

IQBAL AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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ABSTRACT

The problem of evil is arguably the most difficult problem for all theistic worldviews. Modern age is characterized by the extreme obtrusiveness of evil and it could well be argued that it is the changed perception or cognizance of evil that differentiates modern humanist secularist worldview from the traditional religious worldviews.

The painful problem of evil that is really the crux of theism, as Iqbal says,²³² has been the most notorious problem for all theologies, especially for the monotheistic ones. It has been a canker in the heart of theism. All religion is an attempt to respond to this problem. All philosophy (defined as meditation on death) and all religions (defined in salvific terms) and all great literature and art may be seen as attempts to respond to the existence of evil. Paradoxically, it is religion's starting point and first noble truth (especially of Eastern religions) as well as canker in its heart; its doom according to certain critics of theism. Buddhism and Christianity are especially preoccupied with this problem. Hellenist– Christian sense of the tragic colours the world view of the West. The characters of Prometheus, Faustus, and Sisyphus are all variations on the theme of evil. The notions of surrender and peace– the defining features of Islam– have this problem in the background. The doctrines of Karma, rebirth and fatalism or *qismat* have been formulated to reckon with the evil. The problem of suffering, waste, death, meaninglessness, absurdity has been a central problem for great literature. No exoteric theology has been able to provide a really convincing answer for everyone.

The problem of evil is arguably the most difficult problem for all theistic worldviews. Modern age is characterized by the extreme obtrusiveness of evil

²³² Iqbal, M., *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Ed. and Annot. by Mohammad Saeed Sheikh, Adam Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 1997. p. 64).

and it could well be argued that it is the changed perception or cognizance of evil that differentiates modern humanist secularist worldview from the traditional religious worldviews. The problem constitutes perhaps the foremost challenge to traditional theology in modern times. Any attempt to secure a rational foundation for religion in modern times must seriously reckon with the problem. And theodicy has become notoriously difficult job for any theologian in modern times. Christianity has been especially hit hard by modern critiques of theodicy. It has responded by radically modifying or reconstructing itself. Most of these modern Christian theological appropriations of the problem of evil are guilty of the great sin of heterodoxy. The traditional Islamic approach that tackles the problem from a very different perspective which is not conditioned by the Hellenic–Christian–Nietzschean sense of the tragic element, although fully equipped to deal with the problem in its own ways, has, however not been fully brought into light. Modern Muslim theologians have paid very little attention to the problem. It is only Iqbal, who among the great modern Muslim religious thinkers has tried to reckon with the problem in the contemporary idiom, albeit in heterodoxical manner. His whole philosophy of Ego and love could be interpreted as a response to the problem of evil in the broader sense. His hope in the ultimate victory of good over evil is essentially religious solution to this problem which Iqbal believed on faith but could not logically and rationally prove. Present paper attempts to evaluate Iqbal’s approach to the problem of evil in the light of major modern criticisms of theism and theodicy. Perennialist philosophy will be kept in the background to evaluate Iqbal’s position vis-à-vis evil.²³³ Our focus will be primarily on Iqbal’s major philosophical work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, where he has systematically treated the problem of evil. However major themes of his poetry that have a bearing on his approach to the problem of evil have not been ignored either.

On some occasions especially in the earlier life, Iqbal seems to have been simply bowled over or defeated by the problem. He saw life as a futile passion in almost Sartrean sense and any idea of cosmic or ultimate purpose

²³³ The foremost exponent of the perennialist-traditionalist approach is the Swiss mystic and sage Frithjof Schuon. He presents the traditional Islamic approach to evil in his writings like *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, *Dimensions of Islam*, *Christianity/Islam*.

rejected (*sarāpa afsāna wa afsūn bey zīndagi* he cried); he found belief in *Abriman* more logical than the belief in *Aburmazd* as his letters to Atiya Faizi show. He couldn't excuse God, even in his mature years for creating such an evil and imperfect world and indicted him on this or that account. Nietzschean vein in Iqbal makes his approach very unorthodox. Will to power, eulogization of strong and the powerful, critique of what they called slave morality of Christianity, advocacy of superman, praise of *Iblis* and many related aspects of Iqbalian (and Nietzschean) thought show his heterodox appropriation of problem of evil. Melancholic strain and suppressed pessimism of some of his most beautiful poems like "*Lāla-i-Sahra*", "*Eik-Shām*", "*Tanbāyi*", "*Taswirgham*", deconstruct his usual meliorism and his celebration of life. Iqbal as a poet can't escape the conclusion that suffering or evil can't be explained away and that tragic sense of life is irrefutable.

Iqbal seems to be grappling with classical Epicurean formulation of the problem of evil and then tries to answer it.²³⁴ Epicurus' famous formulation

²³⁴ In this classical epicurean formulation problem is almost insoluble. Theodicy becomes almost impossible. Here lies the crucial error of modern philosophers of religion and theologians. Schuon calls it bad metaphysics and this is especially discernible in their approach to theodicy. Schuon's following critique of epicurean reasoning and formulation may be quoted here: "Epicurean reasoning is based on certain ambiguities concerning the very notion of "evil", "will" and "power". In the first place, will and power are inherent in the Divine Nature, which is absoluteness and Infinity; this means that God is neither capable not desirous of what is contrary to His Nature on pain of contradiction and hence of absurdity. It is impossible, because it is absurd, that God should have the power to be other than God, to be neither absolute not infinite, to be altogether inexistent; and He cannot will that which, inasmuch as it is contrary to Being, is outside His Power. God is all powerful in relation to the world, His creation or His manifestation; but Omnipotence cannot act upon the Divine Being itself, given that this Being is the source of that Omnipotence and not the reverse. (*Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*(World of Islam Festival Publishing Company,1976 p. 167)...Epicurean reasoning is the almost classical example of a faultless operation of logic which lacks the data that its content requires; it discusses "evil" but fails to realize that evil is by definition evil only in one respect and not in another, as is proved in advance by the fact that there is no absolute evil and that evil is never a substance; it discusses "God" but fails to realize that God, being infinite, includes in His Nature the seed of an unfolding that necessarily involves an element of contradiction by the very fact of His Infinity; and it discusses "power" and "will", but fails to recognize that the Divine Nature is the Subject of these and not their object, which amounts to saying that these two faculties, although they are unlimited by virtue of Divine Limitlessness and when directed towards contingency, are

of the problem as quoted by Hume runs as follows: Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able, then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?²³⁵

Evil for Iqbal isn't just privation of good, absence of good or a mere shadow. There is something terribly positive about it. He considers it as hard and painfully hard fact. He doesn't take the challenge to theism lightly.²³⁶ He considers it a very serious problem to be addressed by anyone who tries to philosophically justify Islamic conception of God²³⁷. He quotes Nauman who so pithily puts the case of evil in relation to theism.²³⁸ He then proceeds to reconcile "the goodness and omnipotence of God with the immense volume of evil in His creation" without minimizing in any way the magnitude and severity of the problem. He doesn't hide the blemishes in God's creation unlike many theologians to exonerate God²³⁹ or to refuse to see evil in all its horror.²⁴⁰ He says "The course of evolution, as revealed by modern science,

nevertheless limited "at the Summit" by Divine Absoluteness, which no will or power can modify. (*Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, p. 168).

²³⁵ Hume, David, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

²³⁶ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction* p. 64.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²³⁸ Nuaman's following words have been quoted by Iqbal in *Reconstruction* p64-65 from his *Briefe uber Religion*, "We possess a knowledge of world which teaches us a God of power and strength who sends out life and death as simultaneously as shadow and light, and a revelation a faith as to salvation which declares the same God to be father. The following of the world God produces the morality of the struggle for the existence and the service of the father of Jesus Christ produces the morality of compassion and yet they are not two gods but one God. Somehow or the other their arms intertwine. Only no mortal can say where and how this occurs."

²³⁹ Iqbal's boldness is unique and unprecedented in the history of Muslim philosophy in this connection. His poem "Dialogue between God and Man" in *Payam-i-Mashriq*, (*Message from East*) is illustrative in this context. He has exalted man and belittled God in almost all comparisons he has made between God and man. In his earlier years he had found it more rational to believe in *Abriman* than *Aburmazd* (see his letter to Atiya Fayzee dated 17, July 1909 in this connection).

²⁴⁰ Iqbal doesn't fully recognize all the diverse manifestations of evil and dubs all of them under the general heads of suffering and wrong doing. Moral evil isn't just subsumable under the head of wrong doing. The dark reality of sin is left out of the picture, so poignantly portrayed by Christian theologians and such writers as Dostoevsky. Thousand kinds of suffering and pain that plague our human saga-enumerated by great tragedians of the world and great pessimist philosophers such as Schopenhauer and religious souls such as Buddha

involves almost universal suffering and wrongdoing. No doubt, wrongdoing is confined to man only. But the fact of pain is almost universal, though it is equally true that men can suffer and have suffered the most excruciating pain for the sake of what they believed to be good. Thus the two facts of moral and physical evil stand out prominent in the life of Nature".²⁴¹ Iqbal doesn't ignore either physical, metaphysical or moral evil. However it is with moral evil that he is most concerned. He even seems to reduce physical evil to moral evil.²⁴² Iqbal's response to the problem of moral evil has been usually understood in a very limited sense of his concept of *Iblīs*. But the problem of moral evil is very complicated and has many dimensions. Concept of evil principle (Satan or *Iblīs*) doesn't encompass the whole issue.

get marginalized in Iqbalian account of the problem. Not all physical evils are reducible simply to pain. This is important, as McClosky notes, for it means it is both inaccurate and positively misleading to speak of the problem of physical evil. Such critics of theodicy as McClosky have argued that no one 'solution' covers all these physical evils, and that physical evils create not one problem but a number of distinct problems for the theist. Also it needs to be pointed out that even without the discovery of evolution the problem of evil was problem. The horizon of the problem extends far wider than Iqbal thinks.

The terrible reality of Sin (or *zulm* in Qur'anic vocabulary) so acutely and poignantly portrayed by the Qur'an in its description of hell's tortures – Iqbal appears to sidestep.

²⁴¹ Iqbal, *M Reconstruction* p. 64.

²⁴² Many theists have argued that the problem of physical evil is reducible to the problem of moral evil and even this has been conceded by such critics of theism as Mackie.. Iqbal too appears to use this strategy. This tactic makes the next move possible in meeting the critics of theodicy and arrive at complete solution to the problem of evil i.e., trying to argue for the compatibility of free will with absolute goodness. Iqbal's philosophy of ego and his valorisation of struggle and fight against evil so that ego is strengthened and his identification of obstructing forces alone makes real moral good realizable in the world are attempts in this direction. Pain is a goad to action. Life moves on and ego ascends to perfection through the driving force of what he calls as world pain. It is physical evil that fuels the engine of evolution and leads ultimately to emergence of higher egos. However it is precisely this reduction of physical evil to moral evil that is problematic. McClosky has forcefully argued against this reduction of physical evil to moral evil. He argues that physical evils create a number of distinct problems which aren't reducible to the problem of moral evil. Further the proposed solution of the problem of moral evil in terms of free will (Iqbal also proposes it) renders the attempt to account for physical evil in terms of moral good, and the attempt thereby to reduce the problem of evil to the problem of moral evil, completely untenable. See McClosky's paper "God and Evil" in *Philosophical Quarterly* (10), 1960 for detailed treatment of this point.

Iqbal rejects some proposed solutions and approaches to the problem of evil which include positing relativity of evil or its unreality. Thus all *privatio boni* arguments are rejected by him as Jung rejects them in his *Answer to Job*. The *privatio boni* arguments posit evil as not something positive or different or independent principle and marginalize it as only an absence of good. Buddhist approach is the exact opposite. Buddha lifts existence of evil to the status of first noble truth and defines happiness (although this mayn't be equated with good) as cessation of pain which he sees as the norm, the first principle. However this Buddhist approach is also rejected by Iqbal. He doesn't see sufficient warrant for Schopenhaurian pessimism (which, in a way, represents crude appropriation of Buddhist approach). Browning's optimistic faith is also seen as not fully warranted in Iqbalian perspective. Iqbal also appears to reject what has been called as Means and Ends approach which advocates the presence of forces that tend to transmute it and thus be a source of consolation to us.²⁴³ This functionalist approach which is seen in the writings of Richard Swinburne, John Hick and others is unacceptable to him on the grounds that it doesn't explain all evil. However, at other places in his third lecture "The Conception of God and the Meaning of Prayer" and his fourth lecture "The Human Ego – His freedom and Immortality" he uses the same argument in his apology for hell and arguments for immortality and ego's onward march and development as the supreme end for which all the obstructions involving pain and suffering are a means. For the heaven of immortal or permanent egohood, hell may be necessary as a "corrective experience" or means. We need to say yes to all the attendant or accompanying ills and be patient "under ills and hardships"²⁴⁴ for accepting the supreme objective or end of "trust of personality" or "true manhood".²⁴⁵ His interpretation of Adam's fall uses the same "Means and End approach". He says, "The only way to correct this tendency (Faustian tendency of Adam for getting Occult knowledge) was to place him in an environment, which however painful, was better suited to the unfolding of his intellectual faculties"²⁴⁶ and "intellectual evil is an indispensable factor in

²⁴³ Iqbal, *M Reconstruction* p. 64.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

the building up of experience”.²⁴⁷ This is just one example of Iqbal’s inconsistent logic that he uses while dealing with the problem of evil.

Iqbal also rejects the Christian conception of original sin and fall of Adam. Iqbal interprets biblical Fall as rise of Adam and birth of self consciousness. He sees man’s first act of disobedience as “the first act of free choice”²⁴⁸. Parodying the Christian conception he says “Nor does the Quran regard the earth as a torture hall where an elementally wicked humanity is imprisoned for an original act of sin”.²⁴⁹ Although this rationalist humanist modernist understanding and critique of Christian doctrine by Iqbal could itself be challenged by traditionalist perennialist interpretation of religion, Christian theologians and many others. Iqbal’s rejection of this possible solution problematizes his own solution as he can’t opt for any traditional religious explanation, be that of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity or even Islam according to perennialist authors like Schuon. Buddhist solution to the problem of evil that involves doctrine of no-self or dissolution of ego is completely rejected by Iqbal. Preservation and development of ego is the *raison de’tre* of Iqbal’s whole philosophy despite tremendous difficulties on traditional religious or metaphysical, psychological and historical grounds (against this view) that Iqbal is obliged to surmount. Sufi approach to the problem of evil that invokes similar Christian and Buddhist notions is also rejected by Iqbal as he conceives his concept of self in sharp opposition to Sufi conception of the same.

Traditional Islamic approach as represented by Ghazzali (in his *Ihya*, especially the chapter titled “Evils of the World”) takes our fallen condition seriously and doesn’t praise world of matter in Iqbalian (which is in almost secular theological perspective) manner and sees this world or world of matter as something evil due to its separation from God who alone is good, is also unacceptable to Iqbal. Classical theism, as represented by Ghazzali that conceives supreme principle as Eternal consciousness, knowing but not including the world is rejected by Iqbal in favour of panentheism that conceives God as Eternal– Temporal consciousness, knowing but also

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

including the world.²⁵⁰ Classical theistic solution to the problem of evil encounters various difficulties as many philosophers of religion have argued with great force and it is perhaps for this reason that Iqbal is led to take recourse to panentheism. Iqbal doesn't accept *Ash'arite* theological approach that overemphasizes Divine Will and its capricious character, leads to a kind of fatalism and denial of much of human freedom. Iqbal is willing to qualify divine omniscience and freedom in order to safeguard human freedom. But free will defence of theism as a response to the problem of evil has many limitations and Iqbal is susceptible to all those objections that have been raised against it.

Iqbal's own defence of theism against its detractors who base their criticism on the grounds of problem of evil assumes mainly two lines of argumentation: 1) "We can't see all the picture" argument 2) Free Will Defence. However, both of these strategies suffer from serious limitations and these will be discussed now.

"We can't see all the picture" argument has many contemporary defenders, prominent among them being Alston. Hamlet tells Haratio that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy". Though we might find it hard to see why there is evil in a world made by God, there might be a reason. Iqbal invoking similar line of argumentation says "We can't understand the full import of the great cosmic forces which work havoc and at the same time sustain and amplify life because "our intellectual constitution is that we can take only a piecemeal view of things".²⁵¹ Reducing the great and difficult problems of theodicy to just an issue between optimism and pessimism Iqbal proceeds to declare that it "can't be finally decided at the present stage of our knowledge"²⁵². William P Alston argues that "the magnitude or complexity of the question is such that our powers, access to data, and so on are radically insufficient to provide sufficient warrant for accepting the thesis that God could have prevented

²⁵⁰ For pantheistic appropriation/interpretation of Iqbal's thought see Reese and Harthshone's *Philosophers Speak of God* who have devoted a whole chapter to Iqbal. Authors have argued that pantheistic answer to problem of evil is more convincing than the classical theistic answer.

²⁵¹ Iqbal, *M Reconstruction*, p. 65.

²⁵² Iqbal, *M Reconstruction*, p. 65.

many instances of evil without thereby losing some greater good.”²⁵³ Alston argues that “our cognition of the world, obtained by filtering raw data through such conceptual screens as we have available for the nonce, acquaint us with only some indeterminable fraction of what there is to know”²⁵⁴ but this argument, like the argument of Iqbal, proves only a negative thesis that evil and good God aren’t necessarily contradictory but what is needed in establishing a case for optimism or meliorism. Both are unable to do that and just hope for victory of good over evil in future. However Iqbal doesn’t concern himself with the question how present evil could thus be negated or wiped out; how past pain could be obliterated. Future victory of good over evil as Iqbal hopes for and believes in (and is unable to philosophically prove or argue) will still not do away with the existence of past unmerited suffering. Dostoevsky’s Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* rebels against God precisely for this reason. He is unable to accept any scheme of things which requires putting innocent children to torture. This is true of Camus in *The Plague* also. Given the veracity of Iqbalian concept of ego and individual immortality, it is very difficult to conceive how our this-worldly record of pain and evil could be cancelled or annulled.

Most common theistic response to the problem of evil is what is commonly referred to as Free Will Defence, according to which even Omnipotent God can’t ensure that free people act well and much evil is explicable in terms of God allowing for the possible consequences of freedom which in itself is a great good. While this argument has been advocated from many quarters in the past, a contemporary philosopher who argues forcefully along these lines is Alvin Plantinga. Plantinga develops this argument in many works, especially in his *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford, 1974). Iqbal justifies Fall of Adam (along with its attendant or accompanying evils) on the grounds of exercise of free will. For him goodness is only possible by “self’s free surrender to the moral ideal and arises out of a willing cooperation of free egos. A being whose movements are wholly determined like a machine can’t produce goodness”²⁵⁵ but “the freedom to choose good

²⁵³ Quoted by Brain Davies in his edited work, *Philosophy of Religion: Guide and Anthology*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 576.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 577.

²⁵⁵ Iqbal, *M Reconstruction*, p. 68

involves also the freedom to choose what is the opposite of good”²⁵⁶. Freedom is the basic attribute of Iqbal’s ego. Ego and his freedom are worth all the great cost of evil that may accompany them. God chose to limit His own freedom for the sake of human freedom. But free will defence could, at best, explain only moral evil – other kinds of evil are left unexplained. Although Christian doctrine of original sin caters to even animal pain in the world, Iqbal has no explanation for evil in the non-human world. He doesn’t extend consequences of Adam’s first act of disobedience to non-human world; sufferings of innocent children are also left unexplained by this way of argumentation. There is also the existence of physical pain that Iqbal’s free will defence leaves uncatered for. It may also be argued that freedom isn’t goodness, nor a condition for it. Freedom is not such a great good in itself to be worth the world-pain.²⁵⁷ How can we justify this freedom which necessitates an ocean of tears? Existentialist valuation of freedom that Iqbal seems to approve produces many side effects. Ordinary man is too weak to be free and enjoy the heaven of freedom. He dreads it. He wants some escape in “bad faith”. He is too weak to resist the temptations of *Maru*. Most men choose to be disbelievers paying no gratitude to God. Satanic question mark on man’s excellence and angelic irreverent scepticism (in the story of genesis in the Qur’an) seems to have been vindicated. Satan, concedes *Sura Sheba* (V.20) found true his judgment about a rebellious humanity. Impressive record of human vices, human folly, infidelity, waste and irresponsibility seems to vindicate the Satanic reservations about Adam and his descendents. Most people deserve hell due to their *kufr* or ingratitude to God. Human history, from Cain onwards is mostly bad news. A careful examination of moral record has, both in religious and secular perspectives sometimes inspired unredeeming pessimism. Man has great capacity to resist grace and actively desires to thwart God’s purpose. Attainment of virtuous destiny which requires the patient struggle, the hard climb (Quran 90:11) is very difficult for most men. There persists within human nature that inner, regrettably often dominant tendency to evil, the fruits of which are gathered in the Quranic world of unheeded messengers and the sombre ruins of the subverted cities. All this shows the poor record of human freedom as Shabir

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁵⁷ McCloskey, among others, has critiqued free will defence on this point. McTaggart in his *Some Dogmas of Religion* subjects free will defence to a searching critique on the same point.

Akhter has noted in his *A Faith for All Seasons* (Ch. 8 "The Riddle of Man"). (London, 1990) This freedom has produced more evil than goodness. It has also been argued that omnipotent and infinitely wise and good God could have created us as more or wholly predisposed to good rather than evil. He could have foreseen consequences of giving man this great boon of freedom which has proved more often than not a bane rather than (*amanah*) a boon. The Qur'an says that man foolishly accepted the trust of personality. But Iqbal forgets this qualifying clause of Qur'an in his interpretation of such verses.

While this free will defence can be critiqued on many ground on its own terms, there are some additional points also to be considered First is that it may explain moral evil but not all evil; there are many other levels and kinds of evil-like evil in the animal world and the suffering of innocent children (which Camus and Dostoevsky's Ivan highlight) and physical pain. There is not just moral wickedness and consequent hell to be justified. Secondly it may also be argued that freedom is neither goodness, nor a condition for it. Freedom is not worth the world-pain. So great an evil is too big a cost for any gift of freedom. Damned be this freedom which necessitates an ocean of tears. Existentialist valuation of freedom that Iqbal seems to approve produces angst and bad faith. Man is too weak to be free and enjoy heaven of freedom. Freedom is too big a burden a yoke, in itself for most of men. Some moments of free choice may lead one to hell in this or the other world. Man is too weak to resist the temptations of *Mara*. Buddhahood or salvation, as *Dhammapada* and all the religious traditions assert is very difficult to get, most people are condemned to hell or rebirth (and later option Iqbal rejects) so only hell remains and though it may be interpreted as a purgatory or as 'Mother' as Quran calls it in (101:9) but still this worldly hell, pricks of conscience and criminal's and sinner's guilt are still too heavy a price for the bone of freedom and the resultant goodness. It may be hell to choose and to be free Although Sartrian answer to this is that we have no choice; we are condemned to be free and not choose itself and we should be allowed not to be; Hamlet be allowed to take arms against the slings of outrageous fortune and Ivan allowed to respectfully return the ticket to God. For Iqbal man has already accepted, chosen, through the metahistorical event of covenant with God, the crushing burden (*amanah*, as the Qur'an calls it) of free choice and trust of personality. "The Qur'an represents man as having accepted at his

peril the trust of personality which the heavens the earth, and the mountains refused to bear” (33:72). Iqbal’s answer to the next question “Shall we, then, say no or yes to the trust of personality with all its attendant ills?” i.e. could suicide or loss of self as in *nirvana* of Buddha be an option is yes and rejection of later option. Despite Iqbal’s failure in providing any plausible philosophical/ meta-historical basis for this covenant (he takes it for granted) and also why and how we could answer the man who says he is ignorant of this covenant and thus should be allowed to disown it, Iqbal still proceeds to answer the above mentioned question in the affirmative, leaving ordinary and weak man no way for escape. When the first premises itself is not established how can one jump to the consequence of that premises. Iqbal is quite aware that heaven or justifying the trust or faith of God in man is not the prerogative of common or ordinary men; all men are not entitled to immortality – man being only a candidate for immortality. If Iqbal’s concept of self is correct, then it appears that all men are not even candidates for immortality. The finite centre of experience, the unity of mental states, as Iqbal conceives ego many men lack (insane, schizophrenic, idiot men do not have this self) which is a prerequisite for being a candidate for immortality. Children or those who die very young are thus also short listed. Many persons who do not rise above animal level due to very hard conditions of life or some other reason; who have no time to cultivate a ego or win a personality, being always preoccupied with winning a bread or shelter, are also not candidates for immortality. It is also a moot point whether Buddhists who do believe ego to be illusory and thus refuse to win it or cultivate it, could be considered, in Iqbalian paradigm, candidates for immortality. Mystics and Sufis because of their denial of ego principle too have lost the prerogative of winning immortality as they have opted for suicide themselves.

Iqbal has taken a very precarious position with regard to the problem of evil. All traditional religions invoke such notions as sin, grace, fall, redemption or salvation. Iqbal has hardly any use for such notions. His demythologizing approach misses the profound significance of such religious notions and symbols. He takes the modern humanist rationalist project as essentially valid and argues for theism within this framework. This is the root cause of his problems. Modern man denies reality of sin and fall; he feels no need of grace and salvation. He is anthropocentric rather than theocentric.

He has too sanguine an estimate of man and his goodness. *Iblis* is a fiction for him. In his pride he may deny the reality of evil. And paradoxically it is God who needs to be exonerated and defended against evil rather than man who is required to take it seriously and win his salvation. Onus lies on God rather than on man vis-à-vis evil. This is the modern man's unpardonable sin, a perversion. Perennialist authors reject whole modernist project as great perversion, as second fall, as sin. Although this may be going too far and there is possible religious appropriation of Renaissance project as Tillich and others argue but the fact remains that it is very difficult to make sense of the problem of evil within that framework.

Without the crucial notions of Beyond Being and Impersonal Absolute and even "rebirth" and *maya* it is very difficult to account for evil, as perennialist authors like Schuon argue. Buddhist insight into the nature of evil which aren't incompatible with monotheistic perspective of Islam, as Schuon in his *Treasures of Buddhism* and *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* argues need also to be appropriated for satisfactory solution to the problem of evil. Nietzsche too offers some brilliant insights into the nature of evil and there have been Buddhist attempts at appropriating them. Iqbal too offers some brilliant insight here and there which if properly understood could open a new vistas for understanding evil. Iqbalian insight that there is no pleasure or pain giving acts; only ego sustaining and ego destroying acts is typical Nietzschean and even Buddhist in tone. Heaven and Hell aren't final resting places but both need to be transcended. Onward march of ego knows no destiny. Categories of thought and of pleasure and pain don't apply to ego and our appreciative self. We aren't here to seek pleasure and avoid pain but must win our egohood or soul in this vale of soul making which appears vale of tears only for obdurate pessimists. Buddha is triumphant over evil in this world. His practical approach to the problem of evil rather than speculating on its metaphysical significance is displayed by Iqbal also. Iqbal isn't a scholastic thinker or an advocate of God like Milton who justifies ways of God to men. Man's concern is to win immortality through his own efforts and this is emphasized by Iqbal as by all traditional religions.

Iqbal has a unique way to deal with the moral evil. For him traditional theological notion of sin is of no account (Nietzsche's reading of Jesus' central judgment concurs with this). Guilt, confession and repentance he

knows not. This is despite the fact that God's Fore knowledge and even Omnipotence is restricted by Iqbal to safeguard man's freedom and responsibility. Supreme end as ego cultivation justifies even "sinful" acts for Iqbal. Sin is not alienation from some abstract transcendent God but from our own deeper self. His is almost Whitmanian celebration of life. Anything which obstructs life is sin and evil and it will need to be fought even in heaven. Hell is not a torture pit made by revengeful God according to Iqbal. This implies man commits no "sin" which would be revenged by God, even sin of sins, original sin of Adam is excused or explained away by Iqbal.

Iqbal's is the only significant and worth reckoning endeavour to deal with the problem of evil in modern Muslim philosophy from a modern view point. He has almost no predecessors in this regard. The classical Muslim theological debates on this difficult problem hardly throw light on the modern formulations of the problem. It is no wonder that Iqbal's attempt suffers from many inadequacies. But the question is who in the history of theology or scholasticism (apart from Sufism as Valiuddin has cogently argued in his *The Qur'anic Sufism* and practitioners of traditionalist metaphysics such as Schuon. Present author has presented Sufi and perennialist approach to problem of evil in his forthcoming work *Justifying God's Faith in Man: Iqbal's Reformulation of Islamic Theodicy*, being published by Indian Publishers and Distributors, Delhi), has provided any really satisfactory solution to this problem? It is also a fact that modern knowledge (especially the discovery of evolution, psychological and sociological determinism and rediscovery of man's original sin) has put new challenges to classical attempts of dealing with this problem. Iqbal has however not given the requisite attention to this problem. Iqbal did consider this problem more important in his earlier years, especially when he wrote *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*. Later in life Iqbal had to attend to different problem and he, like most of Muslim philosophers, was not preoccupied or obsessed with the problem. The Hellenic and Christian-Nietzschian sense of the tragic element, so acutely portrayed by Christian paintings remains foreign to Muslim (Iqbalian) sensibility.

Iqbal, like Tolstoy's peasants, believes in *faqr*. Ego's onward march goes on without complaint of hardship and pain. He is "patient under hardships" as Iqbal appropriates Qur'anic verse to characterize human becoming. He is

co-worker of God in creative work. He does not feel Sartrian nausea in his sojourn to life eternal. In Whitmanian and Oshoian sense he blesses the existence and is at peace with God given life which is always worth living for a Muslim as he is the one who has submitted or surrendered to Existence's or God's call of saying yes to existence, to becoming with all its pain and waste and nausea. Islam emphasizes innocence of becoming as self will merges with God's will. There is no resentment against the "given". However, the Qur'an is pessimistic regarding man's willingness to surrender or submit to God. Very few indeed are Muslims, most are disbelievers, transgressors, ignorant, not paying thanks, who deny their selves and thus they are to go to hell. God has given man freedom not to be, not to recognize value of ego, value of soul-making. Qur'an declares "Man is indeed in the loss" excepting only those who believe and do good But very few count us believes and doers of good in the Qur'an. Religion ensures that man will recognize his disbelief or his failure to win ego and then work for winning it (religion uses terms salvation for it) But Iqbal's eschatology being based on Muslim exoteric theological sources (ignoring estoteric dimension of Islamic eschatology which is similar to other traditional religious eschatologies (which ensure universal salvation) as traditionalist perennialist authors argue. Within the modernist humanist context which colours Iqbalian reading of Islam to some extent there is no satisfactory solution to life's enigmas including the enigma of evil. Evil as sin hardly exists for it. Evil as God's creation (God attributes creation of evil to Himself in the Bible (Calvin so full heartedly accepts it) and the Qur'an (Muslims affirm in what is called *iman-i- mufassal* that good and evil are from God) is not acceptable to humanistic sensibilities of Iqbal (Jung goes to the extent of making Satan part of God in reaction to this). God's goodness is not goodness in the ordinary sense of the word. Modern man hardly knows what is good and what is evil. God's ways defy his expectations. Satan was not originally created evil. God is not only transcendent but also immanent. God is totality of being, as Tillich says. Spinoza and Ibn Rushd do not find much difficulty with the problem of evil. This has to be understood. Theology is always anthropocentric, even good and evil are defined with respect to man the measure of all things (and even here man is identified with his self and not Spirit). God and enlightened man are beyond good and evil. Buddhism emphasizes this fact (Nietzsche took it from Buddhism). Everything falls in perfect harmony if we conceive God and universe as unity as Ibn Rushd

argues. We or desiring egos (extinction of which is aim of Buddhism, Hinduism and Sufism) want to dictate terms to God. We do not want to surrender to God (who is totality of being containing what we call both good or evil) We impose our categories on existence. We mould the image of good God (all theism succumbs too readily to this *shirk*) in our own image. God can be seen only through God's eyes, as Meister Eckhart said and God can be perceived only when we leave ourselves behind as Bayazid Bistami said. Even the most sublime theism is unable to relinquish anthropomorphism. Iqbal's anthropocentric and anthropomorphic tendencies are too evident to be discussed in detail. And he has to pay the price.

Iqbal's faith in life or ego despite all its defeats in this tough world, coupled with his dynamism make things a bit comfortable to him. Tagore's following observations in *Sadbhava* represent Iqbalian position also "... Evil is ever moving; with all its incalculable immensity it does not eventually clog the current of our life... when science collects facts to illustrate the struggle for existance that is going on in the animal world red in tooth and claw'. But in these mental pictures are give a fixity to colours and forms which are really evanescent Life as a whole never takes death seriously. It laughs, dances and plays, it builds, hoards and loves in deaths face. Only when we detach one individual fact of death do we see its bleakness and become dismayed... within us we have hope which always walks in front of our present narrow experience, it the undying faith in the infinite in us.. it sets no limits to its own scope, it dares to assert that man has oneness with God... if existence were an evil, it would wait for no philosopher to prove it. It is like convincing a man of suicide, while all the time he stand before you in the flesh. Existence itself is here to prove that it can not be an evil" This is ego's answer to Schopenhauer and Maari. Ego and love conquer everything according to Iqbal.

Love has been most potent antidote to poison of evil. It is the redeeming element, the grace, the hope and thus an answer to the corrosive effects of evil. In a world where there is neither joy, nor peace, nor certitude, nor help for pain, love alone can sustain us. *Ishq* dissolves evil but then one can hardly accommodate it in the philosophy of ego, despite Iqbal's belief in the contrary. Sufism has cogently demonstrated that self and Self aren't synonymous and thus there is no escape from time, from suffering or

possibility of Self realization or vision of God in dualistic personalistic philosophy of ego. However Iqbal is himself a Sufi, at least in some of his great poetic moments and there with the sword of love he defeats evil.

Nature or ruthless logic of evolution, as history of mankind shows and anthropological evidence also fortifying it, hardly cares or favours preservation of ego. Individual's self-multiplication which Iqbal, like Shakespeare in sonnets, sees as one way of ego preservation, is denied to many individuals. This "collective immortality" does not guarantee or mean individual ego's immortality which is the real concern of Iqbal's own philosophy of ego. The "mutual conflict of opposing individualities" which constitute "the world pain"¹⁶ as Iqbal himself concedes darkens the career of life, though it may illuminate it for a chosen few. Superman, not man, can bear the trust of personality as Iqbal understands it. Ordinary average men in strictly Iqbalian terms are not eligible candidates for immortality. To preserve ego and thus enter the Kingdom of Heaven as Iqbal visualizes it is not the prerogative of ordinary mortals. Preserving ego is in itself a painful act and for most people it is itself a hell. To be born, as an ego and trying to preserve it against heavy odds (classical and especially modern literature shows numerous concrete examples of this fact) is greatest misfortune as Marri, Schopenhauer, Hardy and Buddhist and Hindu philosophy and indeed all mysticism asserts and this is true for most ordinary mortals. Very act of suicide, taking arms against the slings of fate by choosing not to be, despite all the forces of instinctual "life's irresistible desire for a lasting dominion, an infinite career as a concrete imdividual"¹⁷ speaks volumes against Iqbal's proposed heaven as a state of perfected and integrated ego) as an answer to problem of evil. For Iqbal Buddha did not find his way to heaven. What a judgment on the whole eastern religious consciousness!. Since mystics of all religions (even most of theistic mysticism leads to practical Sufistic dissolution of ego) do not consider winning an individual, separate personality or ego as a legitimate goal, they fail to be admitted to immortal Kingdom of Heaven! Mystics are in hell! This absurd conclusion follows from all personalistic individualistic ego centred humanist or anthropocentric philosophies and Iqbal's can't be an exception. *Akhirat* or other worldly oriented thrust of all religions and mysticism, and their refusal to be trapped or too much involved with ceaseless becoming, with the realm of impermanence or *maya* (without concept of *maya*, some difficult metaphysical

problems of traditional religion, including Islam, as Schuon explains in *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, can not be solved) and the realm of time and ever changing life all these points can not be squared with Iqbal's divinization of time and advocacy of becoming. Traditional religion considers world to be separated from God, "it involves a partial and contingent aspect of badness because, not being God despite its existence, it sets itself against God or is a would be equal of God; as this is impossible as all phenomena and ultimately he world itself– are touched by impermanence"²⁵⁸ So world can not be good. Crucial notion of Beyond Being is necessary for religion for its solution to problem of evil (Iqbal does not concede this).²⁵⁸ Why is man exposed to evil?

²⁵⁸ I quote Huston Smith, a perennialist, at length, to explain this perennialist approach to problem of evil which posits absolute/Beyond Being rather than personal God as the First Principle. He writes about religious conception of Absolute, "Because in the west the word God tends to be tied to his/her/its personal aspects, it is perhaps better to speak of the Absolute, to widen the screen. The personal dimensions of the divine are not unreal, but they are not inclusive. They are caught up and assume this place in the abysmal infinity of the Godhead which our rational minds can no more fathom than a two dimensional mind could fathom the nature of a sphere, The trans-rational depths of the divine are accessible, but by reason only abstractly and with anomalous residues; kataphatic theology inevitably produces paradoxes analogous to the ones that turn up on two-dimensional maps of our three-dimensional earth. Only in the inclusive light of intellective discernment can these paradoxes be resolved. Such intellective knowing requires more than thought – It requires that the subject be adequated to its object according to the dictum that "only like can know like".

The infinite aspect of the Absolute provides the solution to the problem of evil. That finitude exists is beyond question, for here we are as witnesses. The infinite must include the finite – include it paradoxically, of course, as something outside the infinite which by definition is impossible. So ontological gradations are required, that between the finite and the infinite being the one that is most important. When these gradations are considered in the mode of value or worth, they produce distinctions between better and worse and open vistas onto the primitive view of evil.

Esse qua esse bonum est; being qua being is good; evil is the relative absence of good in the way shadow is the relative absence of light. The issue is subtle, but a sentence by St. Augustine points to, the direction in which the traditional argument proceeds: "I no longer desired a better world, because I was thinking of creation as a whole: and in the light of this more balanced discernment, I had come to see that higher things are better than lower, but that the sum of all creation is better than the higher things alone". (*Confession*, VI, xii, 19). Not to affirm that point is to complain about the admittedly inferior while essentially noble condition that is ours. How noble it can come to be seen is life's open – ended

Schuon answers “precisely because he is he handiwork, not the Principle, which alone is good, he can neither be, nor experience, good alone ... In a certain sense, the function of evil in the world is to serve as a reminder that “God alone is good”; otherwise the world would be good... It is in any case naïve to accept the idea that everything would be perfect if only man no longer suffered or no longer committed crimes, since the average man of “the dark age” [whom Iqbal makes to dwell in primitive heaven until birth of self-consciousness i.e., his fall] even if his moral behaviour be correct is far from representing a pure good [as Iqbal thinks] and the way he views both good and evil is on a level with his decadence, that is, it has nothing to do with man’s ultimate interest”.²⁵⁹

Iqbal’s version of Islamic theodicy hinges heavily on his understanding of the notion of freedom of will. Retrospectively we can ask whether the freedom was worth the great risk that God undertook in giving it to man. Iqbal’s basic assertion which amounts to his reformulation of Islamic theodicy is that God in having taken this risk of giving freedom to choose good against evil to man shows His immense faith in man and that it is for man to justify this faith. Onus really is on man, not God. This is the fundamental insight of all traditional religions and this is what modernist critics of theodicy and theism and Western pessimist absurdists like Camus don’t concede. Religion ensures that man has to willy nilly justify this faith. The sole purport of religious doctrines of karma or emphasis on orthopraxy, reincarnation and hell and apocatastasis is to drive home this point. Man can’t be left unaccounted, or evil can’t have the final say. Man will not be allowed to untrue to his own Self and be unheedful of his ultimate purpose, of his ground of being. He can’t be allowed to live life inauthentically or devoid of care, to use Hediggerian phrase. God is true to his purpose whether men know or not, as the Qur’an says (and Iqbal quotes it). However it must be pointed out that from the perspective of personalist philosophy of Iqbal it is hard to see how all this will come to be /or is realized. It is only from the perennialist mystico-metaphysical approach that one could easily

question.(Smith, Huston (1990). “Primordialist Claim” in *God Self and Nothingness: Reflections Eastern and Western*. Ed. Robert E. Carter, Paragon House:New York

²⁵⁹ Schuon, F., *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, World of Islam Festival Publishing Company,1976 p. 171)

see how all this is accomplished. Western absurdists and many a critics of theism forcefully point out limitations of personalist and exoteric theological approaches to evil.

Iqbal is led to profoundly differ from orthodox Islamic position vis-à-vis evil. He rejects any idea of redemption on, assumedly, Qur'anic grounds. This ignores Muslim conception of prophet as redeemer (*shāfi*). There is a scope for grace within Islamic framework and yet Iqbal has no room for it. He has too much faith in man's independent and self-sufficient capacity for salvation. However he knows this that ordinary mortals are incapable of sustaining a strong ego and only Superman is really capable of winning immortality. If man is only a candidate for immortality and very few people have strong egos (if we go by the tough criteria of Iqbal himself) then most men are denied individual immortality. Yet the Qur'an promises everyone immortality (although it does not grant heaven). Iqbal's hell and heaven are not traditional Islam's hell and heaven. Iqbal's heterodoxy in this context is attributable to his not cognizing or accepting the traditional Islamic approach to the Fall, Sin, *Iblis* and afterlife. Iqbal's heterodox appropriation of evil is also one of the factors responsible for his modernist interpretation of religion. Ghazalian approach to the question of evil, which represents traditional Islam, is in sharp contrast to Iqbalian heterodox approach to evil. Yet Iqbal's approach is highly significant and cannot be ignored for its originality and bold appropriation of modern science and philosophy of religion. Modern man who has been conditioned by certain factors not fully appreciated by traditionalists will find Iqbal worth reckoning.

However to be fair to Iqbal it must be pointed out that one could well read him as a Sufi. His position at many places especially in his great poetry, comes close to what traditionalist perennialist position implies. Iqbal has been interpreted in traditionalist or Sufi terms. It is also true that at many places he self deconstructs his own position that he maintains in *Reconstruction* which is more or less coloured by theological and philosophical dualism and comes close to Unitarian vision of Sufis. Occasionally he redefines ego from Sufistic framework of Self. In his later days he had come very close to orthodox Sufi position that solves problem of evil so admirably. Iqbal's Sufi inheritance crops up here and there in his philosophical writings also. He rejects exoterism in no uncertain terms although he had reservations in

accepting traditional Sufism as esoteric dimension of Islam. Despite his many heterodoxies he does emerge as the worthy disciple of Rumi. Despite his theological and philosophical orientation he remains at bottom a metaphysician. Iqbal could well be exonerated from many a charges if we read closely his poetry and in that light interpret his prose works such as *Reconstruction*, especially his post *Reconstruction* works. In the sublime *Javid Nama* problem of evil doesn't disturb our sage. His sensibility remains the Eastern one despite the Western cloak that he seems to have worn (he self avowedly saw through the Western spectacles as modern Western philosophy had become part of his very conceptual framework). It is hard to reconcile Iqbal of the *Reconstruction* with Iqbal, the poet of the East despite some serious attempts of Iqbalian scholars such as Suheyl Umar to prove the contrary. It is undeniable that Iqbal has contradictions and holds many widely divergent theses in the same breath. A perennialist reading of Iqbalian thought as attempted by Shahzad Qaisar and by the present author in his forthcoming works shows this so clearly. Present author has argued the case for incompatibility elsewhere. Iqbal's concept of appreciative self and pure duration non-successional change and thus eternity deconstructs his own avowed chronocentricism. Despite seeing Love as beyond all determinations and change and becoming he as a philosopher tries time and again to uphold time and divinize it. As a poet he does want to transcend time (e.g. in his poem 'Mosque of Cordova' and many verses scattered throughout his poetical works) He wants to defy time through Love and art. He sees, as many others (philosophers, mystics and prophets of religion have seen) time's and especially serial time's mechanizing effect as evil and regards prayer as an escape from this mechanizing evil effect of time. Solution to the problem of evil becomes very difficult if time is divinized and its reign accepted even in heaven and Iqbal knows this but he has other compulsions to see time as a question of life and death for Muslims. His concept of *faqr* appropriates insights of Buddhist (or mystical) approach. He is essentially situated in the timeless moment of eternity and thus beyond the realm of becoming, of impermanence or suffering. With his Gabreilic wings he soars high in the empyreal realms, partaking of eternity and singing the songs of Self with gay abandon. Nothing can contain our bard in his great moments of mystical ecstasy and he appropriates whole universe with all its contradictions in that vital act that he calls *iman*. Iqbal seems to transcend all binaries and dualisms, all time infected thought constructions,

and the whole dominion of time and the phenomenal world where alone reigns evil and sorrow. Time and space (the realm of becoming and change) are *butan i wahm-o-guman*. The secret of the *kbudi* (*sirri-i-nibaan*) is none other than transcendence of all things relative in the timeless vision of Absolute (*la illaha illallah*). In fact there is no other to Self. Universe doesn't confront God as the other. World is the revelation, the manifestation of God rather than creation out of nothing according to Iqbal's pantheistic appropriation of the Qur'anic narrative of genesis. *Khudi ki zud main hay sari kbudaie* If one carefully builds on these and similar insights of Iqbal his theodicy could well emerge as very significant contribution and its heterodoxical elements (highlighted in this study because it focuses primarily on his *Reconstruction*) could be appropriated in a more or less orthodox Sufi framework.

Authentic religious vision faces the issue of existence of evil (it emphasizes not just the existence of suffering but the suffering of existence) squarely without blinking or head-in-the sand approach. It does not marginalize it; it does not show it in less bleak colours. It may even highlight this and make it central issue as in Buddhism. It does not refuse to shed tears (Prophet SAW wept more and laughed less) for the difficulties ordinary man encounters in his journey to heaven. Religion and its salvific dimension is geared towards the solution of the problem of evil. It takes our fallen condition (i.e., suffering of existence) as something given or far granted and proceeds to take us back to paradise. Key notion of surrender and submission to Reality in Islam shows the depth and maturity of religious approach to evil. Promethean revolt and Faustian transgression are rejected as naïve and facile attempts to evade and deny what can not be evaded or denied, the Rock of Truth. Resisting the innocence of becoming will create only resentment and that creates all anguish. Absolute stillness on our part in encounter with the God is what solves this problem. Refusing to appropriate the whole universe in one great vital act is what is *kufr* or disbelief according to Iqbal (and Islam). Yes-saying to the reality of time (which is identified with God in a sacred tradition) is the authentic Islamic approach. Iqbal's greatness is evident here. Sometimes he gives such brilliant interpretations as to encompass everything; all problems would appear to disappear. He encompasses even God and that is the *Iman*. Only he remains, no "other" is there to create a hurdle in his onward march. Evil loses its meaning. As there is no "other" for God, encountering Him from a distance, so speak, as Iqbal

says, and thus many difficult theological problems get a solution. Similarly, on such supreme moments, all “others” disappear before *kbudi*.

This reminds us of the enlightened Sage or Buddha or mystic who enjoys a sort of lordship in the whole universe and even gods come to bow before him. God’s function in ego’s ascension (*miraj*) is to be the witness of the power and glory of ego. He becomes heir to eternity and thus not susceptible to evil or corruption. It is a moment of supreme bliss when ego through this vital act (*iman*) conquers space and time and gets a station where categories of good and evil are transcended (as in stations of the mystic). How profound Iqbal can be in facing the ultimate questions “the greatest trial for the ego” and achieving “supreme bliss” of heaven and thus conquer evil is seen in those verses from *Javid Nama*.

Art Thou in the state of 'life, death, or 'death in life' invoke

the aids of three witnesses to verify thy 'station',

The first witness is thine own consciousness

See thyself, then, with thine own light

The second witness is the consciousness of another ego-

See thyself, then, with the light of an ego other than thee

The third witness is God's consciousness-

See thyself, then, with God's light

Consider thyself as living and eternal as He!

That man alone is real who dares-

Dares to see God face to face!

What is 'Ascension' only a search for witness

Who may finally confirm thy reality-

A witness whose confirmation alone makes thee eternal

No one can stand unshaken in His Presence

And who he can, verity he is pure gold.

Art thou a mere particle of dust?

Tighten the knot of thy ego/ And held fast to thy tiny being!

How glorious to burnish one's ego

And to test its lustre in the presence of the Sun!

Re-chisel, then, thine ancient frames and build up a new being

Such being is real being

Or else thy ego is a mere ring of smoke