

IQBAL AND BERGSON: CONCEPT OF TIME

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Time is a central concept in Iqbal's philosophy, From various accounts we know that the tradition *la tasubbu ad-dahr* i.e. Do not vilify Time (for Time is God), accompanied Iqbal all his life. He even surprised Henri Bergson with it when he visited the French philosopher in Paris."He took this prophetic word for a designation of that overwhelming reality of which time and space are only aspects." In 1933, he wrote,"If dahr is continuous and extended and if it is Allah himself - what then, is space? Just as if time is a kind of reflection of dahr." Iqbal emphasizes time more than space. Time is more fundamental than space; it is related to space as soul is to the body. It is the mind of space. Pure duration is the matrix of the whole universe.

In his view of time, Iqbal comes nearest to Bergson of whom he says;"among the representatives of contemporary thought Bergson is the only thinker who has made a keen study of the phenomenon of duration in time". Bergson uses 'time' in two senses. In its narrow or superficial sense it means specialized or clock time. In its wider or real sense it is conceived as 'duree' which is not mere blank lastingness, enduring through a hypostatized, specialized Time—it is ceaseless, continuous flow in which all things live and move and have their being. Like Heraclitus, Bergson insists that the notion of ceaseless change is

fundamental, but unlike him he does not stultify the notion by permitting cyclic repetition. For him, *duree* evolves ever new and newer forms, that is, it is genuinely creative.

Like Bergson, Iqbal distinguishes between the serial and non-serial aspects of time. The former is associated with what Iqbal calls the efficient self and the latter with the appreciative self. The efficient or practical self is related to the spatial world. While retaining its unity as a totality, the efficient self reveals itself as a series of discrete (quantum) states. The time of this efficient self is just a dimension of the space-time continuum. It is of the serial character postulated by the Ash'arites. The time in which the efficient self lives is the time of which we predicate 'long' and 'short'. It is hardly distinguishable from space. Time, thus regarded, is not true time, according to Bergson.⁹ The appreciative ego lives in pure duration, i.e. change without succession. According to Iqbal, the unity of the appreciative ego is like the unity of the germ in which the experiences of its ancestors exist, not as a plurality, but as a unity in which every experience permeates the whole. There is no numerical distinctness of states in the totality of the ego, the multiplicity of whose elements is wholly qualitative. There is change and movement but they are not divisible. Their elements interpenetrate and are wholly non-serial in character. The time of the appreciative self is a single 'now' which the efficient self spatializes into a series of 'nows'.

⁹ Reconstruction, p. 46.

Bergson also points out the difference between time as infected by the idea of space and pure time: "when we speak of time we generally think of a homogeneous medium in which our conscious states are ranged alongside one another as in space, so as to form a discrete multiplicity. Would not time, thus understood, be to the multiplicity of our psychic states what intensity is to certain of them—a sign, a symbol, absolutely distinct from true duration? Let us ask consciousness to isolate itself from the external world, and, by a vigorous effort of abstraction, to become itself again. We shall then put this question to it: does the multiplicity of our conscious states bear the slightest resemblance to the multiplicity of the units of a number? Has true duration anything to do with space?...If time, as the reflective consciousness represents it, is a medium in which our conscious states form a discrete series so as to admit of being counted, and if on the other hand our conception of number ends in spreading out in space everything which can be directly counted, it is to be presumed that time, understood in the sense of a medium in which we make distinctions and count, is nothing but space . . . it follows that pure duration must be something different".¹⁰ It has been pointed out that Bergson does not deny succession to pure duration. For him the flow of pure duration is a succession of interpenetrating states. Iqbal takes away succession altogether. For him pure duration is eternity in the sense of change without succession.

¹⁰ (Bergson, H., *Time and Free Will*, translated by Pogson, F. L., London, 1910, pp. 90-91)

Iqbal agrees with Bergson that pure duration is known intuitively rather than intellectually. Bergson points out the barrenness and artificiality of intellectual abstraction which cannot perceive the organic unity of life."Instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside them in order to recompose their becoming artificially. We take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality."¹¹ Iqbal's distinction between intellect and intuition, like Bergson's, is in alignment with his distinction between specialized time and *duree*. In *Gulshan-e-Raz-e-Jadid* (p. 216) Iqbal says:

Unable to perceive infinity,
The intellect just multiplies pure unity
Lame, it likes to stand still;
And blind, give up the kernel for the shell
The stars and planets that we see
Are fragments of reality –
Creations of the intellect
Which must dissect.
We never saw Time with our inner sight

¹¹ (Bergson, H., *Time and Free Will*, translated by Pogson, F. L., London, 1911, p 332.

And have invented year and month and day and night.¹²

And again he comments upon the inadequacy of the intellectual approach to the question of time (Gulshan, p. 229):

The Intellect counts every breath With a clock's hand,

As if breath were Time's unit. So it can never comprehend

And take the measure of Infinity. It only fashions night and day, Imaginary parts of Time.

Afraid to seize the flame,

It gathers sparks alone.¹³

He compares the intuitive and the intellectual mode of perceiving reality (Gulshan, p. 229):

Life's essence is eternal, though seen with the body's eye it is a part of Time.¹⁴

Thus for Iqbal, it is "only in the moments of profound meditation, when the efficient self is in abeyance, that we sink into our deeper self and reach the inner centre of experience."¹⁵ However it is to be remembered here that Iqbal does not agree with Bergson in thinking that thought only "that spatializes living

¹² Translation by Husain, H., p.7.

¹³ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁵ Reconstruction pp 47-48H

processes. For him, in its deeper movement, that is "in its true nature", thought "is identical with life".

Iqbal shares with enthusiasm an idea found both in the Qur'an and in Bergson's philosophy, namely, that time is creative. Bergson vehemently opposed the old idea expressed in Ecclesiastes that "there is nothing new under the sun."

On the contrary, he urges if we picture duration as a ceaseless as a ceaseless flow, we are bound to hold some kind of an evolutionary view in conjunction with it. Time is not static, it is a process continually working towards ever new forms which cannot be predicted. He takes the example of a painter. "The painter is before his canvas, the colours are on the palette, the model is sitting—all this we see, and also we know the painter's style: do we foresee what will appear on the canvas? We possess the elements of the problem; we know in an abstract way, now it will be solved, for the portrait will surely resemble the model and will surely resemble also the artist but the concrete solution brings with it that unforeseeable nothing which is everything in a work of art."¹⁶

According to Bergson, "science can work only on what is supposed to repeat itself—that is to say, on what is withdrawn, by hypothesis, from the action of real time" and thus "concentrated on that which repeats, solely preoccupied in welding the same to the same, intellect turns away from the vision of time." Iqbal also

¹⁶ Creative Evolution, p. 360.

points out that creation and not repetition is the characteristic of real time."If time is real, and not a mere repetition of homogeneous moments which make conscious experience a delusion, then every moment in the reality is original, giving birth to what is absolutely novel and unforeseeable

...To exist in real time is not to be bound by the fetters of serial time, but to create it from moment to moment and to be absolutely free and original in creation...creation is opposed to repetition which is characteristic of mechanical action. That is why it is impossible to explain the creative activity of life in terms of mechanism¹⁷

Despite the many similarities between the thought of Bergson and Iqbal, there are certain significant differences. Bergson denies the teleological Character unreal of Reality on the ground that it makes time According to him,"the portals of the future must remain wide open to Reality"; otherwise it will not be free and creative. Thus if teleology is admitted, the primordial freshness of *duree* will be nullified. Iqbal points out that this objection only holds good so long as teleology means the acting out of a plan in view of a pre-determined purpose. As Professor Bausani observes,"such a religious predestinationalism would destroy the freedom of both God and man," Teleology is to be understood not as a vitalistic-creative process—a line not already drawn, but a line in the drawing—an actualization of open possibilities. The world-process"is purposive only in this sense that it is selective in

¹⁷ Reconsruction, p. 50.

character and brings itself to some sort of present fulfillment by actively preserving and supplementing the past.” For Iqbal, then, ultimate Reality "is pure duration in which thought, life and purpose interpenetrate to form an organic unity”.¹⁸ In his opinion Bergson’s mistake was that he overlooked the forward looking aspect of consciousness which makes it teleological.

According to Iqbal, Bergson was wrong in that he considered pure time as preceding the Person, of whom alone both pure duration and *elan vital* can be predicated. Pure time cannot keep the multiplicity of objects together. The multiplicity of nature, broken up into innumerable instants, can only be grasped by the appreciative act of a lasting self which can build it up together in a lasting synthesis. For Iqbal, time, although an essential element in reality, is not reality itself. In Greek and Hindu thought time was bound to things visible and escape from it was possible only through self-annihilation, but Iqbal boldly introduces Time into the very heart of God. God is not the unmoved mover; the God portrayed by the Qur’an is an active changing, and living God. For Iqbal, God lives both in eternity and in serial time. The former means change without succession while the latter is organically related to eternity in so far as it is a measure of eternity. In Javid Nama (pp. 178-180), Iqbal attempts to portray life in the non-serial time of the world beyond creation:

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 55.

I passed beyond the bounds of this universe
And set foot in the undimensioned world,
A world . . . without both right and left,
A world devoid of night and day.
In that universe was another world
Whose origin was from Divine fiat,
Undecaying, and every moment transformed,
Unimaginable, yet there clearly visible;
Every moment clothed in a new perfection,
Every moment clad in a new beauty.
Its time had no need of moon and sun;
In its expanse the nine spheres are contained.¹⁹

Serial time comes into existence only by the very act of creation:"The Time of the Ultimate Ego is revealed as change without succession, i.e., an organic whole which appears atomic because of the creative movement of the ego. This is what Mir Damad Mulla Baqir means when he says that time is born with the act of creation by which the Ultimate Ego realizes and measures, so to speak, the infinite wealth of His own

¹⁹ Translation by Arberry, pp. 113-114.

undetermined possibilities.” Hence it is possible for Iqbal to interpret logically the two contrasting statements on creation in the Quran: "All things have We created bound by a fixed decree: and Our command is no more than a single word, like the twinkling of an eye" (54: 50) "and do thou trust in Him who liveth and dieth not; and celebrate His praise who hath created the heavens and the earth, and whatever is between them, in six days; and ascended His Throne; the Merciful" (25:60). Viewed intellectually, one Divine Day, in the terminology of the Quran and the Old Testament, becomes equal to a thousand years. But from another viewpoint, the process of creation is a single act as swift as the twinkling of an eye. Iqbal illustrates this point further. The sensation of red is caused by a wave-motion of the frequency of 400 billion per second and is practically incalculable, yet it is received by the eye in a single momentary act of perception.