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# Iqbal on God

In his discussions on God Iqbal was supposed to argue on two points. These are (i) existence of God and (ii) nature of God. Regarding the first point Iqbal's philosophical approach is almost negative. Iqbal points out, quite convincingly, weaknesses inherent in the classical arguments which scholastic philosophy furnishes in defence of existence of God. These arguments, the cosmological, the teleological and the ontological fail to establish the existence of an Infinite Being because these regard thought as an agency which is foreign to its object. Thought, in these arguments, is not formative of the being of the objects about which it thinks. The Infinite thus reache dis limited by the thought which contemplates it. Iqbal believes that at the level of God thought has to be conceived as an agency which is formative of the being of its object i.e. thought and being constitute a unity. Even if we grant this premise, the existence of God is not established. It only shows that if there were such a thought it would not be limited by its object. But it is not an existential proposition. It is only a truth of reason and belongs to the sphere of the possible.

Iqbal admits that knowledge as applied to the finite ego always means discursive knowledge and at this level the ego views an object as its other existing *per se*.[1] Such a movement of thought will always establish a finite and a limited god, a being which cannot be an object

af worship for any true religion of the world. Iqbal, however, warns us that thought has a deeper movement in knowledge and is capable of reaching the Infinite. "In its deeper movement, however, thought is capable of reaching an immanent Infinite in whose self-unfolding movement the various finite concepts are merely moments. In its essential nature, then, thought is not static; it is dynamic and unfolds its internal infinitude in time like the seed which, from the very beginning, carries within itself the organic unity of the tree as a present fact. Thought is, therefore, the whole in its dynamic self-expression appearing to the temporal vision as a series of definite specifications which cannot be understood except by a reciprocal reference. Their meaning lies not in their self-indentity, but in the larger whole of which they are the specific aspects. This larger whole is, to use a Quranic metaphor, a kind of "Preserved Tablet," which holds up the entire undeterrmined possibilities of knowledge as a present reality, revealing itself in serial time as succession of finite concepts appearing to reach a unity which is already present in them. It is in fact the presence of the total Infinite in the movement of knowledge that makes finite thinking possible".[2]

In the history of Western philosophy it was Leibniz who described a contingent proposition as infinitely analytical. He based his distinction between truths of reason and truths of fact on the finitely analytical and infinitely analytical character of propositions expressing truths of reason and truths of fact respectively. Truths of reason are necessary propositions such as we have in mathematics and logic. These are not existential propositions and are concerned with the sphere of the possible. All truths of reason are true necessarily and their truth rests on the principle of contradiction Truths of fact are contingent propositions. They are not necessary propositions and their opposite is possible. As a principle of explanation for the existence of contingent facts Leibniz introduced the principle of sufficient reason and the principle of perfection. There must be

sufficient reason for any event to happen as it does happen and not otherwise. And out of the undetermined possibilities of existence of the possible worlds God's choice of creating world was moved by the consideration of the principle of perfection i.e. of the best possible world. Further, Leibniz thought that all propositions about reality were of subject-predicate form. Now in case of a contingent proposition, Leibniz held, the predicate assigned to the subject one of the modes of its being. The subject, for Leibniz, was a windowless monad which could receive nothing from outside nor any influence could ever generate from it which could influence other monads. All undetermined possibilities of an individual monad were always present to an Infinite Mind. If Baber conquerred India it was indeed comprised in the notion of Baber. Thus, for Leibniz, a contingent proposition attributed to a subject one of its possible modes of being. All the unrealised possibilities of a monad can be known to the Infinite Monad but these possibilities reveal themselves gradually to the finite monad. Since monads were windowless no interaction between monads was possible. The life of a monad had thus to be conceived as a self-revelation. Their mutual cooperation and adjustment was explained on the principle of pre-established harmony. The possibilities of being of a monad, because of its being windowless, were contained in its very concept. Thus a contingent proposition though not necessary, was analytical in the sense that all possible predicates of a subject were containted in its very concept. Only the analysis required was infinite. Each monad, for Leibniz, was universe in miniature and embraced the Infinite.

The deeper movement of thought to which Iqbal refers pertains to truths of fact, to contingent propositions. About thought Iqbal further says, its real function is to synthesize the elements of experience by employing categories suitable to the various levels which experience presents. It is as much organic as life. In conscious experience life and thought penetrate each other. They form

a unity. Thought, therefore, in its true nature is identical with life.[4] 'The undertermined possibilities of knowledge' are thus for Iqbal the undertermined possibilities of existence of things. "The underter-mined possibilities of becoming of reality" are contained in an ego, as open possibilities. Iqbal assumes that all propositions about reality are of subject-predicate form. The predicate simply attributes to a subject, one of the infinite possibilities of its being at any one particular moment. Where Iqbal differs from Leibniz is that he grants interaction between egos or monads. The life of an ego is a constant interaction between the ego and its environment. The future states of an ego exist only as open possibilities of its modes of being.

You record your destiny with your own pen.

Your brow has been left blank by the Divine Pen,[5]

Since for Iqbal the egos are not windowless but are in constant give and take relationship with one another and with the enviroment, each realises the undetermined possibilities of its being as a result of this interaction. In terms of the subject-predicate from of proposition the possibilities of being of an ego which could be predicated to it are infinite and all these in a way belong to the ego. It is the realiza-tion of any one set of properties which fashions the ego as an indivi-dual. The realization of one set of properties rules out the possibility of realizing another set of properties. This, in a way, curbs the freedom of the ego. For Sartre, the emergence of empirical ego is an act of bad faith because consciousness, in thus creating the empirical ego, conceals from itself its infinite freedom. Infinite freedom in its infinity will make action impossible for an action is nothing but realization of one particular course out of the unlimited number of possibilities available to an ego at any one particular moment. For Iqbal, however, this limitation on one's freedom is an act of free choice.

We may note that contingent propositions are always about truths

of fact i.e. about events and happenings in the spatio-temporal order. The deeper movement of thought which is identical with life, synthesises various stages of life and presents them in the form of propositions. The proposition must be either true or false. As G. Ryle points out : 'It is not extrinsic but intrinsic to a thought to be true or false, or to have 'objective reference' When I Judge that something is the case. If it is not the case, then I have misjudged : and the allegation that I have misjudged implies that something else is the case. In saying what we think, we do not just signal what is going on in our heads ; we describe or else we misdescribe reality".[6]

Life, Iqbal emphasises, believes in the principle of individuation. It manifests itself in the form of egos or monads. The deeper movement of thought which is to grasp life in its wholeness is the movement of the appreciative self—a self which we occupy in moments of profound meditation.[7] Conscious existence at the level of appreciative self is pure duration i.e. a non-successional change, Inner experience is uniquely individual ; it is confined to the subject. Even if we multiply such experiences of all sentient creatures it would imply enjoyment by each of its own duration. To regard my own inner experience as connected with or dependent upon" "a wider whole" (in the sense of Infinite) is something to which no clue is furnished by thought at any level—appreciative or efficient. In fact no rational proof can be furnished about the existence of God. Iqbal's attempt to make the deeper movement of thought as confronting the ego with the Infinite belies all verification. Truths of fact must submit to verification to be cogent and workable.

As to the nature of God, Iqbal's approach is routed through an analysis of conscious experience. Making conscious experience the pivot of his reasoning Iqbal interprets matter and life objectively but later, on the analogy of conscious experience, conceives all forms of sense experience as indicative of spiritual character of Reality.

Such an approach opens him to the charge of anthropomorphism which he partly admits.

"......since our conscious experience is the only point of departure for all knowledge, we cannot avoid the limitations of interpreting fact in the light of our own inner experience. An anthropomorphic conception is especially unavoidable in the apprehension of life ; for life can be apprehended from within only".[8] But he, at the same time, warns us : ' To interpret this life (God) as an ego is not to fashion God after the image of man. It is only to accept the simple fact of experience that life is not a formless fluid, but an organising principle of unity...... ."[9]

Iqbal thus relies on analogy in explaining the nature of God. It may be here pointed out that the term analogy is here used not in the sense of a mode of inference but in the sense of 'resemblance" or "basis of comparison" for explaining meanings of religious concepts. The implication is that the words used for describing the nature and attributes of God have been used neither univocally (i.e. with exactly the same meaning) nor equivocally (i.e. with completely different and unrelated meaning) but analogically. All predications of God are analogical. Let us explain the meaning of analogical predication by taking a simple example. On observing the behaviour of a dog to its master we may say that the dog is faithful. We may also describe a man as faithful. There is, however, a world of difference between the behaviour of a man which earns him the adjective faithful and the behaviour of a dog. We are, therefore, not using the word univocally. We are using it analogically to show that at the level of dog there is a certain quality of behaviour which corresponds to what at the human level we call faithfulness. But human faithfulness differs from canine faithfulness. There is thus difference within similarity and similarity within difference and it is this fact which is the basis for using the term analogically in two different contexts.

Iqbal proceeds by analysing experience at the level of sense perception i.e. matter, life and consciousness. His analysis of conscious experience reveals that life is pure duration, a creative flow, Now what is true of conscious experience is also true of matter or the universe (a structure of events possessing the character of a continuous creative flow). "On the analogy of inner experience, then, the universe is a free, creative movement".[10] Iqbal applies his analysis of conscious experience analogically to both matter and God. "A critical interpretation of the sequence of time as revealed in ourselves had led us to a notion of the Ultimate Reality as pure duration in which thought, life and purpose interpenetrate to form an organic unity. We cannot conceive this unity except as the unity of a self—an all embracing concrete self of such a self it is impossible to form an adequate conception".[11] The main difficulty in such an approach is posed by the question "In what way are the properties of human beings and God supposed to be analogous ?" You experience matter, life and consciousness. You get in these areas help from Physics, Biology and Psychology. You study them independently and the analogical use of language may help you in interpreting the facts of matter and life "in the light of your own inner experience." In describing the nature of God analogy can help if we could first know God independently. Only then can we answer the question stated above. In analysing the concept of matter Iqbal is quite objective. He maintains this attitude in his discussions on life and consciousness as well. The analysis of the three levels of sense experience is later on reduced, on the analogy of inner experience, to pure duration, The same procedure has not been observed while dilating on the nature of God, When we say that a certain expression X symbolizes the nature of God better than another expression Y, we presuppose that we know God. For otherwise, we shall not be in a position to make such a judgment. This has, however, not been done, for Iqbal has simply confined himself to a study of sense experience and God is not an object open to sense perception.

## II

A logical analysis of Iqbal's argument brings out the weaknesses inherent in any attempt to furnish rational proof of existence of God. Besides the three levels of sense experience which Iqbal critically examines, there is another type of experience which is termed religious experience, the case for which Iqbal has very forcefully projected. It is this experience which needs a careful study by modern students of religion for our knowledge of God. The subjective nature of this experience is very much emphasised but this does not pose an unsurmountable difficulty in the way of its study and communication. What is urgently needed is the formulation of a criterion to distinguish a genuine religious experience from a spurious one. When Berkeley was questioned that if things are ideas how can one distinguish between ideas, illusions and hallucinations, he came out with a criterion. To know whether an experience is hallucinatory one has simply to check whether the sense-experience in question belonged to a family. In doing this we relate our sense-experiences to one another. A visual object can be confirmed by touch. In case of religious experience. perhaps, tactual sensations cannot operate. Sound sensations, however, in some cases of revelation accompany visual phenomena. "It is not for man that God should speak with him, but by vision or from behind a veil".[12] Iqbal held that a genuine religious experience can stand both pragmatic and intellectual tests, In the following verses of the Quran an outline of criterion for religious experience can be discerned.

"By the star when it setteth, your *compatriot erreth not, nor is heled astrary. Neither speaketh he from mere impulse.* The Quran is *no other than the revelation revealed to him*

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*His heart falsified not what he saw*".[2]

The communicability of religious experience needs special attention of students of religion. Is not all experience subjective and unique in a way ? Let us approach this problem through a study of our experience of the external world.

Our experience of the external world as experience, is smeared with subjectivity. It is as much private and personal as the experience of the inner world. At the common sense level we regard "the experience without" as caused by objects existing in the external world. This was the position assumed by Descartes and Locke. Berkeley's analysis of matter led him to believe that matter was ideas and ideas could only exist in a mind. But ideas (things) being passive could not act on spirit *i.e.* cause any sensation in us. The passivity of matter or ideas Berkeley had accepted uncritically from Locke. Some of the ideas in us, Berkeley argued, were produced by other minds. You speak and I hear ; you communicate and I understand. You being an active spirit or mind could act on me. Hence sensations in me were produced by some active spirit. The regularity and orderliness with which sensations about the external world or nature were produced in us indicated the great wisdom and power of the spirit which caused them and Berkeley termed that spirit God. Thus it was God who produced sensations in my mind. The world of matter was, in fact, for Berkeley, ideas in the mind. Hume confining himself to a more rigorous analysis of experience, could not affirm the cause of sensations. An impression can be compared only with an impression. We cannot compare impression with things. We only get impressions and cannot contact things. Thus for Hume, the cause of sensations could not be known. Experience furnished no clue as to the being and nature of that which could be regarded as the cause of sensations or impressions. Hume held that all experience whether of the external world or of the inner world was only passing states of consciousness. Hume's position committed him to solipsism.

Since what is available to a subject are his own sense-data the question how can a number of private sense-data conceivably make up a common public world emerges as a relevant issue. Must we say with State that a theory of knowledge be necessarily based upon individual's private experience. In his Theory of Knowledge and Existence, State observes : "I cannot experience anything except my own experience. I can see my red but I can never see yours. I can feel a pain in my leg. But I can never feel the pain in your leg. I feel my emotion but not yours. Even if your anger infects me, so that I feel it in sympathy with you, it is yet, in so far as I feel it, my anger, not yours. I can never be you, nor you me I cannot see through your eyes, nor you through mine. Even if you can telepe- pathically transfer a mental state, say an image, from your mind to mine, yet when I become aware of it, it is then my image and not yours. Even if, as some think, I can directly percieve your mind, without having to infer it from your body, still this perception of your mind will then be to me my perception, my experience.

"All knowledge", he continues, "all philosophy must be based upon experience. And from whose experience can I begin except from my own ? Whatever belief I hold on whatever subject must be either a datum of my consciousness or else an inference or mental construction which I base upon my data. If I accept a scientific belief on your authority, this belief must be an inference which I make from the sounds (words) I hear you utter, and from my belief in your repute as a scientific authority. Whatever I believe rests in the end upon the data of my own consciousness. Therefore all knowledge must have had its beginning in my own self-enclosed personal experi- ence. This original solipsism is utterely unescapable except by pre- judice or refusing to see it."[13]

Prof. Ayer has pointad out[14] that the real difficulty with Stace is that he fails to see how to make the transition from the individual's

"self-enclosed personal exerience" to the common, social world. If we describe personal experience, say of pain, as numerically different from the pain of every other person then there is no doubt that the proposition 'I can never feel the pain in your leg' is analytically true proposition, for it is a matter of convention that any pain that I feel is numerically different from any pain that is felt by you. It is not, however, logically necessary that all the pains that a person feels should be located in his own body".[15] Spinoza's account of sympathetic pains is an instance in point. We do frequently utter such sentences as "Mr President you are expressing the feelings of the the whole house ————". Again 'I like him for we have so many tastes in common." When a mother feels the pain in her son's body, her pain is numerically different from the pain of her son. This is true, but it does not mean that she can never share the grief or joy of her son. We do share feelings and communicate to one another. If one is completely confined to one's own private world he would have no reason to belive in the existence of any knowledge besides his own. Earlier in the history of philosophy, Descartes had taken such a position and found it difficult to come out of his own shell except through his reliance on a principle (veracity of God) which his own position had, in fact, ruled out.

The real problem whether we talk of the experience of the external or the internal world is that of description i.e. the problem of communication. The conditions which make mutual understanding possible are partly intra-linguistic and partly extra-linguistic. The intra-linguistic condition may be expressed as follows. agreement must be reached about the rules according to which we use the words of our language i.e. we must speak the same language. The extra-linguistic condition may be formulated as under : we should be so constituted that we can speak the same language and this dispends partly on the fact that our bodies are similarly constituted

and have the same sense organs and reactions to stimuli, and partly on the fact that our subjective experiences and our bodily expression regularly go together. I can teach the meaning of feeling cold to a person by taking him into a cold room and telling him that he is feeling cold. I rely here on what has been described as the extra-linguistic condition of communication. The bodily expressions of cold, shivering, contraction of blood vessels paleness etc. go with the subjective experience which makes it possible to learn the words which describe experience. Prof. Ayer goes even a step futher and says that even if no manifestations of feeling come from a person's body there could be other psychological grounds for believing that the pain was felt by him. A description of pain by A may be characteristic of pain of B and consequently B may be able to affirm that he too had the experience.[16] Here certainly the intra-linguistic condition is the main basis for communication of purely subjective experiences. We may further add that a certain degree of intelligence is also needed for communicating experiences by words. Animals lack that degree of intelligence which is needed for making abstractions and hence communication by coventional symbols is not possible for the animals. We may here note that ordinarily we communicate our subjective experiences on account of the definite bodily phenomena which accompany these experiences for, on this fact depends the possibility of our learning the words for these experiences.

If there are subjective experiences which do not accompany any marked bodily processes the communication of such experiences is not possible in a common language. (The psychological description of an experience to another presupposes that intra-linguistic condition of communication does exist) An experience can be communicated to another only if the other is capable of experiencing it. You cannot teach to a born blind man how to pick out red objects from

among coloured objects. He cannot have that experience, hence no communication with him on that point. A subjective experience which is without any extra-linguistic condition is incommunicable. It may, however, be recorded in a "monologous" language. A child makes use of a monologous language when he just starts learning to speak conventional symbols. Only the child's mother understands her son's "monologous" language.

Religious experience, Iqbal rightly points out, is a genuine experience. It has been reported from times immemorial and the contribution which it has made to the moral and intellectual fund of the world cannot be questioned. The problem that arises here is : Do the mystics use "monologous" language for recording their experiences ? We have said above that even purely subjective experiences can be communicated if intra-linguistic and extra-linguistic conditions of communication are met with. The incommunicability of religious experience is often stressed, yet it is claimed that the experience has a cognitive content. So far as the content of any subjective experience is concerned it is numerically different from the experience of any other person yet by a certain verbal convention these experiences are communicated and this fact presents no difficulty.

Iqbal very much wished that language used by Sufis be remoulded to become intelligible to students of religion. The language of Sufis may have intra-linguistic conditions which the novice and his preceptor understand and on the basis of which they discuss about their experiences with each other. Consider in this connection, as quoted by Iqbal, the observations made by Sheikh Ahmad of Sarhind on hearing the mystic experience of one Abdul Momin.

The experience of Abdul Momin was described thus :

'Heavens and Earth and God's throne and Hell and Paradise

have all ceased to exist for me. When I look round I find them nowhere. When I stand in the presence of somebody I see nobody before me : nay even my own being is lost to me. God is infinite. Nobody can encompass Him: and this is the extreme limit of spiritual experience. No saint has been able to go beyond this'.

**On this the Sheikh replied :**

'The experience which is described has its origin in the ever-varying life of the "*Qalb*", and it appears to me that the receipient of it has not yet passed even one-fourth of the innumerable "Stations" of "*Qalb*". The remaining three-fourths must be passed through in order to finish the experiences of this first 'Station" of spiritual life. Beyond this "Stations" known as *Ruh, Sirr-i-Khafi* and *Sirr-i-Akhfa*, each of these "Stations" which together constitute what is technically called *Alam-i-Amr* has its own characteristic states and experiences. After having passed through these "Stations" the seeker of truth gradually receives the illuminations of "Divine Names" and "Divine Attributes" and finally the illuminations of the 'Divine Essence'.[17]

These passages indicate that the language of Sufis is not wholly monologous". It is rather a technical language and is understood by the Sufis. What is needed is an effort to recast this language in terms which the 20th Century students of religion can understand. The intra-linguistic and extra-linguistic conditions of the language of Sufis be delineated.

A Sufi takes great care to ensure objectivity of his religious experience. He tries to hold his subjective and personal interests and desires in abeyance. This process of sifting the subjective and personal elements from the objective contents of the experience goes on till the final stage is reached. For this purpose a Sufi seeks a

confirmation of his experience by discussing it with his preceptor. This process of eliminating the subjective factors when completed results in "the revelation of a new life-process—original, essential, spontaneous. The eternal secret of the ego is that the moment he reaches this final revelation he recognises it as the ultimate root of his being without the slightest hesitation."[18]

"Our selves are our centres and pins for manifestation.

We are waves and rise from the bottom of being."[19]

This touch with the roots of one's own being generates faith in the whence and whither of the ego. It is our pro-attitude to directly or indirectly experience facts that constitutes faith. Faith pre-supposes knowledge or experience. Faith generates confidence and builds itself up into an unshakable conviction in the Infinite and this changes the entire man. At this stage the individual says God exists because "I choose Him".

II

And now a word about metaphysics of Iqbal.

To regard the outer and the inner experience as symbolic of God at once exposes you to the difficulties which pertain to the filds traditionally called cosmology and ontology by the metaphysicians. Since all variety of experience is to be conceived as symbolic of the same reality, Iqbal easily switches from his analysis of conscious experience to the nature of matter, life and God. The universe in its totality becomes organically related to the Most Real which it symbolises. The universe is, therefore, treated as a "fleeting moment" in the life of God. The significance of "fleeting moment" against the age of the universe which the geologists estimate at trillions of years makes the use of the phrase "fleeting moment" a

very unusual use. Iqbal is not very cautious in the choice of words for he says :

> The wise do not get involved in the intricacies of words
> Is the diver interested in pearl or the shell.

> If the heart confirms a certain complicated meaning,

> In value it surpasses a glittering pearl.

> It is either dead or is at its last gasp

> A philosophy which has not been written with your life-blood.[20]

God creates, sustains and transcends the universe. Nature is not ideas in the mind of God as was conceived by Berkeley. It is an ever-creative process which remains dynamic and growing because it is just an expression of "His Great I amness".

This is not pantheism. In pantheism Nature and God equate. In Iqbal God is immanent in nature but at the same time transceds nature. A person reveals himself through any of his activities, but the person himself is much more than the momentary expression which his activities signify. A person does transcend himself but at the same time creates his self through his conduct. God likewise both creates and transcends the universe. The universe, for Iqbal, is a growing and dynamic universe.

Such a metaphysical account at once presents a number of problems which one finds in the history of philosophy—problems pertaining to cosmology and ontology, and to which no cogent answer can be given, e.g. the problem of Creation, God's foreknowledge and human freedom, God and Evil, Relation of temporal with the non-temporal etc., etc. Your answer to these questions depends upon the attitude you adopt towards them. A realist, an idealist, a pragmatist, a materialist and a vitalist will all give you different accounts. Your metaphysical views are, therefore, a matter of

choosing your point of view. The descriptive part of your account is not of primary importance. This point is very forcefully brought out by Stevenson's concept of pursuasive definition [21] A materi-alist and an idealist both make use of pursuasive definition in deal-ing with the subject of their inquiry. Their differences are rooted more in their disagreement in their attitudes towards their subject, and hence cannot be resoved.

Since your metaphysical theory provides you supporting reasons for your philosophy of life, for your system of values, you have to judge the worth of a metaphysical theory in terms of its workability. If it provides a firm and effective support to your philosophy of life, it has genuine worth for you. The Greek, the Roman, the Christian and the Islamic, all these views of life find support in different metaphysical systems. Your metaphysics is closely linked with your philosophy of life and so long as you live, you cannot dis-pense with metaphysics of some sort. "Metaphysics has a long and distinguished history, and it is consequently unlikely that there are any new truths to be discovered in descriptive metaphysics But this does not mean that the task of a descriptive metaphysics has been or can be done once and for all. It has constantly to be done over again. If there are no new truths to be discovered there are old truths to be rediscovered."[22] Iqbal himself admits the relative and tentative character of a philosophical theory. Iqbal never claimed finality for the views he expressed in his Reconstruction of Religious Thought. "It must, however, be remembered that there is no such thing as finality in philosophical thinking. As knowledge advances and fresh avenues of thought are opened, other views, and probably sounder views than those set forth in these lectures are possible."[23] In applying intellectual test to the revelations of religion Iqbal simply wanted to provide supporting reasons to the philosophy of life presented by Islam. To a theist, Iqbal's account

makes a strong appeal. But if viewed critically it is open to all those objections to which reference has been made. There are limits within which supporting reasons operate. To a materialist supporting reasons for an idealistic philosophy of life make little sense. In the ultimate analysis it is your attitude that determines the relevance or otherwise of philosophical theory.

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