IQBAL AND CLASSICAL MUSLIM THINKERS

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ABSTRACT

Iqbal seems to be engaged in constructing his own metaphysical system; he moves all over a vast canvas of the annals of Islam's intellectual history to seek support and inspiration. His ambitions are noble, and his concerns are invaluable– but what he does philosophically is beset with all kinds of problems.

If one considers the totality of Iqbal's literary output as constituting a single integral whole, then there is hardly any important personage of Islamic intellectual and cultural history not to be found figuring in his horizons. Indeed, he cast an enormously wide net both in his imaginative world of poetry and his discursive world of metaphysical speculations, capturing so much in it that the sheer historical range and scope of his locutions are simply overwhelming. Hermann Hesse, the celebrated Swiss-German writer and Nobel-Laureate, once spoke of three spiritual realms of Iqbal (*drei Reichen des Geistes*): the world of India, the world of Islam, and the world of western thought.[99] Gerhard Böwering called Iqbal "a bridge between East and West," drawing upon enormously variegated legacies of what he considers two distinct cultural spheres.[100] Aziz Ahmad, while discussing Iqbal's thought process and thought structure in a somewhat critical vein, pointed out that Iqbal's intellectual efforts embraced a "vast range" of positions culled from a whole multiplicity of schemes of thought.[101] Elsewhere, I have myself brought into fuller focus the fact that Iqbal not only drew upon the Arabo-Persian sources, but opened many other vistas too, receiving light also from

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[99] Reproduced in *Fikr wa Fann*, 22 (1979), p. 1.

[100] G. Böwering, "Iqbal: A Bridge of Understanding between East and West," *Journal of South Asia and Middle Eastern Studies*, 1 (1977), pp. 12-21.

[101] Aziz Ahmad, "Iqbal: Speculative Neo-Modernism" in Aziz Ahmad, Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan: 2857-1964. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967, pp. 141-63.

the Indo-Persian, Greco-Arabic, Iranian, and of course Western and Indic traditions.[102]

I feel very strongly that Iqbal's fundamental identity has been shaped by his poetry, not by his discursive thought. It is in the world of poetry, not of the discipline of philosophy, that he reigns supreme; indeed, it is Iqbal the Poet, not the speculative metaphysician, who rules over the hearts of millions and who has gained the grand stature of a global literary colossus. But, then, poetry does not construct rational systems; it often distorts natural realities to render them fictions, though meaningful fictions.[103] So to discuss Iqbal and classical Muslim thinkers in the context of his poetry is to move beyond a structured discourse and to follow poetry's own rhythms and its own complex logic in which factual reality is only an instrument and not an end in itself– or as Iqbal would have said himself - not the destination but only the lamp that illuminates the path leading to the destination. And yet, the context of this discussion of mine is rational-historical, not literary-subjective, and this means that we must restrict ourselves to those works of Iqbal in which he explicitly attempts to construct a discursive scheme, a system guided by formal logic, within which he treats factual empirical data of history, science, and nature.

And this means a limitation: that is, we are to narrow our consideration to two of his prose writings, generally regarded as his "philosophical" works– namely his doctoral work submitted to Munich University in 1907, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*,[104] and of course, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, first published in London in 1934.[105] However, it is widely known that Iqbal's thought, active and animated as it was, went through its own development and evolution, and he subsequently distanced himself from many of the views he had expressed in the dissertation, reluctant to

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[102] S. Nomanul Haq, "Recovering Iqbal," *Dawn Books and Authors*, 24 August 2008, pp. 2-4.

[103] In articulating my views I have drawn upon the many writings of Shamsur Rahman Faruqi. See particularly his *How to Read Iqbal*. Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 2004.

[104] Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia: A Contribution to the History of Muslim Philosophy*. Lahore: Bazm-I Iqbal, n.d.

[105] Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Lahore: S. M. Ashraf, 1951.

allow the publication of an Urdu translation of the work. This leaves us largely with one work that embodies the mature phase of his rational system-building, namely his *Reconstruction*. In what follows, therefore, the focus is very largely, though not exclusively, on this latter work. It is the *Reconstruction* that serves here as the point of departure as well as the point of return.

The list of classical Muslim thinkers that make an appearance in the work is fairly large– we see some of them appearing briefly, some extensively, and some appearing only once and some repeatedly. In fact, Alessandro Bausani has compiled a complete catalogue of all of these citations and invocations in both the *Reconstruction* and the *Metaphysics*, reproducing Iqbal's text in every case. The Italian scholar has counted some twenty-three classical Muslim sources, both individuals and doctrinal communities, spoken of or directly quoted by Iqbal; furthermore, he classifies these Iqbalian sources very broadly according to their specific intellectual discipline.[106] This classificatory catalogue essentially embodies a mechanical exercise with minimal theoretical discourse or explanatory thrust. And yet, when the two bodies of Iqbal's writings are viewed not *qua* collections of fragments as Bausani seems to have done here, but in their wholeness as forming two integrated units, then it becomes possible to generate another classification– a classification not merely mechanical but explanatory, shedding much light on our poet's speculative methodology as well as the rather personal nature of his interpretive historical narrative

Thus, firstly, there are those sources invoked by Iqbal which have influenced him significantly both in the structure and substance of his thought. Quite naturally, such sources are referred to and discussed frequently and at length in his discourses. Then, secondly, there are those thinkers, philosophical groups, and traditions that are cited by Iqbal for the purpose of seeking support for his own ideas and to give these ideas a ring of traditional and established authority; or for the purpose of demonstrating a parallel between classical Islamic thought and modern Western intellectual and scientific developments, emphasizing what he sees as the historical and logical priority of the former in anticipating what was to be discovered by Europe only centuries later. And, finally, Iqbal cites many classical Muslim

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[106] A. Bausani, "Classical Muslim Philosophy in the Work of a Muslim Modernist: Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938)," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 42 (1960), pp. 272-88.

personages for the embellishment and ornamentation of his own assertions and claims. Less charitably, this last may well be called "name-dropping." These three categories, however, are not mutually exclusive. Some focused research on this taxonomy would be most fruitful, but it is not undertaken in this article.

Here, another word about the limitations of this study of mine is to be said: I have largely limited myself, firstly, to those Muslim sources which fall in the first group, and, secondly, to those sources from this group that have been cited in Iqbal's philosophical discourses, or rather, in his metaphysical constructions, leaving out those he draws upon in his disquisition on Islamic law and Sharīah.

Methodology of Metaphysical Constructs and the Iqbalian Spin

I shall begin with two important observations, one concerning Iqbal's discursive methodology, the other having to do with his reading of the sources he invokes. As for his methodology, it happens to be almost invariably speculative. What does that mean? It means that whenever a tension arises within the elements of his doctrinal scheme, he fixes it by metaphysical constructs; this is practically a poetic fix, one ought to note. So, for example, speaking ontologically about God's existence in non-serial time, he is confronted with the challenge of reconciling two assertions of the Qur'ān: One speaking about God's command as being - to say it in ordinary language– timeless; this is 54:50 which Iqbal translates as "Our command was but one, swift as the twinkling of an eye" (*ka-lamhim bi'l-basar*). And the other (25: 59) declaring that it took six days for God to create the cosmos– Iqbal renders it, "Who in six days (*fī sittati ayyāmin*) created the Heavens and the earth, and what is between them." How does one reconcile both the absence and presence of a time-period in one and the same process, twinkling of an eye on the one hand and six days on the other?

Now, typically, Iqbal's method is quite unlike that of the traditional Muslim *tafsīr*, Qur'ānic hermeneutics, which would as a normal course resolve the variation by one or more of the standard exegetic devices– historicization (the *sha'n nuzūl* approach), contextualization, philological analysis, and explication by Hadith reports. As against all this, Iqbal explains the variation by a heavy metaphysical construct: there exist two kinds of

selves, he teaches us, the appreciative self and the efficient self. A whole speculative edifice is now erected on this construct:

> The unity of appreciative ego is like 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. There is no numerical distinctness of states in the totality of the ego, the multiplicity of whose elements is, unlike that of the efficient self, wholly qualitative. There is change and movement, but this change and movement are indivisible; their elements inter-penetrate and are wholly non-serial in character. It appears that the time of the appreciative self is a single 'now' which the efficient self in its traffic with the world of space, pulverizes into a series of 'now' like pearl beads in a thread …
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> If we look at the moment embodied in creation from the outside, that is to say, if we apprehend it intellectually, it is a process lasting through thousands of years; for one Divine day, in the terminology of the Quran… is equal to 1,000 years. From another point of view the process of creation, lasting through thousands of years, is a single indivisible act, 'swift as the twinkling of an eye'.[107]

This sounds unmistakably Bergsonian, distinguishing between pure duration (*durée*) and serial time with its multiplicity of moments as they come into manifestation in sequential succession.[108] Indeed, Iqbal does acknowledge that he is drawing upon or rather *appropriating* the French philosopher in this metaphysical adventure of explaining the differing Qur'ānic assertions. What Iqbal is doing embodies a highly imaginative exercise, but it is more pleasing poetically than philosophically, in the strict and technical sense of philosophy.

The reason for the philosophical weakness of the exercise is the idiosyncratic manner in which Iqbal recasts his sources and appropriates them to serve his own ends– even though these ends are, I must add, certainly noble ones. And this takes us to the second observation made above, namely his own reading of the sources that he invokes. In the

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[107] *Reconstruction*, p. 48.

[108] A detailed study of Iqbal metaphysics of time is A. Bausani, "The Concept of Time in the Religious Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal," *Die Welt des Islams*, N. S. 3 (1954), pp. 158-186.

particular case at hand, we see Bergson expounded, fundamentally readjusted, and finally mapped onto the framework of classical Muslim thinkers. Harmonizing Bergson with the *kalām* or sufi traditions, or with Greco-Arabic philosophy, is an impossible task due to the incompatible conceptual presuppositions upon which these various sets of ideas are severally grounded. Yet Iqbal tries to make this harmonizing possible by presenting to his audience a modern Bergsonian reading of classical Muslim thinkers; and in giving his own spin to both, in the end he effectively transmutes each beyond recognition.

Thus, on the hand, Iqbal introduces an Aristotelian teleology into the *élan vital* of Bergson, the primordial energy flowing in pure duration (*durée*), and on the other hand reformulates Abu'l-Hasan al-Ash'arī's (d. 937) time atomism, so that the two are brought into a compatible relationship. Iqbal then brings to bear a large number of Muslim thinkers to support this adventure of his, again reading these thinkers in his own personal manner. Here is a mixing of Bergson, Ash'arī, and (derivatively) Ghazālī:

> Pure time [*durée*] … is not a string of separate, reversible instants; it is an organic whole in which the past is not left behind, but is moving along with, and operating in, the present [Bergson] … It is time freed from the net of causal sequence– the diagrammatic character which the logical understanding imposes upon it [*kalām*/Ash'arī/ Ghazālī] …
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> If time is real, and not a mere repetition of homogeneous moments which make conscious experience a delusion, then every moment in the life of Reality is original [*kalām*/Ash'arī/Ghazālī] … To exist in real time is not to be bound by the fetters of serial time [Bergson], but to create it from moment to moment and to be absolutely free and original in creation [*kalām*/Ash'arī/ Ghazālī].[109]

Now comes Iqbal's re-casting of Bergson. The vitalism of Bergson, he declares, "ends in an insurmountable dualism of will and thought."[110] Here enters 'Urfī, largely for ornamental support, a Persian Muslim poet imaginatively appropriated to usher Iqbal into the psychological theory that

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[109] *Reconstruction,* 49-50.

[110] Ibid., 52.

"ends and purposes … form the warp and woof of conscious experience."[111] Bergson then undergoes an Iqbalian transmutation:

> Purposes … constitute the forward push of our life [Bergson's *élan vital*], and thus in a way anticipate and influence the states that are yet to be … Thus past and future both operate in the present state of consciousness, and the future is not wholly undetermined as Bergson's analysis of our conscious experience shows… On the analogy of our conscious experience, therefore, Reality is not a blind vital impulse wholly unilluminated by idea. Its nature is through and through teleological.[112]

Iqbal is not bothered by the fact that by introducing *telos* into the *élan vital* of Bergson, he is removing the very foundational principle on which the French philosopher's whole metaphysical system stands: making the *élan vital* purposive negates the essential primordial freshness of the *durée*. If Bergson's vitalism is given a specific ontological direction or is made to move towards an end, and its wholly undetermined nature is denied, then it is no longer Bergson's *élan vital*. Again, note Iqbal's methodological tendency to resolve conceptual tensions by metaphysical constructs: teleology, he says, is not mechanistic, but a vitalistic-creative process.

The Mélange: Bergson, Ashʿarī, Ibn Hazm, and Persian Thinkers

Bergson thus transmuted is then fully woven with classical Muslim thinkers. Iqbal has a corrective formula here for the famous Spanish writer, theologian, and legist Ibn Hazm. He hesitated to predicate life of God, observes Iqbal, out of his fear for conceiving Him in anthropomorphic terms. Ibn Hazm resolves this fear by proposing, our poet reports, "that God should be described as living, not because he is living in the sense of our experience of life, but only because he is so described in the Quran."[113]An Ashʿarī-Bergson mélange now appears, a mélange which would be recognizable neither to Ashʿarī nor to Bergson, since it maps the cosmological-metaphysical atomism of the former onto the vitalistic-

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[111] Ibid., 53.

[112] Ibid., 53.

[113] Ibid., 59.

psychological pure duration of the latter. Iqbal reads Ibn Hazm in his own private manner and then offers a curative:

> Confining himself to the surface of our conscious experience and ignoring its deeper phases, Ibn Hazm must have taken life as a serial change, a succession of attitudes towards an obstructing environment. Serial change is obviously a mark of imperfection; and, if we confine ourselves to this view of change, the difficulty of reconciling Divine perfection with Divine life becomes insuperable. Ibn Hazm must have felt that the perfection of God can be retained only at the cost of His life. There is, however, a way out of the difficulty.
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> The Absolute Ego … is the whole of Reality. He is not so situated as to take a perspective view of an alien universe; consequently, the phases of His life are wholly determined from within. Change, therefore, in the sense of movement from an imperfect to a relatively perfect state, or *vice versa*, is absolutely inapplicable to His life. But change in this sense is not the only possible form of life. A deeper insight into our conscious experience shows that beneath the appearances of serial duration there is true duration. The Ultimate Ego exists in pure duration wherein change ceases to be a succession of varying attitudes, and reveals its true character as continuous creation, 'untouched by weariness' and unsiezable 'by slumber or sleep'.[114]

A few things need to be brought into focus here. Note, first, the *speculative* reading of Ibn Hazm on the part of Iqbal, a reading that is all his own ("Ibn Hazm *must have* taken …"; "Ibn Hazm *must have* felt …"). Then we see both Ash'arī and Bergson brought to bear in the same breath, but without reference or acknowledgement. And finally, we find here Qur'ānic verses beautifully embellishing the discourse. This is typical of Iqbal the Metaphysician!

Interestingly, the weaving together of vastly distant Muslim and European thinkers– distant both in time and in terms of their fundamental doctrines– continues throughout the *Reconstruction,* and we have at one place the mixing of the sixteenth/seventeenth-century Iranian philosopher Mīr Damād, the teacher of the relatively better known Mullā Sadrā, and the nineteenth-

[114] Ibid., 59-60.

century Bahā'ī, Mullā Bāqir. These two figures are brought together for the support of Iqbal's Bergsonian-Ash'arite metaphysics of serial time, pure duration, and the atomism of continuous creation. "The time of the Ultimate Ego is revealed as change without succession, i.e. an organic whole which appears atomic because of the creative movement of the ego. This is what Mir Damad and Mulla Baqir mean when they say that time is born with the act of creation by which the Ultimate Ego realizes and measures, so to speak, the infinite wealth of His own undetermined creative possibilities."[115] Typically, Iqbal gives no references.

It is quite evident already that while the two Persians are invoked by Iqbal only for legitimizing his own views by a flash-back technique, he is definitely influenced profoundly by one trend in the classical intellectual history of Islam: namely, *kalām* atomism, especially as it is articulated in the Ash'arite tradition. Indeed, Iqbal also had to be critical of this tradition since his metaphysical project needed to inject into the "objective" Ash'arite cosmology the psychological theory of time picked up from Bergson. On the other hand, Iqbal does speak very highly of the *mutakallim*s of this mould, paying them the tribute of being "on the right path" and for anticipating some of the "more modern" forms of idealism." In fact, he often discusses them anachronistically, and does so even in the context of modern mathematics, a field in which he had no expertise. Thus, we are told, and accurately so, that the Ash'arite did not believe in the infinite divisibility of space and time. "With them space, time and motion are made up of points and instants which cannot be further subdivided."[116] But, then, Iqbal concludes that they therefore admitted the existence of infinitesimals. This was rejected by Ibn Hazm, Iqbal reports, saying that modern mathematics had now vindicated the Spanish sage.

Ash'arite thinkers were superior to Kant, says Iqbal. Writing in the *Metaphysics* that the German philosopher in his inquiry into human knowledge stopped at the idea of "*Ding an sich*" (thing-in-itself) but these *mutakallim*s went further and practically became the forerunners of the German logician Rudolph Lotze's (d. 1881) idealism.[117] Declaring the

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[115] Ibid., 76-7.

[116] Ibid., 35.

[117] *Metaphysics*, 57.

Ash'arite Abū Bakr Baqillanī (d. 1036) in the *Reconstruction* as the "most exact and daring thinker,"[118] Iqbal pays a resounding tribute to the *mutakallim*s: the emergence and endurance of atomism in Islam was the first important indication of an intellectual revolt against the Aristotelian idea of a fixed universe; and this formed one of the most interesting chapters in the entire history of Muslim thought.

Earlier, in the *Metaphysics*, Iqbal says something that should serve as an antidote to a misleading presumption still lurking about in some contemporary circles– that science in Islam came to a halt after Ghazālī's dismissal of causality and the assertion of his atomistic theory of continuous creation, both carried out, as they were, in an Ash'arite vein. This view of the end of science from Muslim societies is arrogantly drawn from the now discarded thesis of Ignaz Goldziher, a view that is historically absurd but highly satisfying ideologically. Here Iqbal moves in exactly the opposite direction– he recognizes Ash'arī, whom Ghazālī had followed, as having provided the very logical justification and metaphysical grounding that make experimental science philosophically respectable, thereby supplying a supporting intellectual muscle to these sciences for a renewed boost! "Such a state of thing [experimental-observational science of Ibn al-Haytham and al-Bīrūnī] could have existed, but *could not have been logically justified* before al-Ashari."[119] 277 Bausani This is a highly original observation; it is contextual and therefore non-anachronistic, opening up rich and fruitful historical questions.

Anachronisms: *Mutakallim*s, Sufis, and Poets Mapped onto Quantum Physics and Newton

But anachronism remains a part of Iqbal's attitude, since he declares both the Mu'tazilite Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 845) and the Ash'arite thinkers rather awkwardly as the precursors of the modern theories of quantum physics.[120] Giving Ash'arites a priority in intellectual history, Iqbal acknowledges that their doctrine of time is perhaps the first attempt in the history of Muslim

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[118] *Reconstruction*, 67.

[119] Bausani, 277

[120] Ibid., 69.

thought to understand it philosophically.[121] And yet, he had no choice but to be critical of them in the same breath. Their position with regard to the philosophy of time leads to absurd conclusions, he says, because they looked at the subject of their inquiry from a wholly *objective* point of view. They are censured by Iqbal for having learned no lessons from the history of Greek thought. But, note, here is a clear ambivalence: surely, Iqbal had also hailed these very *mutakallim*s as embodying a pioneering, heroic, and decisive revolt against Greek intellectual thralldom!

Again, with a messier anachronism Iqbal lumps together the Ash'arites, Isaac Newton, and modern science. Giving his pronouncement that any notion of time that deems it wholly objective is doomed to run into difficulties, Iqbal observes that Newton's view of time is equally objective and that "the verdict of modern science is exactly the same as those of the Ash'arite … [T]he constructive endeavour of the Ash'arite, as of the moderns, was wholly lacking in psychological analysis … [T]hey altogether failed to perceive the subjective aspect of time."[122] Then in support and elaboration of his own (poetic) doctrine of time, Iqbal would draw upon Muslim mystical philosophers, all the time continuing with his characteristic methodology of making metaphysical constructs to resolve logical tensions.

The two figures in this particular case are the Shirazi theologian and philosopher, Mullā Jalāluddīn Dawwānī (d. 1502) and the famous Suhrawardī sufi-poet Fakhruddīn 'Irāqī (d. 1289), who was part of the entourage of Bahā'uddīn Zakariya. It is interesting to note that both of these figures are influenced by Ibn 'Arabī, something that indicates Iqbal's own inclinations. This is what Iqbal has to say in a full-blooded metaphysical theory-construction:

> Dawani tells us that if we take time to be a span which makes possible the appearance of events as a moving procession and conceive this span to be a unity, then we cannot but describe it as an original state of Divine activity, encompassing all the succeeding states of that activity. But the Mulla takes good care to add that a deeper insight into the nature of succession reveals its relativity, so that it disappears in the case of God to

[121] Ibid., 73.

[122] Ibid., 74.

> Whom all events are present in a single act of perception. The sufi Iraqi has a similar way of looking at the matter. He conceives infinite varieties on time, relative to the varying grades of being, intervening between materiality and pure spirituality.[123]

We are not told from which text exactly Iqbal gives these citations, but it is to be noted that he is not bothered by Dawwānī's anthropomorphism: the thinker is cited as having spoken of God's "act of *perception*"! Also, it becomes more and more evident that Iqbal is engaged in cobbling together support for his own views no matter from which quarter this support comes from: from a poet or a philosopher or a *mutakallim* or a sufi, or, decisively, from the Hadith or the Qur'ān. In the process he is wont to put his own spin on these sources– accepting them selectively when they suit him, or rejecting them selectively when they are at variance from his own asserted doctrines, or freely reconstructing them as needed, and doing all of this sometimes quite arbitrarily. In the passage just quoted one also notes a whiff of Neoplatonic ontology– "degrees of being" between materiality and spirituality.

In Iqbal's metaphysics of space, we see a similar trend. Thus, two sufis are invoked for a thoroughly speculative construction of the notion of space– one of them is 'Irāqī whom we have met above and the other is the early Naqshbandi sufi Khwāja Muhammad Pārsā (d. 1419); again, note that like 'Irāqī, Pārsā too had affinities for Ibn 'Arabī. Iqbal speaks of the "religious psychology" of the two sufis and claims that they bring us "much nearer to our [modern] ways of looking at the problem of space and time."[124]. Now after citing the Qur'ān, Iqbal approvingly presents the speculative doctrine of 'Irāqī: there are three kinds of space - the space of material bodies, the space of immaterial beings, and the space of God. The first space is further subdivided into three sub-spaces– space of gross bodies, space of subtle bodies, and space of light. Then, typically, the Suhrawardi sufi-poet is declared to be the precursor of modern physics! He is "really trying to reach the concept of space as a dynamic appearance. His mind seems to be vaguely struggling with the concept of space as an infinite continuum … [His ideas]

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[123] Ibid., 75.

[124] Ibid., 134-35.

suggest the modern notion of space-time."[125] Iqbal does not seem to distinguish between poetry and relativistic mechanics!

Iqbal's Positivistic View of Science and Abū Bakr Rāzī, al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Khaldūn

A very large number of classical Muslim thinkers are also criticized by Iqbal– they include, for instance, Ash'arī, as we have seen, but also Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd. Yet there are a few who escape his censure, particularly the scientists Abū Bakr Rāzī (d. 925) and al-Bīrūnī (d.1048), and the philosopher of history Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406). It ought to be noted here that Iqbal espouses a positivistic view of scientific methodology which has long been discarded, a view that is now called the "myth of inductivism," or the "Baconian myth," given that Francis Bacon is its begetter. According to this myth, science *begins* with the observation of concrete reality, doing so often through experiments; out of these experiments and observations it discovers causal links between phenomena; and through repeated verification of these causal links universal scientific theories are then logically induced. With all good intentions, and despite the powerful rejection of causality by Ash'arī, Ghazālī, and David Hume, all of whom are known to Iqbal, he goes as far as to pronounce that "The birth of Islam… is the birth of inductive intellect"! Here is Iqbal's neat history with all its chronological awkwardness and highly suspect reading of the sources:

> Abu Bakr Razi was perhaps the first to criticize Aristotle's [logic], and in our own times his objection, conceived in a thoroughly inductive spirit has been reformulated by John Stewart Mill. Ibn Hazm, in his *Scope of Logic*, emphasizes sense perception as a source of knowledge; and Ibn Taymiyya [d. 1328], in his *Refutation of Logic*, shows that induction is the only form of reliable argument. *Thus arose the method of observation and experiment.* [!][126]

Daringly, Iqbal makes al-Bīrūnī the precursor of none other than Newton. al-Bīrūnī approached the modern mathematical idea of function, Iqbal claims, and saw the insufficiency of the Greek static view of the universe. By introducing time into the fixed cosmos of the Greeks, he rendered the

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[125] Ibid., 127.

[126] Ibid., 129. Emphasis added.

universe a becoming rather than a being, we are told. Iqbal goes too far afield now and says, "al-Bīrūnī generali[zed] Newton's formula of interpolation from trigonometric function to any function whatever"![127]In this way, Iqbal refutes Spengler's claim that the idea of mathematical function is Western. But then, what Spengler seems to have in mind is calculus, and Newton is one of its inventers, a monumental mathematical development unknown to al-Bīrūnī. So, despite his greatness as a scientist, we cannot map al-Bīrūnī onto a Newtonian system of modern physics.

Iqbal lavishes profuse praise upon Ibn Khaldūn. One might venture to speculate a kind of back-formation here: by the time Iqbal was writing, Western scholars had begun to recognize the eminence of this Muslim philosopher of history, and he came into prominence in the twentieth-century Islamic world as an echo it seems from the West, not owing to any indigenous intellectual developments. In all likelihood, it is through Western sources that Iqbal too focused on Ibn Khaldūn. Moreover, it is also likely that he has no recourse to the original text of the *Muqaddima* since his Ibn Khaldūn is sometimes his own construction, an Ibn Khaldūn freely re-shaped. Thus, Iqbal makes him the forerunner of the modern hypothesis of subliminal selves,[128]and cites an orientalist in support. In the same psychological context, Iqbal discusses Hallāj's mystical experience and his cry of "*Ana'l- Haqq*," and then invokes Ibn Khaldūn as the Muslim sage who felt the need to develop an effective scientific method to investigate experiences of these kinds.[129] This is something that modern psychology has only recently realized, Iqbal claims. Ibn Khaldūn, then, had a priority in the world of modern psychology.

But the most problematic are the observations Iqbal makes with regard to Ibn Khaldūn's view of time and the life of civilizations. Reiterating his observation that Muslim thought sees the universe in dynamic terms as a process of continuous becoming, he says that this position is reinforced by Ibn Khaldūn's view of history. A keen sense of the reality of time, and the

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[127] Ibid., 133.

[128] Ibid., 17.

[129] Ibid., 96.

concept of life as a continuous movement in time, are the teachings of the Qur'ān, Iqbal tells us. Then, he goes on to say:

> It is this conception of life and time which is the main point of interest in Ibn Khaldūn's view of history… [C]onsidering the direction in which the culture of Islam had unfolded itself, *only a Muslim could have viewed history as a continuous, collective movement*, a real inevitable development in time. The point of interest in this view of history is the way in which Ibn-i-Khaldun conceives the process of change. His conception is of infinite importance because of the implication that history, as a continuous movement in time, is a genuinely creative movement and not a movement whose path is already determined … *[Ibn Khaldūn] may well be regarded as a forerunner of Bergson*.[130]

This reading of Ibn Khaldūn is hard to justify!

Going back to the observation made earlier, Iqbal seems to be engaged in constructing his own metaphysical system; he moves all over a vast canvas of the annals of Islam's intellectual history to seek support and inspiration. His ambitions are noble, and his concerns are invaluable– but what he does philosophically is beset with all kinds of problems. As Aziz Ahmad once said: "In the fusion of two different streams of civilization, modern Western and medieval Islamic, of two currents of thought, philosophic and mystic, and two strands of value-recognition, ethical and dynamic, what he achieved was not a synthesis but his own thought-process and thought-structure, which is an individual expression embracing a vast range of isolated positions of Western and Islamic schemes of thought."[131]

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[130] Ibid., 141. Emphasis added.

[131] Aziz Ahmad, "Speculative Neo-Modernism" repr. in M. I. Chaghatai ed., *Iqbal: New Dimensions*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003, p. 337.