

ALLAMA IQBAL AND EDMUND HUSSERL  
ON INTUITION:  
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

Among various epistemological sources intuition is one. Intuition is considered by some an infallible source as it is immune to error. However, it is an instinctive feeling that is incorrigibly known. It also helps us to acquire knowledge without any immediate conscious reasoning. This paper is an effort to determine the nature of intuition in recent work of experimental philosophy. Effort has been made to explore and examine the essential point of contrast and similarity between the views of Edmund Husserl and Allama Iqbal on the concept of intuition. Therefore, it is hoped that this work will help in advancing philosophical understanding of intuition in structuring epistemology.

## 1. Introduction:

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature, scope, validity, methods and limits of knowledge. Intuition is one of the sources of knowledge and is used as a tool to analyse reality. The word 'intuition' was introduced by scholastics for the very first time – it was derived from Latin word *intuitio* or *intueor* which means to 'look'. Intuition as such cannot be mixed with abstract knowledge, conscious analysis and rational thinking. It is most personal and immediate signal one can receive from any higher authority. Being an introspective or internal source of knowledge, it is the most direct perceptual knowledge which a perceiver can evidently perceive. One can say that intuition is not something that is haphazard or is unconsciously performed but it is like a series of thoughts that run swiftly through mind without being conscious of mediating steps. The scope of scholastic notion of intuition, however, was restricted because it was unable to provide justification for its grounds in modern mechanical vision of science.

In Islamic theology, however, the word intuition is used in such specialized ways as '*kashaf*' and '*ilham*' – signifying God's communication with a believer to convey the knowledge of the unseen. This source of connectedness with higher deity is not new or limited to one religion. Even the famous Greek philosopher Socrates claimed of having 'intuitions'. He believed that God communicates with him to teach him the pearls of wisdom.<sup>1</sup> On a parallel note, *Allah* says in Quran; "*He alone is the All Knower of the unseen and He reveals to none of His unseen, except to a Messenger whom He has chosen.*"<sup>2</sup> Aristotle does not speak of intuition directly. However, he presents perfect justification for such reflective intuition in his theory of thinking- by declaring thinking as the realization of forms. He states that this realization is a real and direct representation the external reality. These sort of forms share the same powers, properties and relations with the other forms. Hence, our soul can recognize other interrelations and forms. For him the mind literally is the justification of existence of all object of thinking.<sup>3</sup>

Just as Descartes considers immediate intuitive awareness of the self as the most authentic and, in turn, makes it the starting point of all knowledge, Kant also gives special importance to intuition.

Intuition for Kant is not a source of knowledge but a representation. He considered that our representations to objects could be of two possible ways; either direct or indirect.<sup>4</sup> These representations give meaning to intuition in opposition to general concepts. Intuition for him is neither a source of truth, nor there is any link between intuition, sense perception, or imagination. The idea of intuition raised by Kant changed the meaning of the term and gave it a special transcendental sense as a priori knowledge. In the same spirit, both Husserl and Iqbal consider Intuition as an infallible, authentic, and transcendental source of knowledge that connects us with the real. In this study, we will try to make sense of the views of both the thinkers on the topic and will try to bring forth their convergence and divergence by further taking into account the strength and explanatory power of the views. The study becomes important as it tries to unleash the methodological similarity of two philosophical traditions (i. e., Eastern and Western) that are generally considered to be divergent by making an appeal of two important representatives of the traditions.

## **2. Phenomenal Consciousness of Husserl**

According to Husserl, process of intuition involves three steps which include;

1. Empirical Intuition
2. Reflective Intuition
3. Abstract Intuition

To start with, our senses supply us certain objects which we perceive and store in the form of intuition. Our consciousness after getting such empirical evidence (empirical intuition) starts working on them on its own. It processes, stores, manages and reflects them (reflective intuition). Finally, on the basis of the first two it approaches the essences of the objects through abstraction (abstract intuition). The process is summarized by Husserl by saying that “*Seeing an essence is therefore intuition.*”<sup>5</sup> For Husserl, intuition as a perceptual consciousness has *hyle* which is unstructured raw material and is also known as hyletic data. This raw unstructured data (visuals or other data) is being informed by consciousness or intellect which is further unified into a single set of appearance of an object. Both form and *hyle* make an object’s existence mind-independent. This intuition therefore not only gives our consciousness an empirical object with matter and form but also a *hyle* which is separated from essence in itself.

Phenomenological experience is therefore, related with three kinds of intuition, i.e., empirical, reflective and abstract. While

empirical focuses the sensory awareness of objects, reflective emphasises on memory storage and abstract intuition, deals with the instantiations of forms. At this point Husserl differs from empiricists. For him, essence is also a kind of immediate experience as; “*intuition of an essence is consciousness of something, an ‘object’, is something to which the intuitional regard is directed and which is ‘itself given’ in the intuition...*”.<sup>6</sup> This procedure works under the supervision of ‘reason’, which is helping to couple mind with reality. This phenomenon traces its ground from Kant’s work in ‘*Critique of Pure Reason*’ in which concepts such as ‘sensibility’, ‘understanding’ and ‘reason’ work together in order to understand phenomenal reality.

### **3. Intuitive Consciousness of Iqbal**

Kant showed the limitation of pure reason and impossibility of intuitive experiences. For him, one cannot go beyond experience and consciousness.<sup>7</sup> Contrarily, Iqbal puts no limitations on consciousness and experiences. For him, ‘reason’ is ‘box mentality’ and limits the expansion of knowledge – as knowledge involves thinking ‘out of the box’. For him we can know the physical or material world not only from reason, but through another source of knowledge. Hence, Iqbal propagates ‘intuition’ and in this regard he criticises ‘reason’ and ‘conscious processes’ that philosophers like Kant and Husserl offered. Iqbal compares ‘discursive consciousness’ or reason with ‘intuitive consciousness’ in the following manner:<sup>8</sup>

- Reason present partial reality, while intuition grasps the Reality as a whole.
- Rational consciousness supplies us with the tools of analysis and synthesis, while in intuitive consciousness experience runs with ‘un-analysable unity’ into the mind of receiver.
- Reason distributes the object within subject-object dichotomy while any such distinction does not exist in intuition.
- Reason cannot reach the essence or ‘thing in itself’ while, intuition has the capacity to unleash it.
- Intuitive experience is qualitative, while rationality focuses on quantity and productivity of an experience.

Therefore, religion, revelation, intuition, mystic experience doesn’t hold any proofs for their existence. They are non-propositional and non-verbal. On the other hand, rational discourse is propositional and communicable.

### **4. Comparing Husserl and Iqbal**

#### **4.1 Husserl and Iqbal on Intuition**

Phenomenology is an attempt to account for how things appear to our awareness and ultimately, how the world appears to us in

terms of our personal experience to it. It is about reflection upon our experience in order to gain a sense of understanding of the underlying principles, coherence, structure and order of the world. It involves tracing sources of conceptual world in immediate experience. It is the identification of intuition as well as, the medium in which things are presented and given to us. In the case of Husserl, his use of intuition is pre-Kantian.<sup>9</sup>

The term which Husserl uses for intuition is ‘originally presentive’ or ‘reflective awareness’ to present the character of intuition. Through phenomenology he tries to radicalize and develop the ideas of philosophers of science. For him, genuine science is the one which is presented to us immediately in our experience.<sup>10</sup> He explicitly states that “*genuine science which is free from prejudice, as the foundation of all proofs requires immediately valid judgements which derive their validity from intuition*”.<sup>11</sup> Husserl in “*Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence*” announces that it is the time to begin phenomenology in order to get rid of unarticulated diffused presuppositions.<sup>12</sup> For him we should start an active constitution to produce new values for truth and life. Therefore, phenomenology is the reduction of naïve realism.

Iqbal, likewise, consider intuition to be a source of knowledge and makes an efforts to denounce the views of all those who believe that intuition is a mystical voice (alone) that is quite internal, special and mental medium of representation.<sup>13</sup> Iqbal in his major work “*Reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*”, contrary to Kant, assures that it is possible to acquire the knowledge of ultimate reality through intuition. Both religion and metaphysics become possible on recognition and acceptance of intuition as a valid and authentic source of knowledge. For him “*religion is not feeling or an action but an expression of a man as a whole*”.<sup>14</sup>

For both Iqbal and Husserl, intuition deals with reality. However, Husserl believes that intuition has kinds and applies on universals as well as particulars, whereas intuition, for Iqbal, has different goals that are holy and spiritual in nature. Iqbal contends that intuition holds unimpeachable meaning and reference – like religion, and God – and holds the divine content. For Iqbal as referred in Quran, mystic state does not occur in a vacuum but requires a state of connectedness and a live relation with the reality. “*And your Lord says, call me and I (Lord) responds to your call.*”<sup>15</sup> “*And when My servants ask you about Me (Lord) I am near. I respond to those who call Me, so let them respond and believe in Me, so that they may be guided.*”<sup>16</sup>

#### **4.2 The possibility of Metaphysics and Religion**

Husserl’s notion of intuition worked in general on overall structure of thought that is different from Kant. Intuition to him is a

component of reality that is immediately given to us. He sometimes calls it transcendental<sup>17</sup> unlike Kantian use of this word 'transcendental'. Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* declares the impossibility of metaphysics as it steps outside the limits of time and space.<sup>18</sup> Transcending the experience is an instance of the impossibility of intuitive knowledge, metaphysics and religion. Kantian position on the issue is signified by the following argument;

P1: God is a mathematical entity.

P2: Mathematical symbols have no reference to experience.

C: Therefore, God has no reference to experience.

But from the lectures of Allama Iqbal one can easily find the possibility of intuitive consciousness and hence, metaphysics. Similar to Husserl, Iqbal believes that 'intuition' is immediately given to us and is transcendental. Iqbal states that "*knowledge of intuition is absolutely certain, and information when interpreted by the heart is never false*".<sup>19</sup> The acceptance of traditional declaration that intuition is knowing reality with absolute certainty and immediacy, allows Iqbal to include mystic experience in intuition – as it is immediately known to us. Just like other sources of knowledge, intuition also gives us knowledge but with an element of superiority.

Iqbal believes that – in the absence of intuition – we are not capable of analysing the contents of non-rational (non-rational is not the same as irrational) modes of consciousness, hence God and mystic experience is one of them. Therefore, it is through intuition that we can have the knowledge of God – apart from relational understanding. Iqbal interprets the word *transcendental* in a unique way and declares any instant of informal association with the unique and ultimate Self (God) as *transcendental*. "*A person is in direct unity with the 'Other', he may lose his subjective consciousness as a distinct person*".<sup>20</sup> This interpretation enables him to justify mystic encounter (and intuition) as a tool to approach higher reality and to develop a live relation with God. As Allah mentioned in Quran; "*Allah should speak to him through revelation, or from behind the veil, or by sending a messenger*".<sup>21</sup> This implies that the higher reality is beyond empirical comprehension and observation – which can only yield relational knowledge. Iqbal's position on the possibility of metaphysics and religion can be summed up as;

P1: Metaphysics and Religion includes intuitive experiences.

P2: Intuitive experiences are possible.

C: Therefore, Metaphysics and Religion are possible.

### **4.3 On the Question of Imagination**

Husserl distinguishes between imagination and intuition. Intuition, according to him, is something which is 'given' –

'immediate', or a medium in which reality impinges the consciousness. Imagination, on the other hand, only creates and experiments. This implies that Imagination is not an internal oracle. It only guides to the essence and not the truth. Imagination, therefore, cannot act as a source of knowledge as it is only an 'act' that happens in our consciousness. It can yield new knowledge but only in an indirect way. Husserl says, fiction or imaginary variation is the basic element that holds phenomenology.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, imagination is the source from where 'eternal truths' extract their knowledge but it is not the kind of immediate knowledge.

Quite in line with the differentiation that Husserl advocates (between Intuition and Imagination), Iqbal also differentiates Intuition from Imagination. Imagination as a faculty of forming ideas and concepts depends upon perceptions, external objects and experiences. Imagination is dependent upon man as it involves the will or desire of a perceiver. Being an idea (and not experiential), imagination can be productively explained to others – as in the case with storytelling. Iqbal establishes the communicability of imagination with the help of the following argument:<sup>23</sup>

P1: Imagination is an idea

P2: Ideas are communicable.

C: Therefore, Imagination is communicable.

While building on the inference of the above quoted argument, Iqbal offers a point of distinction between imagination and Intuition in the following manner:<sup>24</sup>

P1: Imagination can be communicable and conveyed.

P2: Intuition is not imagination.

C: Therefore, intuition cannot be communicated and conveyed.

According to Iqbal, intuitive experience is not communicable and is experienced directly – the content of intuitive experience is highly unique and a priori in nature. Only people of high rationale and morals, i. e., the Prophets can comprehend the inner essence of it.<sup>25</sup> Allah says in Quran; *'it is not for man that God should speak with him, but by vision or from behind a veil: He sends his messenger to reveal by His permission what He will: for He is Exalted, Wise'*.<sup>26</sup> The content of intuitive experience, therefore, is analytic and a-priori, in contrast to imagination – which is synthetic and a-posteriori in nature.<sup>27</sup>

#### **4.4 Natural vs. Phenomenological Attitude**

Within Husserl's framework the usual way of observing reality is in terms of what he calls natural and phenomenological attitude. Natural attitude is a normal state of a man. It is a situation in which man does things without questioning or thinking about them. We are



so comfortable and accustomed to such attitude that we stick to it, without questioning. Sebastian Luft summarizes the natural attitude by saying that “*The natural attitude is identified by the fact that we take the being of the totality of the world for granted ...*”.<sup>28</sup> Phenomenological attitude, on the other hand, is a modification of natural attitude. It is a kind of re-evaluation of a man’s knowledge in which we suspend the judgement that helps us to rediscover and investigate the nature of reality. From ‘phenomenological attitude’, we have a new and unbiased perspective for the things of the outer world. This kind of attitude gives us surprises towards the fundamental nature of things. This attitude, for Husserl, is an important step to lead man’s attention away from the world of prejudices –towards meaningful life. It allows questioning those things which were taken for granted. Husserl claimed that, before phenomenology whole philosophy was of the level of natural attitude. His aim is to create a philosophy that is beyond naivety, normality and natural attitude.

For Iqbal, the habit of accepting without thinking and questioning, is the characteristic of the layman. Masses take refuge in this sort of attitude because it yields conformity with the things and decisions of daily routine life. The natural attitude, for Iqbal, is of use for the people of natural science – as it is related to the empirical evidence available to a man’s direct consciousness.<sup>29</sup> Contrarily, the sort of phenomenological attitude (as Husserl calls it), is quite positive and rewarding as it expands the horizons of knowledge.<sup>30</sup> It is a sort of an intuitive power which corrects many ambiguities. Iqbal states that such intuitive movements are unique, sacred, timeless and absolute. Whoever is involved in intuitive activity interprets it in phenomenological sense, rather than natural. Like Phenomenological attitude, Iqbal’s intuitive knowledge understands every bit of reality deeply. It determines characteristics, purposes and functions of reality without any partiality, preconception, and discrimination.

#### **4.5 Crisis of the Modern World**

Husserl, through his phenomenology, tried to address the crisis of the modern world by grounding the world of experience (philosophy and science) in a thoughtful and methodical understanding. Husserl’s last and unfinished work “*The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*” highlights the importance of existence, consciousness and human experience to make sense of the reality by saying that “*Natural science, modern world and philosophy are based on Natural attitude rather than relying on any thorough understanding of the nature of human experience, existence and consciousness.*”<sup>31</sup> Husserl believes that the reason behind the crisis in the fields of science and philosophy –

that has been translated to the crisis in culture, and ultimately in the world we live in or we know of – is overreliance on natural attitude. He believes that,

... the crisis of philosophy is actually implies the crisis of all modern sciences as members of the philosophical universe; at first a latent, then a more and more prominent crisis of European humanity itself in respect to the total meaningfulness of its cultural life, its total Existence...<sup>32</sup>

For Iqbal, the proper way of dealing with Reality is in the mode of actual living – in which philosophical theology stands on rational grounds. He states that; “*it is amazing that mathematics only sees the universe as a collection of differential equations and physics holds various methods and rules to disentangle the strings of the universe.*”<sup>33</sup> But definitely there are many questions that are unanswered by science and mathematics. Science ignores the core details of life – such as feelings, emotions, passions, moods, aspirations, hopes, desires, urges and purposes. Modern man with the support of analysis, criticism, naturalism, reason, scientific method, and observation etc. has assumed that he can conquer the forces of nature. But this quest has eroded the interiority to make men but, soulless entities on earth. Iqbal’s theology (which is a modernist interpretation of Islam) can serve as an antidote in such crisis.

### **Conclusion:**

The concept of intuition in Islamic and western tradition is quite radical as well as controversial. Iqbal’s approach throughout the ‘*Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*’ is to consider intuition as an important prerequisite for philosophy and religion. The idea of regenerating Islamic culture upon authenticity of self, intuitive awareness, religious consciousness and faith are bastion to dethrone objectification of modernity. Husserl’s notion of intuition provides us an account of both, empirical and abstract objects. His account of phenomenal consciousness under Hyletic elements showed intuition to be a medium of immediate givenness, because of which phenomenologists direct their attention towards empirical objects. However, Husserl’s notion of intuitive immediacy is related to pre-Kantian sense of intuitiveness. But unlike Kant, it can grasp essences and abstract objects as his concept deals with universals. To conclude, both Iqbal and Husserl showed various points of contrast and similarity in structuring the preface of epistemology and religion under the heading of reflective awareness. However, Iqbal while explaining the notion of intuition steps ahead by adding the spark of religion and God into his framework.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- <sup>5</sup> Jan Patočka, and Jmaes Dodd. *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*. Chicago: Open Court, 1996, p.10
- <sup>6</sup> Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book, General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology. Translated by Frederick Kersten, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998. p. 149
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- <sup>14</sup> Iqbal, Allama Muhammad, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.2
- <sup>15</sup> Al-Quran, 40:62
- <sup>16</sup> Al-Quran, 2:186
- <sup>17</sup> Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book, General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology. Translated by Frederick Kersten, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998.
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- <sup>19</sup> Iqbal, Allama Muhammad, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.16
- <sup>20</sup> Iqbal, Allama Muhammad, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp.19-24
- <sup>21</sup> Al-Quran, 42:51
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- <sup>23</sup> Iqbal, Allama Muhammad, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp.22-23
- <sup>24</sup> Iqbal, Allama Muhammad, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp.19-23

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- <sup>26</sup> Al-Quran, 42:51
- <sup>27</sup> Iqbal, Allama Muhammad, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.28
- <sup>28</sup> Luft, Sebastian. *The Space of Culture: Towards a Neo-Kantian Philosophy of Culture*, USA, Oxford University Press, 2015, p.79
- <sup>29</sup> Iqbal, Allama Muhammad, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp.6-7
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