

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF IQBAL ' S THOUGHT

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The question of Iqbal's statement that "there is a need for a rational foundation for religion" should not necessarily be accepted as valid without further study and reflection. Professor al-Attas said, after elaborating on the Western concept of Knowledge pertaining to the correspondence theory of truth, and tracing its history of ideas in connection with the problem of intellectual perception of higher truths from Aristotle to Augustine and the Avicennan School of the University of Paris; to Aquinas and the Thomistic Synthesis; Ockham, Descartes, and finally Kant —that their problem of the existence of God arose out of the context of their theory of knowledge based on Parmenides' identity of intelligence and being. Because of this he said that for the West the existence of God cannot be rationally demonstrable. Iqbal's raising of the need for a rational foundation for religion, he said further, seemed an involvement in this Western scholastic and intellectual context, and a reaction to this Western problem, and is relevant, only within the non-Islamic intellectual context. Only when Muslims have become confused about Islam and the Islamic world view will such a need arise among them. The need for a rational foundation for religion is then relevant and valid only within the context of Western religion and of intellectually confused Muslims (which actually was the case of the audience Iqbal addressed at Hyderabad) because a 'rational' foundation is already built into the very foundation of Islam and the worldview it projects. Such a need does not occur except when Muslims have become intellectually westernized and confused. The alternative solution to the problem of conveying Islam in its true form to intellectually confused Muslims is to be effected through education and the learning of its true nature as understood and formulated by our great predecessors, and not through the formulation of a philosophical-rational system as this would lead to further confusion. Muslims would invariably

inherit Western philosophico-rational problems in this way, as we have learnt from the lesson taught by al-Ghazali in this respect.

2. Iqbal's contention - or that of those who interpret him- that al-Ghazali and perhaps others such as the ahl al-Tasawwuf thought within the framework of an existing dichotomy between reason on the one hand and intuition on the other is perhaps a misunderstanding of the Islamic conceptual structure within which all true Muslims think. They did not recognize nor apply such a dichotomy, which they knew to be non-existent in Islam - and this fact is further attested to by the Islamic vocabulary they employed. In Islam there is only one term - i.e. al'aql which is used to convey meanings denoting both reason and intuition in the sense Iqbal means. The 'aql is ratio as well as intellectus. The imagined, dichotomy arises out of reading Western philosophico-rational vocabulary such as reason and intuition, ratio and intellectus, into the thoughts of the great Muslim thinkers and theologians and Sufis of the past, imputing conceptual error which did not exist in their thoughts but did exist in the thoughts of Western philosophers, metaphysicians and scientists.

3. In connection with what is stated and implied in paragraphs 1 and 2, above, Professor al-Attas contends that al-Ghazali's conception of the soul has been misrepresented as "immutable" and "static (Iqbal's terms). He says that, on the contrary, the word nafs, which is an aspect of ruh, already conveys within its own semantic structure the connotation of dynamic duration, and that there is no reason to suppose that the great Muslim thinkers were unaware of this.

4. In regard to the concept of knowledge, he said that the Western conception and its methodological approach made rationally possible only the knowledge of the world of objects and their relations. The development of secular science in the West is geared to this conception, which emphasizes the role of ratio and naturalism, leading to a thorough-going scientific empiricism. He said that knowledge is not neutral, and that the conception of knowledge in Islam does not lend itself into the Western framework in which to conceptualize their ideas will invariably become confused in their conception of the Islamic worldview. It is therefore necessary that the Islamic concept of knowledge be made the foundation of our educational system before any "rational" formulation of the Islamic worldview can be permitted

to propagate itself and be propagated among Muslims. Education, and learning based upon a system of education couched within the Islamic concept of knowledge; is therefore more fundamental than a formulation of a rational philosophical foundation for religion at this stage. When the stage after passing through such a system of education and learning has been reached then it will have been realised that there ought to have been no question of a necessity for a philosophical rational foundation of Islam to arise in the manner advocated.

5. Professor al-'Attas said that Iqbal's philosophical ideas are not to be construed as new as some of his interpreters seem to have made out. What Iqbal says regarding the Self has already been clearly understood and 'systematized' by the early Sufis. In fact Professor al-'Attas contends that Iqbal has in his Reconstruction attempted to present a simplified version of the metaphysics of the Ahl al-'Tasawwuf couched in philosophical and rational vocabulary and method in the hope that its essential teaching might be conveyed to a wider audience. In further elaboration of the above argument, in which an exposition of the salient features of the classes of Sufis are given, Professor al Attas said that Iqbal's conception of the Ego and the Ultimate Ego is derived from that class of Sufis called by Sadruddin al-Qunawi as the Ahl-al-Tamkin - i.e. the People of Maturity in Spiritual Understanding - and by Sayyid Haydar Amuli as the Dhu'l 'Aynayn – as the Possessors of Two Eyes - who did not reject the world as illusory, but who affirmed its metaphysical reality in relation to the Ultimate Reality. He went on to give a brief account of the distinction between the spiritual experiences of fana and baqa which has given rise to serious misunderstandings about the Sufis and 'Tasawwuf. In doing so he quoted Ibn' Arabi, al-Qunawi, 'Iraqi, Jami, Amuli and others.

6. Professor al-' Attas believes that it might be detrimental to our understanding of Iqbal if at this stage we are bent upon 'developing' his philosophical ideas in a kind of secularized empiricism. Other concepts alien to our minds will invariably be introduced. Already Iqbal has been compared by some Western scholars with certain Western theologians and philosophers whose views of truth and reality are contrary to Islam. Unfortunately the haste among the Muslim scholars who have not quite grasped the essential features in Western intellectual history and their fundamental differences

with those within the tradition of Islamic intellectual history seem too uncritical in accepting foreign views about Iqbal's ideas and meanings so that eventually, in their quiescence to such view, we will have an Iqbal who means differently to Muslims than the real Iqbal himself. The Western mind is now bent upon 'universalizing' values and truth everywhere geared, of course, to its own form and desire and inclination. Now is the fashion in which religion itself is universalized, and the process of universalizing in the way that is now happening is none other than the dilution of selected values and concepts so that they might mix into each other and become acceptable to all. This way means the loss of individuality and distinctness that makes Muslims different from others and Islam different from other religions.

7. Finally he also remarked that we should not attribute to Iqbal what he did not intend and is not his claim, nor to 'develop' him into the kind of Universalist that some people mean in the way some Western scholars and Muslim intellectual have developed Muhammad 'Abduh into a modernist Reformer. This manner of 'developing' a man will not necessarily enhance his stature in greatness, on the contrary, it might tarnish true greatness in that any amount of making out a man to be what he is not will not escape the critical scrutiny of future generations.