MYSTICISM IN MODERN CONTEXT

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'Allamah Iqbal speaks of the three periods of religious life, which he calls the periods of "Faith," "Thought," and "Discovery".[168] He does not lay much stress on the first two, as the first is the doctrinal, while the second is the metaphysical aspect or period of religion. He, however, emphasizes the third one in which according to him.

"Religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power; and the individual achieves a free personality, not by releasing himself from the fetters of the law, but by discovering the ultimate source of law within the depths of his consciousness. . . . Religion in this sense is known by the unfortunate name of Mysticism, which is supposed to be a life-denying, fact-avoiding attitude of mind directly opposed to the radically empirical outlook of our times. Yet higher religion, which is only a search for a larger life, is essentially experience and recognized the necessity of experience as its foundation long before science learnt to do so."[169]

Again, while recounting the main characteristics of mystic experience, he says: "The first point to note is the immediacy of this experience.

. The immediacy of the mystic experience simply means that we know God just as we know other objects. God is not a mathematical entity or a system of concepts mutually related to one another and having no reference to experience. . . . The third point to note is that to the mystic the mystic state is a moment of intimate association with a unique other self,

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[168] Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam (Lahore, 1965), p. 181.
[169] Ibid., pp. 181-82.

transcending, encompassing, and momentarily suppressing the private personality of the subject of experience."[170]

Path to God from these excerpts it becomes clear that Iqbal holds religious or mystic experience a ground or, better still, the ground, for the existence of God. En his lecture: "Knowledge and Religious Experience," he examines the traditional proofs, namely, the ontological, the cosmological and the teleological, for the existence of God and comes to the conclusion like Kant that as proofs they fail miserably. Iqbal did not examine ethical arguments advanced by Kant, Sidgwick and Taylor, nor did he examine the existential arguments advanced by thinkers like 'Kierkegaard, Berdyaey and TiIlich. He simply exposed the hollowness of the oft-discussed arguments and prepared a way to "inner intuition or insight which, in the beautiful words of Rumi, feeds on the rays of the sun and brings us into contact with aspects of Reality other than those open to sense-perception,"[171] In this respect Iqbal will find himself in good company, for mystics of all denominations, Christian, Judiac, Hindu or Buddhistic, have claimed, in unmistakable terms, the immediate knowledge of the Ultimate Reality, whatever its nature be. It is, however, alleged that the Reality with which they come in contact, in moments of ecstasy or spiritual illuminations, is the Immense, the Supreme Value, the Highest Good, and the Personal God. Rudolf Otto has described it as the Numinous, which as value fills us with bliss, but at the same time evokes an awareness of our own nothingness.

Besides Rudolf Otto (vide his book The Idea of the Holy), another thinker of great eminence who has furnished a foundation for faith in religious experience is Schleiermacher (vide his book On Relīgīon: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers). If these thinkers are right, then, Passmore says, we

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[170] Ibid., pp, 18-19.
[171] Ibid., pp 15-16.

do not need rational demonstrations. Man in his own sense of creatureliness and dependency has a direct awareness of the Divine Presence.[172]

From the above it would be obvious that a mystic has no need to take recourse to reasoning and to get himself entangled in philosophical controversies, for he has direct access to Reality. Indian philosophers have designated six systems of their philosophy as six darsanas, meaning thereby that they are six ways of having direct and immediate knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. The Muslim philosophers often use the word shahada to designate the same attitude. Shahada means observation, inspection or perception. A Muslim has to testify on the basis of shahada that there is no god but God and that Muhammad (peace of God be upon him) is the Prophet of God. And, since in the higher stages, a religion ceases to be doctrinal or discursive but becomes an experience or a testimony—a darsana or a shahādah, the only evidence worth considering for the existence of God or the certitude of religious verities would be the personal experience of the devotee.

None can deny the mytic or religious experience as such. Many psychologists like William James and Otto have given vivid descriptions of religious experience, from the literature of various races and the experience of mystics belonging to different climes and countries. Edward Sapir, an anthropologist, says:

"Religion in some sense is present everywhere. It seems to be as universal as speech itself and the use of material tools. It is difficult to apply a single one of the criteria which are ordinarily used to define a religion to the religious behaviour of primitive people, yet neither the absence of specific religious officers nor the lack of an authoritative religious text nor any other

[172] A Hundred Years of Philosophy (1st ed.), p. 95.

conventional lack can seriously mislead the student into denying them true religion."[173]

What is, however, doubtful is that if the knowledge of. God can be grounded in the feeling, then that feling is an index of the existence of God. It is quite conceivable that one may have the feeling that one is in the presence of God and yet there may be no God at all. The question, therefore, is: Does the feeling that one is in the presence of God a sufficient or undeniable ground for holding that one is in the presence of God ? For there is no logical contradiction involved in saying that one has a feeling that one is in the presence of God and that there is no God as a matter of fact.

Some psychologists, among whom Freud's name can be included, hold that mystics, religious visionaries and Prophets have been neurotics, and therefore their reports cannot be trusted. Not all psychologists, however, subscribe to this view. In-deed, there are plenty of them who observe that many religious mystics lived normal lives and devoted themselves to works of public interest. Accordingly in their mode of thinking or living they did not exhibit any such deviation as to warrant their being called neurotics. Besides, before condemning the mystics as neurotics, what is needed is to agree on the criteria of neurosis and then to study the behaviour of mystics with a view to finding out whether in fact the characteristic feature of their every-day conduct is peculiar enough to distinguish them from the so-called normal individuals and to place them in the category of neurotics. On the basis of a few resemblances which mystic behaviour may have with that of a neurotic, it would be in-correct to conclude that the mystics are neurotics. Logically, it would be a bad use of analogy. For, in the first instance, the analogy in this case is not grounded on significant resemblance and, in the second, analogy, being a weak type of inference, cannot entitle any person to say with confidence that this is in fact the case. Again, as George Godwin says:

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[173] Culture, Language and Personality.

"But even when it can be demonstrated that such mystics as St Paul, St Augustine, St Tersa and St Francis of Assisi, of the Catholic Calendar ; the post-Reformation founders of sects, such as George Fox, Jacob Boehme and Emanuel Swedenborg ; and the mystical poets, such as George Herbert, William Blake and Francis Thompson, were emotionally unbalanced in some way, or even diagnosable victims of neurotic or psychotic disorders, the validity of their mystical experiences is not thereby necessarily explained away."[174]

Philosophically speaking, the origin of a thing has no bearing on its validity. An experience does not stand condemned simply because it arose from a diseased mind. A proposition has to be judged on its own grounds, and the fact of its origin has nothing to do with its validity or invalidity.

Those people who call mystics as neurotic have usually in view some unusual religious experience of the mystics and also perhaps some unusual bodily manifestations accompanying such experiences. But the unusualness of the religious experience can-not be made a ground for adverse judgment. The religious experience at its height is bound to be unusual. Indeed, all intense and emotionally surcharged experiences are unusual in a way. Even a poetic experience and sometime the bodily behaviour accompanying it is not the usual or the customary one. If a mystic is unusual in his religious experiences but is normal otherwise, that is to say, conducts his daily activities in the usual manner, it would be unjust to call such a person as neurotic. So far as mystic experience is concerned, since it touches the ultimates of one's being and swamps one's personality as a whole, it has to have characteristics which deviate substantially from the so-called normal one. And in this lies its distinction.

The psychoanalysts, relying on their theory of the Unconscious and the Sex, very often say that the mystic experience is a product of repressed sexual desires. The psychoanalysts trace, directly or indirectly, all activities of life, be

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[174] The Great Mystics; London : Thinkers Library, 1946,

they religious or otherwise, to sex. But Freud and his followers make very sweeping generalisations and allege, more often than not, what exceeds or what is not warranted by the facts of evidence. People other than the mystics may have the same sexual predicament and yet they may not have the religious experiences of the mystic. Sex may be a part of the causative factors of religious experience, but it is by no means the whole of the cause. Accordingly, to point out the sexual repression or urges under-lying a religious experience is, logically speaking, not a correct way of describing the religious experience in all its facets and dimensions.

The critic may, however, say that in leveling his attack on the veracity of religious experience he is not simply relying on the psychological origin of such experience but that he can marshall facts from life to show how from a very early date a child is indoctrinated and initiated to a religious mode of thinking and to a religious style of life. Coupled to this practice are fears and rewards, earthly and heavenly, which induce a child to believe and to conduct his life under the all-comprehensive shadow of gods and goddesses, benign or evil. This conditioning goes on receiving occasional reinforcement from various quarters until it becomes perfectly natural to believe unquestionably the so-called truths of religion, and also to practice such spiritual, exercises as are required and enjoined by a particular religion.

The sociologists can indeed point to much brain-washing that goes in the name of religion in every society. From cradle to grave, not a single moment is lost to impress the need and significance of religious doctrines, incantations and practices. But the point is that the sociological facts are as much facts concerning the origin of religious experience as psychological are and are consequently open to the same charges. It has been shown that the origin of a belief is one thing, and its validity quite another. If, however, the psychologists and the sociologists succeed in showing that religious experiences can be explained completely, that is to say, without a remainder in their own terms, then their charges can be accepted as true. But this claim is never made. What is, however, said is that if the so-called mystic

experience is capable of being explained in simpler terms of Psychology and Sociology, then why bring in metaphysical entities like that of God or angels and offer explanation in abstruse terms ? It is a well-known principle in the field of Philosophy that of two explanations for the same phenomenon, that one is to be prefer-red which uses fewer and simpler categories. This principle is known as Ockham's principle. In the case of mystic experience the psychological or the sociological explanation uses a fewer number of categories and is also much simpler than the meta-physical one, which uses occult and trans-empirical categories. Hence it goes against the spirit of Ockham's principle if the religious explanation is accepted in preference to the scientific one. It is also contended that there are a good many mystics who do not claim encounter with some Super-sensible Reality. They do not say that they are aware of God or a Divine Presence in their religious experiences. As Kai Nielson says:

"Like Matthew Arnold, Thomas Hardy, and George Eliot they have feelings of alienation, creatureliness and dependence, but they remain secularists utterly unaware of the presence of something infinite upon whom they can depend."[175]

In defense of the religious standpoint, it may be held that the religious categories need not be reckoned as abstruse, or metaphysical; their logical status resembles that of scientific categories, such as ether and energy, for both are posited when facts under consideration cannot be adequately described or explained without their help. Scientists take recourse to such categories when they find there are certain facts which need explanation and cannot of themselves offer any reason for their mode or manner of occurrence. And if a scientist is permitted to use categories in the interest of scientific knowledge, why can't a religionist be allowed to use categories if he finds that such categories are required in the interest of religious know-ledge? The religionist very often says that without positing God he cannot explain

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[175] Reason-and Practice (New York, 1971), p. 201.

mystic experience and, therefore, he is within his rights if he invokes such categories which the logic of his arguments require. This line of argument is taken both by Kant and Sidgwick while advancing ethical arguments for the existence of God. They have contended that the requirements of morality cannot be met without belief in a good and just God. Therefore, such a God should exist. Sidgwick maintains that just as scientists make postulates to explain facts of Nature, like-wise a religionist makes postulates to explain religious truths. An inductive logician postulates or presupposes the law of causation and the uniformity of Nature to explain facts of empirical sciences. Likewise a religionist can take as postulate the existence of God, for without this presupposition the fact of religious experience cannot be understood.

Kant and Sidgwick try to establish a pragmatic ground for the acceptance of God as a sort of hypothesis, but it seems doubtful if the religionists would agree to it. If God is an hypothesis, like any other scientific hypothesis, then God would stand on very shaky grounds. An hypothesis in science can be modified, amended or rejected in the light of fresh facts. As an example we can take the law of causation and the principle of the uniformity of Nature which were once regarded as postulates of Induction but have now been replaced by the Keynesian Principle of Limited Independent Variety. Keynes points out in his book, A Treatīse on Probabīlīty, that inductive generalisations can be justified on the ground "that the objects in the field, over which our generalisations extend, do not have an infinite number of independent qualities ; that, in other words, their characteristics, however numerous, cohere together in groups of invariable connections which are finite in number." Keynes sugests that, in addition to the Principle of Limited Independent Variety, another principle which he calls the Principle of Atomic Uniformity is needed as a postulate for scientific enquiry. Like the law of causation and uniformity of Nature the hypothesis of ether has also been given up by physicists as it is no longer required. Thus hypotheses in science stand on precarious grounds. They can maintain their identity provided they fulfil certain conditions and, when those conditions

are no longer fulfilled, they lose their identity. If God is treated as a hypothesis, it shall have to present itself for authentication at the court of facts and the moment it fails to secure certification or authentication from facts it shall have to change or to cancel itself. Moreover, if we concede for the sake of argument that God is a hypothesis, it will not be the religious God, Who as a Person possesses all those virtues and qualities which comfort and inspire human beings.

Despite the fact that psychological and sociological considerations, being concerned with the origin of religious or mystic experience, have no bearing on the validity or otherwise of such experiences, it remains a fact that the feeling that one is in the presence of God is no guarantee for saying that there is in fact God. Besides, belief in God requires bringing in categories not needed at the scientific level and would thus violate the spirit of Ockham's principle. It has also been .seen that religious categories cannot be held at par with scientific hypotheses. It, there-fore, seems that those people who rely on mystic experience for God's existence have no good ground to stand upon.

The religionists of course would say that "the feeling that I am in the presence of God" may not be a good ground for making an inference that there is God, but that the mystics never make any inference at all. The mystic is not a logician, making his feeling a ground of inference. The point is that the immediate and non-inferential knowledge that he has of the Ultimate Reality is enough for him to say that there is God. Now, though it would be hard to deny this claim, yet it is a matter of observation that perceptions can be vitiated by one's own common imaginings and that there are cases of hallucinations so that it becomes difficult to accept every feeling as genuine, that is to say, as indicative of an actual existent referend. We may not agree with C.D. Broad when he says "that the whole religious experience of

mankind is a gigantic pure delusion,"[176] yet there is no gainsaying the fact that experience as such is not a guarantee of its genuineness.

Mysticism and Existentialism. Let us now turn our attention to another group of thinkers who, though not mystics and would even strongly repudiate the epithet of mysticism if ascribed to their mode of thinking, nevertheless take their stand on some sort of experience and make it the basis of their attitude to Reality. No doubt, these people are averse to transcendentalism, if transcendentalism is taken in the old traditional sense of the Idealistic philosophy; but they would welcome transcendental-ism in the sense of self-transcendence and also God-transcendence. I am alluding to Existentialism—a powerful intellectual movement of the present-day world. In our country there is a general tendency to draw parallels between our own authors and those of other lands, indicating thereby that what is presented by others, in a new diction, under the garb of modernity, is already possessed by us. People have tried to discover in Iqbal the salient features of Existentialism, implying thereby that Iqbal's thought is repository of what is essential to this new mode of thinking. While there is no harm in discovering similitudes in the thoughts of our own thinkers and those of others, the motive behind this effort may not be laudatory. Existentialist strands may be present in sufistic and other thought but that does not provide a sufficient ground for saying that sufism or Iqbal's philosophy is existentialistic.

For a religionist and a mystic the Ultimate Reality, by what-ever name it is called, is spiritual, but for an existentialist this is hot the case. While Iqbal says: "Personally, I believe that the ultimate character of Reality is spiritual,"[177] and that "the facts of experience justify the inference that the ultimate nature of Reality is spiritual, and must be conceived as an ego,[178]" for Sartre, an arch-existentialist, there is no Reality as such and hence the question of its being spiritual or otherwise does not arise. Sartre is a Nihilist,

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[176] Religion, Philosophy and Psychical Research.
[177] Op. cit., p. 38.
[178] Ibid., p. 61.

for he believes that all existence leads to nothingness ; but even those writers who lean towards religion and theism regard man as thrown into this friendless world in all his forlornness as the primary reality and pass on to God to safeguard individuality, freedom and existential dialectic of man. Thus the ultimate and primary category being the predicament of man, it is futile to raise the question whether Reality is spiritual or material. As a matter of fact, there is no "Reality" for existentialists ; if at all, it is absurd—hardly comfortable to religionists.

The concept of absurdity, so prominent in existentialist thought, marks off mysticism from existentialism. If, as Frithj of Schuon says that sufism is the "kernal" of Islam, and that for sufism "the cosmos is the manifestation of Reality" is a cardinal principle,[179] then it is evident that the cosmos can, by no stretch of imagination, be regarded absurd, irrational or purposeless. In one of his earlier books Iqbal says:

"Beneath this visible evolution of forms is the force of love which actualizes all strivings, movements and progress. Things are so constituted that they hate not-existence, and love the joy of individuality in various forms. The indeterminate matter, dead in itself, assumes or, more properly, is made to assume by the inner force of love, various forms, and rises higher and higher in the scale of beauty."[180]

In opposition to Bergson who looked upon Reality as a free creative impulse of the nature of volition, serving no purpose, Iqbal, with the tradition of purely teleological evolutionary theory as evolved by Muslim thinkers before him, and the clear Quranic statement "We have not created the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them in sport. We created them not but with truth ; but most of you know not[181] could not conceive of Reality as an aimless and blind impulse. And this is more or less the case with

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[179] Understanding Islam, London, 1963.
[180] Development of Metaphysics in Persia (London, 190S), p. 39.
[181] xtiv. 38-39.

every religion, particularly so with the Semitic ones. Whereas the concept of absurdity is like an article of faith for the existentialists, the converse of it is true for the religionists. Thus it is evident that existentialism as a movement in human thinking has a standpoint which is hardly identical with that of religion. It may perhaps be said at this point that religion is to some extent "absurd" ; since it accepts the non-applicability of rational considerations in so far as God, after-life, soul and human destiny are concerned, and leaves its votaries in a state of wonder when questions of ultimate significance are raised. But there is an important difference in the attitude of a religionist and that of an existentialist. While a religionist acknowledges the incompetence of reason in the domain of ultimate religious truths, he never doubts their existence. An existentialist simply believes that such truths do not have 'the ultimate significance that is claimed for them, and therefore as truth existentially apprehended their nature vastly differs from that of the religionists. For Albert Camus the world is' not absurd, because no rational explanation can be offered of its existence; it is absurd, for when such an explanation is demanded as it is by the curious nature of man, then none can be offered. Now this is not the position of a religionist. He always depends upon the wisdom of God and, where explanations are not available to him, he does not believe that there are none whatever. He simply waits, and hopes that God in His infinite mercy will one day reveal what is hidden at the moment.

Another point of contact between mysticism and existential-ism is found in the importance that they attach to the phenomenon of anguish. Both in mystic and existentialistic literature, a good deal of emphasis is given to anguish. But this, again, is a superficial resemblance. In one case it is the anguish of being, in the other it is the anguish of the soul. Maulānā Rum does talk of the pangs of separation in the opening verses of his great Mathnavī. He describes how the soul laments because of its separation from the primal source and is yearning all the time for a return to or absorption in that source. Behind the lamentation and yearning of the soul lies a

metaphysical theory regarding the creation of this universe, the nature of God, the relationship of man to God—all against the background of neo-Platonic philosophy current then. The object of this anguish is to make a man conscious of his predicament as a result of soul's separation from its source and the supreme necessity of making an all-out effort for reunion with it. Thus the mystic urge is teleologically oriented, inasmuch as its objective is the deliverance of the soul from the clutches of material environs, and its return to its source. When, however, the existentialists talk of anguish, they are primarily concerned with the plight of man, thrown as he is in a hostile world, with limitless possibilities and limitless freedom but surrounded on all sides by forces ready to deprive him-of all the freedom that he possesses and to squeeze out, in the bargain, the soul or the very basis of his existence. Man is accordingly a victim of self-alienation, he has lost his identity and he goes about, in the world, like a corpse which willy nilly he has to carry himself. In olden days whosoever was condemned to death had to carry his own guillotine to the scaffold. The modern man is likewise condemned to death by present-day technology and science and is required to carry his dead body himself to the scaffold. Thus both in the case of mysticism and existentialism, the feeling of anguish is there, but the meaning of anguish is not the same.

The difference that is obvious in the case of anguish is obvious in the case of inner dialectics as well, for in respect of mysticism the dialectics is motivated by spiritual considerations, while in respect of existentialism it is motivated by existential requirements of one's being. A Sufi traverses the path of piety, going from one stage to another, till he reaches the final one which may be called the absorption of the soul in the Ultimate Reality. In this path each succeeding stage excells the previous one, because of the greater depth as well as the greater height of its spiritual experiences: The yardstick in each case is the spiritual proximity of the human soul to the Ultimate Source. In existentialism, too, there is a path to be traversed as is evident in Kierkegaard, but the path has no extraneous object to achieve; it is, on the

other hand, directed to the unfolding of one's possibilities towards greater creativity and subjectivity. Kierkegaard traces the evolution of one's existence, starting from the stage of irresponsibility which he calls the aesthetic stage and reaching ultimately the religious stage which is that of commitment and dedication. In between the two is the ethical stage where one is bound to a code of life of which one is not the author. Thus there is an upward movement, both in the case of mysticism and existentialism, but the motive and goal of this movement are not identical.

The differences worked out above are mainly due to the fact that mysticism is by and large a God-oriented movement, while existentialism is an earth-oriented movement. That accounts for the fact that, while mysticism is a purposeful and optimistic movement, existentialism is a purposeless and pessimistic movement. The words "purposeful" and "purposeless" are a little misleading. All that is meant is that, while a mystic strives to achieve reunion with the Ultimate Reality and hopes to realise this state one day, either through his own efforts or through the grace of his spiritual guide, the existentialist has no such ambition. He has no spiritual heights to acheive. What he is striving for is "authentic existence," that is to say, an existence in which one lives to the ultimate possibilities of one's being. In one sense existentialism is as much purposive as mysticism is, for in both there is an objective to be achieved, though the nature of the objective is not identical but in another sense, if by purpose is meant a predetermined purpose which pulls life either from behind or from front, then existentialism is non-purposive, for it believes only in such purposes as are created by the free choices of human beings and which are this-worldly and not other-worldly. In short-existentialism is a secular, humanistic movement, which mysticism is not.

There is no denying the fact that existentialism has been appropriated and made use of by Christians, both Protestants and Rot-flan Catholics. They feel that existentialism is a product of Christian thinking and supports Christian truths. It is said that existentialism arose by the efforts of

Kierkegaard who raised the question; "How to be Christian in a Christian world ?" and in answering this question, laid the foundation of existentialism. There is a lot of truth in this assertion, but the fact that existentialism arose in answering a Christian question does not imply that it is suited to Christian truths alone. In some Muslim countries the Muslims are trying to interpret Islamic truths with the help of existentialism. It seems to me that truth, whether Christian or Islamic, is essentially truth and if existentialism has proved a helping hand to Christianity it can render the same service to Islam, but imitation in this respect would be of no avail. It should be understood that the character of the Islamic faith is not identical to that of the Christian faith and therefore the applications and interpretations of existentialism for Christianity may not be true for Islam. That, however, does not mean that a Muslim should not countenance modern movements of thought. On the other hand, if the Muslims have to be in the vanguard, as they once were, it is essential that they should grasp the full significance of modern thought and incorporate it in their own thinking. Followers of other religions, particularly Christians and Jews, do not spurn the fruits of modern thinking. They taste them and spurn them only if they upset their stomach. The Muslims have a horror of everything modern, and reject it without trying it. The result is that there is hardly any movement in the religious thought of Muslims, though other religions are experimenting with all sort of ideas and adapting their religion to the demands of the present-day world.

Though existentialism is not necessarily religious, yet there is a theistic brand of existentialism, of which Kierkegaard is the forerunner and Gabriel Marcel, Jacques Maritian, Nicolas Berdyaev, Martin Buber and Paul Tillich, typical representatives. Their thinking, though religious in a sense, differs from the characteristic religious thinking, for it does not present itself as an elaboration of revealed truth but as the conclusion of a philosophical reflection and analysis. Further, it starts from the "human situation," from the uniqueness of the existing individual and the primacy of the enacted being over the mere concept of being, rather than from the concept of the

Creator and His supposed or actual relationship with the creation. Hence the "experiential concreteness" that we meet in the existential religious thinkers can hardly be placed alongside of the mystic experience. In what follows my endeavour will not be to place mystic experience at par with the existential experience. What I am concerned with is to show that the experience of the existentialists, whatever its nature be, has been made a basis for the knowledge of God and the theistic existential thinkers have very often alleged that the facts of human existence oblige them to seek God and to acknowledge His existence. In the Journals, Kierkegaard says that, though a belief in God is a scandal to the intellect, a manifest absurdity, yet to ward off despair and to give sense to our lives we must take the leap of faith, we must believe in some-thing that, intellectually speaking, we recognise to be absurd. Religious knowledge, according to him, is completely beyond the limits of human understanding. But we are, he believes, hounded by heaven; our very human condition drives us to faith if our lives are to have any meaning. Our wills are free and we can turn away from God out of pride. But if we do so, we lose all meaning of life.

A mystic has also the same feeling. He too feels that his life will be devoid of all significance if his soul remains separated from its Primal Source. Both the mystic and the existentialist are, therefore, warriors waging war, one against the flesh and the other against the absurdities of human existence, with the object of finding meaning for their own lives. The starting point in both cases is "human situation," though viewed differently. I therefore guess that, in spite of very material differences between the experiences of an existentialist and those of a mystic, there is a common element, as it leads in both cases to God and also because both start from the same basis. Moreover, as the mystic abhors reason and resents its intrusion in the sacred precincts of religion, so does an existentialist. When Kierkegaard calls God a "manifest absurdity" he does not take the literal sense of the absurd ; what he means to imply is that the categories of discursive reasoning do not apply to Him and further that the Christian conception of God is riddled with such

contradictions that He has to be taken on trust. As an example he takes the idea of Incarnation and shows that it defies all rational attempts at explanation. To think that one might discover God through reason or revelation is illusion for Kierkegaard. It is a kind of evasive "double-mindedness" that enables one to postpone indefinitely making the leap of faith. There is nothing to be discovered. One must simply act, for there are and can be no rational grounds for Christian belief. A Sufi also feels that God cannot be under-stood through reason, but he would not call Him absurd. God is certainly incomprehensible to him, because of the fact that a finite intellect cannot comprehend the Infinite, but incomprehensibility is not equivalent to absurdity.

It seems to me that the whole difficulty about God's know-ledge arises from the fact that we recognise only one type of criteria which can lead to truth and these are the criteria of reasoning as laid down by Aristotle and his followers. It was held by early logicians that truth could be achieved through the employment of the principles of deductive logic alone. In deductive logic, the type of reasoning, unless it is strictly tautological, assumes the shape of "If-Then," that is, to say, given the pre-misses, this must follow as a matter of necessity. The relation of "If-Then" is that of entailment. The conclusion, so to say, is entailed by the premisses. Aristotle wanted all other types of reasoning to be thrown in the form of "If-Then" so that their validity be checked. Later, when inductive logic came into existence, it was demanded by philosophers that inductive arguments should justify themselves at the bar of reason, implying thereby that induction had to transform itself into deduction so that its conclusions be granted the official sanction of validity. Nowadays with the rise of the philosophy of language it has been recognised that there is not one way in which truth can be reached. Accordingly, induction has no need to metamorphosise itself in order to be treated a first-class citizen. What is true of induction is true of other sciences. Each science has its own criteria which are suited to its requirements. Likewise, religion can have its own criteria and the fact that the criteria of discursive reasoning

fail to apply to its findings cannot make it absurd. Now, it is for the religionists to work out the criteria of religious knowledge to lend meaning and significance to religious discourse. The point to be stressed is that not in all domains of human knowledge can the same principles be applied. Religion is distinct from all other disciplines and as such it must have its own principles and procedures.

While Kierkegaard is wrong in calling God absurd, there, is no gainsaying the fact that the principles of deductive meta-physics cannot apply to God or to other religious truths. The reason for this inapplicability is not to be found in the so-called absurdity of God but in the peculiar nature of the data a religionist is called upon to examine and to report. Kierkegaard feels that the absurd nature of God is the way to the knowledge of God. But if God is a pack of contradictions, as Kierkegaard would have us believe, it may not lead to His knowledge but to His rejection as was shown by Bradley—an English meta-physician, who in his famous book Appearance and Reality, finding contradictions in the nature of God relegated Him to the world of Appearances. I agree with Kai Nielson who says: "If belief in God is so absurd, why believe in God ?"[182] Kierkegaard thinks that, in order to escape from fear of death and human vanity, it is necessary that one should believe in God. This line of argument is similar to that of Kant. Whereas in the case of Kant, it was the ethical requirements of human beings which led to God, in the case of Kierkegaard it is the existential requirements of the human beings which call for a belief in God. And if the existential requirements are also moral requirements, as some existentialists have held, it can be said that Kierkegaard repeats the argument of Kant though in a different diction and with a different motif. "I believe," he says, "the time is not far off, when one will experience, perhaps dearly enough, that one has to start, if one wants to find the Absolute, not with doubt, but with despair." Starting with despair, his problem became, how again to become oneself? His solution was redintegratīo in station prīstīnum. He coined for it the term

[182] Op. cit.

"repetition," and meant by it "becoming again oneself before God". In his book Repetition, he shows how his hero, after his entanglement in the world, regains himself ; that the split in his personality is healed ; and that he reunites all forces; that is what he means by repetition. The idea behind repetition is that one has to become what one once was. Kierkegaard feels that as man journeys through life he is assailed by destructive forces which destroy the unity of his self and, therefore, raise the problem of putting the pieces together and integrating the forces of life once again. In essentials the process resembles what Jung calls individuation. But it is a process familiar to mystic thought. A mystic feels that the worldly forces have reduced him to nothingness and that, in order to become his real self, he has to muster all his conscious and unconscious forces, and this is not achievable without the grace of God. Kierkegaard starts from the feeling of despair and flies to faith in order to become once again his original self.

Kierkegaard advances no argument, for he does not believe in discursive thinking, and regards it blasphemous to prove the existence of God under His very nose. He depends upon choice and says that the existential dialectic of one's life pushes the individual from the aesthetic stage to the ethical one, and the same dialectic pushes him beyond the ethical to the religious one. This dialectical movement is urgent to fulfil the existential demands of one's life. For Kierkegaard, the existential demand is the choice of truth. But truth, for him, is not the truth of philosophers, something transcendental, abstruse and logical ; it is, on the other hand, the truth of one's own being. To be true means to be true to one's self, but not to the momentary one. It is to be true to one's eternal self, and, therefore, to be true to God.

As for Kierkegaard, so for sufis, truth is subjectivity. Like-wise, as Kierkegaard chooses God to liberate himself from despair, so do sufis choose God to become their own self once again. I, therefore, feel that Kierkegaard has not broken fresh ground. Indeed, his statements are more open to doubt, than those of the mystics.

Mystīcism and Fragmentation. It may be observed in passing that existentialism arose as an antidote to the poison of the present-day technology and scientifically-grounded civilisation. But it took its stand on despair and remained to the end a philosophy of despair. There has consequently been a sharp reaction against this movement on the Continent in recent years. This is evident in what is called the "Philosophy of the Living Spirit," championed by philosophers like Friedrich Otto Bollonow, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Fritz-Joachim Von Rintelen.[183] Bollonow feels that existentialism, in emphasising the feelings of despair alone, indicates its shortsightedness. Hence he counteracts the onesidedness of the existentialistic attitude of anxiety and des-pair by explicating the value of the open-hearted, exultant and elevated moods or dispositions, which are just as genuine to man as are the dispositions analysed by existentialism. Likewise in making an assessment of Heidegger's philosophy, Von Rintelen says:

"But Heidegger knows only the basic human disposition of anxiety and seems to disregard the basic disposition of joy which inclines towards value and is as original and fundamental as anxiety."[184]

Existentialism is thus a matter of history and the Philosophy of the Living Spirit which seems to have superseded it on the Continent has reintroduced the virtue of hope, joy and love by which human beings live and sustain their otherwise miserable existence. This philosophy, I feel, is more akin to mysticism and also to Islam.

The philosophers of the Living Spirit have felt that existentialism has failed in re-establishing the disrupted relation of trust between man and his world. In this respect, one can say mysticism is better suited than the philosophy of the Living Spirit. Before one can appreciate the service which mysticism can render in this connection, it is necessary to understand what the precise nature of this disruption is and how it has come about.

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183 Contemporary German Philosophy, Bonn, 1970.
184 Ibid., p. 143.

A.W. Levi says:

"There is in the climate of the modern world a sense of impending danger, a rootlessness of the person, a pervasive tenseness which point to certainties dissolved and emotional centres displaced. It is not accidental that the two most novel philosophic positions of the time—Logical Empiricism and Existentialism—should contribute to this massive effect—the one by narrowing the region of authentic knowledge to a point where it is no longer adequate to the breadth of human concern, the other elevating into ontological principles the human emotions of cal e, anxiety, anguish, abandonment and despair. Clearly the sense of integration has been lost. . ., The faith in a real future has been destroyed. . . . The consciousness of belonging to a great human enterprise seems to be withering away. "[185]

No wonder T.S. Eliot says:

"We are the hollow men,

We are the stuffed men;

Leaning together

Headpiece filled with straw. Alas !

Our dried voices, when

We whisper together

Are quiet and meaningless

As wind in dry grass,

Or rat's feet over broken glass

In our dry cellar.

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[185] Philosophy and the Modern World, Indiana University Press, 1950,

Shape without form, shade without colour,

Paralysed force, gesture without motion."

Karl Jasper also says: "The insecure human being gives our epoch its physiognomy."

How has this disruption come about ? Why this rootlessness, insecurity, and forlornness? The existentialists have made a philosophy out of this mood. They attribute the modern predicament of man to technology and to its twin offspring, bureaucracy and urbanisation. Marcel maintains that the growth in technology and bureaucracy is creating in Europe a cult of mediocrity, conformism and loss of individuality, with the inner life of the individual sacrificed to external forms. Heidegger, too, sees the individual as threatened by impersonality. On the philosophical side it was Hume whose empiricistic standpoint led ultimately to the rejection of soul, mind or self—call it by whatever name you like.

Till the end of the Middle Ages, in Europe, the heart of the common man beat in unison with that of Nature. But in the seventeenth century—which Whitehead calls the "century of genius," when the success of the science of the physical world became assured—the human mind, through which that science was obtained, began to be in doubt. First, Descartes doubted it and then philosophers of empiricism, one after the other, till Hume arrives and, with one stroke, he laid the idea of personal identity to rest. If personal identity goes, it means that there is no hard core of reality behind the perpetual flux of ideas. He says quite bluntly:

:'I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity and we are in a perpetual flux and movement.... The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions

successively make their appearance; pass, repass, glide away and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations."[186]

Thus what for the Greeks constituted the unity of the rational self and for the medievals the unity of the God-given soul disappeared altogether. For Kant who was awakened from his dogmatic slumber by the onslaughts of Hume on the citadel of knowledge, Soul, Mind or Self became a regulative principle for the ordering of natural knowledge and the connections between the different items of experience had to be made as īf there was a mind doing this job. Mind so considered had merely afictional unity.

After dismissing the unity of mind and its permanent nature, there came the social category in prominence, and the functions which mind used to perform in the Middle Ages were relegated to culture David Riesman, an American sociologist, has traced the economic process of the Western civilisation through three stages: handicraft production, early industrialisation emphasising work and productivity, late industrialisation emphasising leisure and consumption. Corresponding to these are three types of character-formation: the tradition-directed individual of the Middle Ages, the inner-directed individual of the seventeenth century, the other-directed individual of contemporary America and Europe. The first type is dominated by traditions, the second by a system of motivation implanted by parents and directed towards clear goals and the third by the approvals and disapprovals of others. Since in the other-directed civilisation the source of inspiration ceases to be one's inner self, there is a grave danger of our discovering one day that we are mere accumulation of the debris around us and that we have no authentic self at all. This has been brilliantly expressed by F,S. Fitzgerald, a novelist, in the following words:

"So there was not an 'I' any more not a basis on which I could organize my self-respect save my limitless capacity for toil that it seemed I possessed no more. It was strange to have no self to be like a little boy left alone in a

[186] A Treatise of Htonan Nature, Oxford : Clarendon press, 1928.

big house, who knew that now he could do anything he wanted to do but found that there was nothing that he wanted to do."

Cultural basis, however, could not last long. The industrialisation of modern life and the growth of modern science tended towards specialisation, leading inevitably to fragmentation. Accordingly a civilisation torn within itself came into being, and this division had its source in technology. Both urbanisation and bureaucracy have resulted from the growth of scientific knowledge and technological appliances. They have made man to live a fraction of what man is destined to live, they have imposed routine and artificiality on human existence and have also made man rootless and insecure. The real culprit is, therefore, technology and science which have robbed man of the glory of his existence. There is a saying attributed to an ancient sage, Chaung-tze:

"I have heard my teacher say that whoever uses machines does all his work like a machine. He who does his work like a machine grows a heart like a machine and he who carries the heart of a machine in his breast loses his simplicity. He who has lost his simplicity becomes insecure in the strivings of his soul. Uncertainty in the strivings of the soul is something which does not agree with honest sense. It is not that I do not know of such things; I am ashamed to use them."

Likewise Gerald Sykes says: "Man rushes first to be saved by technology, then to be saved from it."

But are we justified in condemning technology and science? Is science really responsible for our fragmentation and soulless existence? In the past, science has been denounced so much that its real function has been ignored. To rectify this mistake, William Kuhns has stressed the changing conceptions of technology.[187] He says that technology is not so much a phenomenon of

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[187] The Post-Industrialist Prophets—Interpretations of Technology, New York, 1971.

energy transformations or work or even applied science, but a way of doing things—a state of mind and being. Whereas, he says, the people of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth identified technology with the work-performing, energy-transforming machines, we are learning to identify technology with media and other forms of information control. The distinction between a machine-dominated or mechanistic interpretation of technology and an information-control interpretation heals to a major new consideration. The most important of these is the way in which one conceives of technology in relation to man.

In the eighteenth century when the whole universe was regarded as being knit in a vast chain of causal relationships with no break anywhere, the machine was taken as a model by which philosophers and scientists tried to understand the universe and man. The machine was interpreted as a principle of its own, opposed to man. It was held that machine worked on physicochemical principles which failed to apply to man, since he was spiritual, teleological and free. The critics who were mostly religious saw the action of the machine as imposing its own mechanised pattern upon man, degrading and dehumanising him. It is this image of science which has mostly been presented by existentialists in Europe and by Iqbal in our country. But this conception has been superseded by a new one, in which the emphasis is on medīa and which has consequently led to a different conclusion about the relationship of man to technology. As William Kuhns says:

"Where the mechanized conceptions of technology led almost inevitably to a polarization of man and machine, the media or information-control interpretation leads to a conception of organic continuity between man and his techniques. All media are 'extensions of man' and modern technologies from the automobile to the electric light are 'extensions of media'. A principle of organic continuity between man and his technology, not only

posits a new harmony, but provides an entirely different set of values, by which man can judge his technologies and their effects."[188]

If, instead of regarding technology as inimical to human purposes, one regards it as an extension "of man" and if, instead of regarding Nature as a hostile force, "red in tooth and claw,"

one regards it as a challenge and as an -opportunity, a different conception of the relationship of man to himself and to Nature anises. It will stress the fundamental cooperativeness of all the elements of Nature including man and will make a strong plea for harmony and unity. And this is nothing but mystic attitude to life and the universe around. According to Russell, one chief characteristic of mysticism is its belief in unity, and its refusal to admit opposition or division anywhere.[189] In the same strain William James says:

"Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge to-wards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictions and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity. Not only do they, as contrasted species, belong to one and the same genus but one of the species, the nobler and better one, is itself the genus and so soaks up and absorbs the opposites into itself."[190]

The mystic attitude, therefore, requires that a sense of unity be cultivated, and that the forces of Nature, instead of being regarded as hostile to man, should be taken as challenges and opportunities for the expansion and enrichment of man. This view cannot lead to inertia or passivity since the world, if it meets' us as a challenge, has to be understood and met on its

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188 Ibid.
189 Mysticism and Logic, Ponguin Books, 1953.
190 Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 388.

own grounds. The unity has to be achieved by the planned activity of the individual. It is a fruit which cannot simply drop into one's mouth from above but has to be won by each person through his own efforts.