

Souleymane Bachir Diagne (2001), *Islam et société ouverte: la fidélité et le mouvement dans la pensée de Muhammad Iqbāl*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose

Through this essay we discover a thinker imbued with the idea of his own inner joy. But the notion of opening gives the tone of the essay, which is intended to share and pass on knowledge. Though the author dedicates the book to his mother, it is to his father that he first addresses his thanks, the father who opened the path to reading Muhammad Iqbāl, the early 20th-century poet and philosopher.

The author of the preface, Charles Taylor, tells us what we have before us: 'that rare and powerful realization' that makes Iqbāl's thought one of the modernisms that take account of time. For, 'in tracing his own centuries-old itinerary, he manages to set in a fruitful mutual exchange thinkers and texts that are far apart: Nietzsche and Bergson, Halladj and Rūmi, and these and others are reconsidered alongside a rereading of the Koran' (p. 7). Is it a coincidence that the author of the preface stresses Iqbāl's topicality? Poet, philosopher, barrister but also political theoretician, he left, apart from his basic books on philosophy and literature, over a hundred letters on various subjects. We need to hear that 'passionate but serene' voice, the voice of a man who has transcended all 'over-sensitivity about identity'. A voice open to all other voices because it has its own path: 'the Revelation of the Koran'.

And so this essay demonstrates how taking the path of thought means persevering in being, as Spinoza would say, and encountering other ways of thinking in time and space. That perseverance is needed in order to know oneself and recognize one's individual place in a universe that is not fixed for all eternity like the astrologers' heavens.

But who is Muhammad Iqbāl? A man of action, he was the inspiration for the idea of a modern Pakistan, which was to come into being in 1947, nearly ten years after his death in 1938. He was born on 9 November 1877 in Sialkot, a town in the Punjab, and his father brought him up in the tradition of Sufi Islam. His ambition was to steer his children towards a brilliant university career and he had made the right assessment because, after his initial studies and work as a philosophy teacher in Lahore, his youngest son went off to Europe. For Iqbāl that trip was an important staging post in his life. At Cambridge he undertook research in philosophy and in 1907 he defended a doctoral thesis on 'The development of metaphysics in Persia, a contribution to the history of Muslim philosophy'. That thesis, which was published in London in 1908, was presented again in Munich in its German version. At the same time Iqbāl trained in law and qualified as a barrister, a profession he pursued on returning to his home country. At that point he had already written a great deal and this well-informed and open thinker, a '*faylasûf* for our times', similar to the 9th-century *falsafa* – where Greek and Hellenistic philosophy ran in parallel with the universe of Islam – shows us a thinking in which we see the spirit of free research designed for the future.

Souleymane Bachir Diagne emphasizes first of all the idea of 'the individual' in Muhammad Iqbāl's thought.

Thus 'individual reality . . . tests itself against divine Reality'. The essay's author refers us to some examples that demonstrate what is at issue. What is called 'individual reality' is neither merging nor immersion in a great All. It retains its distinctiveness and takes on consistency, becoming aware of itself in God's presence; for

just as face to face with God the eye of the Prophet 'was not deflected and did not wander', similarly 'the atom experiences its brilliance in the sun's presence' and the water droplet 'remains whole even in the ocean's depths'. The same is true of the ego. Indeed for Iqbāl being human is 'to manifest oneself as a wish to be', it is 'to be something' solid, substantial. The notion of *khudī* expresses the idea of the 'self that affirms itself before God himself' and the proof of the ego's reality and substance lies not in the 'Cartesian I think' but in the 'Kantian I can'. Thus awareness of the self emerges in action, for the water droplet must be able to shape itself like a pearl in order to exist, just as the wave is carried as it is, in its beauty, by its own movement. The wave exists only in its thrusting forward. And movement is nothing other than 'that continual restlessness that speaks of life itself'. The life that, for Iqbāl, seems endless . . . So the individual emerges not from a world to be contemplated but rather from a universe to be created. Parallel to the philosophy of the individual there is a 'cosmology of emergence' where the Individual refers back to the Koran's notion of God, not a Thought that thinks itself, as in Aristotle, but an Act of 'free creative energy', as in Bergson.

And so in Iqbāl's work, in the philosophy of action, the human ego, which is finite, is simply the 'manifestation' of the infinite Ego of God; for, when tested by God, human beings must have their own personality, must have 'the consistency of the diamond'. There is no conflict between humankind and God, since the word Islam means submission and peace. This submission is a strength that not everyone can have, it has to be won in the movement that shapes an individual's own personality. Those who believe in God have that strength that allows them to overcome the tension between 'fearing and hoping'. Thus they can live in peace. But the thing that strengthens the ego is love, which shapes humans and gives them an inner wealth that is always in 'the order of being', where they attain their full personality and radiate joy. Then, like the firefly, they can light their way through the darkest night. And the firefly, which is like a spark, is not a moth that flies towards the outer light 'to burn its wings', as Iqbāl says in *The Message of the East*. The firefly is itself an inner light.

It would be possible to write a detailed commentary on these pages, which show that Souleymane Bachir Diagne was not simply carrying out research rigorously and lucidly. Readers will be conscious of the fact that the author has tried patiently to walk alongside the poet philosopher, deciphering his images, his universe and his messages, highlighting the tension between the freedom of individuals carried along by their own movement, which makes them what they are, and faithfulness to the source that gives them substance, permanence and radiating joy. Constantly the philosopher and epistemologist was, at the same time, performing the work of a historian of philosophy by showing the connections in Iqbāl's thought with ways of thinking that were ancient but also modern and contemporary. The last chapter and the essay's conclusion demonstrate that Muhammad Iqbāl may be called 'modernist' in that his thought welcomes the dialogue between science and religion that is unacceptable to those who favour a strictly 'literal', conformist reading of the Koran.

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 Translated from the French by Jean Burrell