, in a sense, a limitation of the freedom of the all-inclusive Ego. But this limitation is not externally imposed. It is born out of God's creative freedom, whereby he has chosen finite egos to be participants of his life, power and freedom.” But perhaps this freedom is an illusion of the serializing self. Iqbal argues that we could not exist as individuals if we did not, in some sense, act contrary to the world. He says,



“The life of the ego is a kind of tension caused by the ego invading the environment and the environment invading the ego . . . it is present in the areas of mutual invasion, as a directive energy, and is formed and disciplined by its own experience. It is open to man as thus conceived to belong to the meaning of the universe and become immortal.” In this way Iqbal exorcises that strict determinism that had provided such an important element in Islamic moral and political theory as the doctrine of Qismat. A person comes into being only through individual striving and creative activity. The causistical consequence of the rejection of Qismat, the fixed destiny, in favour of Taqdir, the personal creation of destiny, is the claim Iqbal makes, that a man is good only by striving according to those ends which by inward meditation or empirical investigation he makes for himself. Only in this sense must men work out their destiny.

The casuistry is reinforced by a corresponding theory of immortality. It was mentioned above that Iqbal believed life to centre in the tension between mind and environment, a tension which holds an individual together and makes the centre to which his individuality can refer. A person is self-sustained, in individuality, just so far as he resists absorption in nature. Death then becomes the test for the power of self-maintenance in man. “Personal immortality,” says Iqbal, “is not ours by right, it is to be achieved by personal effort.” Paradoxically one creates oneself at the same time and by the same process as one serializes the creation of God, the world of nature. In particular the study of

the science would not be inimical to immortality on this view, but a positive assistance.

In describing this metaphysical system, my intention has been purely expository and not critical. Internal criticism of the system could no doubt be made to seem fatal to it, but would be based upon a misunderstanding of a metaphysical system's purpose and character. External criticism would require a judgement on a way of life for which it is inappropriate to ask in less than a full scale's study. My purpose in this article is to make clear what a man, whom many now follow, thought about his religion for holding the opinion he did. If these reasons and opinions have no intrinsic interest, then the metaphysician has failed altogether in his recommendations for a reformed conceptual scheme. This suggests the kind of judgement which it would be appropriate to make.

Iqbal proposed a counter-revolution within the Islamic tradition. Though the spur for his reconstructions came from study of Kant and Whitehead, he seems as one might expect to have gained some of his most characteristic attitudes and opinions from philosophers deviating little from Islamic tradition. For example, Iqbal provides an explanation of the Divine suspension of states in non-temporal duration, resolving the paradox by a distinction between intensive and extensive infinity. A never ending extensive infinity of states can be generated by some extensively limited but intensively infinite process, as an infinite series can be generated from a short formula. This distinction of

kinds of infinites is made a great deal of by the thirteenth century Persian mystic Rumi, for whom Iqbal often professed admiration as the great practitioner of enlightenment by inward exploration. Again, he takes from the tradition, and especially from Rumi, the classical notion of expressing a moral theory in a description of the perfect man. Iqbal's perfect man shows in his character the philosopher's rejection of the doctrine of Qismat. Salvation through the dissolution of self is to be replaced as a moral ideal by salvation through the assertion of self. It should be clear from the character of Iqbal's metaphysics that this assertion is not like the assertion recommended by existentialists. It is assertion of self, not by the doing of something simple for the sake of action, but a complicated and difficult process of scientific enlightenment, mystical experience and finally rational action towards those ends to which the two ways of knowledge lead us.

Finally I should like to make it clear that nowhere in Iqbal's work do we find a connected, strictly argued philosophic system. Iqbal is not a philosopher in the sense in which this term was understood in the European academic tradition. He aimed quite self-consciously to inculcate an attitude and not to argue a case. With this attitude to metaphysics we would, in our post-Wittgenstein world, agree. However, Iqbal does aim to convince, and his system is intended to be intellectually acceptable; it is not intended to be a soft philosophy. Nevertheless, I believe that we must ask of such systems not "Is it true or acceptable?" but "could I live by it?"