



# A NIETZSCHEAN MYSTIC: MUHAMMAD IQBAL ON THE ETHICS OF SELFHOOD

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## Introduction

Although he died nearly a century ago, Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) is one of the most influential figures of Islamic modernism—a strand of Islamic thought that emphasizes a reformist paradigm to meet the challenges of modern society, including its institutions and technology. Appearing at a crucial juncture of history in colonial India, Iqbal, who was at once a poet, philosopher, social commentator, and part-time politician, wrote on a wide array of topics ranging from philosophy and economics to science, mysticism, and public policy. He is also regarded as the spiritual father of what came to be known as Pakistan.

In this article, I aim to provide a thorough investigation of Iqbal's ethics of selfhood in light of his encounter with the Islamic mystical tradition. When his famous *Asrār-i khūdī* was translated into English in 1920, it received a mixed reception both in India and abroad. Critics of the *Asrār* accused Iqbal of adopting the German philosopher Nietzsche's theory of the *Übermensch* to reinterpret the mystical doctrine of the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*).<sup>1</sup> In a letter to R. A. Nicholson, Iqbal claimed that "the philosophy of the *Asrār* is a direct development out of the experience and speculation of old Muslim Sufis and thinkers."<sup>2</sup> Yet the substantiation of this claim rested on thin air since a close

1. For a detailed analysis of Nietzsche's influence on Iqbal, see section 4. The perfection of the *Übermensch* is attained through overcoming the human, or the everyday, self, as Nietzsche says in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "I teach to you the *Übermensch*. The human is something that shall be overcome." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11. This means the *Übermensch* emerges from our going beyond the human perspective and transcending the anthropocentric worldview. For Nietzsche's exposition of the *Übermensch*, see his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 11–16, 18, 21, 31, 33, 45, 49, 54, 57, 62, 67, 123, 171, 184, 193, and 250–51.

2. Muhammad Iqbal, "In Defense of the Self," in *Discourses of Iqbal*, compiled and edited by Shahid H. Razzaqi (Lahore: Ghulām 'Alī, 1979), 196.

reading of his treatises shows how a misinterpretation of the classical texts informed his ethics of selfhood.

In the remainder of the paper, I will first sketch Iqbal's socio-cultural context and then draw attention to his articulation of the crisis of modernity. This will pave the way for understanding why he thought a new expression of the self is necessary to tackle the crisis of modernity. Following this, I will offer a critical analysis of Iqbal's ethics of selfhood to show how, despite his claim that his theory has been developed from the writings of the great Sufis, he misconstrues various Sufi doctrines. Overall, this study will show that Iqbal's ethics of selfhood emerges from forging some kind of middle ground between Nietzsche's philosophy and Islamic mysticism.

## The Crisis of Modernity

It is instructive to note that the context of Iqbal's writings was shaped by the forces of colonial modernity, and especially the struggle for self-definition that had occupied the minds of subcontinental Muslims. It was a period when various Muslim groups were trying to define "Muslimness," which explains Iqbal's motivation for a new articulation of the self. Broadly speaking, Iqbal aimed to instill self-confidence in the Muslim mind under colonial rule. He felt that Muslim self-confidence was severely undermined by both colonial rule and by centuries of intellectual inactivity.<sup>3</sup> The medicine that he prescribed to cure the Muslim self was a novel concept of subjectivity based on self-affirmation and dynamism.<sup>4</sup>

Iqbal, who was well-versed in the Hegelian tradition, uses the term "modernity" to speak of the crisis of which Muslims and others need to be aware. For instance, in the *Reconstruction*, he articulates the global nature of the "modern crisis:"

Surely the present moment is one of great crisis in the history of modern culture. The modern world stands in need of biological renewal. And religion, which in its higher manifestations is neither dogma, nor priesthood, nor ritual, can alone ethically prepare the modern man for the burden of the great responsibility which the advancement of modern science necessarily involves, and restore to him that attitude of faith which makes him capable of winning a personality here and retaining it hereafter. It is only by rising to a fresh vision of his origin and future . . . that man will eventually triumph over a society motivated by an inhuman competition, and a civilization which has lost its spiritual unity by its inner conflict of religious and political values.<sup>5</sup>

In this text, we are told that modern humanity faces a crisis because of progress in modern science which challenges the conventional understanding and interpretation of religion. This situation is exacerbated by unrestrained economic competition and the conflict of

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3. As will be seen, Iqbal's assessment of the Islamic intellectual tradition was based on the problematic (and now-proven untenable) Orientalist thesis that the Islamic philosophical tradition ceased to be of relevance after the famous attack of al-Ghazālī on the philosophers in the eleventh century. Cf. Sajjad Rizvi, "Between Hegel and Rumi: Iqbal's Contrapuntal Encounters with the Islamic Philosophical traditions," in *Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, ed. Chad Hillier and B. Koshul (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 123.

4. There are several notable difficulties when it comes to Iqbal scholarship that seem to impede a serious academic study of his reformulation of the Muslim self. In terms of scholarly attitude, there are two interrelated approaches that one may identify in Iqbal studies—namely, what can be called "the adulatory approach" and "the nativist approach," both of which are equally problematic. As regards "the adulatory approach," the problem lies in overstating the novelty and brilliance of Iqbal's thought, while "the nativist approach" starts from the premise that Iqbal's ideas must be defended and justified against those whom he criticized because of his political importance in shaping Muslim identity in the subcontinent. For a full-scale treatment of the problems in Iqbal studies, see Muhammad Faruque, "The Crisis of Modern Subjectivity: Rethinking Iqbal and Iqbal Studies," forthcoming.

5. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, edited and annotated by M. Saeed Sheikh (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 149.



church and state or the separation of religion and politics. In the same passage, Iqbal also notes that neither the techniques of Sufism, nor nationalism, nor Marxist atheism can cure the ills of a despairing humanity. In Iqbal's view, the remedy to this desperate situation lies in offering a "fresh" articulation of one's origin and return—i.e., religious metaphysics. At any rate, since Iqbal's attitude to modernity seems to be complex, and since much of the motivation of articulating a new conception of selfhood results from this *attitude*, we need to look at what he considers to be the threats posed by modernity. Iqbal writes:

Thus, wholly overshadowed by the results of his intellectual activity, the modern man has ceased to live soulfully, i.e., from within. In the domain of thought he is living in open conflict with himself; and in the domain of economic and political life he is living in open conflict with others. He finds himself unable to control his ruthless egoism and his infinite gold-hunger which is gradually killing all higher striving in him and bringing him nothing but life-weariness . . . The technique of medieval mysticism by which religious life, in its higher manifestations, developed itself both in the East and in the West has now practically failed . . . No wonder then that the modern Muslim in Turkey, Egypt, and Persia is led to seek fresh sources of energy in the creation of new loyalties, such as patriotism and nationalism, which Nietzsche described as "sickness and unreason," and "the strongest force against culture."<sup>6</sup>

No doubt, in the above passage, Iqbal paints a very dark picture of the world in which the modern human has lost her sense of higher spiritual purpose.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that, according to Iqbal, such a bleak picture of modernity has led Muslims to seek ideological inspiration in "nationalism," which he rejects *in toto*<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Iqbal believes that the condition of modernity has caused Muslim youth to lose hope in a purely religious method of renewal, which alone, for Iqbal, can guarantee the everlasting fountain of life by expanding our thoughts and emotions.<sup>9</sup> Thus, "the modern man, with his philosophies of criticism and scientific specialism, finds himself in a strange predicament" and "his Naturalism has given him an unprecedented control over the forces of Nature, but has robbed him of faith in his own future."<sup>10</sup>

In his important essay "What is Enlightenment?" Michel Foucault explains the phrase, "attitude of modernity" "as a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task."<sup>11</sup> Foucault likens this to the Greek idea of *ethos*. Drawing on Baudelaire, Foucault continues to describe the "attitude of modernity" in various terms such as a consciousness of the discontinuity of time, a break with tradition, and a feeling of novelty or of vertigo in the face of the passing moment.<sup>12</sup>

6. Cf. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), book V, where Nietzsche denounces "nationalism and race-hatred (as) a scabies of the heart and blood poisoning." See also his *The Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), Chap. viii, where he considers nationalism to be "the strongest force against culture."

7. The literature on modernity—a contested category—is vast. Some major studies that are relevant to the present concern are: Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987); R. W. Hefner, "Multiple Modernities: Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in a Globalizing Age," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998): 83–104; Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," *The International Scope* 3, no. 5 (2001): 1–9; Bruce Lawrence, "Modernity," in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), 245–262; Enrique Dussel, "Beyond Eurocentrism: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 3–31.

8. For more information, see Iqbal S. Sevea, *Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 126ff. See also Faisal Devji's recent reflections on Iqbal's political thought vis-à-vis nationalism and liberalism, idem., "Illiberal Islam," in *Islam after Liberalism*, ed. Faisal Devji and Zaheer Kazmi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 65–90.

9. Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 148–49.

10. Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 147.

11. Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32–50, at 38.

12. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 38.

As noted, Iqbal's "attitude of modernity" is complex and marked by internal tensions and contradictions. On the one hand, he admires modern science, but on the other, he is critical of its naturalism.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, although he thinks the techniques and metaphysics of Sufism have failed to provide any viable alternative to the crisis of modern subjectivity, he goes on to defend the cognitive value of mystical experience.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, he calls upon religious scholars to be open to *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and modern education on the one hand, but does not hesitate to label them "modern," in the sense of being influenced by the West, if he cannot come to an agreement with them, as is shown by his famous debate with the Deobandī scholar al-Madānī over Muslim politics.<sup>15</sup> Above all, Iqbal does not embrace a concept of modernity that foresees a complete break with the past or rejection of the tradition as a whole. As he says:

The task before the modern Muslim is, therefore, immense. He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past. Perhaps the first Muslim who felt the urge of a new spirit in him was Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi . . . The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us.<sup>16</sup>

The above text would be crucial while navigating through Iqbal's ethics of selfhood. Although it is unclear whether or not Walī Allāh himself also felt "the urge of a new spirit," Iqbal conveniently aligns himself with him.<sup>17</sup> So, unlike Walī Allāh, Iqbal proposes that the teachings of Islam be understood and interpreted "in light of modern knowledge"—a feature that he shares with other modernists.<sup>18</sup> In any event, the Iqbal who wants to preserve some form of continuity with the past also maintains that "[w]e must criticize our values, perhaps transvaluate them; and if necessary, create new worths; since the immortality of a people, as Nietzsche has so happily put, depends upon the incessant creation of worths."<sup>19</sup> This is because although things certainly bear the mark of divine manufacturing, their meaning is all too human.<sup>20</sup>

## An Anatomy of the Term Self

In the preceding section, I described Iqbal's complex attitude toward modernity and his motivation for a reconstruction of the Muslim self. In what follows, I will investigate Iqbal's ethics selfhood, showing how it departs from the Sufi model, even though Iqbal claims that he has developed it directly out of the experience and speculation of classical Muslim mystics and thinkers. Iqbal uses a number of terms to talk about the self, including the word "self" itself since he also wrote in English. Although one might think that his primary term for self is "*khūdī* (self)," it is not the only term he uses. He is aware of the existence of other terms that have been employed to render the English word "self" such as *nafs* (self/soul), *anā* (I), *shakhṣ* (person), and *anāniyyat* (selfhood).

13. On Iqbal's remarks on naturalism, see his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 147.

14. See, e.g., Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 17–19, 150.

15. For more information on this, see Muhammad Q. Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 38; cf. Sevea, *Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*, 133–55.

16. Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 78. One wonders if such a statement (i.e., interpreting Islam in light of modern knowledge) is self-contradictory because Iqbal castigates Islamic philosophers for interpreting the Qur'an in light of the then "scientific knowledge," i.e., Greek philosophy. See Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 102–3.

17. For more information on this, see Muhammad Faruque, *Sculpting the Self: Islam, Selfhood, and Human Flourishing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021).

18. Majid Fakhry expresses disappointment over the role that science holds in Islamic modernist thought with particular reference to Iqbal because of his universal appeal as well as the erudition of Western thought. For a sustained analysis, see Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 355.

19. Muhammad Iqbal, *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, edited by Latif Ahmad Sherwani (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1995), 121.

20. Iqbal, *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, 121.



“The word ‘*khūdī*’ was chosen with great difficulty and most reluctantly,” Iqbal informs the reader, because “from a literary point of view it has many shortcomings and ethically it is generally used in a bad sense both in Urdu and Persian.” Moreover, in his view, “the other words for the metaphysical fact of the ‘I’ are equally inconvenient—e.g., *anā*, *shakhṣ*, *nafs*, and *anāniyyat*.” So “what is needed,” Iqbal says, “is a colorless word for self, ego, having no ethical significance.” But since “there is no such word in either Urdu or Persian”—the word *man* (I) in Persian being equally inappropriate—“I thought that the word ‘*khūdī*’ was the most suitable.”<sup>21</sup> Iqbal then claims that there is some evidence in the Persian language of the use of the word *khūdī* in the simple sense of self, i.e., to say the colorless fact of affirming the “I.” So the phenomenological use of the term *khūdī* expresses an “indescribable feeling of I, which forms the basis of the uniqueness of each individual.”<sup>22</sup> In Iqbal’s usage, then, *khūdī* does not convey any ethical significance for those who cannot get rid of its ethical undertone.<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, *khūdī*, in Iqbal’s philosophy, does bear an “ethical” connotation in addition to its “phenomenological” usage. Iqbal himself categorically states this by saying, “Ethically, the word ‘*khūdī*’ means (as used by me) self-reliance, self-respect, self-confidence, self-preservation; even self-assertion when such a thing is necessary, in the interests of life and the power to stick to the cause of truth, justice, duty, etc. even in the face of death.”<sup>24</sup> For Iqbal, such usage of *khūdī* is ethical “because it helps in the integration of the forces of the Ego, thus hardening it, as against the forces of disintegration and dissolution.”<sup>25</sup> In all, Iqbal makes it clear that *khūdī* has both phenomenological and ethical connotations, and it does not mean the egotistical self, full of pride.

## Selfhood via Nietzsche

It is to be noted that Iqbal’s philosophy of the self marks a departure from classical Muslim thought even though he claims to have derived the ingredients of his theory from classical Sufism. Moreover, although like Muslim philosophers, Iqbal focuses on the self from a first-person perspective, underscoring the irreducibility of its first-person character, his account of the self’s moral development leading to the degree of the perfect human highlights his differences with them. Relatedly, very early on after the publication of *Asrār-i khūdī*, critics accused Iqbal of incorporating Nietzschean themes into his exposition of the self and the perfect human, which Iqbal denied vehemently. Even so, some aspects of Iqbal’s self and the perfect human do seem to show a clear Nietzschean influence (see below). It is true that Iqbal at times chastises Nietzsche for his materialism, but one does not fail to notice his admiration and sympathy for the German philosopher throughout his career.<sup>26</sup>

When critics pointed out the resemblance between Iqbal’s perfect human and Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, Iqbal retorted by saying that the conception of the Overman in Nietzsche is purely materialistic, which is the same as the idea of the Over-soul in Emerson.<sup>27</sup> More intriguingly, Iqbal surmises that Nietzsche might have borrowed the concept from the literature of Islam and then tainted it with his materialism.

Iqbal’s articulation of the three stages of the growth of the self appears suspiciously similar to Nietzsche’s “three metamorphoses,” or the three stages of progress

21. Iqbal, “An Exposition of the Self,” in *Discourses of Iqbal*, 201–02.

22. Iqbal, “An Exposition of the Self,” 201–02.

23. Iqbal, “An Exposition of the Self,” 201–02.

24. Iqbal, “An Exposition of the Self,” 203.

25. Iqbal, “An Exposition of the Self,” 203.

26. See Faruque, *Sculpting the Self*, chap. V.

27. Iqbal, “An Exposition of the Self,” 200. On “over-soul,” see Ralph W. Emerson, *Essays: First and Second Series* (New York: Vintage Books: Library of America, 1990), chap. IX.

toward the *Übermensch* in his *Also sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). In Iqbal's rendering, the representation of the first metamorphosis of life is the camel, which is a symbol of load-bearing strength. The second is the lion, which symbolizes the strength to kill without pity, for pity is a vice and not virtue for Nietzsche. The representation of the third metamorphosis is the child, which is the Superman passing beyond good and evil like the child and becoming a law unto himself. In Iqbal's view, this is materialism turning the human ego into a monster, which, according to Nietzsche's idea of immortality, has repeated itself and will repeat itself infinitely.<sup>28</sup> Iqbal claims that the similarities between Nietzsche and himself are superficial, since the former does not believe in the spiritual fact of the self and its will to power.<sup>29</sup>

However, Iqbal fails to explain why his theory of the self also has exactly three stages, as opposed to four or five. He rightly notes that, for Nietzsche, the "I" is a fiction because there is no autonomous self standing behind the drives, capable of constructing their order; there is only the play of drives that mold the ego.<sup>30</sup> According to Iqbal, Nietzsche followed Kant's lead in the *Kritik's* (i.e., *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*) conclusion that God, immortality, and freedom are more of a fiction, though useful for practical purposes. Against this view, he reiterates the Bergsonian intuition of the self, saying that, from the viewpoint of inner experience, the "I" is an indubitable fact, which stares at us in spite of our intellectual analysis of it. Moreover, Iqbal argues that the perfection of the perfect human in Islam consists of realizing the eternal Now, which one does not find in Nietzsche.<sup>31</sup> Also, Iqbal suggests that Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is a biological product, whereas the Islamic perfect human is the product of moral and spiritual forces such as virtue, justice, duty, and love.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Iqbal denies that his coal-diamond analogy in the *Asrār* has anything to do with Nietzsche since, unlike the latter, he does not mean callousness or pitilessness when he says, "Be as hard as the diamond."<sup>33</sup>

Despite all Iqbal can say in self-defense, there is no denying that his conception of the perfect human as the highest mode of self-development shows influences from Nietzsche. Even though Iqbal claims that he adopted the doctrine from the Sufis, his exposition of the perfect human bears only a superficial resemblance to the original Sufi doctrine. Iqbal significantly modifies the doctrine of the perfect human when he asserts that it represents the "completest ego, the goal of humanity, and the acme of life both in mind and body" in whom "the discord of our mental life becomes a harmony."<sup>34</sup> Moreover, according to Iqbal, the perfect human is the last fruit of the tree of humanity, who justifies "all the trials of a painful evolution" because he is to come at the end. Iqbal's evolutionist interpretation of the perfect human becomes evident in the following:

The more we advance in evolution, the nearer we get to him. In approaching him we are raising ourselves in the scale of life. The development of humanity both in mind and body is a condition precedent to his birth. For the present he is a mere ideal; but the evolution of

28. See Iqbal, "An Exposition of the Self," 200. For Nietzsche's explanations of the "three metamorphoses," see Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 23–24; cf. *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966).

29. Iqbal, "An Exposition of the Self," 198–99.

30. On some interpretations of the Nietzschean self, see Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Robert Miner, "Nietzsche's Fourfold Conception of the Self," *Inquiry* 54, no. 4 (2011): 337–360; Daniel Breazeale, "Becoming Who One Is: Notes on Schopenhauer as Educator," *New Nietzsche Studies* 2–3/4 (1998): 1–25.

31. Iqbal, "An Exposition of the Self," 200.

32. Iqbal, "An Exposition of the Self," 200–01. However, the Nietzschean influence is clearly traceable in his doctrine, as in the following: "You must give up all those modes of activity which have a tendency to dissolve personality, e.g., humility, contentment, slavish obedience, modes of human action which have been erroneously dignified by the name of virtue. On the other hand, high ambition, generosity, charity and a just pride in our traditions and power fortify the sense of personality." See Muhammad Iqbal, *Stray Reflections: A Notebook of Allama Iqbal*, ed. Javid Iqbal (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 2008), 29.

33. Iqbal, "An Exposition of the Self," 202.

34. Iqbal mentions Nietzsche in this regard, saying he had a glimpse of the concept. See Muhammad Iqbal, *Asrār-i khūdī*, translated by Nicholson (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1964), xxviii–xxix.



humanity is tending towards the production of an ideal race of more or less unique individuals who will become his fitting parents. Thus the kingdom of God on earth means the democracy of more or less unique individuals, presided over by the most unique individual possible on this earth.<sup>35</sup>

Needless to say, such an interpretation of the perfect human would hardly make sense to the Sufis for whom the doctrine is primarily understood in its spiritual and metaphysical context. Iqbal's idiosyncratic understanding of the perfect human becomes even more apparent when one analyzes his views on the self's freedom and immortality. According to Iqbal, the end of the self's journey is not freedom from the limitations of individuality; it is, rather, a more precise definition of it.<sup>36</sup> As Iqbal says:

Whatever may be the final fate of man it does not mean the loss of individuality. The Qur'an does not contemplate complete liberation from finitude as the highest state of human bliss. . . It is with the irreplaceable singleness of his individuality that the finite ego will approach the infinite ego to see for himself the consequences of his past action and to judge the possibilities of his future.<sup>37</sup>

Iqbal then goes on to add that "pantheistic Sufism"<sup>38</sup> cannot accept such a view, because this would imply the mutual exclusion of the Infinite and the finite self, which contravenes God's infinitude. Iqbal responds by arguing that such difficulties rest on a misunderstanding of the true nature of the Infinite. In his view, true infinity does not mean infinite extension, which cannot be conceived without embracing all available finite extensions. Rather, its nature consists of intensity and not extensity; hence the moment we hold our attention on intensity, we begin to see that the finite ego must be distinct, though not isolated, from the Infinite.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Iqbal maintains that it is highly unlikely that "a being whose evolution has taken millions of years should be thrown away as a thing of no use." Rather, "it is only as an ever-growing ego," Iqbal says, "that he can belong to the meaning of the universe."<sup>40</sup>

Yet there is little evidence to suggest that Sufi metaphysicians (whom Iqbal calls pantheists) considered God's infinitude extensively in spatial form.<sup>41</sup> Consider, for instance, Mullā Ṣadrā's (d. 1640) expression "*ʿidda, mudda wa shidda*" (numericality, duration, and intensity), in relation to *mā lā yatanāhī bimā lā yatanāhī* (intrinsic infinity)—i.e., God, is well known.<sup>42</sup> As for the loss of individuality, it is clear from the writings of many Sufi metaphysicians that for them, there is no "individuality" to begin with because, as Shams al-Dīn Lāhijī (d. 1506–07) explained, "there is no room for duality in the divine unity" (*dūʿī rā aṣlan dar maqam-i tawhīd rāh nīst*). That is, all conceptions of "individuality" separate from the Divine are ultimately illusory, arising due to the Absolute's self-determination.<sup>43</sup> Thus, even though Iqbal claimed that his philosophy of the self is a direct development out of the experience and speculation of the classical Sufis, a close reading of the texts shows completely the opposite.

35. Iqbal, *Asrār-i khūdī*, translated by Nicholson, xxvii–xxviii.

36. Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 156–7.

37. Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 93.

38. Iqbal's pejorative term for the metaphysical-minded Sufis.

39. Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 56.

40. He then quotes the verses from Q 91: 7–10: "By the soul and He Who hath balanced it, and hath shown to it the ways of wickedness and piety, blessed is he who hath made it grow and undone is he who hath corrupted it." Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 95.

41. On the misunderstanding of Sufi metaphysics as pantheism, see Mohammed Rustom, "Is Ibn al-ʿArabī's Ontology Pantheistic?" *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 2 (2006): 53–67. Also, it is to be noted that Iqbal's critique of Sufi metaphysics was borne out of the Indian reception of Ibn ʿArabī via Aḥmad al-Sirhindī's polemic against *waḥdat al-wujūd*. See Muhammad Faruque, "Sufism contra Shariah? Shāh Walī Allāh's Metaphysics of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*." *Brill Journal of Sufi Studies* 5, no. 1 (2016): 27–57.

42. Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya fi manāhij al-sulūkīyya*, ed. Muḥaqqiq Dāmād (Tehran: Bunyād-i Hikmat-i Islāmi-yi Ṣadrā, 2003), 135.

43. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā Lāhijī, *Mafāṭih al-ʿijāz fi sharḥ Gulshan-i rāz*, ed. Maḥmūdī Bakhtiyārī (Tehran: ʿIlm, 1998), 233.

## Conclusion

In all, Iqbal is concerned with the crisis of modern Muslim subjectivity, and he puts forth an ethics of selfhood to overcome this crisis. His influence can be seen in different Muslim camps that have sought to respond to the challenges of modernity. Among his admirers was Sayyid Quṭb, who is known for his fundamentalist ideology. In one of his later works, Quṭb, for instance, praises Iqbal's concept of selfhood as a time-honored idea that Muslims needed in order to cope with the challenges of the modern world.<sup>44</sup> He also approves of Iqbal's criticism of the Sufi doctrine of annihilation (*fanāʾ*) as being the cause of Muslim passivity.<sup>45</sup> Apart from the likes of Quṭb, Marxist Arab thinkers such as Ḥasan Ḥanafī also draw from Iqbal, as can be seen in his recent six-hundred-page work in Arabic titled *Muḥammad Iqbāl: Faylasūf al-dhātīya*.<sup>46</sup>

As for Iqbal's ethics of selfhood, one can certainly detect similarities between him and his Sufi predecessors when it comes to their distinction between the higher and lower self, pious rejection of worldliness, and an emphasis on the immortality of the self, but their worldviews remain significantly different in terms of the true nature of the self and of Ultimate Reality. The Iqbalian self stands out for its emphasis on immanence, individuality, dynamism, activity, life, and self-affirmation, so much so that Iqbal conceives of God as the most Individual Ego. In Iqbal's view, regardless of the self's development and spiritual progress, it always retains its individuality and egohood in its encounter with God. There is no place for a non-dual conception of the self and the Divine in Iqbal's thought. That is why Iqbal says that the ultimate goal of the self is to see God as an Ego and as an Other. However, in asserting such a view of the self, Iqbal does not address the question of how it might be possible for human vision to encompass and comprehend the Infinite, especially in light of the Qur'an (6:103), that states, "Vision comprehendeth Him not, but He comprehendeth (all) vision. He is the Subtle, the Aware."

In contrast, Sufis such as Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240), ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 1424), and others draw a non-dualistic conclusion from such a verse, which is the reason they categorically aver that one cannot perceive the Divine Essence.<sup>47</sup> That is, the "I" as a "subject" cannot perceive the Ultimate Reality as an "object." Nonetheless, they maintain that God can manifest His infinite nature in the heart (i.e., the deepest core of the self) of His believing servants when it is completely polished and purified so that it can reflect all the countless divine names and attributes—and this for them is represented by the doctrine of the perfect human. As was evident from the preceding analyses, Iqbal seems to be unaware of the complexity of much of such classical thought.

The tale of love is something which no tongue may exhaust  
O Sāqī, hand me the wine and make this discourse short.<sup>48</sup>

44. Sayyid Quṭb, *The Islamic Concept and its Characteristics*, trans. Mohammed M. Siddiqui (Oak Brook: American Trust Publications, 1991), 13–16; cf. *idem*, *al-ʿAdālah al-ijtimāʿīyah fi-l-Islām* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1975), 32–43.

45. *Ibid.*

46. See Ḥasan Ḥanafī, *Muḥammad Iqbāl: Faylasūf al-dhātīyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Madār al-Islāmī, 2009).

47. See, for instance, William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

48. Hafez, *The Divan of Hafez*, trans. Reza Saberi (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002), 98.





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