

# COMMUNICATIONS: A REPLY TO SOME CRITICS OF IQBAL

Dr. Muhammad Maruf.

Under the title “Testing Iqbal’s Philosophical Test of the Revelations of the Religious Experience”<sup>84</sup> Dr. Ishrat Hasan Envar has, in fact, critically examined Iqbal’s use of the Intellectual and Pragmatic tests in his famous Second Lecture. He starts with Iqbal’s distinction—implicit in his title, as Dr. Ishrat says—between the religious experience and revelation, and the philosophical test of revelation which is an third thing. Now, there is no doubt that an experience is one thing and a revelation from that experience is mother, for experience is the inner, subjective side while revelation is the outward manifestation thereof. In fact, by ‘revelation’ is meant here what is revealed’, the message, and it is always ‘what is revealed’ that can be true or false. Thus, Iqbal is justified in captioning his chapter as ‘The Philosophical Test of the Revelations of the Religious Experience’, for it is always the revelation that is subjected to test and verification. Revelation is the ‘experient’ in Iqbal’s sense.

Most of the criticism against Iqbal’s view of religion is based on a misconceived notion of the nature of ‘experience’ itself. All experience, whether natural or spiritual, is basically a state of feeling so far as its internal’ aspect is concerned; I mean, the real experience itself. Take, for instance, the experience of a red patch or an ache. What is the internal, original sense of red colour or of tooth-ache can at best be directly experienced by the experiencer himself only; nobody can experience my sense of red colour or my tooth-ache directly. Hence, all experience in itself is incommunicable to another, and the same is true of religious experience, says Iqbal: it is private and personal, to be more precise. But all experience, even of colour and ache, is communicated in the form of judgement/statement. Let us go further into an analysis of a given perception of. say, a red patch of colour. This experience/perception comprises an internal sensation which is caused by an

---

<sup>84</sup> Title of an article written by Dr. Ishrat Hasan Envar, Iqbal, Vol. 41. No. 3, July 1994. An earlier response to Dr. I. Hasan Enwer's article has already appeared in the July 1994 issue of Iqbaliat (Editor)

external phenomenon called object; then the sensation is referred to the external source which is then objectified, i.e. called by the name of an object: this is assigning 'meaning' to the sensation or, sensibilia'. The sensation or sensibilia is totally private and inaccessible to anybody else: say, in my mind the sense produced by stimulation is x by an object A; what happens is that through association Learnt through repeated experience and instruction of the parents, I learn to associate the sense of x with an object A: that is, I learn that whenever a sense x is produced in me, it "means" an object A to me. This process of associating a sensation to an object is called assigning "meaning", and but for this assigning of meaning, no sensation can be understood even by me, not to speak of communicating it to someone else. Now same is the process of learning "meaning" by all of us. Thus communication is possible on the ground of "community" of experiences by any two of us conversing. When I tell someone that I am viewing a patch of red colour, I do so after passing through the process mentioned above; the someone whom I tell will understand me only if he has himself passed through a similar process/experience. This is the sole mechanism involved in all communication or possibility of communication. Here I take a more abstract experience to make the point clear. Suppose I report to a friend of having head-ache myself; he can follow me only if he has been through this experience himself at any time in life. In my case, I have never experienced head-ache in life; so, when someone talks of head-ache, I recall some pain in my belly or some other part of the body which I have experienced and imagine head-ache to be some similar sort of ache. Thus, no communication is possible without some community of experience. This explains why more and more abstract experiences are difficult to communicate: for instance, I enjoy an exquisite sun-rise in the morning. Now, it is extremely difficult to communicate my experience to another as it is not easy to assign it "meaning". The same applies with equal force to a mystic/religious state of mind, for in all such senses the community of experience gradually thins out. Thus, in all experience, the internal side or aspect is more like feeling, as Iqbal very rightly says, for it is the feeling-aspect of mind which it is difficult to convey. He is right in stressing that experience itself, religious. experience in this case, is basically incommunicable; and it is only through 'idea', i.e. judgement, that all experience can be externalized, that is, made public or communicable to others. As said before, even my experience of a patch of red colour is communicable thro statement or judgement only. What is true

of ordinary experiences is more so of less concrete and common experiences like aesthetic or religious/mystical experiences. Thus, all experience, whatever its contents, is communicable through judgement only, a point which Iqbal has stressed so emphatically, and in particular, in the case of religious states.

Now, when any experience is communicated to anyone, it is always in the form of a judgement/statement; and as soon as it is expressed in a statement, it is open to the question of verification/verifiability. In his first Lecture, while discussing the nature of religious experience, Iqbal says:

Now when a judgement which claims to be the interpretation of a certain region of human experience, not accessible to me, is placed before me for my assent, I am entitled to ask, what is the guarantee of its truth? Are we in possession of a test which would reveal its validity?<sup>85</sup>

In fact, whenever an experience or state of mind is expressed overtly in a judgement or proposition, it becomes amenable to verification. This is what Iqbal has stressed the need for at the end of his first Lecture “Knowledge and Religious Experience”. And he has expressed a satisfaction that a religious proposition or revelation, is, fortunately, open to the same tests as any other propositions; we don’t have to devise any special tests. These tests are the intellectual test and the pragmatic test. An assertion or expression which claims to be a proposition comes within the preview of truth-falsity dimension which can be established only by applying tests of truth.

The two tests— intellectual and pragmatic— are not mutually exclusive as Dr. Ishrat has erroneously supposed; they rather evaluate the two different aspects of truth— the former its theoretical, the latter its practical aspect. The philosopher, no doubt, keeping in view his avocation, will try to go for the intellectual test of religious propositions; whereas the prophet will go for the pragmatic test, his mission being basically practical and practicable. Even a prophet/mystic is faced with the question of genuineness of his experience: the Holy Qur’an bids the Holy Prophet.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Sh. M. Ashraf, Lahore, p. 27.

<sup>86</sup> A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, XXIII:97-98.

When St. Teresa was questioned regarding the validity of her experiences, she said about those who doubted her visions, "I showed them the jewels which the divine hand left with me;\_ they were my actual dispositions".<sup>87</sup> Thus, it is obvious that a religious man with a view to confirming his or her experiences refers to its results which can be seen by outsiders. Iqbal himself applies this test to ward off the objections of the critics of the Holy Prophet thus replying to these Western critics who dubbed him as a psychopath he says,

Well, if a psychopath has the power to give a fresh direction to the course of human history, it is a point of the highest psychological interest to search his original experience which has turned slaves into leaders of men, and has inspired the conduct and shaped the career of whole race of mankind.<sup>88</sup>

In fact, Prophetic experience; having a purely practical significance, is more amenable to pragmatic test.

As regards the intellectual test, Iqbal has used this term in a very wide sense to include the various tests which come within the preview of rational proof i.e., both Coherence and Correspondence tests. He believes that all true knowledge must correspond to each other and there must be complete coherence in it: let there be no inconsistencies in it. Hence he believes that if various kinds of knowledge indicate towards truth, even if a partial truth, they must ultimately correspond to, or tend to correspond, to the Ultimate Truth or Reality which trot religion purports to set up dogmatically. The fact that Iqbal seeks correspondence, not confirmation, of the religious truths and realities does not assign any superiority to other kinds of knowledge over religious knowledge. He refers to this fact when he says, 'Philosophy, no doubt, has jurisdiction to judge religion, but what is to be judged is of such a nature that it will not submit to the jurisdiction of philosophy except on its own terms.'<sup>89</sup> Again, since religious approach is 'dogmatic' and direct in the sense that it seldom feels any need to offer proofs, it is other forms of knowledge and science which help a philosopher in finding

---

<sup>87</sup> Dr. M. Maruf, Iqbal's Philosophy of Religion, Islamic Book Services, Lahore, (1977), p. 99.

<sup>88</sup> Reconstruction, p. 190

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.2.

“correspondence” with a view to finding same kind of ‘confirmation’. However, as Iqbal holds, it is not religion seeking confirmation from other sciences and philosophies; it is rather other forms of human knowledge seeking confirmation from religious ‘truths’ regarding their own findings: religious truths are the final goals where— to all human knowledge has to lead— It is because, if all sciences aim at finding the truth, then who will provide the touchstone to their success if not religion; this shows why religious approach is dogmatic. But, it is also the case that no sooner does the scientific findings draw nearer the religious ‘truths’ than they feel satisfied regarding their own directions and goal. In fact, both need each other so far as the human situation is concerned. Thus, Iqbal very rightly remarks that thought and intuition (science and religion) are not opposed to each other; in their probe into reality they rather ‘complement each other’.<sup>90</sup> He goes on to add, ‘Both are in need of each other for mutual rejuvenation, Both seek visions of the same Reality which reveals itself to them in accordance with their function in life.’<sup>91</sup> Thus, these critics are misconceived who think that by appealing to the findings of various sciences Iqbal is degrading the status of religion; this misconception is, unfortunately, very common among the protagonists of religious or spiritual knowledge. In fact, they make a tacit distinction between the spiritual and the material which is against the very spirit of Islam.

Again, the critics of Iqbal, including Dr. Ishrat Hasan, have largely failed to understand the true nature of philosophical method, as used by the renowned thinkers, both in the East and the West. Philosophy is critical and evaluative. It proceeds by examining critically the prevalent views in the field of a particular subject. When a philosopher starts philosophizing he begins by taking up some view or views on the subject he is philosophizing on. Most of the modern thinkers, when writing on a subject like Mind-Body relationship, begin with Descartes’s view of strict Mind-Body dualism and that of Interactionism.<sup>92</sup> Starting with this, he, like Prof. H.D. Lewis<sup>93</sup> of the University of London, examines it critically till he carves out his own views e.g., milder form of dualism in the case of Prof. Lewis. In this process he will

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp.2-3.

<sup>92</sup> W.K. Wright, *A History of Modern Philosophy*, Macmillan, N.Y, pp. 79ff.

<sup>93</sup> Hywel D. Lewis, (1910-1933), a renowned British philosopher.

examine all these views on the subject which come closer to his views on the subject of discussion. For example, Prof. Lewis will examine the views of Prof. Shoemaker, Prof. Williams etc., who have also written on the Mind-Body problems in our times. Similarly those who intend to write on the nature of Reality will either start with Plat's Idealism or with Aristotle's Realism, and then proceed to carve out their own views on the nature of reality. Iqbal, in his *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* has followed the same philosophical procedure which is right in line with philosophical methodology. He is not, as sometimes erroneously thought, confirming the Islamic tenets in the light of Western scientific and philosophical thoughts; he is on the other hand developing his own views on the Islamic principles, and in the process critically examining the scientific views of, say Einstein on Space-Time Relativity, and philosophical views of Russell, William James, Bergson and so on, who came closer to his own views; but what is important, he did not accept any one of these views totally which shows that he has only examined them in the light of his own views, only partly accepting them where they seem to collaborate. In Iqbal's own words, 'With the reawakening of Islam... it is necessary to examine, in an independent spirit, what Europe has thought and how far the conclusions reached by her can help us in the revision and, if necessary, reconstruction of theological thought in Islam'.<sup>94</sup> In other words, Iqbal desires that we should approach the Western knowledge with a critical mind and spirit lest we should be dazzled by its bright exterior. He is very emphatic when he says, 'The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge,...'.<sup>95</sup> Thus, Iqbal in his *Lectures* has followed the true philosophical procedure and has derived logical conclusions from his premises. In my studied view, the critics of Iqbal have themselves misconceived the very natural of method used by the technical and professional philosophers.

## NOTES

---

<sup>94</sup> *Reconstruction*, op. cit. p. 8.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.