

RELIGION, IN THE LIGHT OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF SELF MANZOOR AHMAD

(I)

Religion today is beset with great difficulties and has got to face many problems. The older ways of understanding and interpreting religion seem to have lost their hold on the modern man who, reared in the Scientific culture of our age as he is, has begun to doubt the validity of revelation as a source of knowledge. He needs something more certain and more in accord with the spirit of the age than the cut and dried formulae of the theologians as proofs for the postulates of religion.

The disbelief of the modern man, which he cannot help, is making him anxious. He desires to return to faith—a faith which can give peace and rest to his consciousness torn by doubt and perplexity. How can this faith be regenerated? Iqbal has attempted the task in his lectures on "*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*." But it is by no means a completed task, nor Iqbal meant it to be so. It is simply an initiation of a process which is to be continued along the lines he suggested, namely the reconstruction of religious thought on the basis of human experience, in place of the Aristotelian Law of Contradiction which the scholastics adopted.

(II)

Every attempt to reconstruct religious thought in this age has to face this problem: at present there are two kinds of attitudes towards religion which are diametrically opposed to each other. There are some persons who cling to the literal meaning of all religious assertions, and refuse every kind of philosophical approach to the problems of religion. There are others who totally refuse every proposition, or assertion about religious facts, branding

them as "nonsensical." The former attitude is that of the dogmatic theologians.

Their contention is that the content of religion is unique and discontinuous both with ordinary experience and knowledge, and with the conceptual framework of any philosophical system.. Their argument is: "There is no identity between the use of the term God by religion and its use by a metaphysical interpreter. There is also no way to religious postulates, (God for example) through. human experience".

The latter tendency is exhibited by those analytical philosophers according to whom. religious utterances fall outside the cognitive significance.⁹⁵ Let us briefly examine the two cases.

The case of dogmatic theologians actually involves the denial of any rational way to God. This position is weak for several reasons. Firstly, no valid reason can be found for this type of agnosticism. It seems to be very strange and even nonsensical that though God has created us, and this world of ours, and demands obedience, yet He has not bestowed upon us any such faculty through which we can know Him. If such a contention is maintained then even the Divine guidance, revelation, the prophets and His messages through them, would remain alien to us as the doors to any knowledge of God are totally sealed, and our intellect has been declared inherently incapable of comprehending Him.

Secondly, we cannot consistently avoid the use of our reason or thought. There are so many concepts of religion which cannot be understood without applying the philosophical approach to the subject. Notwithstanding that the Quran has made a differentiation between the *mutashabihat* (متشابهيات) and *mohkamamat* and the believers are required to look into the *mohkamamat* alone and not to indulge into the superfluous speculative conjectures into the meaning of the *mutashabihat*. But the difficulty is that these two classes of verses

⁹⁵ The use of the term "nonsensical" is ironically accepted by them.

cannot be differentiated from each other without entering into an argument which involves that which is, by definition, unwarranted. Moreover the interpretation of (الراسخون فى العلم)⁹⁶ as a continuation of the same sentence is as plausible as any other interpretation.

Thirdly, even this agnostic attitude in its very act of rejection of all philosophy of religion admits its contradictory, and the theologians in the execution of his own project involves himself in philosophical thought and is dependent upon the same appeal to general experience which it is his aim to avoid.

The case of analytical philosophers who deny any 'significance' to religious propositions is no better than that of the theologians. The historical development of Logical Empiricism plainly shows that the basic 'meaning principle' upon which it rests cannot be justified without the employment of an argument that is circular in the vicious sense, or a persuasive appeal to the need for clarity, if we are to have any successful communication. The positivist's claim of the clarity of meaning is neither new nor can it win any favour for their particular attitudes towards metaphysical or religious problems. But the positivists actually go beyond this demand of the clarity of meaning. They make a **NORMATIVE** claim for their principle which cannot be directly supported. In so far as the rejection of religious discourse as meaningless is based upon the 'meaning criterion' of the positivists, the rejection must itself be rejected as dogmatic.

(III)

If the above two tendencies, which lead to the same result, are rejected and any extra-dogmatic or 'non-analytico-empirical' approach is admitted, the question would arise which of the approaches can satisfactorily and comprehensively deal with the religious phenomena. Is rationalism a suitable method for it? Let us examine its case briefly.

⁹⁶ See *al-Quran*, III: 7.

The approach of a rationalistic theory to knowledge of any kind is anti-empirical. It maintains that knowledge must be explained and grounded by those rational concepts and universal ideas which the mind uses in the process of knowing. These ideas are not fashioned by the individual nor they are gradually elaborated, by the race to meet the need of a concrete situation. They are real in themselves and they are superior in the sense that experience presupposes them. They are *apriori* principles. By an *apriori* principle is meant a principle which is necessary if a specific class of experience in a given universe of discourse is possible. It is not absolutely necessary that any particular universe of discourse must be, but if either is or if any realm of ordered being is, there are certain principles without which it could not be at all.

Deny unity and there are no numbers, deny space or time and there is no world, deny obligation and there is no morality. Since each *apriori* is thus relative to a special realm, and lacks apodictic certainty some philosophers speak of it as an ideal. A cognitive ideal or *apriori* is thought of as presupposed by science, a religious ideal is presupposed by religion.

Thus it is to be presupposed, but can't be rationally comprehended, by this type of rationalistic philosophy. Kant's polemic is directed against any such attempt. For him thought and being are two separate entities and any attribute in thought is not necessarily a predicate of being also. "The real contains no more than the possible. A hundred real dollars do not contain a cent more than a hundred possible dollars." The realm of thought is thus incapable of reaching the Divine, because thought alone is no guarantee for its existence. Nor it can, due to its limitations, reach the reality or numena as such. The failure of the famous proofs of the existence of God is telling itself against this capacity of reason. The cosmological and ontological proofs possess no value whatsoever as they are related to the realm of thought alone and not of being.

Kant has suggested a refuge in practical reason which he thinks can safeguard religion against rationalistic onslaught. But if one does

not want to be "practically reasonable" then every hope is destroyed. No sense of 'moral obligation' can convince a dissident nonbeliever to believe in God or in immortality. If one can refuse the cogency of the proofs, one can even refuse to be reasonable.

But the problem is not that one does not want to apply the "practical reason"; it is, that even after that, there is no hope to know God or any other ultimate religious fact, as the doors of being are totally shut. The *apriorism* is too tight a system to allow one to peep to the numena. The gulf always remains between you and your God and you cannot fill it so far as you remain a human being.

(IV)

The ontological argument for the existence of God fails also because the link in between 're' and 'intellectu' has not been established, and moreover it presupposes unwarranted assumptions. To a very great extent the force of such arguments depends upon the meaning which one attaches to the term God. This has been very strikingly exhibited in the case of Spinoza who infers about God's existence from the idea of God as the source and sum of all perfections. But for Spinoza God or substance is the infinite and all inclusive whole within which fall the parallel differentiations of thought and extension as its corresponding aspects. On this construction of the term God His reality is inevitably involved in His idea. To say the essence of God involves his existence is quite true, provided one 'believes' in Spinoza. But this prejudices the whole question, and the proof becomes purely verbal. The same is true of so many other formulations of the ontological proof.

If we feel any force in this type of arguments at all the source of it lies somewhere else. In themselves, they are nothing but an artificial way in

which men sought to justify to themselves a faith of the truth of which they felt sure on other grounds.

(V.)

The pragmatists claim that they have discovered the ground on which these beliefs rest. The exact form and scope of a "philosophy of religion" after a pragmatic type is not yet clear, and perhaps would never be due to the very nature of the pragmatic principle. For it is so vague and elastic that it can be interpreted in a hundred ways. If we trust James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* as a typical example of pragmatic philosophy then the scholastic theology and the metaphysics of Divine attributes do not enter into the practical

r religious life. They are therefore useless and as such untrue. The tendency of pragmatism, no doubt is to deal with religion through an empirical method, which tries to exhibit the implications of those values at work in the actual religious life of men. A speculative conception of God, for instance, which could not be related in a vital way to the needs and purposes of religious conduct would fail to commend itself to pragmatists. "By their fruits ye shall know them," has become a principle of criticism awakening in us a philosophic conscience to the simple need of fruitfulness and a moral effect as a voucher of truth.

But on deeper reflection we find that this idea of working value is not so simple as it appears to be at the first instance.

One can draw broad conclusions about the truth (or value) of religion by this method only when the evidence of history is sufficient. The difficulty in the case of a test of this kind is that the evidence remains incomplete and inexhaustive. There are certain religious beliefs which seemed to work well during certain periods of history and in particular social systems. Moreover history does not record clear cut and plain cases either of successes or of failures .of a belief or a set of beliefs, but rather of partial success or

successes here and partial failures there. To put forward the plea, that when a religious belief works it is true, when it ceases to work it becomes untrue, and if at some future time it again begins to work it again becomes true, is simply an absurd interpretation of history. The very idea of the temporal relativity of truth would make a belief insignificant enough that it would never become practicable, and hence never true. The religious ideas and beliefs work whenever they do so, for the very important factor that 'truth' has a universality and constancy.

Secondly every religion is a complex of beliefs and a knowledge of the workability of the religion as a whole cannot decide the specific growth of any one of these beliefs.

Moreover the difficulty arises when one particular belief is more helpful and more workable for one individual while others are not, or that a particular belief proves very valuable in one age and may lose its importance in another. There is hardly any logical value in this idea of universality. No universal affirmative proposition can be simply converted. We cannot pass from "all that is true works" to "all that works is true". This fact can be vouchsafed even by our experience.

The force of this approach simply rests upon a basic intuition, that "if a theory has no consequences or bad ones, if it makes no difference to men, or makes undesirable differences, if it lowers the capacity of men to meet the stress of existence or diminishes the worth to them of what existence they have, such a theory is somehow false." The pragmatistic philosophy of religion is an unwarranted extension of this naive conviction. Pragmatism then, as a positive principle, has no value whatsoever. It is a simple will to believe and a pure adventure into the unknown future of which we can never be sure.

(VI)

Before passing on to Iqbal's approach to religion let us discuss another oft-repeated and significant attempt to understand religion. This is a certain type of mysticism, which is based upon the idea that religion is a personal relation of man and God and that God can be disclosed in personal experience of human beings. This experience opens for the individuals a bliss, which shuns from articulations. Hence those who have this vision cannot say what it is. They can assert only this much that *it is*, and nothing more. But even the is-ness is a conceptual mode of expression, and hence this also cannot be affirmed of the being which they know. In the words of Tao-teh-King:

"One who knows does not talk

One who talks does not know

Therefore the Sage keeps his mouth shut and

his sense gates closed"

and:

"The holy man abides by non-assertion in his affairs

and conveys by silence his intuitions."

Now this type of mysticism which abhors any articulation can render but little service to the cause of understanding religion. The incommunicability of such experiences makes any discourse impossible. The results of this approach towards understanding religion if accepted would be tantamount to those of the orthodox dogmatics and could be subject to the same criticisms.

Though the truth on which this type of mysticism is based is indisputable, namely that religious truths are immediately known, yet the assertion that this immediate knowledge is necessarily incommunicable, is

unwarranted. There is no basic difference between an everyday experience and a mystic experience, as such. Every experience has its two sides *i.e.*, thought and intuition. The more intensive experiences have thought implicit in them, while in every rational judgment intuition is implicit. There is no basic contradiction between the two. The difficulty arises only when the one is singled out as a criterion at the cost of the other. Rationalism, and mysticism have both been victims of this exaggeration.

In fact the highest type of intuition is one which has the greatest possibilities of articulation. In its inward movement it remains intuition while in its outward thrust it expresses itself into a system. The higher and the more profound the intuition is more complete and perfect the system would be. This is the type of intuition which Iqbal names as religious experience and makes it the basis of religion. The possibility of religion as well as its force and meaning depend upon the possibility of having such an experience.

That this type of experience is possible cannot be doubted. There is nothing strange or illogical about it. We can only know God, and we do know Him, through such an immediate, yet communicable experience, though the degree of communicability may differ in various cases. The intellectual formulations of the existence of God, and the confidence in its pragmatic worth, are all rooted in such experience.

This experience differs from the classical empiricism in as much as it admits that it is not limited to the clear cut and simple deliverances of the five senses and that it is not a passive affair. Moreover it is possessed of an intensive quality. This quality on the one hand means the whole range of comprehensive qualities describing what the moral and aesthetic aspect of experience is for a self, and on the other hand the manner in which the self takes these experiences. It amounts to the total reaction of the self to the world encountered and to the vicissitudes of its own self as an adventure in the world.

An analysis of this experience would reveal that religion is immediately and innately given, and that a religious experience is a universal experience. On the basis of such an experience a philosophy and a system can be constructed which will have all the vigour of rationalism, and a confidence of its truth and workability. That such experience is universal, does not necessitate that every man should have such an experience, or must recognize it as such. Neither it is a special kind of experience granted to a selected few. It is just like any other experience and has something universal in it, in the sense in which the experience of gravity is a universal experience of mankind, although there are many who do not understand what it is when they experience it. And when its full significance is grasped by the scientists there emerges a specifically scientific experience of gravity which carries with it a special insight into the meaning of everyday experience.

(VII)

Let us now examine this experience at some length. The term 'Religious Experience' has been used in the literature of the philosophy of religion in a wide range of meaning. It may mean 'the Experience of God,' or 'an existent Omniscient and Omnipotent_ Being which is directly known through intuition or through any other kind of experience whether mystic or religious.' It has also been used for the experience which is claimed by the person who enjoys it to be the experience of God or a Being, though we do not assume the validity of its claim. The term might also refer to an experience which is connected in such a way with the thought of God as to warrant its being called religious, even though the claim is not made, that it is the experience of Divine Being or Reality itself.

There can be yet another meaning of the term Religious Experience that is an experience possessing of certain qualities in virtue of which the experience can be called (as some people insist to call it) religious, even though it is not directly connected with the thought of God. For instance a

sense of sublimity when enjoying a mountain scene, or a sense of awe in the midst of ocean etc. can be classed under this category.

Our purpose to classify the meaning of Religious Experience is to find out whether anyone or more of the above categories of experience can give us an adequate ground to believe in God, and whether anyone of them can establish a faith in Him. The adequacy of religious experience for the purpose mentioned above can be exhibited when it is shown, that the religious experience either increases the knowledge of reality or it provide grounds for saying that there is a Being of such a nature that it is proper to call this Being 'God.'

But before we discuss the grounds let us look into a possible objection which can be levelled by the empiricist against the adequacy of religious experience. It can be said that the evidence afforded by religious experience can well have a meaning to the person enjoying the experience, but it can claim no validity outside that circle, or for a person who does not enjoy it. It is said, "That certain experiences occur which are grouped under the heading of religious experience *is an empirical fact*. And there seems to me to be no cogent reason why the *external observer* should not raise the question whether or not the occurrence of such experiences affords at least probable evidence of the existence of a Being other than the experiencer, other finite selves and the material world."⁹⁷ Now it can be answered in a dialectical fashion by saying—"that we cannot raise the question of God's "existence" outside religion and that "inside" religion, there is no sense in raising it." This answer may silence one, but can't satisfy him. It can further be said that as the man who already believes in the existence of God, religious experience can, undoubtedly give strength to his belief, because it provides what is demanded by an attitude of psychological preparedness and expectancy. God is there in such an experience, not because He is *found*, but because He is already there.

⁹⁷ F.C. *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XXXI. No. 118, McMillan & Co. Ltd., London, p. 230. (Emphasis mine).

But for a man who remains 'outside' of a religion, and who wants a proof for the existence of God, in the empirical sense such experiences have no meaning. Whether for a man, who totally refuses the existences of God, or tries to maintain an attitude of indifference towards His existence, it is justified to raise the question of the adequacy of religious experience to provide a ground for the belief of God, or not, is a question which we do not want to raise at present. We want to deal with the objection quoted above on the same empirical ground, on which it is made.

Now when it is said that 'religious experience is an *empirical* fact,' what is meant by such an assertion. The one meaning that can be attributed to the statement is, that religious experience is an empirical fact to the person who is enjoying the experience. But this can in no way satisfy the empiricist who perhaps wants to remain a neutral observer and wants that God be given as an empirical fact for him. But then the religious experience of others can't be called an "empirical fact" for him as he himself claims. Is it an empirical fact for him in the sense that it is in his observation that there are persons enjoying such an experience, and reporting it to be so, and he must take it to be an empirical fact in the same way as he takes the reports of scientific experience from a scientist, and believes them to be so ? But then his demand, and objection to the adequacy of religious experience that it provides no ground to believe in God, fails as his attitude becomes inconsistent with the attitude he adopts towards scientific experience, or other mundane experiences where he accepts and adopts them, and makes judgments based upon the testimony of others. The only objection which now can be raised is, that judgments based upon such empirical experiences and the generalizations which are made thereafter, are of a probable nature and their certainty rests on that maximum probability which is never achieved theoretically. Howsoever great the degree of probability may be, it would remain a probability. But the existence of God is a fact claimed to be certain. The idea of probability if applied, even to His existence, would jeopardise the purpose, and meaning, of the existence of God. Apart from

being a purely academic and theoretical. objection which has got nothing to do with the practical attitude of certainty which a man of science or of religion feels, it at least brings the so called outside empiricist nearer to the circle of insiders. At last it can bring him nearer to the possibility of finding God in human experience, because it is probable to find Him, on the basis of religious experience being an empirical fact. Hence the empiricist stands at the same place as that of a non-empirical intuitionist, expecting to find God in experience, on the evidence of others who have searched Him and found Him to be there.

(VIII)

Religious Experience is an emotional conative attitude (of course not without a cognitive element in it) towards the whole of being. It would remain groundless, and irrational unless a psychical life answering to it as its appropriate object really pervades and controls the universe, including the individual who feels it. This attitude is on the one hand towards the whole of being, and on the other is of the whole of the individual, thus guaranteeing full development of his entire personality, aesthetic, theoretical and practical at the same time. In spite of the differences of description due to particular cultural developments at various times and places all those who enjoy it, find it a ground, more than sufficient to believe in the reality of its object. Though they do admit that this ground cannot be translated in any formal argument, thus making it incommunicable to those who do not share it. But this admission does not make their claim in any way less rational, or doubtful. The incommunicability of this experience is simply due to the fact that it is essentially a matter of inarticulate feeling. But like all feelings it has a cognitive element in it. To borrow the words of Professor Hocking, it is an outward pushing, as an idea is outward reporting. No feeling is so blind as to have no idea of its own object. A feeling without a direction is as impossible as an activity without a direction, and a direction implies some objective. The inarticulate feeling seeks to fulfil its destiny in an idea which in its turn tends to develop out of itself its own visible garment.

But besides the difficulties, that might be encountered, and the objections that might be raised on the plausibility of translating such experience in formal language, it is certain that it carries with it a conviction in proportion to its comprehensiveness, intensity, and persistency. It is not tantamount to say that the cogency of Religious Experience lies in this argument, 'that because human beings feel in a particular way hence there is God.' The cogency actually lies in the experience itself, and in its enjoyment must be sought the ground which has actually led mankind to believe in God.

For the sake of philosophic relevance of such experience we can ask whether there are good grounds for regarding the evidence provided by religious experience as fallacious? Does our reflective thinking consider such experience, impermissible, irrelevant or unfounded? If there are no such grounds, rather on the contrary if there are good reasons for regarding religious experience as a sort of *evidence* then its claim becomes unchallenged and there is no ground for rejecting it as invalid.

(IX)

Let us briefly examine the type of evidence supplied by religious experience. Obviously enough every enquiry in this connection would start from the self itself, and its knowledge. How do we obtain the knowledge of our own self. It is certain that self is neither known by acquaintance nor by inference. Acquaintance and memory are fused together in a very intimate and inseparable way to yield the knowledge of subjective states of mind. (And these subjective states alone and their association do not constitute the *self* that we know of). These subjective states are in no way an inference. They are known rather in immediate experience.

An awareness of self and its states is normally present throughout

ones' mental life. Yet it is only at a reflective stage that we start distinguishing a self as a subject, from the object, not belonging to self. In the beginning, at the perceptual level the self and body are not very much

differentiated. The self and body are considered as making a whole which is different from not-self. In a way they are thought identical. But later on there starts a differentiation in the body itself. The heart, or head, are now being identified with self, while other body is included in not-self. Finally the self is distinguished from ones' own body as well as from other bodies.

But then if the individual knows himself only through his subjective states, in his immediate experience, the question would arise, "how he knows of other selves?" One answer to this question is that it is by inference that he obtains the knowledge of the existence of other selves, or other minds. For the sight of other bodies, and their expressive movements similar or analogous to our own, force us to the judgment that another self is there: a self whose movements, expressions are manifested, and through which the bodies of others are actuated. He takes them as embodied selves as his own. He hears a cry, for example very much 'analogous to the cry which he might have himself uttered in similar circumstances and having of the feeling which he might have had, at such time he infers the existence of another self with the same feeling. And so is the case with all other behaviour-patterns which he daily observes and behind which he posits a self for a plausible explanation of their movements.

A much more adequate way of the knowledge of other selves is suggested by Professor Royce. His criteria are not physical. He says, "Our fellows are known to be real because they are for each of us the endless treasury of more ideas. . . (They) furnish us with constantly needed supplement to our own fragmentary meaning."⁹⁸ This means that certain external objects move in a way which is distinctively and obtrusively relevant to our own life. To anything that appears in our life with the character of a *response*, we instinctively attribute outer personality.

But the position is logically the same. It is still an inference of an *other* based on analogy. The individual still remains primarily with his own self, and

⁹⁸ Royce, *The World and the Individual*, pp. 15, 168-174.

its subjective states without any direct references, or *actual experience* of a self beyond his own. This situation seems to turn towards solipsism. This would definitely be the case, if we start from the assumption of an individual and his states of consciousness only as an initial start. We would then remain inside a vicious circle, as howsoever we expand our consciousness, or self, it would never become capable to reach the other, which is outside. Even the question of other self would become irrelevant at all, because it is not the denial of it which is implicit in such a case. The question cannot at all be answered affirmatively or negatively, because it cannot be raised. For such a mind there would never come even a suspicion of the existence of an other mind. It would remain totally free from any such ideas.

Fortunately the case is quite different. We can't start from an assumption of a *self only*, without any reference to the other. On the contrary we constantly presuppose that there are other minds, and thus we are already prepared to look for the signs of their presence. It is our own self awareness which rather seems to be an inference from a physical existence other than our own as an indensible basis of our knowledge. It is the essential incompleteness of the finite individual on which the existence of the mind is based. We can take the analogy from physical sciences as well. The casual connection supplements the temporal sequence due to the essential incompleteness of its own. In the same way it is the involvement of other mind, without which any idea of self remains incomplete and inadequate.

(X)

The above argument is confirmed and supplemented by the actual development of knowledge as such. Because if there is no primary and universal ground for presuming the existence of a physical reality other than our own, then at the most only men and animals, by their peculiar obtruding behaviour would appear as embodying selves. The analogy would break up as soon as it is extended to other parts of nature as then it would have no ground as such. But the facts point to the contrary. In all primitive cultures

we find abundant proof, where psychical life is attributed to the forces of nature most lavishly. Natural phenomena are interpreted in terms of psychical forces, having a distinctive individual unity of their own analogous to that of our own embodied self. This sort of animism, though not so much crude and extensive even persists in the domain of philosophy and sciences. We hear Aristotle saying that a stone falls to the ground because *its natural place* is the centre of material universe which it *seeks*. We hear Newton talking about a *force*, which earth *exerts* on the bodies within its gravitational orbit. Even in modern times where anthropomorphism is considered to be very out of place we can't help talking in terms of "opposing forces" etc.

All this goes at length to show that apart from an implicit reference which is made to a psychical life other than ours (even when we are in an act of denying it), there are definite, positive grounds, primary as well as universal, which point to psychical life beyond the range of human and animal organisms.

If this be the case, the primary demand arising from the incompleteness of the self can alone prescribe what is required to satisfy it. As the demand thus created is due to the essential incompleteness of the self, it cannot be satisfied by the finite and incomplete individuals, or even by a group of them. It must reach for a Universal and Eternal self. It does so in Religious Experience.