

IQBAL ON THE CONCEPTION OF MORALITY

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I propose to discuss in this paper Iqbal's view on the conception of morality. This study will not include an analysis of what the moral philosophers describe first-order ethical terms like 'right', 'good' etc., but will confine itself to an examination of second-order ethical terms as 'moral' or 'non-moral' when these are applied to norms, values, judgements and reasons, etc. The question that I am to discuss shall be in the form, what are the characteristics of a principle which entitle it to be called moral? or what characteristics, formal or material, are intrinsic to morality? Iqbal, it is true, did not write any treatise on morality but his works contain a number of statements which provide a lot of material to answer the question that I propose to discuss.

I

A principle for Iqbal is moral only if it is freely chosen. Further, this choice is exercised when the individual is in possession of complete knowledge about the facts. Conventional values have no place in the thought of Iqbal. Operative principles if accepted blindly or on authority lead to degeneration of the self and thus negate a material condition which Iqbal considers essential to the meaning of morality. For, a moral principle has

not only certain formal features but has also a material condition as intrinsic to its very definition. Iqbal regards integration of personality as built into the very definition of morality.

' Moral reasoning is present if the ego-integration principle is appealed to. A choice is moral if it is ego-sustaining and is immoral if it is ego-dissolving. The moral principle is a vital principle which is legislated not from the consideration of the circumstances of a particular community or people but from a plane of existence which is above spatial and temporal circumstances of a particular group, i.e. a principle is moral if it is not 'culture bound'. It transcends the cultural limitations of a group and thus has the formal characteristics of being universalizable and of being supreme or overriding and is trans-individual.

The social environment to which an individual belongs is made up of customs and traditions, do's and don'ts, which were existentially' experienced in the remote past by authentic individuals. Adherence to these for the persons who conceived them was essential to the meaning of morality. With the change of circumstances and conditions which are consequent upon knowledge and experience, conventional values lose their true import. They cannot be, therefore, considered, from the point of later generations, as essential to morality. In order to have a moral point of view one has to rise above the level of conventional values, to a plane of existence which is not tinged with local hue derived from the ethos of a people. The moral law is thus

essentially enacted by a man of Vision. The moral legislator has to tear himself from the fetters of his culture and to seek contact with the roots of his own being. Such a kind of contact Iqbal describes as “Travel into Yourself.” The individual can have the moral point of view even if he remains at the level of customary morality (the stage of obedience to Law), the same point of view is available at the level of reflective morality (the stage of self-overcoming). One can also ascend to the level of creative morality (the stage of Viceregency) and, for Iqbal, a principle to be truly moral has to be enacted from this third and the highest level. When an individual legislates from the level of creative morality his choice is not arbitrary as is the case with some existentialists but is well-grounded and is trans-individual and in a way trans-milieu. This in brief is a statement of Iqbal's conception of morality. He has emphasized both formal and material conditions as essential to the meaning of morality.

II

Iqbal characterizes the moral point of view in individualistic, social and material terms. A principle or norm for Iqbal is moral only if it is freely chosen and is not accepted on authority. In fact conventional values are rejected by Iqbal. Imitation, uncritical acceptance of norms or values leads to degeneration of the self which would in turn negate the material condition or content element of morality. In Payam-1

Mashriq (p. 62), he says:

تراش از تیشۀ خود جادۀ خویش

براه دیگران رفتن عذاب است

گر از دست تو کار نادر آید

گناہے ہم اگر باشد ثواب است

Carve your path with your own axe, Following the beaten track is calamitous. if you accomplish something unique, It is virtue even if it is a sin.

Again (ibid., p. 264):

اگر تقلید بودے شیوہ خوب

پیمبر ہم رہ اجداد رفتے

Had imitation been morally good,

The prophet would have followed the practice of his ancestors.

Again (ibid., p. 64):

میاں آب و گل خلوت گزیدم

از افلاطون و فارابی بریدم

نکردم از کسے در یوزة چشم

جهان را جز بچشم خود ندیدم

In this place of mud and water I took solitary abode, I turned away from Plato and Fārābī; I did not beg for sight from any one,

I have not looked at the world but through my own eyes. Again (ibid., p. 188):

ز خاک خویش طلب آتشی که پیدا نیست

تجلی دگرے در خور تقاضا نیست

Seek from your own clay the fire that is lacking:

The illumination of another person is not worth having.

But is this free choice available to the individual? Is man free or has he to win freedom? From the fact of “guidance and directive control in the ego's activity,” Iqbal concludes that “ego is a free personal causality.” But he warns that there is a constant rise and fall in this power to act freely.⁵³ The ego is most free at the level of appreciative self. At this level it is above distinction of caste and creed, culture and nationality (ibid., p. 91):

⁵³ Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 109.

هنوز از بند آب و گل نه رستی

تو گوئی رسمی و افغانیم من

من اول آدم بے رنگ و بویم

از آن پس هندی و توارانیم من

You have not yet freed yourself from earth-rootedness, You say, I am a Rūmi and an Afghani.

I am first a being above the distinction of colour and scent, Afterward I label myself Hindi or T'titran-I.

Iqbal makes a distinction between the efficient self and the appreciative self.⁵⁴ The former is the practical self of daily life while the latter is one that we have in moments of deepest meditation, when the efficient self is held in abeyance. It is the inner centre of experience. You have freedom in the highest degree when you rise to the level of the appreciative self. Free choice is truly speaking choice exercised by the appreciative self. At this level the individual is in direct contact with the roots of his own being. His Vision of life and Values goes beyond the limitations of time and space. In *Gulshan-i Rāz-i Jadid*, he says:

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

بخود پیچیم و برے تاب نمودیم
که ماموجیم و از قصر وجودیم
دما دم خویش را اندر کمین باش
گریزان از گمان سوئے یقین باش
تب و تاب محبت را فنا نیست
یقین و دید را نیز انتها نیست
کمال زندگی دیدار ذات است
طریقش رستن از بند جهات است
چنان با ذات حق خلوت گزینی
ترا او بیند و او را تو بینی
منور شو ز نور من یرانی
مژه برهم مزن تو خود نمایی
بخود محکم گزار اندر حضورش

Our selves are our centres and pine for manifestation, For we are Waves and rise from the bottom of Being. Lie in constant ambush against the self, Fly from doubt to faith and certainty.

The fire and ardour of love are not subject to extinction ; Faith and 'sight' have no end.

The perfection of life consists in seeing the Essence,

The way of achieving it is to free oneself from the limits of time and space.

You should enjoy privacy with the Divine Person in such a way, That He sees you and you see Him.

Become illumined by the light of “What you see,”

Do not wink, otherwise you will be no more.

In His presence, be strong and self-possessed,

Don't merge yourself in the Ocean of His light.⁵⁵

This 'sinking' in the depth of the appreciative self yields an experience which Iqbal terms as “vital way of appropriating the world.” The moral legislator views human situation from that

⁵⁵ Question 7, lines 15-28. Translation by B. A. Dar.

point of view. It is creative of norms and values. At this level the norms are intuited. In Zabur-i 'Ajam (p. 167) he says:

خوشا کسے کہ حرم را درون سینه شناخت

دمے تپید و گزشت از مقام گفت و شنود

How happy the man who recognizes the Sanctuary in his own bosom,

Ile consumed himself for a while and passed beyond the stage of argumentation.

But when the norms and values thus discovered are given content, limitations creep in. In Payām-i Mashriq (p. 76), he says:

تراشیدم صنم بر صورت خویش

بشکل خود خدا را نقش بستم

مرا از خود برون رفتن محال است

بہر رنگے کہ ہستم خود پرستم

I carved idols after my own image,

I pictured even God after my own form.

I cannot transcend limitations of my being,

Whatever form I assume I worship my own self.

Again (ibid., p. 71):

هزاران سال با فطرت نشستم

با و پیوستم و از خود گسستم

و لیکن سر گذشتم این دو حرف است

تراشیدم، پرستیدم، شکستم

For thousand years I sat with nature,

I became tagged to her and broke away from myself.

My story is contained in these words:

I carved idols, worshipped them and broke them later on.

Thus for Iqbal a principle or norm is moral when it is freely chosen in the light of available knowledge, i.e. is not taken on authority. Those who remain at the level of custom sink to a sub-human plane. Iqbal quotes in two of his works Rumi's famous lines about a Shaykh who, in broad-day light, was roaming about with a lamp in hand in search of a real man. The followers of custom appeared animals and beasts to the Shaykh:

دی شیخ با چراغ همی گشت کرد شهر

کز دام و دد ملولم و انسانم آرزوست

زین ہمرہان سست عناصر دلم گرفت

شیر خدا و رستم دستانم آرزوست

Yesterday the Master with a lantern was roaming about the city, Crying, 'I am tired of devil and beast, I desire a man. My heart is weary of these weak-spirited companions; I desire the Lion of God and Rustam, son of Zal.'

Vision of values and norms bestow upon the individual unlimited Power. He regards his principles supreme. He says (Bang-i Dara, p. 292):

برتر از اندیشہ سود و زیاں ہے زندگی

ہے کبھی جاں اور کبھی تسلیم جاں ہے زندگی

Life is above the consideration of profit and loss.

Sometimes it is synonymous with soul and sometimes it is surrendering the soul.

Now if a principle is moral only if it is freely chosen and is also held supreme by the individual, on what basis can it be conceived as trans-individual? It may be binding on the individual who discovers it or creates it. It is immersed in pure subjectivity.

May we not say with the existentialists that norms and values are not valid in themselves. Your norms are valid for you only. You take away my freedom when you give to your norms social currency. On what basis do you claim trans-individual validity for your judgement? At one point you condemn uncritical acceptance of norms and values and at another you consider your moral principle as trans-individual. Iqbal establishes the trans-individual character of moral law on the basis of his ontological position. The plane of appreciative self is the same for all. Moral law at that plane is universal. The appreciative self brings home to you that “we are waves and rise from the bottom of Being.”⁵⁶ It is this contact 'I with the source of all norms and values that guarantees trans-individual validity to principles subjectively discovered.

Nothing has so far been said about the material or content of the moral principle. Only formal characteristics of a moral principle have been stipulated. These characteristics are: a principle is moral if it is chosen freely in the light of full knowledge of facts, is held supreme, is universalizable and trans-individual. Iqbal believes that the moral law has a content aspect as well. For Iqbal the goal of moral activity is integration of self or personality. Iqbal conceives human personality as an act. “Thus my personality is not a thing, it is an act. My experience is only a series of acts, mutually referring to one another and held together by the unity of a directive purpose.”⁵⁷ Further, he says, in the

⁵⁶ Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid, question 7, line 16.

⁵⁷ Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 103.

English introduction to *The Secrets of the Self*, “The idea of personality gives us a standard of value, it settles the problem of good and evil. That which fortifies personality is good, that which weakens it is bad. Art, religion and ethics must be judged from the stand point of personality.” In a poem in *Bāl-e Jibreel* (p. 98), he says:

سرود و شعر و سیاست کتاب و دین و ہنر

گہر ہیں ان کی گرہ میں تمام یکدانہ

ضمیر بندۂ خاکی سے ہے نمود ان کی

بلند تر ہے ستاروں سے ان کا کاشانہ

اگر خودی کی حفاظت کریں تو عین حیات

نہ کر سکیں تو سراپا فسوں و افسانہ

Music, poetry and politics, literature, religion and art—All these contain in their fold pearls of a unique kind. These disciplines grow from the conscience of man. Their abode is higher than that of the stars.

If they fortify the ego they become the very essence of life, If they fail, they are mere illusion and fiction.

The social concern of the moral law is equally important. Self cannot develop in isolation. It needs a social environment and cannot exist without it. He says (Bāng-i Dara, p. 210):

فرد قائم ربط ملت سے تنہا کچھ نہیں

موج ہے دریا میں اور بیرون دریا کچھ نہیں

Individual exists by virtue of his ties with Millat, A wave can exist only in a river, Outside the river it is nothing.

This development of the individual is fully represented by the two concepts of 'Ishq and Faqr, the positive and negative aspects of La ilaha Wallah. 'Ishq stands for love and sustained devotion to the ideal and Faqr “indicates that attitude of mind which enables a man to strive, shunning all delights and all rewards except the attainment of worthy ends.” This attitude prepares the individual to fight against all forces of evil, to rescue mankind from servitude. But the real progress of society depends on mard-i hur (cf. Pas Chey Bāyad Kard). Self-centred individuals alone reveal the depth of life. They disclose new standards in the light of which we begin to see that our environment is not wholly inviolable and requires revision.⁵⁸ He says:

آگ اس کی پھونک دیتی ہے برنا و پیر کو

⁵⁸ Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 151.

لاکھوں میں ایک بھی ہو اگر صاحب یقین

His fire ignites the young and the old,

If there is only one man of faith in a multitude of thousands.

Iqbal conceives three stages in the normal development of the individual i.e. stages in the self-integration of the person. These are

(i) obedience to Law. Here the individual is required to conform to the operative values of the group. The moral law is a force that acts from outside. This stage is followed by (ii) self-control or self-overcoming. This self-control or self-overcoming is a common feature to all conceptions of morality in the ancient and the modern world. "Specific differences between particular moralities may be due," says Walter A. Kaufmann, "to divergent conceptions not only of the aim and sanction, but also of the manner of self-overcoming. Thus the classical ideal was that reason should control the inclinations, while Kant insisted that inclination must be overcome to the extent that it may not be a co-motive of action."⁵⁹ This self-control for Iqbal is the control of the efficient self by the appreciative self. The third stage is possible only if appreciative self rules and directs the efficient self (Darb-i Kalim, p. 71):

صبح ازل یہ مجھ سے کہا جبرئیل نے

⁵⁹ Kaufmann, Nietzsche, p. 187.

جو عقل کا غلام ہو وہ دل نہ کر قبول

At the beginning of life Gabriel told me:

Do not accept a heart which is a slave of reason.

The vital experience of the appreciative self is the essence while ends and objectives, values and 'norms' are its changing manifestations. In Nietzschean terminology they are mere foregrounds. The third state is the stage of Divine Vicegerency, the stage of creative morality. In my account of Iqbal's conception of morality I have considered it from the point of view of the third stage.

III

Now on the questions: (i) whether or not a claim to intersubjective validity is to be taken as essential to moral judgement and (ii) whether or not a material (individual and social) concern is to be regarded as essential to morality, Iqbal's position is quite clear. Iqbal claims intersubjective validity as essential to moral judgement. It is true that universal agreement on moral judgements may not be available, but we never make a claim that a moral judgement has no validity beyond ourselves. Our disagreement on moral judgements may be due to the difference in the levels of our moral development. The point of view at the stage of obedience to law or conformity to operative values is narrower and culture-oriented as compared with the one

you have at the stage of creative morality. This has been conceded by Ayer. If there is this difference then the intersubjective validity of moral judgement is restricted to the level of the group you belong to. Even thus understood its validity is not confined to ourselves. Again disagreement on moral matters are partly resolved with more factual enlightenment. pierce was giving expression to the faith of the moralists when he said that those who share the moral point of view will agree in the end, as those will, who share the scientific point of view. A scientist has to check his data and rearrange his facts if he finds that others in the field do not agree with his conclusion. Similarly if in morals despite agreements on facts if still there is disagreement the individual must ask himself if his judgement has really been made from the moral point of view.

As to the question whether or not material concern is to be regarded as essential to morality, Iqbal's answer is in the affirmative. As referred to above Iqbal recommends that ethics must be judged from the standpoint of personality. It may be here noted that Iqbal's use of morality is a descriptive claim and not a normative claim. A descriptive claim implies that the term is actually used in the sense specified while a normative claim makes a proposal about the use of the term.

Before proceeding further one clarification about Iqbal's conception of morality is required. This pertains to the fact that individual concern is held by Iqbal as essential to morality. It may be argued that ego-centred morality is only enlightened self-

interest. To regard social concern as essential to morality may be acceptable but to confine morality to individual concern may distort morality beyond recognition. Such a line of argument will amount to a complete misunderstanding of Iqbal's position regarding the inherent unity of individuals and also the task of his mard-i hur or mard-i momin. His rider of destiny is to silence the noise of nations, has to harp the tune of brotherhood and to bring once more days of peace to the world.⁶⁰

About the unity of mankind he says:

نه افغانيم و نه ترک و تتراريم

چمن زاديم و از يک شاخساريم

تميز رنگ و بو بر ما حرام است

که ما پرورده يک نوبهاريم

We are neither Afghans nor Turks nor sons of Tartary. We are born in a garden, are from one branch. The distinction of scent and colour is forbidden for us For we are the nurslings of one spring time.

Thus the material concern essential to morality for Iqbal is individualistic and social and the charge of narrow egoism does not hold good. But even if we concede that, for Iqbal, material

⁶⁰ Cf. The Secrets of the Self, Eng. trans., pp. 83-84.

concern intrinsic to morality is social, the position is not unassailable. The followers of Kant may say that moral law is only formal, and it has no content. Thus content reference is not essential to morality. It may be urged that we do not in fact apply the term moral only to those judgements which appeal to the social concern. Some apply it even to those judgements which appeal to the will of God. Again, the intuitionists may deny that all moral duties have a social reference. Thus social concern is not in fact taken as necessary condition of morality. Nor can it be regarded as a sufficient condition for the obvious reason that without the condition of universalization there can hardly be any morality. And lastly if a person were to ask: why should I be socially oriented? there is no answer. Morality should carry its own sanction. It should, there-fore, be defined in a way that the individual cannot sensibly ask but why? Iqbal's conception of morality does not fulfil this condition.