

DIVINE CREATIVITY AND PLURALISM IN  
ALLAMA IQBAL'S PHILOSOPHY: A  
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EGOS,  
ATOMISM, AND LEIBNIZIAN MONADS

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## Abstract

This article explores Allama Iqbal's philosophical pluralism, particularly in his understanding of the universe as composed of egos, or self-revealing entities, grounded in his monotheistic faith. Iqbal, through his critique of the Ash'arite atomism and engagement with Leibniz's monads, proposes that all reality, from matter to human consciousness, is a manifestation of the Divine Ego or "Great I Am." His concept of God as a creative, self-revealing entity aligns with an evolving universe, wherein all egos—whether material or spiritual—progress toward self-consciousness, culminating in humanity's unique capacity for individual selfhood. By synthesizing metaphysical insights from the Qur'an with contemporary Western philosophies like Leibniz's monadology, Iqbal refutes static dualism and suggests a dynamic interaction between mind and body, and between God and creation. His ideas emphasize the non-material nature of the self and its potential for spiritual evolution, challenging reductionist materialism and highlighting the continuous, creative process of existence driven by Divine energy. Ultimately, Iqbal's thought reflects a theistic framework that integrates both religious and philosophical perspectives on the nature of reality and the self.

In his philosophical framework, Allama Iqbal presents a pluralistic view of the universe, grounded in his monotheistic belief, where all entities, whether material or spiritual, are manifestations of the Divine Ego or “Great I Am.” He conceives the universe as a dynamic and evolving system composed of egos, each reflecting different degrees of self-awareness and creativity. Drawing from the Ash’arite doctrine of atomism, Iqbal critiques the notion of static material substances, proposing instead that all matter is an aggregation of atomic acts perpetuated by God’s creative energy. Iqbal aligns his philosophy with Leibniz’s concept of monads—spiritual entities that mirror the universe—suggesting that egos are not isolated, static beings but dynamic forces in constant interaction with their environment. This comparative study highlights the synergy between Iqbal’s notion of egos and Leibniz’s monads, as both envision a universe filled with self-contained, evolving entities. However, unlike Leibniz’s pre-established harmony, Iqbal emphasizes a creative, interactive relationship between egos, where higher-order egos emerge from lower ones, leading to spiritual evolution. Iqbal’s thought challenges reductionist materialism by emphasizing the non-material, spiritual nature of the self, suggesting that the ultimate reality is a creative, rationally directed life, which is continually unfolding through Divine creativity.

Allama Iqbal, in spite, or rather because, of his declared commitment to monotheism in regard to his faith in God, is a pluralist insofar as his view of the constitution of the universe is concerned. In the second chapter of his *Reconstruction*, he has undertaken a comprehensive philosophical criticism of all the facts of experience on its efficient as well as appreciative side and has been led to the irresistible conclusion that ‘the Ultimate Reality is a rationally directed creative life’,<sup>1</sup> whom he conceives as an Ego, a Person, a ‘Great I Am’. To interpret this life as an Ego, he, of course, hurriedly points out,

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 organizing principle of unity, a synthetic activity which holds together and focalizes the dispersing dispositions of the living organism for a constructive purpose.<sup>2</sup>

Now, nature and laws of nature being habits of God — a sort of self-revelation of His person—the entire furniture of the universe, from its lowest state of existence to the highest one, does, of necessity, comprise egos and egos alone. Creative activity of God functions as ego-entities because ‘from the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed,’<sup>3</sup>

Iqbal attempts to further define the salient features of his ego philosophy against the context of a critical appreciation of the Ash’arite doctrine of *Jawahir*. The Ash’arites, in opposition to the Mu’tazilite emphasis on human freedom, had laid maximum stress on the sovereignty of God, His supreme authority and omnipotence. This amounted for them to a denial of the natural powers of secondary agents: the particular material objects as well as animals and human beings have no efficacy and no qualities inherent in them. They have, in fact, no nature whatsoever. As substances exist only by dint of qualities so when qualities are explained away, the substances are dismissed as well and so fail to have any durable existence. Tangibility of substances having thus been rejected, the Ash’arites were led straight to a doctrine of atomism which, Iqbal observes, was ‘the first important indication of an intellectual revolt against the Aristotelian idea of a fixed universe’.<sup>4</sup> According to the Greek atomists’ view, in general, the atoms were determinate in number whereas for the Ash’arites they are infinite because the creative activity of God is ceaseless. Fresh atoms are coming into existence every moment and the universe is becoming newer and newer every moment. The Ash’arite atom, unlike its Greek counterpart, can be destroyed as well. Its essence is independent of its existence insofar as existence is a quality imposed on the atom by God: if He withdraws this quality, the atom loses its spatio-temporal character. In fact no atom has the characteristic of continuing for two consecutive moments. If a thing does appear to endure for some time what really happens is that God creates, annihilates, creates, annihilates and so on, the accidents of existence and duration in a quick, perpetual sequence. If God wished to destroy a body, it was sufficient that He stops to create in it the accident of existence as well as the other accidents appropriate to it.

The very important fact emphasized by the Ash’arites that the atom appears as materialized and spacialized when God grants it the quality of existence necessarily implies, according to Iqbal, that before receiving that quality — and, thus, basically and essentially— it is nothing but a phase of Divine energy. Its spatio-temporal

existence is only Divine activity rendered visible. Iqbal, in this connection, quotes<sup>5</sup> with approval the remark of Ibn Hazm that the language of the Qur'an makes no distinction between the act of creation and the thing created. And so a material object is nothing but an aggregation of atomic acts perpetrated by God. It is only mind's search for permanence that has created the world of physics. Thus conceived, the material atom is essentially spiritual. It is for these spiritual atoms comprising the whole cosmos that Iqbal uses the term 'egos':

The whole world in all its details from the mechanical movement of what we call the atom of matter to the free movement of thought in the human ego is the self-revelation of the 'Great I Am'. Every atom of Divine energy, however low in the scale of existence, is an ego.<sup>6</sup>

Iqbal further points out that, corresponding to the different levels of phenomenal existence, viz, material, spiritual and conscious, there are degrees of reality which are nothing but degrees in the expression of egohood. "Throughout the entire gamut of being runs the gradually rising note of egohood until it reaches its perfection in man".<sup>7</sup> The Ego, that God is, is the most Supreme, the most Independent, Elemental and Absolute.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the German philosopher, with whose cosmology Iqbal has greater affinity than is recognizable by a casual observer, was also a spiritual pluralist. He also conceived the universe as an hierarchy, an ascending order of spirit- or force-atoms which are variously named by him; 'metaphysical points' 'substantial forms' or 'monads'. At the apex of this hierarchical structure, according to him, stands God, the Monad of all monads. The number of monads is infinite and no two of them are exactly alike. As God is pure activity, the clearest consciousness, the Soul *par excellence*, so all monads exhibit conscious activity more or less. Each monad is a microcosm—the universe in miniature — as it reflects, mirrors or 'perceives' the universe from its own point of view. There are obscure, confused and obfuscated perceptions—the small perceptions— at the lowest level. These become clearer and clearer as we go up the scale. In man they become apperceptions comprising a 'reflexive knowledge of the inner state' or, what we call, self-consciousness. They are the clearest in God, the Original Monad. Permitting no leaps in nature there is a continuous line of infinitesimal differences from the inorganic matter through plants, animals, human beings onwards to God.

One consequence of faith in the selfsame unitary principle and ground of the universe to which both Leibniz and Iqbal, in their

respective ways, subscribe is that mind and body are to be considered essentially the same. If that is really so, how would the difference between organic and inorganic bodies be understood. Both, of course, are composed of monads, according to Leibniz, and of egos, according to Iqbal, but an organic being, they say, has the distinction of having a central monad or ego. Inorganic bodies are not centralized in this way. They are a mere jumble, a heap of the constituting units. The higher a body is in the scale of being, the more organized and centralized it is.

Answering the question as to how is the central monad, i.e. the mind or the soul related to the peripheral or inferior monads comprising the body of an organism, Leibniz summarily rejects interactionism, the popularly recognized theory about mind-body relationship. Monads, in general, cannot influence one another, he says because 'they have no windows'.<sup>8</sup> Every one of them is self-contained and has in itself the ground of its various states and movements. It is in fact perpetually in a process of evolution and goes on realizing its nature by an internal necessity. He writes:

I do not believe, that any system is possible in which the monads interact, for there seems no possible way of explaining such action. Moreover such action would be superfluous for why should one monad give another what the other already has, for this is the very nature of substance that the present is big with the future.<sup>9</sup>

Anyway, some account must be given of the fact that changes in one thing seem to be connected by definite laws with the changes in others. Apparent mind-body relationship, particularly, can be explained, according to Leibniz, by the theory of a pre-established harmony between monads. The states of each and every monad are internally engineered in such a way that they happen to synchronize with the states of all other monads. The law of natural harmony has been woven into their very respective natures:

Souls act according to the laws of final causes, by means of desires, ends and means. Bodies act according to the laws of efficient causes or notions. And the two realms are in harmony with one another.<sup>10</sup>

The possibility of such a phenomenon can be explained by an analogy. Suppose there are two perfect clocks whose machines have been so set that when one of them strikes an hour, say, exactly one second later, the other strikes that hour too. To a layman it may appear that one clock exercises a sort of influence over the other and makes it behave in a particular way. However, the fact, as we know, is that the harmony between them has been pre-established

by the mechanic who made them, in the first instance. Similarly, the visible harmony between any two monads, and particularly between the monads comprising the mind and the body respectively in an organism, has been pre-established by God, their Creator. When, I will to raise my hand and my hand is actually raised, between these two events there is no causal relationship whatsoever. They happen independently but, of course, in such a way that they would be in a relationship of mutual fittingness. Leibniz agrees with the Occasionalists in their rejection of interactionism. However they sharply differ between themselves also insofar as, according to the latter, God is the only direct and immediate agent of every event in the world, whereas, according to the former, every individual substance evolves in accordance with its own nature which was determined once for all when God created the world. Thus, although Leibniz did not subscribe to transient causality between ordinary monads, he upholds that this causality does operate between God and the universe. This operation took place not only initially as He eternally established harmony between monads but also it continues to happen now and for all times. The clock or the machine that the universe is 'needs to be conserved by God and it depends on Him for its continued existence'. The Supreme Monad would not be windowless to that extent. The source as well as ground of the mechanics of the universe lies in metaphysics.<sup>11</sup>

Iqbal, in general, rejects the dualist theory in regard to mind-body relationship. He specially refutes the doctrine of pre-established harmony because it practically reduces the soul to a merely passive spectator of the happenings of the body.<sup>12</sup> Nor are mind and body entirely separate substances having their mutually exclusive sets of attributes and entering into a relationship of mutual interaction as was, for instance, emphasized by Descartes. They rather belong to the same system, says Iqbal. Both are egos. "Matter is spirit in space-time reference".<sup>13</sup> It is "a colony of egos of a low order out of which emerges the ego of a higher order."<sup>14</sup> The physical organism reacting to environments gradually builds up a systematic unity of experience which we call the human ego. Mind and body become one in action. The Qur'an says:

Now of fine clay We created man. Then We placed him, a moist germ in a safe abode; then made We the moist germ a clot of blood; then made the clotted blood into a piece of flesh; then made the piece of flesh into bones; and we clothed the bones with flesh: then brought forth man of yet another make.<sup>15</sup>

This, however, does not obliterate the distinction between mind and body so that the former may essentially stand reducible to the level of the latter. Iqbal says:

It is not the origin of a thing that matters, it is the capacity, the significance and the final reach of the emergent that matters. Even if we regard the basis of soul-life as purely physical, it by no means follows that the emergent can be resolved into what has conditioned its birth and growth. The emergent... is an unforeseeable and novel fact on its own plane of being.<sup>16</sup>

Here expressly is a reference to the doctrine of cosmic evolution to which Iqbal subscribes. All higher forms of existence, he holds, evolve out of the lower forms because there is a “gradually rising note of egohood in the universe”.<sup>17</sup>

Incidentally, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in one of his articles<sup>18</sup>, recently published in Pakistan, has emphasized that evolutionism – – specially, the concept of biological evolution that was popular in the West of Iqbal’s times — is anti-Islamic in its metaphysical implications and is in contradiction with the teachings of the Qur’an.\*\* Iqbal and other Muslim thinkers of the Subcontinent specially, he in general complains, do not recognize this fact because of the apologetic attitude that they have almost been forced to adopt under the impact of over-all strong influences of Western culture. Here the accusation of being apologetic is, however, I believe, difficult to substantiate adequately at least in case of Iqbal who seems to be fully conscious of the limitations of his contemporary Western science and culture and the inadequacy of the materialistic, reductionist, type of attitude towards life and values that it generated. Anyway, Iqbal is firmly of the opinion that the doctrine of evolution has nothing un-Islamic about it. The verse from the Qur’an quoted above clearly indicates, according to him, that man did evolve out of the lower forms of existence. The orthodox, by applying a literalist approach to some of the verses of the Qur’an, have always held that man is a special creation and is not the result of a long evolutionary process. The human race, according to them, started from Adam, the first human being who was directly and specially created by God. Iqbal, like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), resorts to a symbolic interpretation of the descriptions of the Qur’an in this regard. He says:

The Qur’anic legend of the fall does not describe the episode of the first appearance of man on the earth. Its purpose is rather to indicate man’s rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self capable of doubt and disobedience. The fall ...



is man's transition from simple consciousness to the first flash of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being.<sup>19</sup>

God is not a mere contriver working on alien matter as one might get the impression from the Qur'anic verse referred to above. He, in fact, caused man to grow 'from earth', meaning thereby 'in the normal evolutionary course of nature operating in the spatio-temporal world'.

There is no purely physical level in the sense of possessing a materiality elementally incapable of evolving the creative synthesis we call life or mind and needing a transcendental deity to impregnate it with the sentient and the mental.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, God Who makes the emergent emerge is in a way immanent in nature: 'He is the First and the Last; and the Manifest and the Hidden.'<sup>21</sup>

Not only in the Qur'an, Iqbal also traces his views on evolution in various Muslim thinkers. It was Jahiz (776-869), he points out, who first observed changes in animal life caused in general by migrations and environments. The Brethren of Purity further elaborated these observations. Miskawaih (942-1030) was, according to him, the first Muslim philosopher who presented the theory in a regular and systematic form. He gave concrete examples of the evolutionary process from the world of minerals, plants and animals. On the basis of his views on evolution, he seeks ultimately to justify the emergence of prophets and to build up a system of his ethical views. Jalal al-Din Rumi (1208-1274), the spiritual guide of Iqbal, too gave an evolutionary interpretation of the emergence of man. However, for him, this evolution does not end with man. It may go beyond him to a level which it is not possible for us to imagine now. "The formulation of the theory of evolution in the world of Islam, says Iqbal, brought into being Rumi's tremendous enthusiasm for the biological future of man".<sup>22</sup>

The views of all these Muslim thinkers have remarkable affinities with the concept of evolution as advocated, and made popular in modern times, by Charles Darwin (1809-1882). However, there is one essential respect in which they differ from him. Darwin, we know, is a naturalist. He holds that all changes in the process of evolution occur due to forces in nature itself *viz*, struggle for existence, chance variations and natural selection. These changes have no exterior causes. Miskawaih and Rumi, on the other hand, are spiritualists. The source and ground of

evolution for them is not dead matter but God, Who is the Ultimate Creator of everything. Matter for them is only one of the emanations from God which starting from the First Intelligence become more and more materialized as we go down the scale till we reach the primordial elements. So even matter is not dead and inert. It is constituted of dimly conscious elements. It is the expression of Divine Reality and the objectification of soul. "The universe is nothing but the outward and opaque form of the ideal. When God wanted to manifest Himself, he created a mirror whose face is the soul and whose back is the universe".<sup>23</sup> Iqbal too is a spiritualist: it is not from dead matter but from God Himself ultimately that everything originates. And it is to Him that all returns.<sup>24</sup> He is the Goal, the Ideal *par excellence*.

Leibniz, we have seen, also believed in evolution although the kind of evolution that he conceives is entirely indigenous and internal to monads. Development of each monad into newer and newer states is, in the last analysis, a sort of self-revelation, pure and simple, not determined from without, because monads have no windows through which any influence may come in or go out. This, in general, is the doctrine of preformation or incasement according to which all future states of a particular object are prefigured or contained in it already. Every monad, it is said, is 'charged with the past' and 'big with the future'. Iqbal, in contradistinction to this, is of the opinion that egos have genuine mutual contacts. Those of a higher order evolve out of those of a comparatively lower order when the association and interaction of the latter reaches a certain degree of co-ordination. Talking of the human person specifically, he says:

The life of an ego is a kind of tension caused by the ego invading the environment and the environment invading the ego; the ego does not stand outside the arena of this mutual invasion. It is present in it as a directive energy.<sup>25</sup>

Personality is a state of tension which is to be maintained as a valued treasure with the help of a perpetual encounter with partly sympathetic and partly antagonistic environments. I must be vigilant and active all the time so as not to give myself in to a state of relaxation and so undo my personality.

Thus human ego is dynamic in its essential nature. Iqbal, in this connection, rejects the views of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (and of the entire school of Muslim theology which he represents), according to whom self of man is something static and unchangeable: 'It is a simple, indivisible and immutable-soul substance entirely different

from the group of our mental states and unaffected by the passage of time'. These theologians wanted to vouchsafe two objectives, a psychological one and a metaphysical one. Psychologically, they wanted to establish that the individual must continue to be the same throughout the diversity of his mental states which are related to the soul-substance as the physical qualities are related to the material substance. Metaphysically, they thought, their doctrine established personal immortality of man. However, Iqbal believes, they have been able to achieve neither of the objectives set before them. Neither are the various conscious experiences related to the ego as physical properties are related to a material object, nor does the simplicity of the ego guarantee its unending existence.

Just as Ghazali and others laid stress on the unity and given-ness of the human ego at the expense of its dynamic character, so does William James, in his conception of self stress its dynamic character at the expense of its unity. According to the latter, consciousness is a stream of thought and the ego is nothing but 'the appropriation of the passing impulse by the present impulse of thought and that of the present by its successor'. Iqbal ridicules this idea of appropriation of one bit of experience by the other, holding it to be an impossible state of affairs. For him, human ego is neither over and above our experiences nor is it simply various experiences themselves reporting to one another. Its life, as said above, is rather a state of tension caused by the mutual invasion of the ego and the environments and held in unicity by a sense of direction. I-amness is not a thing; it is an act.

You cannot perceive me like a thing-in-space, or a set of experiences in temporal order; you must interpret, understand and appreciate me in my judgements, in my will-attitudes, aims and aspirations.<sup>26</sup>

The question arises 'What is the principle involved in the emergence of the human ego? Henry Bergson, the French philosopher and biologist, had believed that it was the principle of *elan vital*, the vital dash, which is entirely arbitrary, undirected, chaotic and unpredictable in its behavior. It is a free creative impulse. "The portals of the future", he remarked, "must remain wide open to Reality".<sup>27</sup> Teleology — like mechanical causation — would make free creativeness a mere delusion and would make time unreal. Iqbal, on the other hand, resorts to the theistic hypothesis. God is not only transcendent. He is, in a sense, the immanent force also, Who is constantly causing within the spatio-temporal order newer and newer emergents like the human ego. "Soul is the

directive principle from God”,<sup>28</sup> says the Qur’an. Iqbal does agree with Bergson insofar as the latter says that:

If teleology means the working out of a plan in view of a pre-determined end or goal, it does make time unreal... all is already given somewhere in eternity; the temporal order of events is (then) nothing more than a mere imitation of the eternal mould.<sup>29</sup>

According to this view there would be no really free creation and growth in the universe. Anyway, aside this criticism, Iqbal is firmly of the opinion that our activities are goal-directed, purposiveness being essential to the human self. “The ends and purposes, whether they exist as conscious or sub-conscious, form the warp and woof of our conscious experience.”<sup>30</sup> This is because, he points out, there is a sense of teleology available other than the one conceived and rightly rejected by Bergson. As I act I do not do so because there is a grand plan of action already determined for me. I, in fact, go on creating my own purposes in life. “Though there is no far off distant goal towards which we are moving, there is a progressive formation of fresh ends, purposes and ideal scale of values as the process of life grows and expands. We become by ceasing to be what we are; life is a passage through a series of deaths”.<sup>31</sup> God, the Ideal, inseminates the entire universe and, specially, the life of man with goal-directed behavior at every step during its tenure of existence. The essence of this insemination is, according to Iqbal, love or *ishq*. He says:

Beneath this visible evolution of forms is the force of love which actualizes all strivings, movement and progress. Things are so constituted that they hate non-existence and love the joy of individuality in various forms. The indeterminate matter, dead in itself, assumes, or more properly, is made to assume by the inner force of love, various forms, and rises higher and higher in the scale of beauty.<sup>32</sup>

The ego is individual. There are, of course, degrees of individuality, as pointed out by Bergson also. Most perfect individuality, says Iqbal, belongs to God, the Ultimate Ego, “Who begets not, nor is He begotten and there is none like Him”.<sup>33</sup> But man too is an individual, more or less, insofar as the Qur’an has a clear picture of him as one who is responsible for his own deeds alone and who has his unique future that awaits him: “No bearer of burdens bears the burden of another.”<sup>34</sup> Further, the Qur’an visualizes that in the life hereafter every resident of heaven or hell will have a clear remembrance of his past life for which he will be rewarded or punished. Psychologically speaking too, the I-ness of man is absolutely private. My experiences, my thoughts and

feelings, are all unique with me and unsharable with others. Even my experience of a table or a chair which are, to all appearance, public facts, is strictly my own and cannot be confused with anyone else's experience of the same objects.

The ego or self in man has two aspects which may be termed as the noumenal aspect and the phenomenal aspect. Bergson calls them the 'fundamental self' and the 'social self', respectively. Iqbal makes a more or less corresponding distinction between the 'appreciative self' and the 'efficient self' of man. The former lives in pure duration while the latter deals with serial time. In our day to day life we are so much absorbed with the world i.e. with the sereality of time and the spread-outness of space that we entirely lose sight of the fundamental or the appreciative 'I' within. It is almost incumbent upon us to recognize this not only because that would qualify us for an encounter with the 'Great I-am' and prepare us for authentic social relations with other human beings, but also because it would make one a 'human person', in the full sense of the term. Iqbal says:

To exist in pure duration is to be a self and to be a self is to be able to say 'I am'. Only that truly exists which can say 'I am'. It is the degree of intuition of I-amness that determines the place of a thing in the scale of being.<sup>35</sup>

Mystics of all times have laid a special emphasis on the true self-awareness of man.

How do I know myself? Iqbal's answer is that, being most simple, fundamental and profound, I-amness is neither an object of perception nor an idea pure and simple to be logically inferred and rationally conceived. It can in the final analysis only be known through a flash of intuitive insight. David Hume, for instance, is the philosopher well-known for his attempt to reach the self through purely sensory, empirical channels. He said:

When I enter most intimately into what I call myself I always stumble on some particular perception i.e. some particular mental content or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at any time without a perception... And were all my perceptions removed by death... I should be entirely annihilated.<sup>36</sup>

He thus concluded that there is no such thing as 'I' or 'self' and that a person is 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions'. Hume's supposition here is that all knowledge is to be furnished by sense experience alone and sense experience being a temporal affair leaves no scope for a permanent, non-successional

being. Descartes, on the other hand, represents those who followed the course of reason. Being himself a brilliant mathematician and a discoverer of Analytical Geometry, he was firmly of the opinion that for philosophy a method could be discovered on the analogy of the one used in mathematical sciences where we start with certain simple and self-evident principles, rising by degrees to the complex ones — thus building up an entirely foolproof system of thought. So he set out in search of the indubitable and the self-evident. This he did by a grand process of elimination. He doubted away everything he could possibly doubt: the testimony of his senses, his memory, the existence of the physical world, his own body and even the truths of mathematics. One thing, however, he found, he could not possibly doubt and that was the fact of his own existence, his own self, his I-amness. It is he after all who had been performing the activity of doubting all the time. Doubting is a form of thinking. “I think”, he concluded “therefore I am”, meaning to say, ‘I exist’. This argument, the critics have pointed out, is fallacious on grounds more than one. For one thing, the conclusion to which the entire reasoning leads could only be that ‘there is a state of doubt’ and that’s all. At the most a logical ‘I’, which in fact is the subject of all propositions that are made, can be asserted. From this to skip over to the factual existence of an ‘I’, as Descartes really does, is a leap which cannot at all be justified.

Iqbal is thus right when he holds that both sense-experience as well as reason, forms of perception as well as categories of understanding, are meant to equip us for our dealings with the spatio-temporal world: they are not made to reach the core of my being. In fact “in our constant pursuit after external things we weave a kind of veil round the appreciative self which thus becomes alien to us. It is only in the moments of profound meditation“, he goes on to say, “when the efficient self is in abeyance, that we sink into our deeper self and reach the inner centre of experience”.<sup>37</sup> So neither the *mutakallimun* (theologians) nor the philosophers but the devotional *sufis* alone have truly been able to understand the nature of the human soul. The meditation, referred to here, is either pure meditation through which I imaginatively remove from myself all that is not essentially ‘me’ i.e. all that I possess due to my particular ‘historical’ and ‘geographical’ situation, in the broadest sense of these terms, or it may be the meditation charged with activity in which case I practically eradicate from my nature exclusive love for, and involvement with, the world which is the cause of my alienation from the source and ground of my existence. The second meaning is accepted particularly by the

mystics of Islam. The Muslim mystic's path, in fact, starts with the inculcation of the virtue of *tawbah* (repentance or turning about) which signifies purification of soul and the deliverance of it from all extraneous material so that the Divine within it stands realized. It can thus positively prepare itself for an encounter with God because such an encounter can take place only in case a person realizes the Divine in himself and like Him dispenses with all determiners. "The adherents of mystical religions", says G.S. Spinks, "feel compelled to empty their psychical life... in order to achieve by personality-denying techniques an emptiness that will prepare the way for the incoming of the Divine".<sup>38</sup> Anyway, realization of the true self through meditation is not at all an end in itself. It is a means for the improvement of our behavior and for the cementation and confirmation of our personalities:

The ultimate aim of the ego is not to see something but to be something. The end of the ego's quest is not emancipation from the limitations of individuality; it is, on the other hand, a more precise definition of it.<sup>39</sup>

Now as the essential nature of the human ego is his quest for purposes and ideals, he cannot afford to be mechanical and stereotyped in his behavior. He must be free. Positive scientists – psychologists, physiologists and others – have sometimes tried to understand human behaviour on the pattern of the behavior of the physical world which, they think, is characterized by causal necessity. But the determinism of the physical world, Iqbal rightly observes, is not definitive, objective and final. It is, he says, an "artificial construction of the ego for its own purposes". Indeed, he goes on to observe, "in interpreting nature in this way the ego understands and masters its environment and thereby acquires and amplifies its freedom".<sup>40</sup>

Tracing the historical development of the problem of freedom, Iqbal makes a distinction between ordinary fatalism and higher fatalism. The latter which is the result of a living and all-absorbing experience of God is, however, commendable, though very rare: "strong personalities alone are capable of rising to this experience".<sup>41</sup> The experience is so total that its recipient has a strong feeling of resignation. As the Infinite is absorbed into the loving embrace of the finite, the will of the individual is — though temporarily — held in abeyance. Hopes, desires and aspirations of man, freely exercised by him, become identical with the will of God because of his being thoroughly saturated in Divine colour.<sup>42</sup>

As to the mutual relationship of God, the Ultimate Ego, and the universe, — and specially as to how did God produce the world— there appears to be a close affinity between the respective standpoints of Iqbal and Leibniz. Iqbal regards creativeness as one of the important elements in the Qur’anic conception of God. But as we follow his argument into details it transpires that he does not hold on to the strictly orthodox position in this regard. The act of creation, he says, was not a specific past event; nor is the universe a manufactured article having no organic concern with the life of its maker and confronting Him as his other. The universe, according to him, is rather to be conceived as a free creative energy that ‘proceeds’ from God. It is one continuous act which thought breaks up into a plurality of mutually exclusive things and interprets it as space, time and matter. Here the word ‘proceeds’ is very important. It spontaneously brings to one’s mind the doctrine of emanation that was so popular with the earliest Muslim thinkers who philosophised under the aegis of neo-Platonism. ‘Proceeds’ does have other meanings; for instance, corollaries following from a geometrical definition or rays radiating from the sun or smell from a flower or melodies from a musical instrument or as habits and modes of behavior are exhibited by the personality of an individual. Now God being a Person Himself, the last meaning appears to be the one closest to the mind of Iqbal. That is why he declares the world to be a self-revelation of the ‘Great I am.’ Incidentally the Qur’an’s insistently repeated statement that ‘there are pointers to the being of God spread out in the various phenomena of nature’ sufficiently bring out the revelatory character of God, on the one hand, and, correspondingly, the representative character of the universe, on the other.

Earlier, Leibniz too had vacillated between creativeness and expressionism. He, like Iqbal, avoided the phrase ‘creation out of nothing’ for describing the origination of the universe. Also, he instead used a term which is as ambiguous as — if not more than — the term ‘proceeds’. He describes monads as substances co-eternal with God and calls them ‘fulgurations’ or ‘manifestations’ of Him. As it has been shown above, monads comprising the universe are, according to Leibniz, in general self-contained and independent. The entire life of everyone of them consists purely in the development of its own internal nature. There is, however, at least one property of each monad of which the ground lies not in itself but in God *viz.* its actual existence. From the point of view of Leibniz, it may be ingrained as an additional predicate added by the creative act of God to those already contained in the concept of the



world as 'possible'. This view comes close to the metaphysical position of the Ash'arite theologians which was very much appreciated by Iqbal himself.

The last-mentioned closeness between Leibniz and Iqbal points to a deeper metaphysical ambivalence that is mutually shared by them. Creativeness, in general, we know goes with a theistic view of God whereas emanationism implies pantheism. Controversies have raged regarding each one of the thinkers whether he belongs to one of these metaphysical camps or the other. And, further, in either case majority of the writers have agreed that— specially as we go by their overtly declared positions— they must be taken to be more in sympathy with theism than pantheism. A detailed discussion on this subject will not, however, be undertaken here as it will take us a little beyond the scope of the present article. It needs a treatment independent by itself.

### Notes and References

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- <sup>1</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.48
  - <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*
  - <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.57.
  - <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.54, 56, 109.
  - <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.55.
  - <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.57.
  - <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
  - <sup>8</sup> G. W. Leibniz, *The Monadology And Other Philosophical Writings*, translated by Robert Latta, section 7, p.219.
  - <sup>9</sup> Quoted and translated by Bertrand Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, p.134
  - <sup>10</sup> G.W. Leibniz, *op. cit.*, section 79, p. 263.
  - <sup>11</sup> G.B. Duncan (ed.), *The Philosophical Works of Leibniz*, p.241.
  - <sup>12</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.84.
  - <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* P. 122.
  - <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p.84.
  - <sup>15</sup> Qur'an, 23:12-14.
  - <sup>16</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.85
  - <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* P.57
  - <sup>18</sup> *Al-Hikmat*, A Research Journal of the Department of Philosophy, University of the Punjab, Lahore. Vol. 6, 1975, pp.45-70.  
\*\*For a detailed exposition of Nasr's views on biological evolution, Darwinism, transformist theory and its reductionist implications, see his *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Edinburgh, 1981, Lahore, 1985 pp.169-71, 234-42; *Islamic Life and Thought*, Lahore, 1983, p. 136. Also see his *Science and Civilization in Islam* Cambridge and Lahore, 1992 and *An Introduction to the Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Albany, 1992, pp 71-4. Apart from giving an exposition of the essentially different nature and significance of the views expressed by the Islamic thinkers (Brethren of Purity, Ibn Miskawaih, Rumi etc.) as compared to the Western evolutionism, Nasr has also pointed out the way in which the texts

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of these Islamic thinkers have been misinterpreted by modernist Muslim writers by reading their own ideas in their texts which were often cited and used with a total disregard for their immediate context and over-all perspective and governing paradigm. (Editor, 'Iqbal Review' 36:1 in which this article was initially published).

- 19 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p. 67-8. Also see Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Maqalat*, Vol. 1, pp 216-234.
- 20 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p.85.
- 21 Qur'an, 57:3.
- 22 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p.147.
- 23 Khalifa Abdul Hakim, *Metaphysics of Rumi*, p. 31.
- 24 Qur'an, 96:8.
- 25 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
- 26 *Ibid*, p.83.
- 27 Qur'an, 17:85.
- 28 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.43.
- 29 *Ibid*, p.43.
- 30 *Ibid*, p. 42
- 31 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit* pp. 44.
- 32 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, p.46
- 33 Qur'an, 112:3-4.
- 34 *Ibid*, 6:164.
- 35 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, *op. cit.*, p.45.
- 36 *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Book I, part IV. P.252.
- 37 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.38.
- 38 G. Stephens Spinks, *Psychology and Religion*, p.
- 39 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.86.
- 40 *Ibid*, p. 87.
- 41 Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.87.
- 42 The Qur'an says:(We take) Allah's colour, and who is better than Allah at colouring and we are His worshippers (2.138).