

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN REASON AND INTUITION IN THE THOUGHT OF MUHAMMAD IQBAL

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ABSTRACT

Muhammad Iqbal was a poet and a Muslim philosopher. His poetic masterpiece *israre khudi* (secrets of the self) has been acknowledged worldwide and translated into many languages. Most of his work was written in Persian, Urdu and English. Although as a philosopher he dealt with many philosophical issues, he tried to figure out the distinctive connection between reason and intuition. Iqbal considered reason to be a “wayside lamp”, which leads to the destination but is not the destination itself, because it lacks the power of finality. For this reason, he acknowledged the significant role of reason but challenged its ability to reach ultimate reality. Reason is considered the ultimate way to obtain knowledge in different modern philosophies. But Iqbal preferred ‘intuition’ to reason as the path towards understanding reality. In his philosophy, Iqbal was searching for the organic relationship between reason and intuition because he saw it as the means to reconcile religion and philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

Intellect (*'aql*) is a faculty, which has fascinated man since his first realization of being in possession of it. Together with *fitrah* and *tabiah*, the word *'aql* refers to an inherent and integral part of the soul.¹ In philosophy, reason is understood as the faculty or process of drawing logical inferences while in theology, reason is distinguished from

¹ Riffat, Hussain, "The Meaning and Role of Intuition in Iqbal's Philosophy", *Iqbal Review*, 26, 1 (1985) p. 73-74.

revelation and refers to the application of human intelligence to understanding religious truth.

In addition to reason, intuition is another source of knowledge. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Intuition, in philosophy, the power of obtaining knowledge that cannot be acquired either by inference or observation, by reason or experience."² According to Stocks, the word 'intuition' is derived from a verb meaning 'to look at' and its extended use seems to have been derived from a metaphor referring to the power of sight. "It would stand, presumably, for a mental inspection in which a direct revelation is made to the mind, comparable to the direct revelation which accompanies the exposure of a physical object to the eye."³ Reason is considered an ultimate source of knowledge in different modern philosophies. In Western philosophy, for example, reason is the chief source and test of knowledge.⁴ In contrast, intuition is a more direct and immediate method for the acquisition of knowledge, which surpasses reason. Intuition is the power or faculty of attaining direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference.⁵

Iqbal's position on reason was very clear. He recognized its important role in the acquisition of knowledge. He saw reason as a "wayside lamp",

². 'Intuition', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Last modified 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/intuition>.

³. Stocks, John Leofric and Dorothy Mary Emmet, *Reason & Intuition, And Other Essays*, edited with an introduction by Dorothy M. Emmitt, Oxford University Press: London, 1939, p. 3.

⁴. Brand, Blanchard, "Rationalism," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Accessed 20 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rationalism>.

⁵. 'Intuition', Merriam-Webster. Accessed 20 June 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intuition>.

which leads to the destination but he questioned its finality or supreme authority because "it is not the destination itself". He wrote:⁶

گزر جا عقل سے کہ یہ نور
چراغ راہ ہے منزل نہیں ہے

Pass beyond intellect because this light
Is the wayside lamp but not the destination

In addition to reason, he drew on intuition because he believed that intuition was much more credible than reason. He expressed it in these words:

عقل را سرمایہ از بیم و شک است
عشق را عزم و یقین لاینفک است

Reason is rich in fear and doubt.

But love⁷ has firm resolve, faith indissoluble.⁸

Now the question arises as to whether there is any contradiction in his thought. Sometimes he commends reason and, at other times, he seems to reject it. It is clear that Iqbal adopted neither empiricism, nor rationalism, nor intuitionism. In his epistemology, sense perception, reason and intuition form an organic unity. He fully accepts that light coming from one direction alone cannot fall on every aspect of reality. The problem of existence should be studied from every angle so that a clear and well established basis could be established. He presented his own theory of knowledge according to which human beings could perceive ultimate

⁶. Iqbal, Muhammad, *Bal-e-Jibreel Ma'a Farhang*, Lahore: Iqbal Cyber Academy, 2003, p. 159.

⁷. Iqbal used different terms as analogous to intuition such as love, passion, heart vision and revelation.

⁸. Iqbal, Muhammad, *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, (trans.) Arthur J. Arberry. London: John Murray, 1953, p. 26.

reality directly through the experience of intuition and indirectly through reason.

Religious and non-religious people alike habitually inquire about the connection between faith and reason, partly because it is a deceptively simple question and partly because, although it seems to be a vague question, it refers to something of vital, burning importance with which every believer, in every religious tradition, has to come to terms over the course of their religious life. Iqbal thought that philosophy and religion must be capable of mutual reconciliation.

Iqbal insists that philosophy and religion belong together and complement each other in the effort to find solutions for the problems of the world. Religion 'stands in need of a rational foundation' and philosophy 'must recognize the central position of religion.'⁹ Iqbal believed that both religion and philosophy seek a vision of the same reality that reveals itself to them in accordance with their function in life.¹⁰

Generally speaking, when we refer to the intellect (*'aql*), we appear to be referring to a rational means of attaining knowledge. There are many sources from which to obtain knowledge and each one makes a significant contribution.

SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

Iqbal agreed with Kant that "knowledge is sense-perception elaborated by understanding."¹¹ 'Understanding' here does not stand exclusively for

⁹. Dams, Nicholas, "Iqbal and the Western Philosophers", *Iqbal Review*, 49, 4 (Oct. 2008) p. 88.

¹⁰. Iqbal, Muhammad, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1st ed., Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2011, p. 2.

'reason' but for all rational modes of knowledge. He also agreed with the epistemic model of Kant in so far as our knowledge of the external world was concerned. But, like Haman, Iqbal did not agree with Kant that reason was an absolute, self-subsistent, autonomous and impartial human faculty. Haman tried to demolish the main premise behind Kant's belief in the autonomy of reason. He opposed the 'purism of reason' and argued that reason depended on language, culture and experience.¹¹

Kant, accordingly, titled his famous treatises *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1780) and *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). Iqbal, however, insisted on the need for a third level of thought beside these two, which he described as a deeper movement of thought. Iqbal regretted that both Ghazali and Kant had failed to discover this deeper movement of thought in the search for knowledge. Iqbal applied his critique of Kant's epistemic model to the sphere of religious knowledge as well.¹² In his view, thought played the same organizational role in religious knowledge as it did in sensory knowledge - a fact which Kant failed to realize due to his Western philosophical legacy, which presupposed that (i) the sensory kind of experience is the only genuine human experience and (ii) all human thought is discursive and cursory.¹³

According to Iqbal, on the other hand, religious knowledge, like any other form of knowledge, consists of data organized by human thought or by the capacity for the understanding, which is the fruit of intuition. He maintains that there are two main sources of knowledge: reason and intuition. In Islamic epistemology, the word *hikmat* (wisdom) and '*aql*

¹¹. Ejaz ul Haq Ejaz, "Is Iqbal against reason and science?" *The Nation*. Last modified: <https://nation.com.pk/14-Dec-2018/is-iqbal-against-reason-and-science>.

¹². Maruf, Muhammad, "Iqbal's Epistemic Views", *Iqbal Review* 37, 3 (Oct. 1996) p. 68-69.

¹³. Kant, Emmanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (trans.) Norman Kemp Smith. London: Macmillan, 1963, p. 268.

(reason) are used interchangeably. Iqbal referred to a *hadith*, which established a link with *hikmat* and knowledge. Just as one *hadith* tells us travel great distances if necessary to find knowledge, another *hadith* uses the same expression for wisdom: "God characterized wisdom (*hikmat*) as abundant virtue, Go to wherever you can find this virtue."¹⁴

But Iqbal explained the limited role of reason in the following words:
For a while familiarize yourself with Aristotle,

For another while sit in the company of Bacon.
But you must pass beyond their attitude,
Don't get lost in this stage; journey on
With the aid of that intellect that knows more and less
Probe the depths of mines and oceans;
Master the world of how and why,
Catch the moon and Pleiades from the sky.
But then learn wisdom of another sort,
Free yourself from the snares of night and day.¹⁵

Iqbal's advice was that one must learn from these great rationalist thinkers without blindly following their way of thinking. He states that reason is a starting point and that it acts as a first step in the human journey towards reality. Human beings are encouraged to probe the depths of mines and oceans and to catch the moon and stars with the aid of reason but human beings should not limit themselves to the darkness of night and the brightness of day. They should not depend solely on worldly sources of knowledge because they have access to other sources of knowledge as well.

Iqbal held that human beings have access to another source of

¹⁴. Tirmidi, Muhammad, *Jam'i Al-Tirmidi*, Beirut: Dar'ul Ilmiyyah, 2012, Vol. 4, *Hadith* no. 2696, p. 314.

¹⁵. Iqbal, Muhammad, *Persian Psalms*, (trans.) Arthur John Arberry. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2014, p. 269.

knowledge. An enlightened heart (intuition) can lead to knowledge, provided that it is in tune with the infinite and is connected to the spiritual basis of human life.

If you get knowledge without the burning of heart

Its light becomes a source of darkness all around.

If the heart has connection with God, it becomes prophetic. If it is not, it is infidelity and *kufir*.¹⁶

In the above phrases, Iqbal is saying that knowledge has a direct connection with the inner condition of the heart and that knowledge makes an impact on the human personality. Without leading to enlightenment, knowledge is useless. On the other hand, if knowledge produces clarity in the heart and strengthens the connection between human beings and God, such knowledge is of immense benefit.

IQBAL AND THE STATUS OF REASON

Iqbal held the view that reason can know the outer side of things but cannot fathom their inner aspect.

Reason makes the traveller sharp-sighted.

What is reason? It is a lamp that lights up our path.

The commotion raging inside the house-

What does the traveller's lamp know of it?¹⁷

خرد سے راہر و روشن بصر ہے
خرد کیا ہے ؟ چراغ راہ گذر ہے
درون خانہ ہنگامے ہیں کیا کیا
چراغ رہگذر کو کیا خبر ہے!

¹⁶. Iqbal, Muhammad, 'Falak Atard', *Javed Nama (Tehqeeq'o Tudeeh)*, Muhammad Riaz, (ed.), Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1988, p. 130.

¹⁷. Iqbal, Muhammad, *Gabriel's Wing*, (trans.) D. J. Matthews, Siddiqui, Naim and Shah, Syed Akbar Ali. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2014, p. 276.

Iqbal had a very clear position on the status of reason as is clear from his declaration that reason is a major source of illumination on the journey towards the destination but that it is not itself the destination. He challenged the finality of reason, due to its very limited capacity to perceive only the exterior of things, not their interior dimension.

LIMITATION OF REASON

Iqbal describes the scope of reason and its limitations. He believes that reason does not differentiate between right and wrong because the person who depends on reason is thinking only about his or her own benefit and ignores the rights of others. Relying simply on the power of reason, a human being will not be able to perform acts oriented to the welfare of others. The following phrases shed light on his point of view.

Intellect is not aware of good and evil.

It is transcending its proper limits.

Reason looks to one's self-benefit not to others;

The self-seeking mind heeds not another's welfare.¹⁸

Reason can yield only *Khabar* (information) and cannot lead to *Nazar* (vision).

Though Reason from the House is not far off

Yet vision it is not destined to have;

Ask God also for a discerning heart,

For eye's sight is not light of the heart.¹⁹

Iqbal suggested that if one wanted to have knowledge of ultimate reality, one must beg for an enlightened heart from God because "the eye's sight" cannot substitute for "the light of the heart". Lines such as these express the function of the heart in one's perception of God. According to Iqbal, passion also has a role to play in the perception of God. He did not

¹⁸. op. cit., Iqbal, Muhammad, 'Falak Atard', *Javed Nama (Tehqeeq'o Tudeeh)*, p. 125.

¹⁹. op. cit., Iqbal, Muhammad, *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 263.

consider reason alone to be capable of knowing the ultimate reality but suggested that passion, which was another faculty of the mind, was also a source of such knowledge.

Iqbal pointed to the misunderstanding of people who think that reason is a wayside lamp which indicates the path to their destination without realizing that 'passion' (intuition) is another source of knowledge.

زمانہ عقل کو سمجھا ہے مشعل راہ
کسے خبر کہ جنوں ہی ہے صاحبِ ادراک

The world regards Reason as a wayside lamp.

But who knows that Reason is possessed by Passion too.²⁰ Love lives on, though Reason dies.

ہے ابد کے نسخہ دیرینہ کی تمہید عشق
عقل انسانی ہے فانی، زندہ جاوید عشق

Love is the introduction to Eternity's ancient book,
Mortal is human Intellect but immortal is Love.²¹

RECONCILIATION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

Iqbal is not denying the capacity of science and reason to know reality. According to Iqbal,

The truth is that religious and scientific processes, though involving different methods, are identical in their final aim. Both aim at reaching the most real. In fact, religion, for reasons that I have mentioned before, is far

²⁰. *ibid.*, p. 271.

²¹. Iqbal, Muhammad, *The Call of the Caravan Bell*, (trans.) M. A. K. Khalil, V. G. Kiernan and Mustansir Mir. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2014, p. 177.

more anxious to reach the ultimately real than science. And to both, the way to pure objectivity lies through what may be called the purification of experience. In order to understand this we must make a distinction between experience as a natural fact, significant for the normally observable behavior of Reality, and experience as significant for the inner nature of reality.²²

The ideas of Iqbal are closely related to those of Einstein in his essay "Science and Religion," which was published nearly fourteen years after Iqbal. In the words of Einstein:

Science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration towards truth and understanding. This source of feeling, however, springs from the sphere of religion. To this there also belongs faith in the possibility that the regulations valid for the world of existence are rational, that is, comprehensible to reason. I cannot conceive of a genuine scientist without that profound faith. The situation may be expressed by an image: science without religion is lame, but religion without science is blind.²³

THE COMBINATION OF REASON AND INTUITION

According to Iqbal,

Reason and intuition must combine to give a true picture of Reality. Nor is there any reason to suppose that thought and intuition are essentially opposed to each other. They spring up from the same root and complement each other. The one grasps Reality piecemeal, the other grasps it in its

²². op. cit., Iqbal, Muhammad, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 155.

²³. Isaacson, Walter, *Einstein: His Life and Universe*, London: Simon & Schuster Ltd, 2017, p. 390.

wholeness. In fact, intuition, as Bergson rightly says, is only a higher kind of intellect.²⁴

Iqbal disagreed with Ghazali that reason and intuition were opposed to each other. According to Ghazali, the revelation of the infinite in mystic experience convinced him of the need to draw a line of cleavage between thought and intuition. Ghazali failed to see that thought and intuition was organically related.

Both Kant and Ghazali did not understand that thought, in the very act of knowledge, passes beyond its own finitude.²⁵ Iqbal described the combination of intelligence and intuition in these words:

Only through love intelligence gets to know God,
Love's labour's find firm ground in intelligence;
When love is accompanied by intelligence
It has the power to design another world.²⁶

The heart (*dil*) says to the mind (*'aql*):

I interpret the book of life,
And through me Divine Glory shines forth
You deal with the outward aspect of things,
I know what lies within.
You understand the secret of existence
And I perceive it with my naked eyes;
You give knowledge and I the direct vision
You are a seeker of God and I reveal God.²⁷

²⁴. op. cit., Iqbal, Muhammad, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 2.

²⁵. *ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁶. op. cit., Iqbal, Muhammad, 'Falak Atard' *Javed Nama (Tehzeeq'o Tudeeh)*, p. 301.

²⁷. *ibid.*, p. 135.

The seat of intuition is the heart (*qalb*) where it enjoys direct participation in divine knowledge (*'ilm*) without the aid of rationality. Iqbal had derived the understanding of intuition from the Qur'an, from a word such as heart (*af'idah*, Arabic) mentioned in the verse below:

قُلْ هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْشَأَكُمْ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ

Say: "[God Is] He who has brought you [all] into being, and has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and hearts: [yet] how seldom are you grateful" ²⁸

Bergson advises human beings to make use of an intellect that has drawn inspiration from the heart because only such an intellect can comprehend the mystery of life. Now this is another name for intuition, which is the kernel of Bergsonian philosophy. Intuition, according to Bergson, is a direct apprehension of reality, which is non-intellectual. In intuition, all reality is present. It does not admit of analysis because, in analysis, all is in the past or in the future. But what is the benefit of such intuition? According to H. Weldon Carr,²⁹ what intuition does for us is to give us another means of apprehension by a fluid and not a static category; in apprehending our life as true duration we grasp it in the living experience itself and instead of fixing the movement in a rigid frame follow it in its sinuosity; we have a form of knowledge which adopts the movement.³⁰

Now the question arises as to why Bergson found it necessary to put such stress on intuition and to claim that the ultimate reality of the universe

²⁸. *Al-Qur'an* (Surah 67. 23), (trans.) Muhammad Asad.

²⁹. Carr, H. Weldon, *The Philosophy of Change*, London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1914, p. 30-31

³⁰. Iqbal, Muhammad, "Bedil in the light of Bergson", *Iqbal Review*, 27, no. 3 (Oct. 1988), p. 12-13.

was spiritual? The answer to this question is that, after deep observation and profound insight into the phenomena of life, Bergson had reached the conclusion that the intolerant and haughty cult of science, so prevalent in his day, claimed to be all-knowing. For Bergson, however, science was not able to fathom the depths of the universe but could only touch the surface of the human self.

Bergson considered it strange that metaphysics had been rejected as “fantasy.” He was of the opinion that science was ill- suited to grasp reality in its entirety because reality could be grasped only with the help of intuition.³¹

CONCLUSION

Intuition and Reason may be visualized as a double edged sword. With one edge, a person uses one edge to enter the universe but with the other, a person enters ultimate reality. According to Iqbal, only a proper balance between the rational and technological advancement of the modern world and the moral and spiritual thinking of the East would generate a world of peace and salvation that he described as “the pattern of a different world”. Humanity has ceased to live soulfully. In the domain of thought, modern people live in open conflict with themselves and in the domain of economics and politics, they live in open conflict with one another. This situation cannot be rectified without moral and spiritual changes.

In Iqbal’s view, the most sublime form of reason is intuition and the most elevated form of reason is divine revelation by virtue of which reality can

³¹. Shagufta, Begum, “Iqbal’s Epistemology”, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3, 12 (June 2013), p. 147.

be understood as a whole.³² The integration of the partial with the whole is the discovery of the organic link between reason and intuition. Iqbal thought that genuine metaphysics was the fruit of intuition rather than of intellectual activity. Iqbal praised Bergson, who considered intuition to be a powerful and effective means of apprehending reality, for his deep insight into the human mind. Iqbal was convinced that dry-as-dust rationalism could not fulfil this task. He also had an unshakable belief in the potentialities of man and was convinced that man could move mountains and conquer the forces of nature. In his view, man was capable of attaining unimaginable heights.

³². *ibid.*, p. 147.