

METAPHYSICS OF PERSIA AND IQBĀL

Manzoor Ahmad

Islāmic philosophy or, as it is sometimes called, Arabic philosophy can as well be called Persian philosophy. Except for the fact that most of it is written in the Arabic language there is nothing Arabic about it. Many of the philosophers who excelled in scholastic thought in the metaphysics of mysticism and in using Greek philosophy for interpreting Islām were Persians. So large is their number that, over half a century ago, the development of metaphysics in Persia, which is but a paradigm of Muslim philosophy, served Iqbāl as the subject of a Ph. D. thesis. This thesis was subsequently published in Pakistan several times. It may be interesting to note the indigenous Persian traits in Islāmic thought in the face of the claim made by Western scholars that all Muslim philosophy is merely a footnote on Greek thought. We are not, however, at the moment concerned with this aspect of Muslim philosophy. The subject of our inquiry is the development of Iqbāl's thought from his earlier to his later period with a view, especially, to finding out whether there was any substantial change in it, as has been claimed by some Iqbāl scholars. For the purposes of that inquiry we will concentrate on his two main philosophical

works, i.e., *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* and *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islām*.²¹⁵

While giving permission for the translation of *Metaphysics* to Mīr Ḥasan al-Dīn, Iqbāl has been reported to have told the translator that the book had been written eighteen years earlier. "Since then", he is reported to have added, "many new things have come to light and there has been a change in my own views. There are books written in the German language separately on al-Ghazzālī, Tūsi, etc., which were not available at the time of my writing this book. I should think that there is but little in this book which would now escape criticism."²¹⁶

The statement that IOM's ideas underwent a change was accepted on its face value without much deliberation. A remark to this effect appears in the foreword of a reprint of *Metaphysics* by Prof. M. M. Sharīf: "It [*Metaphysics*] was written at a time when he [Iqbāl] was an admirer of pantheism — a world view which he completely repudiated a few years later."²¹⁷ This remark, which was presumably based on the fact that Iqbāl mentions Ibn al-'Arabī, the great exponent of

²¹⁵ S. M. Iqbāl, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, ed. M. M. Sharīf (3rd impression; Lahore: Bazm-i Iqbāl, 1964); and *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islām* (Reprint; Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968). Hereafter these works will be referred to as *Metaphysics* and *Reconstruction* respectively.

²¹⁶ Mīr Ḥasan al-Dīn, *Falsafa-i 'Azam* [trans. of *Metaphysics*] (Ḥaydarābād: Aḥmadia Press, n.d.), p. iii.

²¹⁷ Foreword to *Metaphysics*.

pantheism, in glowing terms in *Metaphysics*, while he does not mention Rūmī at all, is borne out by a number of statements made by Iqbāl himself.

In a letter to Muhammad Niyāz al-Dīn Khan, he writes:

This Neo-Platonism which I have mentioned in my article is a distorted form of the philosophy of Plato, which was made into a creed by one of his followers, Plotinus. Amongst the Muslims, this creed was spread through the translations by the Christians of Ḥarrān and it gradually became a part of the religion of Islām. To me it is completely un-Islāmic and has no relevance to the philosophy of the *Qur'ān*. The structure of mysticism has been built on this Greek impertinence.²¹⁸

He writes in another letter: "As far as I know, *Fuṣūṣ* contains nothing but atheism and heresy."²¹⁹

Explaining his disgust with mysticism, he writes "When mysticism tries to become a philosophy and, with hair-splitting arguments about cosmology and the essence of God, presents a theory of direct personal experience of God, then my soul revolts against it".²²⁰ In an article published in *Vakil* under the

²¹⁸ *Makātīb-i Iqbāl*, ed. S.A. Rahmān (Lahore: Bazm-i Iqbāl, p. I.

²¹⁹ *Iqbāl Nāma*, ed. Shaykh 'Atā Allāh (Lahore: Shaykh Muhammad Ashraf, 1951), vol. I, 44.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

title "Mysteries of Self and Ṣūfīsm",²²¹ he expresses his opinion in more detailed and candid terms:

I do not feel shy to admit that I have entertained, for a long time, the ideas which are specially entertained by some *Sūfīs* and which, on later reflection, I found to be completely un-Islāmic. For instance, Ibn al-'Arabī's concept of the eternity of perfect souls, or pantheism, or the concept of six graded emanation, or certain other beliefs mentioned by 'Abd al-Karīm Al-Jīlī in his book *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*.²²²

NW thinks that such beliefs are alien to Islām and have been wrongly, though with good intentions, grafted into the apologetics of Islām. The concept of the eternity of souls can be, according to him, traced back to Plotinus, and was later adopted by Ibn Sīnā and Farābī, because of which they were declared heretics *by* al-Ghazzālī. The theory of emanation originates from the same source and was later adopted by Suhrawardī Maqtūl for justifying certain elements in the Zoroastrian religion. Once such alien concepts find credence into Muslim thinkers, pantheism becomes the logical end-stage of their ontology.

One can find many other references to the same effect in letters and articles which Iqbāl wrote from time to time and

²²¹ Reprinted in *Maqālat-i Iqbāl*, ed. S. A. Vāhid [Wāhid] (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1963), pp. 160-170. Henceforth this work will be referred to as *Maqālāt*.

²²² *Maqālāt*, p. 161.

which provoked a strong reaction from certain religious circles in the sub-continent. It seems that Iqbāl in these writings is totally rejecting the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, which is normally accepted by the Ṣūfīs. In response to criticism against his views he later tries to make a distinction between Persian Ṣūfīsm and Islamic Ṣūfīsm and explains his motivation for doing so. Thus, in reply to one such criticism by Ḥasan Nizāmī, he declares that his aim is not to destroy the Ṣūfī movement. What, he says, he is opposed to is Persian mysticism and which is a sort of asceticism and not a part of Islām.²²³

He further makes a reference to different philosophical positions (*waḥdat al-wujūd* being one of them) taken by certain philosophers in interpreting religious beliefs. He thinks that pantheism is not a religious problem, but a problem of philosophy."The discussions on unity and diversity have nothing to do with Islām. Oneness of God is the cardinal principle of Islām, the opposite of which is *shirk*, and not diversity."²²⁴

It seems to me that the *raison d'etre* of Iqbāl's rejection of what he calls Persian mysticism is its allegedly unwholesome effect on human personality, especially when it is accepted as a

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²²⁴ Maḥmūd Nizāmī (ed.), *Malḥūzāt* (Lahore: Naryan Dutta Sahgal & Sons. n. d.), p.107.

way of life rather than a philosophical position.²²⁵ He says it in so many words and at one place quotes a Punjābī couplet:

تھے ہم پوت پٹھان کے دل کے دل دیں توڑ
شرن پڑے رگھناتھ کے سکیں نہ تنکا توڑ

(I was a *Pathān* and could defeat whole armies in battle;

but since I sat at the feet of *Ragnath* [who believed in the principle of the immanence of God] I cannot even break a piece of straw.)²²⁶

The consensus of opinion about Iqbāl's attitude towards mysticism can be summed up as follows:

- a) Iqbāl subscribed to or sympathised with a pantheistic point of view not only as a way of life, but as a philosophical system in his earlier writings, particularly in his *Metaphysics*.
- b) Later he changed from this position to a different one, which found its fullest and mature expression in *Reconstruction* about which we shall have more to say in the following pages.
- c) One of the major motivations for this change lies in the practical effects of a pantheistic outlook on the life and attitudes of a person and on his moral and social behaviour.

It appears that, at times, Iqbāl is at pains to explain that it is a particular type of mysticism to which he is opposed, i.e., of

²²⁵ Ibid.,

²²⁶ *Maqālāt*, p. 164,

the type of Ḥāfīz and Ibn al-'Arabī. This is a significant point, and a very pertinent question can be asked about the conceptual distinctions between the mysticism he is opposed to and his own later philosophy in *Reconstruction*. There are strong indications that, in spite of his categorical rejection of Ibn al-'Arabī's metaphysical mysticism, he has not been able completely to eliminate it from his later thought.²²⁷

There seems to be one thing in common in most of the writings on Islāmic mysticism: the writers, including Iqbāl himself, make a distinction between mysticism as a way of purifying the soul, on the one hand, and as a metaphysical theory, on the other. But, unfortunately, the two have been mixed up both by Iqbāl and by his commentators, in the treatment of the subject. This was to be expected, and is to a certain extent natural, as the two aspects, though distinct, are closely related to one another. The philosophy of *wajūd* is an intricate subject, the difficulties of which have been accentuated by the recondite style of Ibn al-'Arabī and others — a style which was purposely adopted for restricting their teachings to the elite and the initiated. These writers presumably

²²⁷ The word pantheism which is sometimes used for Ibn al-'Arabī's metaphysics of mysticism is inappropriate. It seems that a special effort has been made by Ṣūfīs, including Ibn al-'Arabī with an elaborate metaphysics, to keep Islāmic mysticism clean of the philosophy of *ḥulūl* or *hama ūst* which should be translated as pantheism. Thus an attack of Iqbāl on Ibn al-'Arabī as a representative of pantheism becomes tangential.

apprehended that their writings are liable to being misunderstood or misinterpreted by the common man. They themselves hardly advocate the type of inactivity or fatalism in everyday life that Iqbāl is so concerned about. Iqbāl himself, wittingly or unwittingly, seems to have followed the double path of warning the common man against a fatalistic approach to life and at the same time expounding an ontology not very dissimilar to that of Ibn al-'Arabī or Ḥāfīz. Let us see how he did this.

When Iqbāl talks against the metaphysics of mysticism, he sounds very much like an exponent of 'anti-system'. He himself was a philosopher and was well aware of how the problem of philosophy arises. His own anti-system approach has flowered in the form of a system known as the philosophy of self. It has a particular metaphysics, a theory of knowledge and a theory of truth. It deals with morality and the concept of good and evil, and ordains a destiny for man. As Prof. Sharīf puts it, it is a complete system of thought based on the reality of the self and has its affinities with the philosophical systems of Alexander, James Ward and McTaggart.²²⁸ The mystical flavour and the religious approach of this philosophy invite its comparison with the theory of *wahdat al-wujūd* for elucidating the point we are trying to make.

²²⁸ M. M. Sharīf, "Iqbāl's Conception of God" in *Iqbāl as a Thinker*, ed. M. M. Sharīf (4th impression; Lahore: Sh, Muḥammad Ashraf, 1956). pp. 123-126.

The theory of *wahdat al-wujūd* begins with the observation that this universe is contingent in itself and in time. In this general form this statement has been taken as true throughout Islāmic thought, except for some philosophers who believed in the eternity of matter; but even they, at the same time, tried to reconcile the idea of the eternity of matter with belief in the contingent nature of the created universe. As an immediate consequence of the above observation there arises a problem for *wahdat al-wujūd*, and that is about the process through which One reality could express itself in the diversity of the world. The solution to this problem can be briefly stated as follows: Before this universe came into existence there was only the being of God, and nothing else existed. The being of God has two aspects. In one of His aspects God is the necessarily existent being and possesses all the perfect attributes. The other aspect of His being is looked at from the point of view of His attributes. Knowledge being one of the most fundamental of these, He is termed as the Knower. It is believed that it would be vacuous to say that He is the Knower unless there are objects of knowledge, as it is vacuous to say that one hears or sees without there being objects of hearing or sight. These objects in the knowledge of God are those possibilities that have not yet been actualised or realised. They have not yet been subjected to the command 'Be' (كن), Before such a command is given, these attributes or, as they are technically known, *a'yān-i thābitah* (Divine essences or Divine ideas) are contained in the Knowledge of God; and since the being of God is also the

Knower from eternity, and Knowledge without objects of Knowledge is not possible, therefore these Divine essences are also eternally copresent with Him. They have neither been created in time nor occupy a place in space; hence they are eternal. The activity of creation is a name given to the act of externalization of these ideas eternally copresent in the Knowledge of God. Whatever we see in the world around us was pre-existent in the Knowledge of God in the form of essences. When He willed or desired to create, He only had to direct His attention to the *a'yān-i thābitah* and they immediately saw the light of day. The addressees of the word '*kum*' were these very *a'yān* in Divine Knowledge.²²⁹

The theory *a'yān-i thābitah* was an immediate consequence of 'another philosophical premise taken for granted by the adherents of *wahdat al-wujūd*. This was the famous postulate, directly lifted from Greek philosophy, that nothing can come into existence from absolute non-existence (*ex nihilo nihil fit*). The phenomenon was taken to be a logical impossibility, as non-existence is the negation of existence, pure and simple, and does not have any ontological consequences. The believers of *wahdat al-wujūd* wanted, further, to draw a distinction between the theory of total immanence [pantheism] and their own point of view. Hence they were keen to develop a metaphysics of

²²⁹ See for a precise account of the metaphysics of *wahdat al-wujūd*: Ashraf 'Alī Thanawī, *Zuhūr bi-Nūr al-Qidam* (Deoband: Ashraf al-'Ulūm, 1964), pp. 641-665.

their own for distinguishing themselves from pantheists, who establish an identity between the particular existents and the necessarily existent Being. They repudiate the idea that God Himself has adopted different shapes etc., nor, they say, has He divided Himself into multiple particulars. Both these views are strongly resented by Muslim Ṣūfīs, though at times language creates problems for a proper exposition of their point of view. Once pantheism or the theory of total immanence (*ḥulūl*) is rejected and the sanctity of the concept of unity is preserved as against multiplicity, the only course open for the *wujūdi* philosophers is to advance the theory of eternal essences in Divine Knowledge and a process of emanation as an explanation of the diversity in the universe. These eternal essences or Divine ideas have their own potentialities of expression and are activated by an act of God, which is comparable to the throwing of light on darkness. There are obvious parallelisms between this theory and that of form and matter in Greek philosophy, though in details the two are quite dissimilar.

This is a very sketchy account of the metaphysics of *wahdat al-wujūd*. Nevertheless it is sufficient to mark and identify the divergences, or similarities that exist between this philosophy, supposed to be running through *Metaphysics*, and the later philosophy of Iqbāl.

A glance over *Reconstruction* brings out the points of distinction between Iqbāl's earlier Persian or pantheistic approach and his later one. The main points are as follows:

1) The view of the universe presented in the philosophy of *waḥ dat al-wujūd* is complete, whereas in the later philosophy of Iqbāl it is still undergoing completion.

2) *Waḥdat al-wujūd*, as is evident from its nomenclature, is the philosophy of the unity of Being, whereas in IOW we find a pluralistic approach.

3) In the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* freedom of the human will has no reality, whereas one of the fundamental aspects of Iqbāl's philosophy is the concept of real freedom for the human ego or self, so much so that through this freedom the nature of ultimate reality is revealed. Freedom is a methodological as well as an ontological concept for Iqbāl.²³⁰

This is, by no means, an exhaustive description of the alleged points of difference between the earlier and the later thought of Iqbāl or between Persian mysticism and the philosophy of the ego. We have to delve a little deeper into these points for a clearer understanding of the issue under discussion.

Iqbāl's later philosophy envisages this universe not as a complete and finished product, but as covering the stages of completion. Nothing can, according to him, be finally and dogmatically asserted about it. Creation is a continuous process,

²³⁰ See chapters III & IV of *Reconstruction* for a detailed account of these points.

in which human beings are taking their due share and every moment creating new situations and products. This universe is a colony or collection of individuals or egos; the number of these egos is not determined. In every temporal unit new individuals are being added, who in their turn add to the activity of creation. Life is not something ready-made; new desires always create new changes init. There is nothing permanent in life except change. It is eternally in a state of becoming. Owing to its continuous activity it remains on an endless journey.²³¹

Life, which is the fundamental reality of the universe, was in the beginning a blind instinctive force completely devoid of a purpose. When it came into conflict with matter and contracted the power of resistance, it learned to climb the ladder of evolution. Lost in the wilderness of being for a long time, it acquired, at least, a power of discerning values and attaching to various actions. Value consciousness was a revolutionary change in the pattern of life and became its dearest possession. The process of creation was now conjoined with value consciousness. Life thus developed norms and purposes, and every act of change became a directed act suffused with values. Value consciousness provided the juxtaposition of the ideal and the actual, the actual being incomplete and deficient, yearning to complete and perfect itself through a continuous effort. This

²³¹ *Ibid.*. pp. 106 f.

is, in brief, the ontological position taken in the later works of Iqbāl.²³²

On the face of it there seem to be two different positions adopted in the earlier and the later thought of Iqbāl; and they also have their historical parallels. The concepts of being and becoming can easily be traced to Greek philosophy. Those who say that only change is permanent may be reminded of Heraclitus' famous maxim that one cannot step into the same river twice. From Bergson to William James this aspect of life and reality is asserted again and again. Iqbāl, no doubt, had these views in mind, and shows very clear strains of vitalistic philosophy as against the concept of the block universe of the absolutists. Nevertheless it would be a hasty generalisation to identify his philosophy with the vitalism of Bergson or the pluralism of James and to overlook the deeper strains in his metaphysics, which still come from religious sources and from his earlier so-called repudiated position based upon Persian mysticism. Much depends on finding a right clue for interpreting his assertions about this universe as not being a finished product, but in a process of continuous creation.

It would be a platitude to say that we constantly observe motion and change in this universe and that nothing seems to have permanence in this world. It is obvious that this platitude rests on the point of view of the observer looking at things

²³² Cf. Yūsuf Ḥusain Khān, *Riḥ-i Iqbāl* (2nd ed.; Haydarābād: Idāra-I Ishā'at-i Urdu, 1944), pp. 114 ff.

around him. This view point, as it is asserted both by Iqbāl and by mystic philosophers, is bound up by the limitations of space-time and other necessary conditions of perception like those of quality, quantity, modality,

- etc. It is a limited and particular point of view, which is contrasted with an unlimited and absolute view of a transcendent being. Then a question is asked: could there be a possibility of lifting these limitations, even for a certain amount of time, and having an inkling of what it would be like to have an absolute view of the facts. The mystics talk of lifting the veil of sensory perception by removing the limitations of space and time and of having a direct and immediate perception of the real. They envisage a gradual process, needing a special effort under expert guidance through which such an immediate experience could be obtained; but the immediate experience still remains localised in a particular individual, and hence no complete identity of the perception by the particular of the absolute could be obtained. The particularity goes on decreasing infinitely, but never crosses the limit completely, as, after every limit, there is yet another, *ad infinitum*.²³³ This may be a debatable point, as there are in it suggestions of the possibility of a complete identity when the individual loses his particularity altogether and becomes one with the universal; but this is a point where most of the adherents of *wujūd* would like to posit the rather subtle concept of the individual not him self becoming identical with the infinite and yet achieving a point of view of totality. We believe that at this point there is an

²³³ The concept of transcendence of God is never totally given up; it always remains as complementary to immanence.

agreement between Islāmic mysticism and Iqbāl's philosophy. Iqbal, reaching this position in a similar fashion, points out that when an individual, breaking the limitations of space and serial time, pays attention to his self, he finds in his immediate intuition an awareness of a pure mobility which is comparable to *la dure* of Bergson. From this station he gets a peep at the source of motion and change in the universe, and in this experience he discovers the highest category of reality. This methodology is common between *wahdat al-wujūd* and Iqbāl's philosophy. Both use the immediate and direct experience of the individual as indicative of the experience of God. In *wahdat al-wujūd*, the individual, through immediate experience of God,²³⁴ comes in contact with the Divine essences, but it does not preclude the possibility that the divine experience itself is not a continuous activity, notwithstanding the disputable point about the detailed knowledge of the consequences of God's activity, as against the contention that He knows the universals only. Whether God knows only Divine essences (universals) or has the knowledge of particulars (i.e., all the potentialities of the universals which could be actualized), it does not contradict Iqbāl's contention that the act of creation is continuous. The philosophy of *wah dat al-wujūd* regards the universality of direct and immediate experience as the most fundamental characteristic; so is the case with Iqbāl.²³⁵ The statements in the

²³⁴ 1 The only significant distinction between this experience and that to which Iqbāl refers as religious experience seems to be that the former is passive and gained by training the self to an inert state, whereas the latter is arrived at through activity of the self. This distinction, even if not verbal, is irrelevant for our purpose.

²³⁵ *Reconstruction*, pp. 127 and 181.

philosophy of Iqbāl to the effect that the universe is not a finished product do not mean to imply that in the universe new facts come into being without any determination whatsoever from pure nonexistence, which even God, the Omnipotent and the Omniscient, is unaware of. The same is true of *wahdat al-wujūd*. For IOW the chain of new facts coming into existence every moment represents the internal possibilities of Being, becoming actual. From our localized point of view the creation of the universe is a never-ending process, which would continue eternally because of the eternity of the will of God — one of His fundamental attributes. We cannot put a limit either to the knowledge or to the will of God. Though we are unable to read through the *preserved tablet* from beginning to end, the whole of the creation is preserved in it. Call it the inner possibilities of Being, as Iqbāl would like to call it, or give it the name of Divine essences, as the philosophy of *wahdat al-wujūd* visualizes; the consequences are the same, i.e., the resultant continuity of the process of creation or emanation.

Seen against this metaphysical background, the philosophy of *wahdat al-wujūd*, like that of Iqbāl, envisages no passive concept of God as is sometimes implied by particular mystical attitudes. Knowledge and will are the two fundamental attributes of God, and neither of them can be considered as logically prior to the other in the process of creation; they are rather co-existent and complementary to each other. Hence no mystic metaphysics in Islām can conceive of a static universe or a passive God Who is only the 'Knower' and not the 'Creator'. Mere consciousness of a completed universe without active participation in its creation is never implied in the metaphysics

of *wahdat al-wujūd*. Ash'arite atomistic philosophy, to which Iqbāl subscribes, dismisses the concept of mechanical causation and in its place advances the concept of Divine causation, which is not disfavoured by mystical metaphysics in spite of its disregarding atomism.

The divergence between Iqbāl's later thought and the metaphysics of mysticism is also sometimes emphasized with regard to the status of external objects, i.e., the created world. It is said that mystical metaphysics implies the ideational or mental nature of the objects, whereas Iqbāl conceives them to be real. This observation is based on a superficial view of the philosophy of *wahdat al-wujūd* and also on misapplication of the categories of mental and non-mental, in their ordinary sense, to the metaphysics of mysticism. The logic of mysticism is of a different order and these categories are not applicable to it. These categories assume two distinct modes of existence, one external and the other internal, implying that externality is a necessary property of the objects around us, which are independent of all mental relations. For all practical, everyday, purposes this may be so, and is not denied even by mysticism. Nevertheless the logic of *wahdat al-wujūd* grades reality into tiers, and mental and non-mental are not mutually exclusive, but only juxtaposed concepts. Being is graded, and mental is not a predicate of existence. To say that an object is mental, in this sense, is uninformative and merely analytical. Within this all-inclusive concept of existence there are various tiers, which

possess a reality of their own, and each tier has its own logic. This is the distinction which Islāmic mysticism tries to maintain between itself and the philosophy of pure pantheism. The externality of objects is not a mere appearance; it has a reality of its own and is governed by its own laws, which are laws of a particular aspect. Looked at from the point of view of the absolute, it may not be termed as externality, but the absolute point of view is not the only point of view. There are other points of view about reality, which are as much a part and parcel of total reality as the absolute one. Hence the differentiation between mental and non-mental is either a verbal distinction or is a result of confounding two different categories.

The point at issue in the juxtaposition of the mental and the non-mental lies in the concept of a 'block universe', which is an alleged implication of the philosophy of *wahdat al-wujūd*. This impression is created when *wahdat al-wujūd* is wrongly compared with the idealistic philosophy of the West. In spite of certain parallelisms between the two, they are not identical modes of thought. As we have said above, in the Being of God the two fundamental attributes of Knowledge and Will are eternally complementary and, therefore, there is no warrant for the conclusion that the activity of either of them could be exhausted in time. Hence it would be wrong to conclude that creative activity is not continuously at work in this universe. The Will of God continuously reflects the Knowledge of God, a

process which the calculus of formal logic fails to comprehend. The two universes of Knowledge and Will do not fit into the same framework, namely, that of the law of contradiction. The same has often been expressed by pointing to the two domains of comprehension, one partial and the other total. Looked at from the former angle, reality seems to be incomplete and hence imperfect; it is engaged in an eternal process of evolution for its perfection, thus moving towards a fixed goal. But, seen from the other angle, it is a complete system, perfectly individuated, which is both the traveller and the destiny. From this latter angle it is neither static nor moving, because both these concepts are applicable to the former category only. In this perspective Iqbāl's remarks become significant when he says that the perfection of the creative ego does not lie in its unchanging nature, but in its continuous activity.²³⁶ The being of God is self-sufficient; hence it does not move for attaining a goal external to itself. It moves to manifest the infinite possibilities inherent in itself. The paradoxes in the understanding of this movement in the Being of God arise, because, according to Iqbāl, we apply a wrong logic to it. We try to measure the Divine motion with the numerical concept of time and end up in the antinomies of reason. We can only use this concept on the resultant activity of Being, and not on Being itself, where it would be as meaningless as it is to ask 'what o'clock is it on the sun now?'

²³⁶ See *Reconstruction*, pp. 59 ff.

The second point of dispute we mentioned above between Iqbāl's later thought and the so-called Persian mysticism is that of monism and pluralism. For Iqbāl the chief character of the ego is its individuality. A diffused reality in which individuals could not be identified is characterless. The universe is a colony of individuals and God Himself is an individual, though a perfect one. Iqbāl's philosophy is reminiscent of Leibnizian monadology, though he does not say that his monads are windowless. The spiritual nature of these individuals and of reality as a whole is retained and so is it by *waḥdat al-wujūd*. The only difference between the two is that Iqbāl lays more emphasis on one aspect of the diffused spirituality, i.e., the pluralistic, whereas, *waḥdat al-wujūd* stresses its monistic aspect. The Being of God in *waḥdat al-wujūd*, though immanent in the nature of things, yet, at the same time, transcendent, is necessarily existent. Although this philosophy sometimes talks in terms of appearances, nevertheless, the appearances have a status of their own. They are appearances only when they are compared with reality. They are called 'non-existent' only when the predicate of *existence* is conceived of as applied to God. Otherwise, in so far as the laws of nature and the world of common sense are concerned, these appearances are real in their own right. Events are explained in terms of laws of causation, and social obligations are carried out *as if* this world was a real world. The distinction between 'phenomena' and 'noumena' is meant for two types of individuals, i.e., the common man and the initiated; yet to say categorically about

mysticism that it takes the world around us as a mere illusion would be misleading in the Islāmic context. This is the reason why the distinction between Iqbāl's later and earlier thought becomes more or less verbal. NW never talks about plurality in the sense that this world is completely independent of Divine Consciousness. Though it is a colony of individuals, there is the same creative spirit which keeps every individual active. Again it is through this creative spirit that these individuals form themselves into a well-knit system gradually moving towards perfection. The only concepts that seem to be pulling apart in the two points of view are those which prescribe the means for an end towards which these individuals are striving. *Waḥdat al-wujūd* speaks about losing oneself totally or a complete annihilation of one's self, whereas Iqbāl talks of perfecting one's self. But if we look still closer we will find that this difference is only in the methodology and not in the end-stage of this process. The end-stage concept of Islāmic mysticism is that of a complete identification of the will of the individual with the Will of God. In one case this identification is achieved by self-annihilation, and in the other by developing a consciousness through free creative activity and by realizing that the creative activity of the self is the Divine activity. That is why Iqbāl makes a distinction between the prophetic consciousness and the mystic consciousness, considering the former to be far superior to the latter. The aim of the mystic consciousness is to keep the individual consciousness extinct when the union with God is achieved. On the other hand, the prophetic

consciousness stages a come-back to this world of 'reality' and asserts itself in making and ordering this universe.

Notwithstanding these differences in emphasis between Iqbāl and *wah dat al-wujūd*, those points which have a significance for human conduct are the same in both the philosophies. If we look at the points of dispute between them in the light of what we have said above in connection with the creative activity of Being, we would find that their much-publicised difference is a difference between two languages rather than between two sets of facts.

The third point referred to above is that of determinism or fatalism and freedom of will, Iqbāl is said to have adhered to the former in his earlier philosophy, which he gave up later. This problem arises as a direct implication of a pluralistic ontology and the concept of continuous creation. As a matter of fact, it was to safeguard the concept of freedom that Iqbāl had to have recourse to the Ash'arite philosophy of continuous creation. The concept of freedom, thus, is logically prior to the metaphysics of creation and Iqbāl's reaction against *wah dat al-wujūd* is wholly based on the consciousness of a free ego.²³⁷

In so far as the ethical implications of *wah dat al-wujūd* and Iqbāl's philosophy are concerned, the choice does not lie between fatalism and freedom, as has been wrongly supposed. Absolute freedom has the same moral consequences as fatalism.

²³⁷ See *Reconstruction*, pp. 106 ff.

Iqbāl wants to reject explanations of human action in terms of mechanical causality, on the one hand, and esoteric spiritual causality, on the other. He speaks of a 'free personal causality', which is 'the essential feature of a purposive act'. The causal chain wherein we try to find a place for the ego is itself an artificial construction of the ego for its own purposes. For Iqbāl the destiny of a thing is not an unrelenting fate working from without. It is the inward reach of a thing, its realizable possibilities, which lie within the depth of its nature. The same idea has been expressed by the metaphysics of *wah dat al-wujūd*, though in a different language. Since the world around us has a status of its own in reality, the moral principles *vis-a-vis* this world have the same status; neither is the logic of this sphere of reality applicable to another, nor *vice-versa*. The 'realizable possibilities' of which Iqbāl speaks are for *wah dat al-wujūd* manifestations arising out of the interplay of Divine attention and Divine essences.

Ibn al-'Arabī expresses the same by saying, "God bestows on a thing that which its essential nature demands"²³⁸, or, at another place, "Whatever has been definitely determined about us is in conformity with our nature; further, we ourselves are determining it according to our aptitude."²³⁹ "It is not possible for an '*ayn*' (Divine idea) to be manifested externally as far as

²³⁸ Quoted by M. Valiuddin [Walī al-Dīn], *The Qur'ānic Mysticism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasi Dass, 1959), pp. 127 ff.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

its essence or attribute or action is concerned, except in accordance with its aptitude".²⁴⁰ This is the open possibility, named as freedom by Iqbāl.

We have tried to expose the platitude underlying the assertion that Iqbāl's later philosophy is opposed to his former ideas. The platitude, when analysed, breaks down to a difference between two languages and not between two ontologies. The reason for this confusion is not far to seek. It consists, first, in mixing together the pragmatic expediencies of the moral life and the metaphysical necessities of a spiritual system with God as the unifying force. Had it been realized that moral necessities could be safeguarded without necessarily linking them to a spiritualistic metaphysics, much of the confusion could have been averted. The second reason for not seeing the identity between the so-called Persian mysticism and Iqbālian thought is that we have been misled by the structure of the two languages that these systems speak. Since the facts these languages are referring to when they present a metaphysics are not verifiable in the same way in which common everyday language statements are verified, delineation of the meaning of the two is a difficult task and cannot be achieved unless a bigger perspective of the Islāmic religion is kept in view, about which Iqbāl is concerned in both his former and his later philosophy.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.