TRANSLATIONS FROM IQBAL

*** The Sages**

*** Muslim**

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THE SAGES IQBAL ON LOCKE, KANT,

AND BERGSON: A STUDY OF THREE VERSES

I. Preliminary

Muhammad Iqbal had not only mastered the Islamic intellectual tradition, he had made a deep study of Western philosophy as well, abundant evidence of which is found in his prose and poetical works both. He often commented on the thoughts of Muslim and Western thinkers and writers, and a systematic study of these comments would shed light on aspects of Iqbal's own intellectual life. Here we shall discuss a set of three verses in which Iqbal states the views of three a estern philosophers, Locke, Kant, and Bergson. The piece occurs in payam-i Mashriq (in Kulliyyat-i Iqbal: Farsi (Iqbal Academy Pakistan, d ore, 1989 & 1993), pp. 334-5.

II. The Views of the Three Philosophers and Iqbal 's Verses

LOCKE

The English thinker John Locke (1632-1704) denied the existence of innate ideas. Man's mind at birth, he claimed, is like a "white paper" with nothing on it. Knowledge, he said, arises from one's experience of the sensory world, sensation thus being the source of all ideas. He regarded reflection as a source of knowledge also, but reflection, too, he maintained, took sensory images as its data. In his principal work, Locke attempts to show how men, barely by the use of their natural faculties, may attain all the knowledge they have, without the help of any innate pressions and may arrive at certainty without any such original notions or principles. (An Essay Concerning Human nderstanding, abridged and edited with an introduction by ohn W. Yolton [London and Melbourne: Dent/Everyman's

Library, 1976], Bk. 1, ch. 1.sec. 1.)

Here is how Locke explains the origin of ideas:

The senses at first let in particular ideas and furnish the yd empty cabinet; and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory, and names gives to them. Afterwards the mind, proceeding further, abstracts them, and by degrees learns the use of general names. In this manner the mind comes to be furnished with ideas and language, the materials about which to exercise its discursive faculty. And the use of reason becomes daily more visible, as these materials that give it employment increase. (Ibid., Bk. 1. ch. 2, sec. 15.)

IQBAL'S VERSE

Iqbal puts the following words into Locke's mouth:

It was dawn that lit up its cup

With a drink from the sun:

The tulip otherwise bore an empty cup

When it joined the company of flowers.

A brief explanation of the verse may be offered in the following w. When man enters the world (= when the tulip joins the compan flowers), his mind is empty (= its cup is empty). It is only upon exposed to sensory experience (= it is only upon being illuminated by the rays of the sun through the agency of dawn) that the human receives impressions (= that the tulip's cup is filled with wine other words, man's mind is, originally, a tabula rasa, the source of one's ideas lying outside one. The similarity between Locke's "empty cabinet" (second quote, above) and Iqbal's "empty cup" is too obvious to be missed.

KANT

While Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) accepted the view of Locke other empiricists that sensation was the only source of ideas, he ins that "experience itself requires laws which are a priori at the basis of its possibility" (Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that can Qualify as a Science, tr. Paul Carus [La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publis Company, 1902], p. 89; see also pp. 69-70). Space (the princip extension) and Time (The principle of motion) supply prerequisites for experience, for when everything empirical is taken of an "empirical intuition," "space and time still remain, which therefore pure intuitions that lie a priori at the basis of the empirical (p. 36). Basic to Kant's theory is a distinction between the content form of experience: phenomenal appearance gives the content of experience, but the a priori principles of space and time alone give form to experience (p. 68). Without these principles, in fact, experience would not be possible.

IQBAL'S VERSE

By nature it had a taste

For crystalline wine:

From the eternity's land of night

Has it brought its star of a cup.

"It" in lines 1 and 4 stands for the tulip. The wine is "crystalline" in the twin senses of "clear" and "shiny". Note that while Locke stressed the original "emptiness" of the human mind, Kant, though he affirms this

emptiness in principle, underscores the importance of the mind as an agent that gives form to experience. Thus the Kantian a priori principles, while they are not creative of experience, are yet necessary to all experience and constitute the conditions of its possibility. In its very act of perception, in other words, the mind "illuminates" the data, which would otherwise have remained in the dark or, one might say, would not have been possible at all--hence Iqbal's use of the phrase 'starlike cup." To sum up, the human mind, even though initially like an empty slate, has an innate capacity for giving shape to experience. In Iqbal this translates into the following: The tulip, even though it has no. wine in its cup, does have a taste for wine. Since, moreover, the formative powers of the mind exist prior to any experience, Iqbal speaks of the tulip's having brought its shining cup from the land of eternal night.

BERGSON

In coming to grips with the British empiricist movement, Kant, while arguing for the a priori nature of Space and Time, had also stated that Space and Time do not give us knowledge of reality as it is, experience of the "things-in-themselves" always eluding us. This amounted to relativization of knowledge, for what we end up knowing is not reality itse but the phenomenal aspect of it. To the French thinker Henri Bergson (1859-1935), this view is unacceptable. In Bergson, in fact, the terms of the discussion change completely. Their differences, notwithstanding, Locke the empiricist and Kant the idealist (Kant called his philosophy transcendent idealism) both took a discursive approach to reality, and this is what Bergson finds objectionable. Analysis as a mode of knowing presupposes a static, frozen reality, and, in dealing with reality in this form, intelligence deals with snapshots of reality, not with reality itself, which is living, dynamic, and indivisible:

But this 'inert' world is only an abstraction. Concrete reality comprises those living, conscious beings enframed in inorganic matter. (An Introduction to Metaphysics [tr. Mabelle L. Andison [Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld/Helix, 1983; repr. of 1946 Littlefield edition], p. 92).

Much trouble arises from a confusion between time, which is an aggregate of discrete moments (Bergson calls it "spatialized time" (p. 149])

and duration, which is continuous, fluid, indivisible ("real duration is what we have always called time, but time perceived as indivisible" [p. 149]). The distinction between duration (al duree) and time (le temps) is absolutely fundamental in Bergson. Life is mobility, not rest: "it is flux, the continuity of transition, it is change itself that is real" (p. 16); "let us unfasten the cocoon, awaken the chrysalis; let us restore to movement its mobility, to change its fluidity, to time its duration" (p. 17); life, as experienced not in time but in duration, is "unceasing creation, the uninterrupted up-surge of reality" (p. 18; also p. 91:"… the continuous creation of unforeseeable novelty which seems to be going on in the universe").

There is thus a world of difference between reality as it is experienced whole, directly and immediately--in duration--and reality when it is observed piecemeal and described from the outside--in time. It is through intuition, not intelligence, that one experiences duration: "Intuition is what attains the spirit, duration, pure change (p. 33).

Of the several aspects of Bergson's philosophy what concerns us most directly is the notion of impulsion. But first a word about two other notions emptiness and fullness. Both Locke (with his tabula rasa) and Kant (with his a priori but in themselves stark and non. substantial categories of Space and Time) proceed with what Bergson would call emptiness and move towards fullness, and therein lies the rub. For existence rather than vacuum, and fullness rather than emptiness is reality, and so existence and fullness rather than vacuum and emptiness should be one's starting-point and focus of attention ("the habit of proceeding from emptiness to fullness is the source of problems which are non-existent (pp. 95-96 [emphasis added]). The principle of life does not require an explanation with reference to something other than itself. And life is an evolution, a constant becoming. This brings us to impulsion.

Comparing the movement of thought with the growth of an embryo, Bergson speaks of the "impulsion" that is "given to the embryonic life" and that "determines the division of an original cell into cells which in turn divide until the complete organism is formed" (p. 121). In another place he writes (note the metaphor of the balloon and compare it with the analogy of the embryo):

Reality is global and undivided growth, progressive invention, duration: it resembles a gradually expanding rubber balloon assuming at each moment unexpected form…Reality', as immediately perceived, is fullness constantly swelling out, to which emptiness is unknown (pp. 95.96 [emphasis added])

In other words, it is the inner self that matters:

Let us then go down into our own inner selves: the deeper the point we touch, the stronger will be the thrust which sends us back to the surface. Philosophical intuition is this contact, philosophy is this impetus. Brought - back to the surface by an impulsion from the depth, we shall regain contact with science as our thought opens out and disperses. (pp. 124-125)

But nowhere is the substantiality of change so visible, so palpable as in the domain of the inner life. (p. 148)

The intuition we refer to then bears above all upon internal duration. It grasps a succession which is not juxtaposition, a ' growth from within [emphasis added]... (p. 32)

Along side of intelligence there is in effect the immediate perception by each of us of his own activity and of the conditions in which it is exercised. Call it what you will; it is the feeling we have of being creators of our intentions, of our decisions, of our acts, and by that, of our habits, our characters, ourselves. (p. 93 [emphasis added]).

A little later (p. 105) Bergson, speaking of the gains to be made "in finding some absolute in the moving world of phenomena," says (emphasis added):

But above all we shall have greater strength, for we shall feel we are participating, creators of ourselves, in the great work of creation which is the origin of all things and which goes on before our eyes.

Kant was thus mistaken,

For, in order to reach intuition it is not necessary to transport ourselves outside the domain of the senses and of consciousness. Kant's error was to believe that it was… (pp. 127-128)

IQBAL'S VERSE

It has been necessary to state Bergson's views at some length beca the true dimensions of Iqbal's verse about Bergson cannot otherwise be appreciated. It was Bergson's wish "to take philosophy out of school and bring it into closer contact with life" (p. 126). Iqbal, w he does not agree with every aspect of Bergson's philosophy, could a agree more with him on this point. Here is how Iqbal descri Bergson's views on the subject under discussion:

Neither wine from eternity

Nor a cup did it bring:

It is from the scar of its heart

That the tulip gets its passion abiding.

According to Bergson, the real question is not whether the mind' initially blank (Locke) or whether the a priori principles give form sensory data (Kant). Both Locke ("the tulip came in with an emp cup") and Kant ("the tulip's cup gives shape to the wine that is pour. into it") are off the mark. The whole desbate between the empiricists and the idealists is irrelevant, for both groups ignore what really matters; in their eagerness to "understand" reality, they have failed o "live" reality. Life is not something to be subjected to analysis through the use of sophisticated techniques-- this is tantamount to dissecting butterfly. Rather, it should be experienced---intuitively--in all its richness, multiplicity, and vibrance, its integrity and quality uncompromised by the "machinations" of intelligence. In Iqbal's words, what really matters is the fact that the tulip is possessed of burning passion--the flame of life--whose source lies inside the tulip itself. The first hemistich of Iqbal's verse about Bergson thus critici the terms of the empiricist-idealist debate. The second hemistich state the essence of Bergson's philosophy: it is the inner quality of life, impulsion of life to create, the constant movement of life that should command one's primary attention. Since it is the inner quality of life that has true value, it is obvious that direct intuition and not media intelligence is the appropriate means of getting access to the heart reality.

III. Comment

In the end, a few general comments may not be out of place.

First, one cannot but marvel at Iqbal's remarkably succinct summing up, in only three verses, of some of the essential views of three major Western philosophers. Iqbal does not simply state their deas, he also indicates, by using the dialogical device, the movement of Western thought from Locke to Bergson.

Second, it is equally remarkable that Iqbal is able to state the philosophies of the three thinkers by using a single imgage, that of the dip. The tulip, Iqbal's favourite flower, appears to be ideal for Iqbal's purposes: in the case of Locke it becomes an empty wine-cup; in the case of Kant it becomes the formal conditioning factors of knowledge and understanding; in the case of Bergson, the "scar" in the "heart" literally, "liver": jigar) of the tulip gives evidence of the principle of life which is its own explanation. Note, to begin with, that the three philosophers are shown to be in dialogue with each other. Kant responds to Locke by accepting the terms of the argument as laid down by the latter (the tulip, the cup, the assembly, i.e., man, his mind, and be world, respectively). But while Locke emphasizes the emptiness of he cup, Kant stresses that the cup is a form-giving instrument. Bergson, however, turns his attention to the inner life of the tulip. Neither Locke nor Kant accounts for the principle of life nor is the quality of Life something that is inexplicable with reference to anything extrinsic to it. The source of the tulip's life and beauty lies within the tulip. As can be seen, Iqbal succeeds eminently in explicating certain concepts in Western thought by using a typically Eastern image. An ore felicitous way of describing Western thought to an Eastern audience could hardly be thought of.

Third, one might ask, which of the three views is Iqbal himself sympathetic to? In the light of several other statements of Iqbal, one in say that, in this particular context at least, Iqbal supports the view of Bergson. Speaking elsewhere of the fountain of water, Iqbal says: "It its inner drive and energy that makes the water of the fountain gush forth and rise" (baland josh-i darun se hu'a he favvara). In other words, Iqbal cites the dialogue between the Western philosophers in order to express his own views, by using Bergson as his mouthpiece. But if so, hen the objections that arise against Bergson's view may be taken to arise against Iqbal's view as well. One such objection is that, in his description of Bergson's thought (as opposed to

his description of the thought of the two other philosophers), Iqbal blurs the distinction between intellectual content and poetic expression, for the statement that the source of the tulip's passion lies in the "scar of its heart" may seem to beg the question. To this charge Iqbal would probably reply, as would Bergson, by saying that the shift from the intellectual to the poetic mode does not represent an evasion of the issue necessitated by the terms of the discussion. That is, the issue ca dealt with in discursive terms, and must be approached different), if the essence and quality of life are inexplicable with reference to' matter, then the discursive approach is inadequate to depiction and its movement. In the verse on Bergson, then, Iqbal's use o image of the tulip becomes a critique of the intellectualistic m knowing and understanding.

MUSLIM

THE FUTURE SEEN IN THE MIRROR OF THE PAST: A POEM BY

IQBAL

INTRODUCTORY

Like other serious Muslim thinkers of his age, Muhammad lqbal reflected deeply on the challenge of modernity faced by Islam and Muslims. The results of this reflection are set forth in Iqbal's writings prose and poetry both. One motif seems to have been constant: future of Muslims was inextricably linked with their past. This was a belief held not by a starry-eyed idealist or an incurable romantic, by one who on the one hand possessed a thorough understanding historic Islam, and on the other hand was alive to the problems. challenges, and opportunities presented by modernity, In the follow poem, entitled "The Muslim" and composed in June 1912, 11 addresses the issue of the relevance, in today's world, of a 14-until old religious ideology. In the first six couplets of the original Iqbal addressed by his companions, who reproach him for singing a tune that is out of date. In the remaining part of the poem (twelve couplets) Iqbal responds to this charge. The poem is thus divided into two parts, second part beginning with "I am a Muslim, my friend!"

For the text of the poem, see Bang-i Dara, in Kulliyat-i Iqbal: Urdu (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1993 pp. 223-224).

MUSLIM

Every breath you draw, Iqbal,

Is laden with sighs;

Your smouldering breast is filled with lament.

The lute of your heart has no song of hope:

Your litter, we believe, has not his Layla.[45]

Your ears seek the sound of a song

That has been sung and is no more,

Your heart is unconcerned

With the commotion of the present.

Your fellow-singers of the garden

Would not hear the tale of the rose[46]:

The assembly would not listen

To your message of old.

Quiet, O bell of the numb-footed caravan![47]

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[45] Layla, Majnun's lady-love, is usually pictured as riding camel-litter. She symbolizes the object of one's devotion. He. symbolizes hope Iqbal's companions thus accusing him of suffering from a lack of hope).

[46] That is, the tale of the nightingale and the rose (represe here, the Muslim's devotion to an "old" religion or ideology).

[47] That is, a caravan that would not move. In other words, Iqbal's companions are saying that Iqbal's efforts would be of no avail the caravan for which he serves as the bell lacks the will and des' move and is content to remain where it is.

Your voice causes much despair--quiet!

It cannot be brought back to life,

The assembly of olden times;

Yester night cannot be lit up with candles.

I am a Muslim, my friend

A bearer of the message of Tawhid

And a witness since eternity to that truth!

To Tawhid is due the warm beat

Of the pulse of the existents;

From it, too, the blodness

In the Muslim's thought.

It is for the sake of this truth

That God created the world,

And to guard that truth He created me.

It was I who abolished

The worship of falsehood--

I, indeed, who proved to be

The protector of the laws of existence.

My existence is a robe

That covers the nakedness of the world:

To destroy me would be

A disgrace to mankind!

Of the fate of the world,

The Muslim is the shining star--

One whose brilliance puts to shame

The spell cast by dawn.[48]

The secrets of life are exposed to my view:

I cannot be said to have despaired

Of waging the struggle of life.

How can I be frightened

By the transient scene of sorrow?

I believe in the destiny of my Community!

Of the element of despair my life is free:

The heat of the battle

Gives notice of complete victory.

Yes, my eyes are fixed on the age gone by,

And to the assembly I tell

The same old story.

To the dust of my being is elixir

The memory of the bygone age.

My past is the exegesis of my future;

[48] That is, it is brighter than the bright dawn.

I keep in view that exciting age--

In the mirror of the past I see the future.