

PROBLEMS OF ETHICS IN MOHAMMAD IQBAL'S PHILOSOPHY

M. T. Stepanyants

The tendency to the personal interpretation of the relation between God and man eliminating any ecclesiastic or secular meditation, the tendency which is so much typical for the Reformation explains the attention of the religious reformers to pantheism or mysticism.

Pantheism, which unites God and the world, sometimes identifying them, allows to interpret this unity both ways: as dissolution of nature in God or, just opposite, of God in nature. In the latter case, pantheism contains the elements of naturalistic philosophy. In XVI-XVII centuries these very elements of pantheism made it the most important mythological foundation of the majority of natural-philosophic theories in West Europe (Kampanella, Bruno etc.)

In Islam too mysticism or sufism sometimes served as a form for naturalistic conceptions. Sufism looks at the prayer as a way to personal contact with God. Muslim mystics believe that it is possible by merging in God not only to contact with Him but even to comprehend the Absolute Truth. The achievement of "fana" is considered to be the aim of "tarikât". "Tarikat" stipulates the elimination of human will, the acknowledgement of personal insignificance, the belief in God as the only real being. Iqbal justly considered that mysticism "suppresses personal initiative" and that is why "... the decadents in all ages tried to seek shelter behind self-mysticism and nihilism". "Having lost the vitality to grapple with the temporal"--Iqbal said, — "these prophets of decay apply themselves to the quest of a supposed eternal, and gradually complete the spiritual impoverishment and physical degeneration of their society by evolving a seemingly charming ideal of life which reduces the healthy and powerful to' death".¹

Being critical to mysticism Iqbal at the same time borrowed quite a lot from sufi philosophers and used a number of sufi terms and notions. The sufi doctrine "wandat-al-wujud" which expresses the pantheistic idea of the

¹ 1. See S. A. Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, (Lahore, 1964), pp. 101-102.

unity of God and nature was interpreted by M. Iqbal in the spirit different from that one of the traditional Islamic mysticism. Sufism laid the emphasis on the distinction of "zahir" and "batin" (Appearance and Reality) where God is Reality and nature is appearance. Accordingly, this world and the human beings are the appearance of the Reality-God. This point of view logically leads to the total ignoring of world problems as temporal, not important, and to the understanding of the role of man as a passive conductor of God's will. The unity, the melting of individual ego in Cosmic ego, Iqbal understood not as the refusal of man from his own ego but rather as participation in the creative activity of Supreme Being.

In his time M. Iqbal by his own way developed the ideas which had been early expressed by "non-orthodox" sufis like Mansur Hallaj and Abdul Qadir Beidil. The name of Hallaj to whom belongs the famous exclamation: "Anal-Haq", which brought him to death, was a number of times mentioned in Iqbal's poems.

Iqbal even called himself "the second Mansur".

A. H. Karnali who acknowledges "departure" of Iqbal "from the traditions of emotionalism and idealism, which reduce human existence to a phenomenal shape in the development of the absolute", considers that this departure was due to the fact that "the radical elements of Beidil's thought came to full bloom in Iqbal's philosophy of self".² In contrast to the traditional sufi symbolics, which compare the relation between God and man as that one of ocean and waves, river and bubbles, Beidil used in his poetry metaphors which radically modified the concept of man. "Just like a pearl, which though hardened in the bosom of a river, is thrown ashore I am thrown out, because I could not be absorbed, melted, or dissolved"³. Beidil looked at man as "the pinnacle of creation, the shaper and the maker, the knower and the doer".⁴

Mohammed Iqbal continued this line of thinking and developed it in a comprehensive concept of "khudi", in which man was regarded as a creator, as a partner of God and Maker. In his poem "Mahawarah Ma-Bayen Khuda

² A.H. Kamali, *The Heritage of Islamic Thought in Iqbal*, Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan", N. Y. London, 1971, p. 223.

³ Ibid,, p. 221.

⁴ Ibid

wa Insan" ("God's Conversation with Man"), man speaks to his maker as an equal:

"You made the night, and I the lamp,
And you the clay and I the cup;
You — desert, mountain-peak, and vale;
I — flower-bed, park and orchard; I
Who grind a mirror out of stone,
Who brew from poison honey-drink".

Individual "ego" strives to come closer to the divine "Ego". But Iqbal understood this striving not as a dissolution on account of man's refusal from own "khudi", but just opposite, as his self-affirmation. "The ultimate of the ego", Iqbal wrote, "is not to see something, but to be something... The end of the ego's quest is not emancipation from the limitations of individuality ; it is, on the other hand, a more precise definition of it".⁵

Approaching to God or to Ideal, was regarded by the poet rather as a vital than an intellectual act. He considered it a vital act which "deepens the whole being of the ego, and sharpens his will with the creative assurance that the world is not something to be merely seen or known through concepts, but something to be made and re-made by continuous action."⁶

M. Iqbal in his concept of "ego" tried by his own way to synthesize the ideas of Muslim and European philosophy. His concept of "ego" has much in common with some of the ideas of Fichte. Iqbal was particularly attracted by Fichte's immanent philosophy regarding object and subject in their indissolubility. Like Fichte, the Muslim poet-philosopher affirmed the unity of object and subject, being and thought, non-ego and ego. "It is possible to take thought not as a principle which organizes and integrates its material from the outside, but as a potency which is formative of the very being of its, material. Thus regarded, thought or idea is not alien to the original nature of

⁵ M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 198.

⁶ Ibid., p. 198.

things; it is their ultimate ground and constitutes the very essence of the being."⁷ The real world of "non-ego" is the expression of the creative activity of "ego". Thus the world of objects is not something different from our "self", it is some part of us. "The world is nothing but the manifestation of ours,"—said Iqbal, —"for without us there would be no scenes of lights and sound".⁸

Iqbal believed that affirming by this way the unity of object and subject, he solved the problem of free will and found the golden middle way between absolute determinism and voluntarism. But it seems he has failed to solve the problem. One of the weakest points of this dualistic system is: how "non-ego" appears out of "ego". In Fichte's view the theoretical reason cannot give the answer to this question. This can be done only by practical or moral reason, according to which this "creation" is an act of free will. M. Iqbal also considered that ordinary thought cannot appreciate this unity, the essence of which is the creative activity of self.

In "Asrar-i Khudi" Iqbal says:

"It [the Self] makes from itself the forms of others,

.....
.....

Subject, object, means and causes--

All these are forms which it assumes for the purpose of action."⁹

In Iqbal's view "In great action alone the self of man becomes united with God without losing its own identity and transcends the limits of space and time. Action is the highest form of contemplation."¹⁰

This identification of contemplation with creation reminds Henri Bergson's theses that "the act of cognition coincides with the act which creates reality" and that "the difference between *who* cognizes and *what* is cognized disappears". In his lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious

⁷ Ibid., p, 31.

⁸ M. Iqbal, *The Secrets of the Self*, (Lahore, 1961); p. 16.

⁹ Ref. B. A. Dar, Inspiration from the West, in "*Iqbal, Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*", p. 193.

¹⁰ Ibid., p 193.

Thought in Islam, M. Iqbal a number of times referred to Bergson's ideas, particularly while interpreting intuition as the highest form of intellect and also when considering the problem of time and space. However, the Muslim poet-philosopher did not accept a number of Bergson's notions, which contradicted the spirit and social trend of his own world outlook. Being a mouthpiece of anti-colonial social forces of his society M. Iqbal propagated creative activity and struggle. Bergson's ideas about aimless wave impulses, which are chaotic and non-regulated, lead to the conclusion that it was useless to oppose this play of blind forces. The pessimism of the social conclusions out of Bergson's philosophical premises could not be accepted by Iqbal. Opposing Bergson the Muslim philosopher stated: "Reality is not blind vital impulse wholly unilluminated by idea. Its nature is through and through teleological".¹¹

M. Iqbal realized vulnerability of his position as affirmation of "teleological" character of nature leads to negation of free will. "The world"—Iqbal recognized,—"regarded as a process of realizing a pre-ordained goal is not a world of free, responsible agents. It is only a stage on which puppets are made to move by a kind of pull from behind".¹²

Thus Iqbal did not want to accept voluntarism which liberates from responsibility, leads to pessimism and desires to step away from participation in this life. He also rejected supernaturalistic determinism of orthodox Muslim philosophy which did not recognize free will. Iqbal made an attempt to solve the antinomy of freedom and necessity, God's will and man's free will. Development of the world, the acts of men are not aimless, they are submitted to the teleological purpose. But this purpose is not understood statically, as a predetermined plan of development. "The notion of purpose cannot be understood except in reference to the future".¹³ There is no rigid aim system, in every period of life, people mould and develop themselves according to the spirit of new ideals. Teleological purpose is understood by Iqbal in the sense that "... there is no far-off distant goal towards which we are moving, there is a progressive formation of fresh ends, purposes, and ideal scales of value as the process of life grows and expands".¹⁴

¹¹M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 53.

¹²Ibid., p. 54.

¹³Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 54.

The Muslim reformer recognized that if "ego" selfdevelops, it is able to will and act, then freedom and omnipotence of God are doubtful. How man's free will can be reconciled with God's omnipotence? In Iqbal's view God Himself limits His power. This limitation "is born out of His own creative freedom whereby He has chosen finite egos to be participators of His life, power, and freedom"¹⁵. By giving freedom to man God takes risk, for "the freedom to choose good involves also the freedom to choose what is the opposite of good"¹⁶. God takes this risk because He believes in man and man is to justify this faith.

Iqbal followed the sufi teaching on good and evil. The Quran says, "Whatever good visits thee, it is of God ; whatever evil visits thee is of thyself" (4:81). In contradiction to this, the medieval sufists (Abdul Karim al-Jilli and others) said that both the good and the evil of the universe came from God. In their opinion, evil was a necessary objective condition for the realisation of good. Just as the bird must overcome the resistance of the air to fly, so man can only be good by overcoming evil, and, therefore, he has no right to complain about the existence of the latter.

In adopting this sufist principle, Iqbal modified it somewhat. The pessimism and passivity of the medieval mystics had no place in the philosophy of one who spoke for the middle class at a time when it was rousing itself to political action. His affinities were much more with the romanticism and dynamism of 17th and 18th-century European philosophy. Himself a poet, his understanding of Western philosophical thought was drawn mostly from literature and poetry. We would even say that his dialectical ideas on good and evil were to a great extent inspired by the works of Goethe and Milton.

Iqbal explained his ideas by interpreting the Biblical legend of man's fall from grace and expulsion from the Garden of Eden (cf. the Quran, 7, 10-24) as a manifestation of "free choice", a view entirely out of keeping with religious tradition. "Man's first act of disobedience was also his first act of free choice," he said.¹⁷ Furthermore, if good was the result of free choice, one might say that evil created good. Iqbal's Iblis-Satan-like Goethe's Mephistopheles was part of the eternal force that always desired evil but

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁷ M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 85.

worked only good. Without it life would have no dynamism, and deathly passiveness would triumph in the universe. The figure of Satan in one of his poems, like in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, is more attractive than that of God, because it symbolises the spirit of creativity. Addressing the Lord, Iblis says:

Thou hast created the starry spheres: I cause them to move

I am the life of all in the World, the life latent in everything.

Thou givest life to the body: I infuse warmth into life.

Thou showest the way to peaceful rest: I lead towards restless strife !

The man of earthly origin, foolish and short-sighted,

Is born in Thy lap, but attaineth maturity in mine.¹⁸

The revolutionary spirit of Iqbal's conception suited the mood of the radical intelligentsia at that time of active struggle against colonialism. Its admission of the objective character of evil impressed the intellectuals. It enabled them to account for all social troubles not by any subjective causes, but by the real live evil, which was colonialism and feudalism.

In insisting on such a close relation between the two ethical categories, even on their mutual interchangeability, Iqbal was stressing the necessity and propriety of taking action against the established social order, which had degenerated into an evil. Disobedience, protest, even violence, all acts condemned by the prevailing morality, were held up as virtues to those engaged in the anti-colonial struggle.

According to Iqbal, there are three stages in the development of the ego. These three stages remind the sufi "tarikat" as well as Nietzsche's ideas of the development of supermn. However, they are not the same. Opposite to sufis Iqbal saw the purpose of the development of ego not in "fana"--self negation, but in self-affirmation, in transformation into the perfect man — "Insan-i kamil", who fulfils the divine will, who is a divine vicegerent. Iqbal's views differ from Nietzsche. For the latter, the superman is a man who does not follow any moral norms. For Iqbal, "the perfect man" is a strong

¹⁸ S. A Vahid, *Iqbal, His Art and Thought*, p. 112.

personality, who uses his will and energy not for his own desire for power, but for the sake of fulfilment of the divine will. "Insan-i kamil" is supposed to be able to overcome the vices of the society and to act according to the moral norms ordered by God.

Iqbal undoubtedly felt the influence of Nietzsche, but was not one of his followers. His interest in the German philosopher sprang from a desire to create a Muslim philosophy of action that would suit the aims of the national-liberation movement. He was attracted by Nietzsche's ideal of a superman, a man of will, capable of heroic living. He was impressed with his rejection of Christian asceticism, which condemns man to slavish passivity, for he himself strongly denounced the ascetism preached by the Muslim mystics. He borrowed some of Nietzsche's imagery, for instance the allusions to diamond and coal as symbols of firmness and lack of will.

But while he admired the vision and literary gifts of the German philosopher, Iqbal rejected the basic premises of his philosophy. In his opinion, despite his "vision of the divine", thanks to which he might have become a prophet, Nietzsche never became one because, firstly, he relied entirely on his own faculties without seeking "external guidance in his spiritual life", and, secondly, because he entrusted the realisation of his philosophical principles only to the elite, whom he contrasted to the common "herd". This atheism and cynical aristocratism made Nietzscheism unacceptable to Iqbal, whose philosophy was inspired by belief in an indivisible bond between man and God, man and society.