

# KANT AND IQBAL; EPISTEMIC VIEW

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I have felt a need for a comparative study of the epistemic views of Immanuel Kant, an eighteenth century thinker from Germany, and Muhammad Iqbal, a twentieth century thinker from the Indo-Pak Sub-continent, because the two come interestingly close on many important issues, though differing on no less significant points. Kant presented his epistemic views in his famous *Critique of Pure Reason* (first pub. in 1781).<sup>1</sup>

He begins his Introduction to the above *Critique* with the remarks, ‘There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience’.<sup>2</sup> But he goes on to clarify that ‘... though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience.’<sup>3</sup> What he means to say is that even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through experience and of what our own faculty of knowledge (sense impressions serving merely as the occasion) supplies from itself.<sup>4</sup> When closely analysed, Kant’s above position shows that no knowledge is possible unless the Faculty of Sensibility is first aroused by the presentation of some object in the external world. He says, ‘Objects are given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us intuitions; they are thought through the understanding, and from the understanding arise concepts’.<sup>5</sup> Iqbal not only endorses Kant’s analysis of knowledge, he rather epitomises it in one sentence when he writes, ‘knowledge is sense-perception elaborated by understanding’.<sup>6</sup> He goes on to add that ‘the character of man’s knowledge is conceptual, it is with the weapon of this conceptual knowledge that man approaches the observable aspects of Reality’.<sup>7</sup> Thus, for both Kant and Iqbal it is understanding which turns precepts into concepts, and that human knowledge is basically conceptual.

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<sup>1</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, Eng. Tr. Norman K. Smith (London, Macmillan, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 41

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*. 1

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 41-42

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 65

<sup>6</sup> *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, (Lahore, Sh. Ashraf, 1977), p. 12

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13

In his first part of the Critique entitled “Transcendental Aesthetic” Kant explains the word “intuition” by which he means that through which ‘a mode of knowledge’ is ‘in immediate relation to’ objects.<sup>8</sup> The capacity for receiving representations he calls “sensibility”. Now Iqbal agrees with Kant that “intuition” is not a special mysterious faculty,<sup>9</sup> as is generally believed by the religious people, and also that it is direct presentation of an object to a mode of knowing. However, Iqbal differs with him on a very important basic point. Kant makes a clear distinction between, what he calls, “sensible intuition” and a special mode of intuition which he calls, “intellectual intuition” and adds, ‘which is not that which we possess, and of which we cannot comprehend even the possibility.’<sup>10</sup> Iqbal, on the other hand, following the lead of Muslim Sufis and thinkers like Jalāl-ud-Dîn Rûmî<sup>11</sup> and Al-Fârâbî,<sup>12</sup> admits the possibility of a special kind of intuition to man provided he develops a special kind of ‘sensitivity’. When Kant philosophised, the Faculty Psychology was very much in vogue. Iqbal philosophised at a time when Faculty Psychology had almost become obsolete; so he denied that intuition was a faculty. Iqbal, though agreeing with Kant on the basic mechanism of intuition, treated it in a special sense. He said, ‘...it is rather a mode of dealing with Reality in which sensation, in the physiological sense of the word, does not play any part.’<sup>13</sup> His view of intuition is quite favourably comparable to Kant’s “intellectual intuition” as we will see later while discussing his own view of knowledge—especially, religious knowledge. He goes on to add that ‘the vista of experience thus opened to us is as real and concrete as any other experience’.<sup>14</sup>

Again, Kant makes a distinction between to ‘think’ an object and to ‘know’ an object. Knowing involves two factors: ‘first, the concept, through which an object in general is thought (the category); and secondly, the intuition, through which it is given. For if no intuition could be given corresponding to the concept, the concept would still indeed be a thought,

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<sup>8</sup> Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 65

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268

<sup>11</sup> (1207-73), the greatest Sufi poet of Persian Literature.

<sup>12</sup> Abû Na‘îr Al-Fârâbî (258/870-339/950), a renowned Muslim thinker, and founder of a philosophical system in Islam.

<sup>13</sup> Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p. 16

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

but would be without any object, and no knowledge of anything would be possible by means of it.<sup>15</sup> He, however, admits that if we were ‘to think an understanding which is itself intuitive (as, for example, a divine understanding which should not represent to itself given objects, but through whose representation the objects should themselves be given or produced), the categories would have no meaning whatsoever in respect of such a mode of knowledge.’<sup>16</sup> Iqbal, on the other hand, believes that it is ‘possible to take thought not as a principle which organizes and integrates its material from the outside, but as a potency which is formative of the very being of its material. Thus regarded thought or idea is not alien to the original nature of things: it is their ultimate ground and constitutes the very essence of their being, ...’<sup>17</sup> In fact, Kant, following the legacy of the Western thought, believes in the dualism of thought and being which led him to reject the Ontological and Teleological arguments for the existence of God. Iqbal, however, believes that the human situation is not final and that thought and being are ultimately one. This is possible only if we carefully examine and interpret experience, following the clue furnished by the Qur’an which regards experience within and without as symbolic of a reality described by it, as the ‘First and the Last, the Visible and the Invisible.’<sup>18</sup> Thus, Kant and Iqbal differ on the very basic point whether thought in any sense can be formative of its own material which, as seen above, the former answers in the negative, but the latter answers in the affirmative on the basis of his view of thought which we will discuss in the sequel. This is, in my view, a very important difference.

Kant further faces the question as to what unifies the multiplicity of representations of intuition and how it becomes the knowledge of an object? In his view, these representations are accompanied by the “I think”; ‘All the manifold of intuition has, a necessary relation to the “I think” in the same subject in which this manifold is found.’<sup>19</sup> But according to him, ‘this representation is an act of spontaneity’, it cannot belong to sensibility. He calls it pure apperception or original apperception. ‘The unity of this

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<sup>15</sup> Kant, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-62.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 161.

<sup>17</sup> Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*. [see *The Qur’an*, LVII: 31]

<sup>19</sup> Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

apperception’, he says, ‘I likewise entitle the transcendental unity of self-consciousness, in order to indicate the possibility of a priori knowledge arising from it.’<sup>20</sup> Thus, the unification of all representations is possible through the unity of self-consciousness that brings the representations in relation with the self, on the one hand, and unifies them in the form of an object, on the other. According to Kant, ‘The principle of apperception is the highest principle in the whole sphere of human knowledge’<sup>21</sup> Then, he proceeds to identify this highest principle of apperception to understanding as he says, ‘Indeed this faculty of apperception is the understanding itself’.<sup>22</sup> Iqbal will agree with him that self-consciousness plays an important part in unifying the multifarious representations of intuitions, but these mental states (representations) ‘mean and involve one another. They exist as phases of a complex whole, called mind’<sup>23</sup>. He says, ‘Mental unity is absolutely unique’.<sup>24</sup> Iqbal calls it “the unity of a directive purpose”. My whole reality lies in my directive attitude.<sup>25</sup> He compares it to ‘the unity of the germ in which the experiences of its individual ancestors exist, not as a plurality, but as a unity in which every experience permeates the whole’.<sup>26</sup> He emphatically says, ‘You cannot perceive me like a thing in space, or a set of experiences in temporal order; you must interpret, understand, and appreciate me in my judgements, in my will-attitudes, aims, and aspirations’.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the problem which Kant tried to solve on purely cognitive grounds, Iqbal has tried to solve on conative ground which is quite in line with his general thought which is

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154 f.n.

<sup>23</sup> Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48: Iqbal makes a distinction between the efficient self and the appreciative self, the former being superficial while the latter is deeper and profounder. He says, ‘It is only in the moments of profound meditation, when the efficient self is in abeyance, that we sink into our deeper self and reach the inner centre of experience’pp.47-48. Here we merge into the appreciative self, rising above the superficial (discursive) level of thought into the realm of deeper (non-discursive) level where, as said before, it rises to the level of ecstasy, communion, and inspiration (see page 8 above). In this avocation thought is capable of reaching the infinite Reality as well as real time.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

vitalistic as we will see in the sequel that for him religious facts are ‘vital facts’.

Kant, no doubt, entered upon a great, incisive analysis of the human cognitive capabilities themselves, but he failed to fully capitalize in his such a great venture due to his Western background. He failed to transcend his basic assumption, says Iqbal, ‘that all experience other than the normal level of experience is impossible’.<sup>28</sup> Kant’s famous rejection of the possibility of metaphysics is based on this assumption. Iqbal questions this very assumption when he asks, ‘whether the normal level is the only level of knowledge-yielding experience.’<sup>29</sup> Kant’s distinction between the two kinds of intuition discussed above and his distinction between Noumenon and Phenomenon led him to answer the above question in the affirmative. To him, ‘The thing-in-itself is only a limiting idea. Its function is merely regulative’.<sup>30</sup> If there is any actuality corresponding to this idea, it falls beside the boundaries of human experience, and consequently its existence cannot be rationally demonstrated.<sup>31</sup> In reply to the above sceptical position of Kant, Iqbal holds in the light of the latest developments of science ‘such as the nature of matter as’ the bottled-up light waves”, the idea of the universe as an act of thought, finiteness of space and time and Heisenberg’s principle of Indeterminacy in nature, the case for a system of rational theology is not so bad as Kant was led to think’.<sup>32</sup> Again, Iqbal refers to the great Muslim Sufi philosopher, MuÁyuddân Ibn ul-‘Arabâ, who made the acute observation that God is a percept; the world is a concept’.<sup>33</sup> He infers from the above that the external world is only an “intellectual construction” a position which can be inferred from Bertrand Russell’s position when he called descriptions as “logical fictions” or “logical constructions”.<sup>34</sup>

Kant believed in a unilateral order of space and time. Space and time, according to him, are essentially one; that there is no diversity of space and time. He says “we can represent to ourselves only one space; and if we speak

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 182.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 183

<sup>34</sup> Stebbing L. S., *A Modern Introduction to Logic*, (London, Mathuen, 1958), p. 152.

of diverse spaces, we mean thereby only parts of one and the same unique space”.<sup>35</sup> Similarly of time he says, “Time has only one dimension; different times are not simultaneous but successive . . .”<sup>36</sup> He adds, “Different times are but parts of one and the same time...”<sup>37</sup> Kantian universe is, thus, organized in this unilateral space-time framework which has forced him to the epistemic inferences which he eventually inferred. Iqbal, on the other hand, following the lead of the Sufi poet, Fakhr-ud-Dân ‘Irqâ, ‘... insists on the plurality of space-orders and time-orders and speaks of a Divine Time and a Divine Space’.<sup>38</sup> Iraqi believed that ‘there are three kinds of space—the space of material bodies, the space of immaterial beings, and the space of God’<sup>39</sup>. Then these spaces are further sub-divided. Again, Iqbal refers to Jakl-ud-Dân Daww«nâ, also a Muslim poet and thinker of the fifteenth century, who believed in a variety of time. Iraqi had a similar view of time. ‘He conceives infinite varieties of time, relative to the varying grades of being, intervening between materiality and pure spirituality’.<sup>40</sup> These times are further sub-divided and qualitatively different from each other. Thus, following the two Muslim Sufis, Iqbal believes in a multifarious variety of space and time relative to various types and grades of beings. This led him to infer that ‘there are other levels of human experience capable of being systematized by other orders of space and time - levels in which concept and analysis do not play the same role as they do in the case of our normal experience.’<sup>41</sup> Modern psychology, and especially psychoanalysis, have proved that the normal stream of consciousness is not the only reality, rather not by any means even the most important reality. Iqbal refers to the evidence of religious experts of all ages and countries that ‘there are potential types of consciousness lying close to our normal consciousness. If these types of consciousness open up possibilities of life-giving and knowledge-yielding experience the question of the possibility of religion as a form of higher experience is perfectly

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<sup>35</sup> Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p. 183: Iqbal, perhaps, alludes to Sh. Fakhr ud-Dân Ibr«hâm al-Hamad«nâ (686/1287) referring to the book *Ghoyat al-Imk«n*, wrongly attributed to ‘Irqâ.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75: Muhammad b. Asad Daww«nâ (830-908/1427- 1502); Iqbal refers to a passage of his book *Zourâ*.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

legitimate one and demands our serious attention'.<sup>42</sup> Herein lies an extremely important difference between the epistemic views of Kant and Iqbal, and latter's views are rendered thereby much more wider than those of the former.

There is another assumption on which Kantian position is based, viz., that the normal facts of human life are the only facts amenable to man. Iqbal, rejecting this assumption also, appeals to the revealed and mystic literature of mankind which 'bears ample testimony to the fact that religious experience has been too enduring and dominant in the history of mankind to be rejected as mere illusion. There seems to be no reason, then, to accept the normal level of human experience as fact and reject other levels as mystical and emotional'.<sup>43</sup> He adds, "The facts of religious experience are facts among other facts of human experience and, in the capacity of yielding knowledge by interpretation, one fact is as good as another"<sup>44</sup> In this connection we may refer to A. C. Ewing in his article "Religious Assertions", where he urges against the position of the positivists that they limit the term 'fact' to empirical facts, i.e., facts which can be the object of observation and natural science, and in that sense God is not a fact. But this is not the usual meaning of the word outside the books and lectures of these philosophers. The position that nothing can exist except the type of subjects we know in science and ordinary sense-experience is certainly not true, and if other things do exist there will certainly be facts about them (in a well-recognized sense of "fact"). The metaphysicians may rightly claim to be giving "factual information", though not about the empirical facts of ordinary life".<sup>45</sup> Again, as said above, if modern psychology and psychoanalysis have shown that there are other, and deeper, levels of consciousness—the sub-conscious and the Unconscious levels— then by virtue of the same logic there are facts other than the normal facts, perhaps having greater importance for the human life than the latter. Iqbal holds that Reality reveals itself both internally and in the external appearance, and in order to have a fuller and completer vision of the real we require to approach from both angles, i.e.,

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 185.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>45</sup> Maruf Dr. M., *Iqbal's Philosophy of Religion*, (Lahore, Islamic Book Service, 1988), taken from *Philosophy*, Vol. XXXII, July 1957, p. 214.

from within and without. He very emphatically says that ‘religious and the scientific processes, though involving different methods, are identical in their final aim. Both aim at reaching the most real’<sup>46</sup>. He adds, ‘In the domain of science we try to understand its meanings in reference to the external behaviour of that reality; in the domain of religion we take it as representative of some kind of reality and try to discover its meanings in reference mainly to the Inner nature of that reality. The scientific and the religious processes are in a sense parallel to each other!’<sup>47</sup>

Kant rejected the possibility of metaphysics, including rational theology, on purely cognitive grounds, but on practical grounds in the Critique of Practical Reason,<sup>48</sup> he was forced to admit the very same entities as indispensable postulates of human life, viz., ‘Immortality, freedom positively considered (as the causality of a being so far as he belongs to the intelligible world), and the existence of God.’<sup>49</sup> For Iqbal, on the other hand, religious realities are not practical postulates; they are rather the very facts of human life and its necessary preconditions. That is because to Iqbal religious life is not only a cognitive fact, it is rather more a “vital” fact, a fact concerned with the realm of values. He says, ‘The basic perception from which religious life moves forward is the present slender unity of the ego, his liability to dissolution, his amenability to re-formation and his capacity for an ampler freedom to create new situations in known and unknown environments’.<sup>50</sup> Again, he says, ‘...the ultimate aim of religious life,’ is ‘the reconstruction of the finite ego by bringing him into contact with an eternal life-process...’<sup>51</sup> Though admitting a cognitive value to religious experience, for Iqbal, ‘The ultimate aim of the ego is not to see something but to be something . . . The end of the ego’s quest is not emancipation from the limitations of individuality; it is, on the other hand, a more precise definition of it. The final act is not an intellectual act, but a vital act which deepens the whole being of the ego, and sharpens his will with the creative assurance that the world is not something to be merely seen or known through concepts, but something

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<sup>46</sup> Iqbal, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-96.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 196.

<sup>48</sup> Kant Immanuel, Eng., tr. T.K. Abbott, (London, Longmans Green, 1959).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 229-30.

<sup>50</sup> Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 194.



to be made and re-made by continuous action'.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Iqbal agrees with Kant that religious facts cannot be known through pure reason, but he adds that reason has other higher avocations too, which it is capable of reaching the Infinite, which Iqbal calls 'the deeper movement of thought'.<sup>53</sup> This was beyond Kant due to his Western legacy.

Kant, following the legacy of Aristotle, mainly concentrated on two kinds of Thought or Reason —viz., Pure Reason and Practical Reason; he published his two famous Critiques on these two kinds of reason. No doubt, he published his Third Critique<sup>54</sup> on the Beautiful and the Sublime in which he mainly dilated in the field of Aesthetics. Iqbal, on the other hand, added a third kind of thought of which he says, 'In its deeper movement.. thought is capable of reaching an immanent Infinite ... In its essential nature, then, thought is not static; it is dynamic and unfolds its internal infinitude in time.....'<sup>55</sup> He adds, 'The idea that thought is essentially finite, and is for this reason unable to capture the Infinite, is based on a mistaken notion of the movement of thought in knowledge'.<sup>56</sup> He says, '... Kant ... failed to see that thought, in the very act of knowledge, passes beyond its own finitude'.<sup>57</sup> He goes on to say, 'Kant, consistently with his principles could not affirm the possibility of a knowledge of God'.<sup>58</sup> Iqbal's third kind of thought gave him a great insight that enabled him to employ the epistemic model of Kant in the realm of divine knowledge, i.e., knowledge of God. Agreeing with the latter on the basic mechanism of intuition, he conceived the word 'intuition' in a special sense; according to him religious knowledge is a special kind of data given by 'intuition', an internal sense, and organized by thought or understanding. Of intuition he says, 'It is, according to the Qur'an, something which "sees", and its reports, if properly interpreted, are never false'.<sup>59</sup> Comparing the two he says, 'As regions of normal experience are subject to interpretation of sense-data for our knowledge of the external world, so the region of mystic experience is subject to interpretation for our

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 198.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, Eng. tr. James C. Meredith, (Oxford: Clarendon,1952).

<sup>55</sup> Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, P. 5.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

knowledge of God'.<sup>60</sup> Iqbal brings out the difference when he says, 'Religion is not physics or chemistry seeking an explanation of nature in terms of causation; it really aims at interpreting a totally different region of human experience— religious experience—the data of which cannot be reduced to the data of any other science'.<sup>61</sup> Thus, according to Iqbal, the epistemic model of religious knowledge is the same as for sensory knowledge of the world with the following differences:

1. It begins with a special kind of data provided by a special inner sense called 'intuition';
2. A special data that are non-physiological, are then systematized into religious knowledge proper by 'thought' (understanding) in a special sense of avocation which Iqbal has called 'the deeper movement of thought';
3. The religious data are systematized in a specific Space–Time framework that is totally different from the everyday Space–Time order. Iqbal calls it 'divine'.

The points 1-3 above open the way to interpretations of the universe other than the materialistic and mechanistic interpretations of everyday experience and science. This greatly enlarges the vision of man and enables him to see reality in a new and much wider perspective not amenable to modern man who is living a very mundane type of life.

To conclude, then, Iqbal propounds a much wider view of knowledge and the universe. According to him, the fundamental pattern of knowledge remains the same whether we are dealing with perceptual type of knowledge of everyday life or with a special type of knowledge called mystic or religious knowledge. This insight was not within the purview of Kant who was working his way through specific limitations imposed by his Western legacy. Iqbal, no doubt, drew inspiration from his Muslim legacy as bequeathed by thinkers like Al-Fârâbî according to whom higher thought (or 'intellect' as he called it) 'rises to the level of communion, ecstasy, and inspiration'.<sup>62</sup> It was

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, P. 18.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> Sharif M. M. (Ed), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, (Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), Vol. I, p. 463.

under the inspiration of Muslim Sufis and thinkers that he could enlarge his vision regarding the knowledge of man.